Evaluating Internet Sources – Climate Change

Scenario

You have done a Google search to check on a claim made by a notable celebrity that challenges a prominent scientific theory. You don’t know much about science, but this is something you’ve heard before and you’ve decided that it’s time to learn about it.

The claim is, “Climate change isn’t real. It was invented to hurt American businesses.”

You have done two searches – one search was *climate change real*, and another search was *climate change fake.* The following are websites that came up on the first page of results for both Google searches.

Using CRAAP to help you evaluate, you will determine a source is credible or not credible.

* <http://www.realclimate.org/>
* <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/11/28/science/what-is-climate-change.html>
* <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/seven-answers-to-climate-contrarian-nonsense/>
* <http://www.infowars.com/scientists-admit-fake-climate-change-predictions/>
* <http://www.debate.org/opinions/can-someone-prove-that-climate-change-is-real-yes-or-fake-no>
* <http://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>
* <http://www.wnho.net/global_warming.htm>
* <http://web.mit.edu/effects/www/zjinman/GWFalse.htm>

Your Assignment

Click the links above to **view each source. Select two sources** from the list. One of the sources should be a “good source,” and the other source should be a “bad source.”

In a two-page paper, you will explain why you have determined that the source is either “good” or “bad." **Bold** the use of **CRAAP criteria** throughout your paper. For example:

One of the reasons this source isn't reliable is that it lacks **authority.** The author makes assumptions about the behavior of autistic children but isn't an expert in autism, child behavioral psychology, or a related field. He/she also does not cite any experts in the field.

# Evaluating Internet Sources – Answers Suggestions

The links provided for them to use as example search results for evaluation came from the first page of results on two Google searches (December 2016) – one search was *climate change real*, and another search was *climate change fake.*

<http://www.realclimate.org/>

* **Poor choice.**
* Reasoning: While the "About" section of the site leads to verification of **authority** of writers, the result was for the entire site. The entire site is filled with information that would take additional searches to sift through to answer the claim. Thus it is **not relevant** in this initial page. Moreover, when clicking through different posts, the language used is found to be likely dense for persons not in the climate science field.

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/11/28/science/what-is-climate-change.html>

* **Good choice.**
* Reasoning: This appears in the New York Times online and is written by the science reporter (which I discovered by clicking the link to his NYT bio and then searching him on Google). Thus, the **authority** can be assumed based on the reputation of the publication *.* While the writer provides links, they often return to the same publication – but those others include facts and links to external or other authoritative sources. The facts, thus, will likely be **accurate.** It is **relevant** to answering the claim for a layperson looking for a general explanation. However, it may **not be relevant** for scholarship. This is a good entry point to the discussion and topics of climate change.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/seven-answers-to-climate-contrarian-nonsense/>

* **Good source.**
* Reasoning: This is a good source. In terms of **authority,** the publication, *Scientific American,* is a well-regarded popular source for science topics. The purpose of the article is to counter climate science deniers with facts, thus it is **relevant** thematically. Throughout, there are listed claims and lots of links to external content supporting the science. This suggests lots of research and **accuracy** as well as a boost to authority (considering the sources linked). The **purpose** is biased – it is explicitly geared to counter the claim we are researching, but the publication's overall purpose (when following menu and bottom links) is to educate and to offer commentary on science, not push a political agenda.

<http://www.infowars.com/scientists-admit-fake-climate-change-predictions/>

* **Poor choice.**
* Reasoning: The claim of the headline is shocking. This should raise the speculation of the source's **purpose** first. If the reader isn't familiar with the content of the InfoWars sites, then a quick scan of the side bar links to other articles and the bottom banner links to other sites should make the alarmist and neo-conservative slant of the site clear. Alarmist keywords like "exposed!" And "shocked!" Suggest the "click-bait" nature of the site's content. Skimming the post, the reader will find that the article is written in first person and there is no quotation apart from "climate consensus" (which denotes slant, again). The only source linked is to a Youtube video of a source, Lord Christopher Monckton, which is not a good source on its own merits, and to a website that leads to an error (broken link). Thus the **accuracy** is unqualified because the **authority** is so very questionable. For all the additional work that it would take to vet any of the information presented, this is a poor choice.

<http://www.debate.org/opinions/can-someone-prove-that-climate-change-is-real-yes-or-fake-no>

* **Poor choice.**
* Reasoning: The **purpose** of this source is to provide a blueprint to students on debating climate change. As a guide for *how* to discuss climate change, it may be relevant. However, it is *not* **relevant** as a source for evaluating the claim. Many of the premises and arguments listed claim facts with no sources or links; others are comments of opinions. Thus, there is no way to test the **accuracy** of them.

<http://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>

* **Great choice.**
* Reasoning: The .gov domain tells us that this is a federal US government website, thus it is subject to much fact-checking and likely contains facts, data, and research from the primary research groups. NASA is the department who has published and authored this page. These are sources of **good authority** on the subjects of science and climate change. Many links to research and many citations provided suggest that the evidence is strong for their claims, thus **accuracy** can be inferred. In terms of **relevance** this is a rich resource for evaluating the claim. It includes various forms of data presentation and analysis including easy-to-read visuals (graphs and images), brief and direct text, and provides links to other content. The **purpose** is to educate and to lead to more education, as is evidenced by links to more detailed areas of climate science.

<http://www.wnho.net/global_warming.htm>

* **Poor choice.**
* Reasoning: The URL doesn't seem too biased, but the page banner makes it clear that the **purpose** of this site is to support the claim that global warming or climate change is a hoax. There is no banner or linking to contact or author information and no information on the page itself about the author, so **authority** cannot be ascribed. Links are provided, which is good for **accuracy –** until those links are viewed. The links lead to poor choices for sources, many of which are politically extreme.

<http://web.mit.edu/effects/www/zjinman/GWFalse.htm>

* **Poor choice.**
* Reasoning: The .edu domain denotes an institution of higher education and, for those readers that know what MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), the prestige of the institution suggests, initially, that this is a source with good **authority**. However, once opened, the site is bare and lacks any side or menu bars and branding to lend that credibility to this source. We can't know what subpages of MIT's site this is published on so we can't judge the authority of it, or even its **purpose.** This could be an example used by a professor of a bad source! The only date available is in one of the references of the source which is 1999 – in other words, **not current.** One of the links is broken further complicating the currency. It does provide references, so there is a better chance at **accuracy** than if it didn't, but the work it would require to verify that is not worth it considering the rest of the factors.