Credibility of Sources

The credibility of research is dependent upon the source of the information gathered. Credibility of research has a couple of facets:

First is the reporting source. Information should be sought from the original source. Questions researchers should ask:

- Is the reporter the original source of the data and its interpretation? Did the reporter collect the research and report it themselves? The government census and their tabular reporting of data is highly credible. But many people write reports from the census and each interpret the data based upon their agenda.
- What is the agenda of the writer/publisher? As an example, articles written about gun control. The National Rifle Association has an opinion that is at extreme odds with the Brady Campaign. Both may report the number of shootings or deaths/year by guns but their interpretation, or the story they tell, have very different conclusions.

Second is the security and/or accuracy of the reporting of information. Internet sites such as Wikipedia, About.com, and other open source sites are easily manipulated. There is very little true fact checking with the material that is posted and it is easy to hide authorship. These sources may be a starting point to lead to credible sources for information but should never be used as an authority. They lack credibility.

Third is authorship. Who are the authorities on subjects? Questions researchers should ask:

- Who is the author and what is their reputation/credentials?
- What proof can be found to support their credibility? Sam Smith versus Sam Smith, Nobel laureate in… What is the credentialing organization? BBA from GC, an AACSB accredited college of business vs. ITT Tech or Trump University whose Dean of Student Affairs was Dennis Rodman at one point.
- Does the author or source have the authority, credibility and/or reputation related to the subject? At 22 years of age, actress Selena Gomez openly expressed solidarity with the Palestinians; however, she has no personal experience, connection nor expertise on the subject. Celebrities often speak on subjects of which they are uninformed, misled and often mistaken. The number of retellings does not increase the credibility.

Fourth is publication. Is the publication, whether it is a new agency, governmental agency, corporate web page or any other source, a credible authority on the subject to which they are reporting.

- Coca Cola’s corporate web page for investors will be a far superior source for information about the company’s volume growth in Latin America (up 6% in 2011), than a newscaster on the local news station reporting about the company.
- Not all sources necessarily have to be “lofty”. YM, or Young Miss magazine, would be a credible source for teen girl trends and psychographic information and, depending on context, more credible than a report in the wall street journal on teen girls habits.