

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Internet is an interactive mass medium of communication rendered through the computer network systems that consist of millions of smaller domestic, academic, business, and government networks worldwide. The Internet grew out of the ARPANET (Advanced Research Project Agency Network) commissioned by US Department of Defense in 1969 for research into computer networking. One of its main purposes was to link computers to the networks so that researchers can exchange or share research information and expand the knowledge obtained from their research.

The capabilities of Internet that link computers to the networks around the globe have allowed users to search or screen for specific information in an instant. This has made it popular among university students who have searched the Internet for information stored there for their studies, research, and entertainment. It has been nearly four decades since its first stage of development; the Internet has become an integrated channel of communications for students and general users who have access to computers with Internet connections.

Metzger states that the Internet and its applications are always changing and evolving, and so are its users. BJ Fogg: 'For web credibility researchers, there are 3 significant moving targets: the Web user base, user experience levels, and web technology itself'.

This research aims to find out students' attitudes toward the Internet as a source of knowledge and the degree of awareness they hold toward the credibility of Internet information.

Usage Increased

The Internet World Stat. Com claims that Internet usage around the world in 2007 has risen to,1,319,872,109, or 20% of the world's population. The number represents an increase of 265.6% from 2000 through 2007.

According to NECTEC's research in 2007, 13.15 million Internet users in Thailand access the internet for various types of interactive activities related to entertainment, social, education, and shopping. It is interesting to see a change in the usage of Thai Internet users according to NECTEC's 2007 annual survey which examined the behavior of Thai Internet users in which gathering information topped the list of intended activities. This is slightly different from the survey conducted in 2006, in which e-mail was the prime activity.

The survey also revealed that 66% of the respondents are aware of the threats the Internet poses to teenagers' and that 22.9% are worried about society being divided. The survey has revealed that Thai Internet users were concerned about looming threats of the Internet.

Threats

The current communication technologies coupled with Web 2.0 computer mediated communication (CMC) have allowed greater and more efficient usage of the Internet/Web. In 2007 through first quarter of 2008, Internet users have enjoyed new Internet features such as content search, social networks, online media (music, video, and etc), content aggregation, syndication (RSS feed), and much more. This phase of development saw some phenomenon related to disinformation on the Internet, which may jeopardize its value as a source of knowledge for students, researchers, and professionals worldwide.

In gathering information, the Internet users have to search the collection of data files that are stored on servers and select the files containing information relevant to their needs. In this process, users expose themselves to the Internet content, which is exponentially growing. Given the fact that online publishing has little or no quality control, it is therefore interesting to find out what causes users to believe the information they find on the Internet.

Content errors on Wikipedia.com

Thomas Chesney, a lecturer of Information Science conducted an experimental study entitled 'An Empirical Examination of Wikipedia's credibility' and found that Wikipedia contained errors (13%). 'Wikipedia claims that none of its articles are ever complete or finished. They also admit that vandalism is a constant problem with

people publishing 'with an agenda', reported Chesney. The study finds no correlation between respondent's cynicism and perceived credibility.

However, Mike Clowe (2007, p. 1) a research analyst, who conducted marketing experiments, emphasized that credentials of authors was an important issue for a user provided content web site like Wikipedia.com. 'In the wake of the Wikipedia scandals in 2007', two of their contributors were found responsible for posting content anonymously. Clowe said, 'It has become increasingly important to provide credentials to prove what you claim to be is actually who you are'.

Wikipedia.com is a free/public online encyclopedia popularly used/accessed by the students and general users worldwide. It is important that a user seeking knowledge has to be aware of its user-providing-content concept. Information must be scrutinized before accepting.

FaceBook:

Figure 1 Image from CNN's website



Watchdog reports on October 24, 2007 that FaceBook users are at risk of ID theft. The Watchdog team conducted an experiment by creating a fictional user on Facebook, the popular social network site. Equipped with personal details on the website, the team could open bank accounts and credit cards using the invented information.

Nothing is free

This incident signifies the great potential of the Internet as a money making channel. Its role as a modern medium with boundless attendance can be interpreted as the core of next generation business. The Internet as a new media actually involves high investment on creating and delivering content to the audience. However, the

concept of the Internet's freebies may have users' greed as an underlying motivation. In order to obtain quality information, the Internet etiquette and ethics may be required to help users/students in their interactive search for online information.

Consequently, it is important for teachers, educational institutes, and parents and the general public to understand how students perceive online resources. In addition, the insights revealed by this study may be used as a guideline to improve Internet skill subjects and better cyber space experiences. In respect of this matter, the current study serves two purposes: (1) to determine students' attitudes on Internet information; and (2) to find out the affective factors that contribute to the degree of credibility they have for information found on the Internet.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This research study aims to answer the following:

1.2.1 What are students' attitudes on using Internet as a source of knowledge?

1.2.2 Do demographic differences influence their views toward the credibility of Internet information?

1.2.3 What affective factors contribute to the degree of credibility the students have toward Internet information?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research study has the following objectives:

1.3.1 Main Objective:

To determine students' attitudes toward Internet resources and to find out what causes them to believe the information they find on the Internet.

1.3.2 Sub-Objectives:

1.3.2.1. To examine students' attitudes toward the credibility of Internet information.

1.3.2.2 To compare the degree of credibility that students of different groups and educational levels have toward Internet content/information.

1.3.2.3 To identify if there are any relationships between students' demographic data and the degree of perceived credibility of Internet information.

1.3.2.4. To identify the core criteria that influence students' views of credibility of the information they access.

1.3 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The terms mentioned in this study are operationally defined as follows:

The '**Internet**' refers to the physical infrastructure of interconnected computers, cables, and other devices that serve as the infrastructure of global communication which allows interactive communications. The 'Web' refers to a system of computers (servers), utilizing graphical user interfaces and accessed via the Internet, that provides access to documents, multimedia files, and Web sites that are connected by hyperlinks to other documents, multimedia files and Web sites.

Although the Internet concept covers the Web and other resources (such as chat rooms), the Web typically refers only to hypertext linked sites and their content. However, respondents and the norm tend not to distinguish and the two words are used interchangeably.

Internet information (Internet content) refers to data which is of interest to users, including textual information, images, animated graphics, music and movies, and it generally excludes formatting information, such as fonts, colors, positioning and borders, software that is used to provide and render the information, and unrelated advertising. The content of the Internet which students expose themselves to have an impact on their views toward credibility.

Nancy De Lane suggests that it is useful to think of information as:

Data → Information → Knowledge

Information that can be obtained through the Internet resources includes research articles, solutions, conference reports, essays, technical

information/specifications, references, directories, geographical data, online news, images, graphic, statistics and more and comments by users of various products and services

Internet users-students refers to students of secondary education and university level, who search the Internet to find information for academic purposes.

Attitudes refers to the opinion each participant holds toward the internet usage. Values of attitudes of this study are 1) source of knowledge, 2) low cost media, 3) computer efficacy, 4) equal learning opportunity, 5) intellectual property violation, 6) necessary skills for future work, 7) social problems, 8) self efficacy, 9) commercialization, and 10) sexual and violent issues.

Credibility refers to the degree of believability that each respondent has of Internet information. According to Miriam J. Metzger, a communication instructor at University of California and who has seriously pursued research on Internet credibility, credibility occurs to the minds of message receivers after evaluation of information. Internet credibility is perceptual and situational. Even though, there are many levels and types of Internet credibility to consider, this study focuses on six components generally used in evaluating online resources, which includes 1) coverage, 2) currency, 3) reliability, 4) source authority, 5) prominence, and 6) objectivity.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The target group represents a cross section of society of students ranging from secondary to master degree levels. According to Information Technology terms, people who use the Internet are called ‘users’ because they are ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ of the content/information of the Information.

1.5.2 The total subjects are 179 students, some among which are careered people.

1.5.3 The subjects comprises of students of a provincial school, Muaklek Wittaya School of Saraburi province - representing Internet users in a rural environment, a city environment school, Nawaminthrachinuthit Bodindecha School,

and two Bangkok universities, Assumption University, and Thammasat University (Ta Prachan campus).

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.6.1 The study gives an insight into how students use the Internet as a sources of knowledge.

1.6.2 The results can be used to promote students' awareness toward evaluation of information while they are searching online.

1.6.3 The results provide a groundwork for understanding what affect students' perceived credibility toward the Internet information, which can be used for further studies to provide effective and safe searches and to create a safer cyberspace environment.

1.6.4 Hopefully, this study will shed light on computer/internet requirements for schools or universities.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter includes the background of the problem, the statement of the problem and objectives of the study. It also incorporates the definitions of the terms, the scope of the study, the significance of the study and the organization of the study. The second chapter gives attention to the literature review and relevant studies. The third chapter relates to how the study is carried out in terms of subjects of the study, data analysis, materials, procedures used in the collection of the data and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the outcome of the study. Finally, the summary of the study, its findings, discussion, conclusions and suggestions for further study are described in Chapter 5.