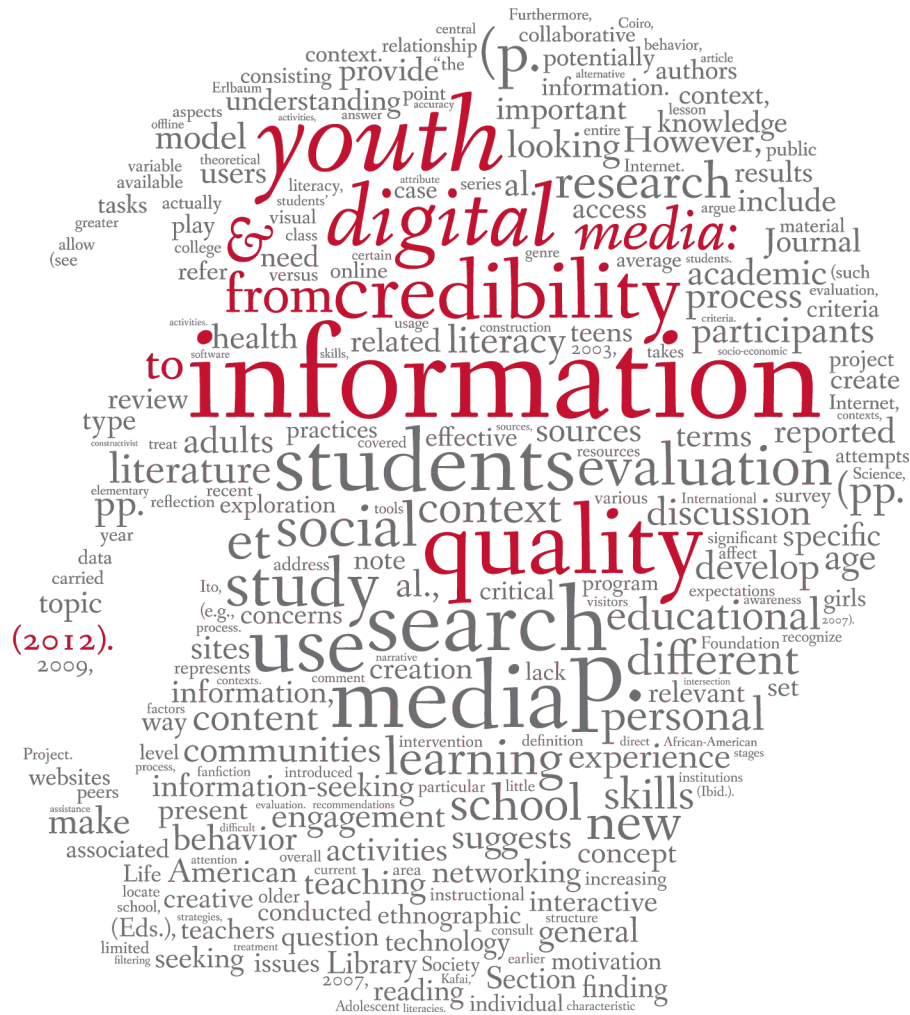




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## Youth and Digital Media: From Credibility to Information Quality



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## SUMMARY

As youth increasingly turn to the Internet as a source of information, researchers, educators, parents, and policy-makers are faced with mounting challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, the amount and diversity of “speakers” online, the lack of traditional gatekeepers and quality controls, and new modes of dissemination mean that youth are faced with challenging information quality judgments. On the other hand, these same shifts in the information ecosystem afford youth the opportunity to access, share, and create knowledge in entirely new ways, presenting myriad learning opportunities inside and outside of school. Prior to developing policy and deploying new educational initiatives, however, we must understand youths’ real experiences of online information quality. Toward that end, this paper reviews an interdisciplinary body of literature and offers a conceptual framework that may inform future research initiatives and policy discussions on the theme of youth and information quality.

### **The Information Quality Framework:**

- Expands on the current literature on information credibility to allow for a more holistic approach to quality assessments;
- Suggests a stronger process-orientation when exploring information quality issues by looking at the entire process of youth interaction with information, which today includes not only evaluation, but also the search, creation, and dissemination of information;
- Accounts for the different contexts in which youth engage with information online, such as personal, social, and academic contexts;
- And offers a taxonomy for looking at youths’ experiences of information quality: the ethnographic, adult-normative, systematic, and prescriptive perspectives.

### **A review of literature provides the following key findings:**

- Youths’ information seeking and information evaluation processes are not clearly distinct. On the contrary, youth evaluate the usefulness of information throughout their search. Therefore, depending on context, information that is available, accessible, and inviting may be of higher quality to an information seeker than a more exhaustive and credible source that is less accessible.
- Although youth may at times use different evaluative strategies than adults, such as visual cues and heuristics, they are nonetheless dealing with a similar set of issues concerning the quality of information online as the adult population.
- Content creation and dissemination activities foster various digital fluencies that can feed back into search and evaluation behaviors. Creation and sharing in collaborative online environments also foster norms that relate to skill development.

- Although content creation occurs mainly through personal and social activities, such as social networking services, wikis, personal websites, blogs, self-authored content sharing, games, etc., the learning that occurs may provide interfaces for learning in the academic context.

**The information quality framework will be useful looking forward:**

- Because information quality issues persist from youth to adulthood, albeit in different ways, future research can apply this paper's conceptual framework to a variety of contexts.
- Recognizing that youth participate in content creation outside of school, educators can seize on new learning opportunities by understanding and integrating these behaviors in the classroom.
- As youth increasingly rely on the Internet for all types of important information, such as health information, adults must understand how youth experience information quality and take appropriate steps toward youth-oriented information design and infrastructure.
- Because of the multiple perspectives and contexts of information quality, any policy discussion must involve all stakeholders, including policy-makers, technology developers, educators, parents, and youth.