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A GUIDE ON HOW TO CREATE A CREDIBLE TOURISM WEBPAGE

Business Economics and Tourism

2015

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä	Barbora Hrobařová
Opinnäytetyön nimi	Guide on How to Create a Credible Tourism Website
Vuosi	2015
Kieli	Englanti
Sivumäärä	50 + 3
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Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoite oli tarjota opastusta verkkosivujen ylläpitäjille. Opinnäytetyö tarkentaa monimutkaista aihetta kuinka internetin käyttäjät arvioivat verkkosivujen uskottavuutta. Tutkimuksen kysymyksellä ”Uskottavuuden teorioiden vertailu ja niiden käyttö tosielämässä” yritettiin lisäksi tutkia kuinka uskottavuuden arvioinnin menetelmä toimii.

Opinnäytetyö koostuu kahdesta osasta. Ensimmäisessä osassa käsitellään teorioita ja tuloksia, jotka on esitetty aiemmin julkaistussa kirjallisuudessa. Tässä osassa myös kaikkein tärkeimmät uskottavuuden arvioinnin menetelmät selitetään.

Toisessa osassa kuvaillaan laadullinen tutkimus empiirisen tutkimuksen kannalta. Julkaistulla kyselylomakkeella kerättiin ja eriteltiin 236 vastausta. Tutkimuksen tulos auttoi selkeyttämään uskottavuuden arvioinnin menetelmiä ja tarjosi uusia näkökulmia siihen, mitä tekijöitä käyttäjät pitävät tärkeinä. Verkon ylläpitäjille jaettiin yksityiskohtaiset neuvot tutkimuksen tuloksen perusteella.

ABSTRACT

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Title	Guide on How to Create a Credible Tourism Website
Year	2015
Language	English
Pages	50 + 3
Name of Supervisor	Thomas Sabel

The goal of this thesis was to offer a guide for website administrators which would detail the complex topic of how the users evaluate credibility online. The research question “A comparison between credibility theories and their use in real life” tried to further examine how the process of credibility evaluations works.

This thesis consisted of two sections. In the first theoretical section, theories and findings presented in previously published literature were discussed. In this section also the most important processes of credibility evaluations were explained.

In the second empirical study, the qualitative research process was described. 236 answers to the published questionnaire were collected and analyzed. The results of this research helped to further clarify the processes of credibility evaluation and offered new perspectives on what factors users consider to be important. Detailed advice for the web administrators based on the results of the research was given.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In today's world having access to a regular internet connection is starting to become an inherent part of people's daily lives. The commencement of Web 2.0 has brought new and unique possibilities for both the end users and the service providers and entirely changed the way of user interaction, which become much easier.

The aim of this thesis is to bring more light onto this problem, describe further the process how the users assess the credibility and offer a guide on how to create a credible tourism website. The motivation for choosing this topic was my prediction of high demand for information of this kind as well as growing potential for this topic in the future as well as a deep interest in this topic.

1.1 Aim of the research and research problem

This thesis presents two major theories; one theory presents the credibility factors which might have an effect on user's credibility perception whereas the second theory is questioning the actual frequency of evaluation of these factors on day-to-day basis. The aim is to find if it is really true that even if the users might consider these factors as important at first then on daily basis the factors are no longer checked diligently. Therefore, as a research question "*Comparison between credibility theories and their real use in daily life*" was chosen.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of two sections – the theoretical framework and an empirical study. Information presented in the theoretical framework is based on a literature review. In chapter 2, the most essential terms for complex understanding of the credibility assessment are explained. Chapter 3 presents an introduction to the understanding of credibility and theory of Prominence-Interpretation.

In Chapter 4 the factors which might affect a user's credibility perception are further examined whilst following chapter 5 is a critique of the previously presented factors of credibility assessment.

Chapter 6 is the last chapter of the theoretical framework section. It offers insight about credibility assessment of the field.

The following two chapters, chapters 7 and 8, specify the research methods and validity and reliably followed by the empirical study. In chapter 8 the results are presented and further analysed. In chapter 9 conclusions based on the results of the research are made and the research question is answered, also suggestions for further research are made.

2 TERMS USED IN THE STUDY

2.1 Web 2.0

Web 2.0 refers to the second generation of the World Wide Web. The term “2.0” is taken from software industry where the number at the end serves as an indicator of the version of the programme. However, in this case the number is not signalling the version of the programme, but rather indicates that the programme was improved and that possible malfunctions of the previous version were corrected. Moreover, also new features and functions were added. Some of the newly introduced features were blogs, wikis, social networking and web applications. Launching of new features led to improvement of user interaction, “Websites have become much more dynamic and interconnected” which led to bigger increase of “information sharing” and “online communities” (Techterms.com, 2008)

An advantage of Web 2.0 is the possibility to create more dynamical presentation of information than other media (pictures, video, links could be used at the same time) and information could be accessed at any time. (Wathen et al., 2002)

2.2 Trust

Trust could be seen as “willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence”. (Morgan et al., 1994) In other words, trust could be defined as decision of one party to make itself “vulnerable to another party” because the doer is confident that this action would not be negatively misused against him or her. (Rieh, 2007; Hill et al., 2006; San Martín et. al., 2008)

2.2.1 Cognitive trust

“Cognitive trust is a customer’s confidence or willingness to rely on service provider’s competence and reliability.” (Johnson et. al., 2005) It is created by observance of the behaviour of the service provider, his reliability or by evaluation of “reported reputation”. This type of trust could be gained if the service provider presents himself as stable and the customer feels that his behaviour could be somewhat predicted. As the cognitive trust is “knowledge-driven” the final

judgement is based upon assessment of these factors and it might either result in favour or disadvantage of the trust. Service providers should pay close attention to their behaviour and their overall presentation or appearance to the customers as “if the effects of the reputed credibility are strong initial interactions might be merely an opportunity to confirm or disconfirm prior perceptions”. (Johnson et. al., 2005)

2.2.2 Affective trust

Whilst cognitive trust is more based on reputation and knowledge, affective trust is more concentrated on feelings or relationship quality in between the concerned parties. Some of the attributes having an influence on the cognitive trust might be shared, nevertheless, this type of trust places importance primarily on personal experiences, instead of “reputation effects”, which show rather marginal significance. For formation of affective trust attributes such as “level of care and concern”, “perceived strength of the relationship and “feelings of security” are important. (Johnson et. al., 2005)

2.3 Credibility

Wide spectrum of literature describes credibility as a combination of expertise and trustworthiness.

Credibility is often described also as “believability”. Credible people or information are those who can be trusted and relied upon. When describing the credibility we speak about “perception of credibility”, which results from evaluation of several dimensions simultaneously. (Fogg, 2001)

Fogg (2001) describes that the process of evaluating of credibility is done via assessment of both trustworthiness and expertise and then by making a final conclusion about the credibility based on that.

3 BUILDING A CREDIBILITY

In the developed world internet usage has become an inseparable part of daily lives. According to Wikipedia.org, in 2010, the number of web search queries conducted daily on Google.com was coming up to one million per day. This figure pictures well the amount and diversity of usage of the internet on daily basis. Internet as a tool could be used passively by searching through its content and viewing desired pages or its users can also actively contribute to the content creation. By a cause of the technical progress and establishment of many content management systems and publishing services, content creation has become more easily accessible for wider range of users. Many of these services nowadays require only intuitive administration and therefore content creation became effortless also for the users with basic computer literacy, hence almost anybody can now create the web content. Nevertheless, this could have negative affect on the perceived quality of the content and it might lead to higher uncertainty and scepticism towards the credibility of the information stated on internet. This chapter introduces and further examines the problematics of the trust and credibility acquisition online.

Creation of credible website is very current topic, as usage of internet is globally growing phenomenon. Figure 1 shows that number of the internet users has grown by nearly 10% during the eight years period. It is apparent that in 2013 majority of the population in the developed world used the internet and there was also noted a significant growth in number of internet users in the developing world.

	2005	2010	2013 ^a
World population^[3]	6.5 billion	6.9 billion	7.1 billion
Not using the Internet	84%	70%	61%
Using the Internet	16%	30%	39%
Users in the developing world	8%	21%	31%
Users in the developed world	51%	67%	77%

^a Estimate.

Source: International Telecommunications Union.^[4]

Figure 1. Worldwide internet users

Figure 2 accompanies the results shown in Figure 1 and further pictures the percentage of internet users of a given demographic location. As seen, in most countries of the developed world the percentage of internet users reaches at least 40% of the total population.

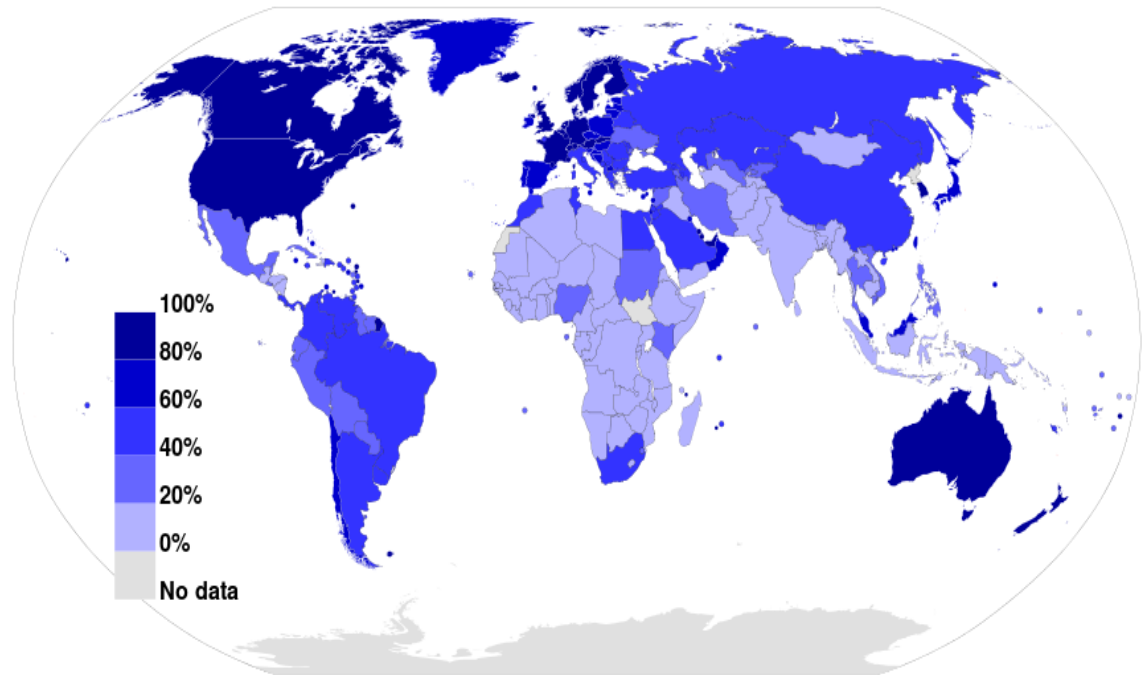


Figure 2. Internet users in 2012 as a percentage of a country's population

Despite of the growth of internet use, to date there has been relatively little research done about the credibility on the internet and, thus, there are still many blank areas to be filled by the future researchers. Not only if a website is perceived as being credible, it might evoke an interest of the user to stay on the page but when the user evaluates information as credible and relevant, it might also help in further persuasion that a page presents unbiased information. If the source is viewed as being conclusive, it might help with the remembering of the information, or even lead to a change of a user's attitudes. (Fogg, 2003a; Wathen, 2002)

Therefore, if one wants to create a successful, protruding tourism webpage or simply desires to produce information which could influence the reader, building credibility might be one way of achieving these goals.

Building a credible tourism website is a long-term outcome including multiple different dimensions. Not only the website itself, but its appearance and content affect the final perception of credibility; and still other external factors such as firm reputation, personal attitudes, previous knowledge or time limitations play a role in creating credibility. (Fogg, 2003a; Wathen, 2002) Therefore, ongoing reflection and awareness of those dimensions might be desirable for the maximization of the results. Importance should be placed even on small details, as if those will be noticed and negatively evaluated the whole credibility assessment might suffer. (Fogg, 2003b)

The process of assessing credibility on the internet was further described by Fogg (2003b) in his “Prominence-Interpretation Theory” (Figure 3). According to this theory, a user needs to first notice the element (“Prominence”) in order to be able to evaluate it (“Interpretation”). Both dimensions are directly dependable on each other, so if a user does not notice the particular element, no assumption can be made based on it. It is presumable that not all elements present on a website would be noticed and, therefore, only some will be under final examination. Website administrators, therefore, might consciously try to make some elements more prominent in order to maximize the impact of the message. The “Prominence” is constituted by factors such as reason for entering the webpage (entertainment, crucial need for the information), computer literacy; whilst “Interpretation”, is based on knowledge of the topic, cultural factors or expectations. (Fogg, 2003b)

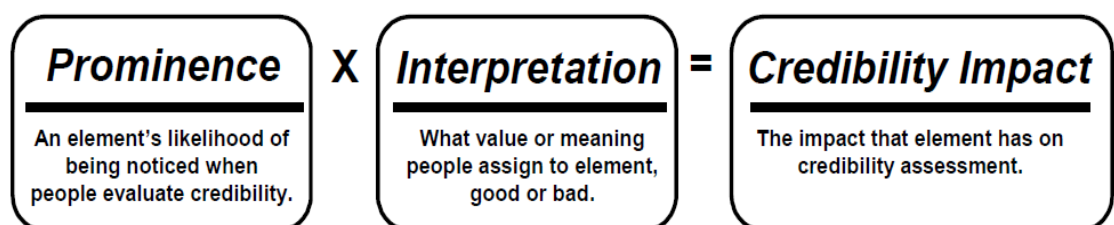


Figure 3. Prominence-Interpretation theory

4 FACTORS AFFECTING THE CREDIBILITY ASSESMENT

This chapter deals with factors which contribute to the credibility judgement and how these might be used in content creation in order to create a more credible tourism webpage.

Results of earlier research on this problema imply that there are multitudinous factors affecting general perception of credibility. However, due to the complexity and constant development of the problema, as shown in research executed by Fogg et al. (2003a), results might significantly fluctuate over the years. It is expectable that technology advancement and perception of credibility are linked together and that they develop accordingly, therefore, the importance of some elements might be less significant, or even obsolete with time.

The existing literature offers a wide range of approaches and viewpoints about understanding credibility assessment and factors influencing it. Studies found that the presence of certain elements leads to an increase of the credibility and, therefore, their presence on the web page is desirable. On the other hand, there are also elements which might have negative effect on the user's perception of the credibility.

Despite that the findings might to some extend vary, the majority of prior studies have particularly attributed the importance to two factors - trustworthiness and expertise. Literature describes them as most essential elements for the creating of credibility. (Figure 4) (Sejung, 2002; Wathen, 2002; Fogg, 2003a; Johnson, 2005; Mezger, 2007)

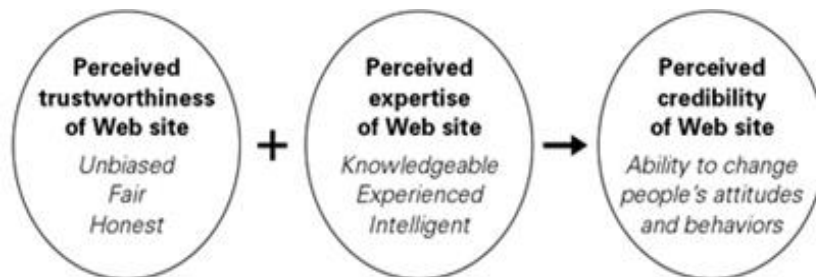


Figure 4. Trustworthiness- related elements (Fogg, 2003a)

4.1 Layout of the website

When entering a webpage for the first time, a user might not be able to anticipate its content, look or the purpose it was created for. Multiple studies have found that one of the first and most important factors a user notices is the design of the website. If the design looks to be poorly done, a user might forget about the initial intention which brought him/her onto the website or find the website as not credible, which might result into leaving from it and never returning back. (Fogg, 2003a; 2003c; Smith, 2011) However, as the Wathen et al. (2002) suggests, although this element usually plays a relatively significant role, if the need for the information is high, it is more likely that the user will be more indulgent to the deficiencies of elements increasing credibility. If the need for the information is not so high and the design elements do not match the user's expectations and demands, it might lead to the conclusion that the website is not credible. (Wathen, 2002; Metzger, 2007) Therefore, the importance of clear layout and easy orientation in the webpage content (Fogg, 2003a, 2003c; Smith, 2011) might be crucial in persuasion of the user to stay on the webpage. (Wather, 2002)

A webpage should be graphically pleasant to look at which includes, for instance, well matching colour schemes, appropriately chosen fonts and their size, placing and size of the pictures. (Wathen, 2002; Fogg, 2003a, 2003c; Smith, 2011; Rieh, 2007) A webpage should be easy to navigate through (well-structured menus, important information should be easy to find, not too much information) (Martín, 2011; Wathen, 2002; Smith, 2011)

4.2 Uncertainty diminishment

At the time a user enters an unknown webpage, the level of uncertainty will probably be high. Therefore, listing certain information might help with reassurance of the user about the nature of the webpage and what purpose it was created for. Factors such as presence of contact information (including full name and address of the company or author, personal photo, phone number, email) might decrease the

initial uncertainty and anonymity of the author. Anonymity might be diminished also by stating the full name of the author if the new article or update is made on the webpage, especially if a website has more than one author contributing to content creation. If a user feels that a website is neglected (rarely updated, outdated information) or does not provide access to archives of the website, it might have negative effect on credibility perceptions. Website administrators should also pay attention to details such as regular checking of the hyperlinks functionality, because if the website provides broken links, it might harm the user's perception about trustworthiness and professionalism of the website. (Fogg, 2003a, 2003c; Wathen, 2002; Smith, 2011)

4.3 Information Structure

Information stated on the webpage and its structure might also influence the user's view of credibility. If the information seems to be outdated, inaccurate, biased or even fraudulent, it is less likely that this information will be evaluated as credible. Research showed that users relate more closely to information which corresponds with their own opinions. Also, if the user has good knowledge about the topic presented on the website and the text seems to contain many factual errors or deceiving information, credibility assessment will suffer. (Rieh, 2007; Wathen, 2007; Fogg 2003c; Smith, 2011)

4.4 Brand name, Referrals

As part of cognitive trust, previous knowledge about a brand is likely to affect how users perceive the whole brand and also the website. Positive perception of the brand might increase the likeability that the user will visit their webpages and that he will feel that the webpages are going to be trustworthy. The perception of brand trustworthiness could be also affected by recommendations from people the user trusts.

A company should also carefully choose with whom they co-operate. Wrong choice of co-operators might decrease positive perception of the brand and their webpages. On the contrary, even if user doesn't initially know the brand or the website, if company seems to co-operate with someone user respects, the credibility perception will be positively boosted. (Wathen, 2002; Fogg, 2003c)

4.5 URL suffix

Studies such as those conducted by Smith (2011), Fogg, Rieh (2007) have shown that an URL suffix might also be important when assessing credibility. According to the studies, the URL suffixes symbolising non-commercial use such as “.gov, .org”, were found to appear to be more credible than domains which symbolised commercial use. “.com”. (Rieh, 2007; Fogg, 2001, 2003a; Wathen, 2007)

5 CRITIQUE OF CREDIBILITY FACTORS

Whereas previously presented results of the studies mainly concentrated on the factors which might increase perceived credibility; research done by Metzger (2007) in contrast to all of these, questioned the actual frequency of these credibility evaluations on daily basis. Metzger (2007) found that even though users might assign importance to certain factors at first, only a few users did check the presence of all factors diligently on daily basis.

Nevertheless, as Metzger (2007) suggests, an approach of “Dual processing models” (Metzger, 2007) might be the way how to more deeply and objectively understand users’ credibility assessment.

According to these models it is suggested that if the need for the information is higher, the more probable it will be that users will evaluate information more complexly and diligently. Thus, this model also supports the findings of Metzger’s study (2007), that on the daily basis (when information need is not so high) users do not perform a review of all of the mentioned credibility factors to such depth. On the contrary, when the need for accurate information increases, the user will also evaluate credibility factors of the website with more effort and to bigger depth.

6 CREDIBILITY OF HOTEL WEBPAGES

Previously presented theory discussed the processes of credibility evaluation. However, it is clear that the exact processes might change depending on what website the user visits. The requirements and expectations about the credibility would be probably different each time and would change according to not only what task user needs to do on the webpage but also according to the type of the website she/he decides to visit.

Even within the field of tourism, the importance of some factors will be lower or more prominent depending on the exact type of the website. If the user decides to visit a webpage of a flight company and is ready to make a money transaction on the site, his/her prior concern would probably be the safety policy and overall safety on this webpage. Nevertheless, on the websites such as official sites of tourist attractions the expected credibility factors might include the contact information, dates when the site is open, opening hours and prices of the tickets.

Therefore, all website administrators should closely think what credibility factors an average tourist will probably expect to see on the website and then develop the website accordingly. (Motocms.com) In any case, if possible, a website administrator could do a beta version of the webpage and collect some data of how it was received by its users; this might help to get an impartial opinion about the credibility factors and their presence or absence on the website.

Hotel webpages should especially concentrate on providing full address of the hotel with the directions, stating the full list of services and hotel prices and sharing the photographs and further specifications concerning the hotel and its rooms and facilities such as conference rooms. (Clickz.com; Motocms.com) Hotel should also offer online booking option so that the tourist could book the desired hotel room or service immediately. If the hotel takes any extra charges it should be clearly stated so that the possible disappointment or dissatisfaction could be prevented. Also stating of the near events, interesting things to do and sights to visit in the locality might be good way how to create professional and successful hotel website. (Motocms.com)

7 RESEARCH METHODS

When the research question is defined, the researcher has to carefully select a suitable method of how the research will be conducted. There are several methods how the research can be conducted, this chapter presents two of them.

7.1 Qualitative method

The aim of the qualitative method is to create some theory or a hypothesis. Therefore, smaller and specific samples are used when conducting qualitative research. (e.g. as a group with certain characteristics) When the results are analysed the researcher makes a theory or an assumption based on it. Results of this type of the research can not be generalized because the research was conducted only with a small and specific sample.

In qualitative method the researcher is not that detached as in the case of quantitative research. In qualitative research the researcher plays a bigger role, because s/he evaluates the collected data and then based on that creates a theory. The data collected are textual. Examples of qualitative research are focus groups, cognitive testing, interviews, historical analysis and so on. (Glenn, 2010; Wikipedia.cz)

7.2 Quantitative method

Quantitative research is based on some theory or a hypothesis, which according to the results would be then supported or disproved. The researcher's role when using the quantitative method is not so prominent and s/he acts purely as an observer. Quantitative research is usually conducted in a form of survey, content analysis or an experiment.

Results of quantitative research are numerical and therefore they might be interpreted in the form of, for instance, graphs. It is very important to make sure that the questions in the questionnaire are well formulated. The researcher should create the questionnaire so that all possible misinterpretations would be avoided and s/he should be sure that the questions would be understood in the same way by all the participants.

In quantitative research sampling is random and the goal is to get as many of the answers as possible so that the assumptions could be made based on the results. (Glenn, 2010; Wikipedia.cz)

For the purposes of this study, the quantitative research method was chosen. As the survey is based on the credibility theories and their real use in daily life, this method appears to be more suitable.

7.3 Scientific Validity

When conducting a research study not only a suitable research method has to be chosen, but the researcher has to also take into consideration other essential aspects, such as validity. The term “validity” refers to how well the research is measuring what it is supposed to measure. That might include the way of formulation of the questions, also known as “face validity”. (McQueen, 2002) Also the way how the questions appear to the respondents might affect their approach to answering. If the questions seem to be inappropriately easy or are formulated badly it might negatively affect the scientific validity of the research.

Questions should always be formulated so that background information of the respondents is taken into consideration (opinions, views, depth of the knowledge of the topic and so on)

If it is expected that factors such as age and personality traits might significantly affect how the respondents views the questions, the researcher should adapt the evaluation of the results accordingly. (McQueen, 2002)

As presented by Bui (2014) scientific validity of the study could be ensured by the conducting of pilot testing or asking for an opinion from various experts. In this study the scientific validity was ensured by distributing this questionnaire to a pilot testing group. By doing this the researcher ensures that the questions are really measuring what they should measure and that the pilot testing group understood them well. While pilot testing this questionnaire also opinions of few experts were used to assure that all of the validity requirements would be met.

Even though the maximum scientific validity tried to be ensured in this questionnaire, the researcher could not be ever truly sure if the respondents fully understood the question or if they were able to be objective enough when conducting the self-assessment of their behaviour.

7.4 Scientific Reliability

Before conducting a research, a researcher should make sure that a reliable way of obtaining results will be ensured. Research is reliable if each time it is conducted, similar results are obtained. The reliability could be acquired, for instance, by using the technique of reproducing of identical research twice to the same testing sample of the respondents; and then evaluating both results and their uniformity.

This method, however, could not be used in all cases and sometimes it is preferable to rather distribute two different forms instead of two identical ones, especially if the participants' memory of previously distributed questions might negatively affect the reliability of this test. If a researcher plans to implement two different versions of the research, the reliability and the unity of both of them have to be ensured in order to get truly reliable results.

The scientific reliability was assured in this study by redistributing the questionnaire to the pilot group twice, first the initial version of the questionnaire was redistributed, the second time slight changes were made. Also, the questionnaire was redistributed to people with different nationalities, to test that the results are in all cases similar. (McQueen, 2002) The challenge factor for scientific reliability of this study might have been that the research of this extent was conducted only once (236 answers) and therefore comparison of two separate results could not be done.

8 EMPIRICAL STUDY

The questionnaire was published on e-lomake webpage and data were collected starting from 21st May 2015. The main channels used in distribution of this questionnaire were social media and an online survey tool “VypInto.cz”. The goal was to get at least 200 answers, which was met on 25th of May 2015 when, after reaching 236 answers, the data collecting was stopped.

The goal of this questionnaire was to be as short and easy to orientate to as possible, but yet still also contain all the information needed to adequately research this problem. All of the 15 questions (divided to 3 sections) were based on the theoretical study presented in this thesis. The objective of the first section of the questionnaire was to get basic information about the respondents; the following section examined the respondents’ views about the internet in general, as well as the extent of daily use of the internet; and in the last section the credibility assessment was addressed. Three questions contained a text box where the respondents could freely write their response if they felt that none of the above mentioned options would correspond with their opinion.

8.1 General information about the respondents

The aim of the first section of this questionnaire was to collect data about the background of the respondents. The questions in this section aimed to be easy and more general.

The first question asked was about gender. As shown in Figure 5, the majority of the respondents were 158 women (66%) and by 78 men, representing 33%.

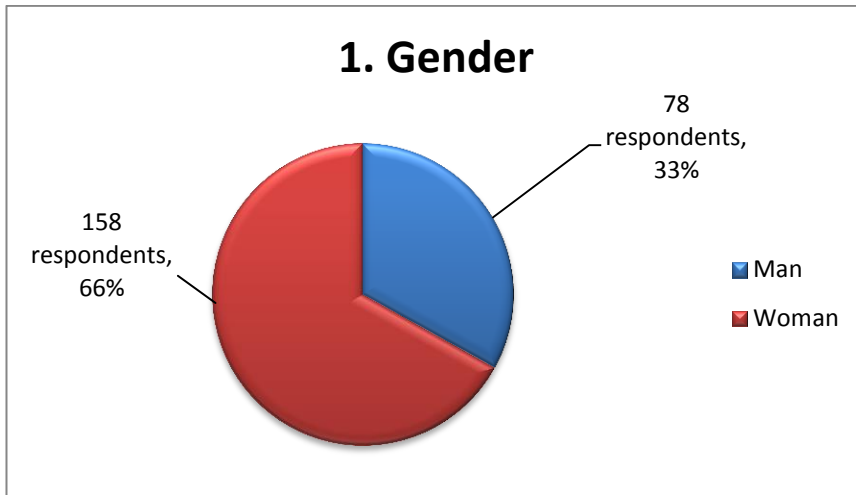


Figure 5. Gender.

The age distribution of this sample was very miscellaneous. This was very beneficial as good insight into the perception of the credibility of users of all ages could be gained. Most of the respondents of the questionnaire belonged to the category of 18-25 years old (31%) followed by 26- 35 year old (21%) (Figure 6.)

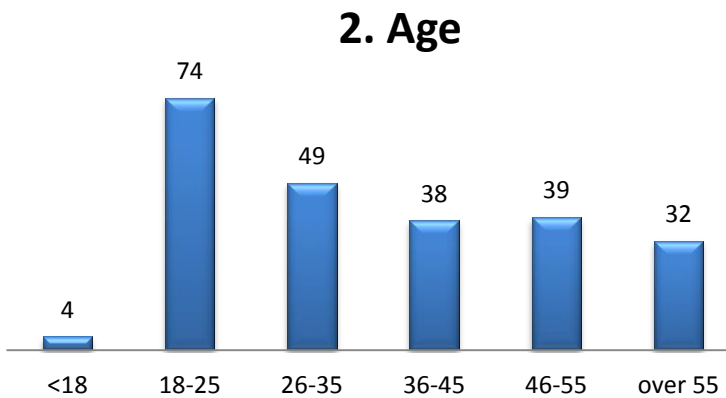


Figure 6. Age ratio of the respondents.

As of nationality, most of the respondents were from the Czech Republic (90%) Finland (3%) and Slovakia. (2%) Other countries were represented by 3%. (Appendix 2)

Also the educational background of the respondents, which was asked in question 4, was very diverse. 45% of the respondents have stated that their highest obtained education was the completing of high school. The second most common answer was a Master's degree education (28%) followed by a Bachelor's degree education. (15%) (Figure 7)

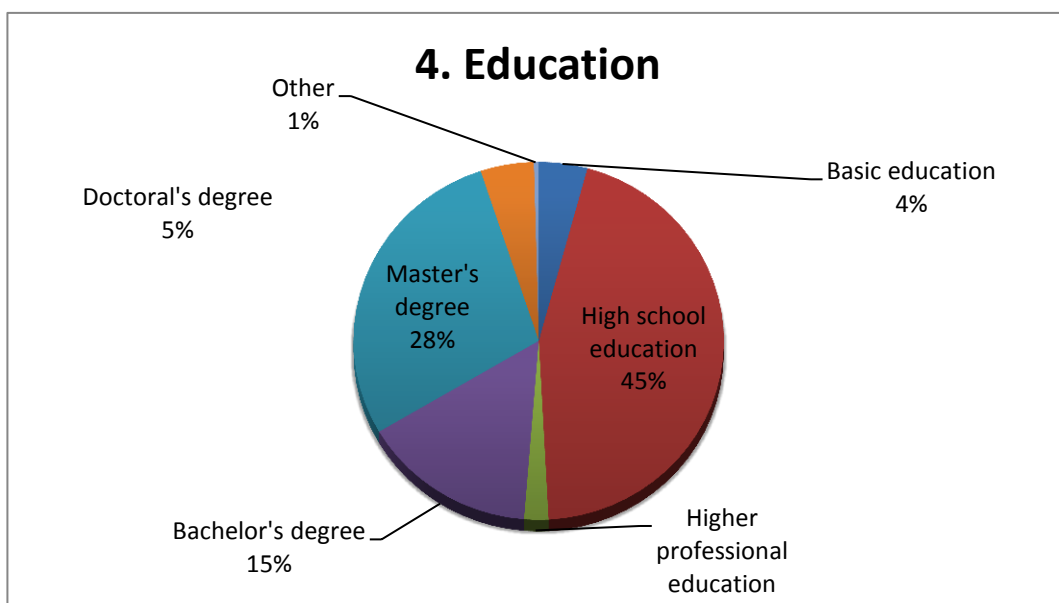


Figure 7. “What is your highest completed education?”

8.2 Attitudes towards the Internet

The fifth question was the opening question for the second section of the questionnaire, which concentrated on the opinions about the internet. (Figure 8)

Interestingly, the results show that most of the respondents are not heavy users of the internet, but still spend approximately 3-4 hours online every day. Even though all the questions in the research were designed so that the scientific validity would be ensured, in this case it might be questioned to what extent the users are actually capable of objective evaluation and honesty about how much time

they spend on the internet. It is very likely that users do not closely monitor the time they spend on the internet on day to day basis and that the real time the users are online might somewhat differ from the answers.

As this question was based on self-assessment method and its aim was only to find out how familiar the respondents were with the usage of the internet; the possibility of a slight differentiation from the reality was of mere importance for this research.

The second most prominent category of respondents (28%) spend 1-2 hours on the internet daily followed by 5-8 hours. (17%) Less than one hour per day on internet is spent by 11% and more than nine hours by 6% of the respondents. (Figure 8)

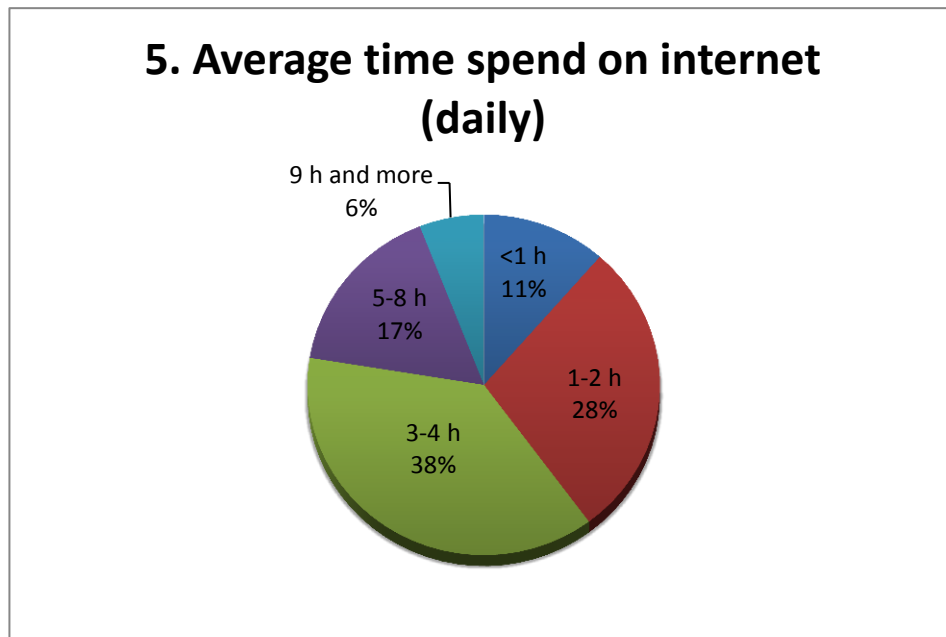


Figure 8. "On average, how much time do you spend on internet daily?"

In the sixth question the respondents were asked if they feel that the internet is a suitable medium for searching for credible information. 64% of the sample answered that they agree, followed by 17% of the respondents who strongly agreed. 11% disagreed with this statement, 6% were neutral and 2% strongly disagreed. (Figure 9)

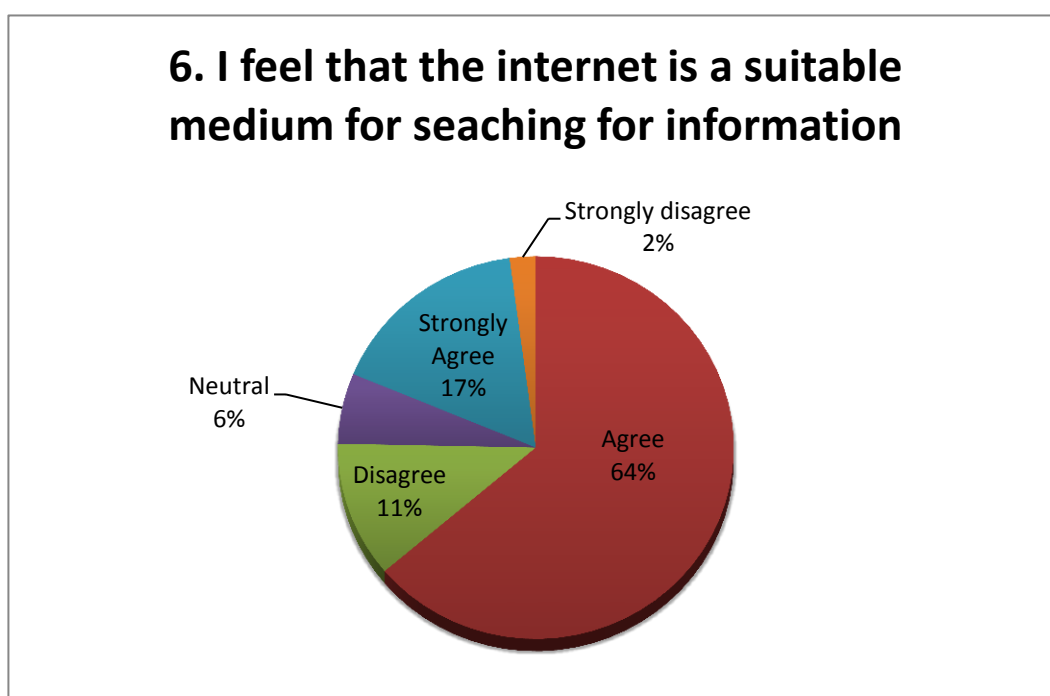


Figure 9. “I feel that the internet is a suitable medium for searching for credible information

As of awareness of possible threats on the internet (malicious websites, scripts and malware) most of the respondents (91%) felt that they either strongly agree (46%) or agree (45%) that they are aware of them. Only 4% answered that they disagree and 1% strongly disagree with claim in the seventh question. (Figure 10)

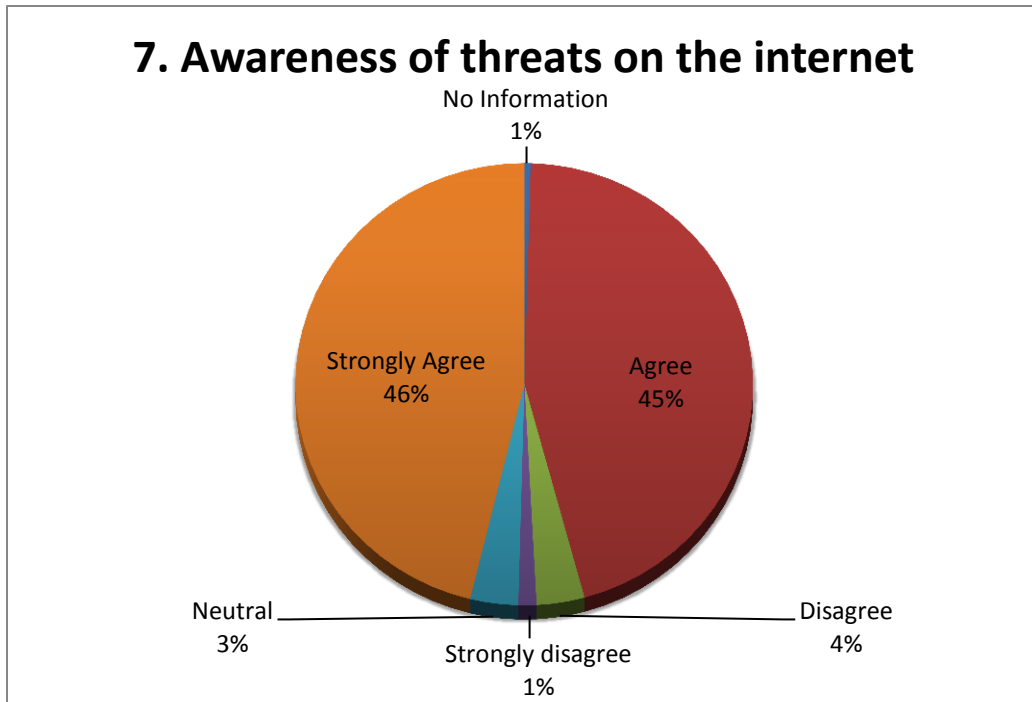


Figure 10. “I feel I’m aware of possible threats on the internet (malicious websites, scripts malware etc.)”

8.3 Credibility Assessment

Finally, in last section of this questionnaire, the credibility assessment process was studied.

The eight question examined what factors are noticed first when visiting a website. As opposed to the result of Fogg’s study (2003a) a vast majority of the respondents in this study considered credibility of the information to be the most prominent factor (40%). This was somewhat surprising because according to research conducted by Fogg (2003a) the design quality was found to be most important factor. In this research only 26% of the respondents stated that the first thing they would notice would be the quality of the design. The next most common factor users notice was how easy the website is to navigate through (21%) and 11% of the users would noticed the URL suffix of the website. (.org, .edu, .com...)

2% of the respondents would pick some other factor. Factors such as “amount of advertising”, “combination of all the mentioned factors”, “it changes all the time”, “motivation why the text was written”, “user’s opinions” and “website is https://” and were mentioned. (Figure 11)

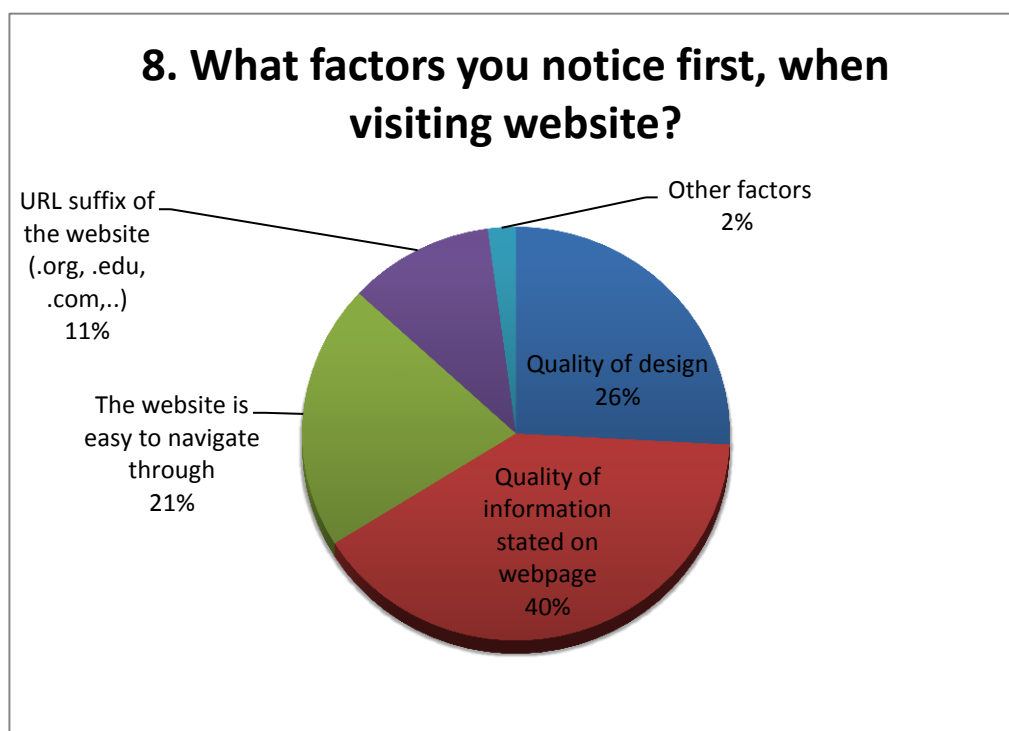


Figure 11. “What factors do you notice first, when visiting a website?”

In the ninth question the respondents were asked to rate the mentioned factors according to how important they are for them when evaluating the credibility. This question contained nine factors which were introduced in theoretical part of the study. As the goal of this thesis was to create a guide for web administrators, ninth question was designed to thoroughly examine how important the individual factors are.

The first factor which was rated was the design quality. 57% of the respondents stated that this factor is important for them and 23% stated that this factor is Very Important for them. For 17% this factor was not too important and not at all important for only 3% of the respondents. (Figure 12)

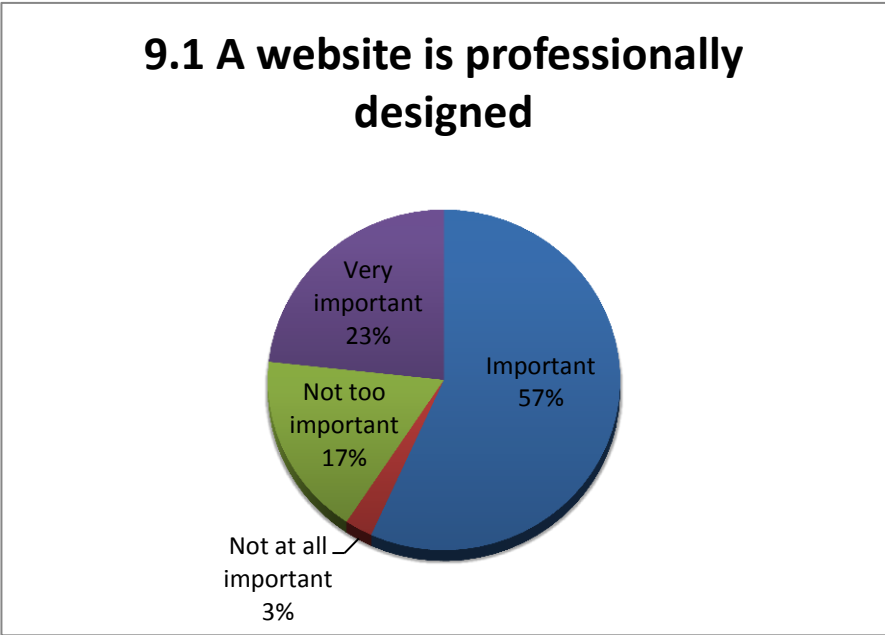


Figure 12. “A website is professionally designed (graphics, colour use, readability of text)”

The second factor was presented as “A website co-operates with firm you respect”. Most of the respondents (47%) considered this factor as important and at the same time this factor was not too important for 24% of the respondents. 21% considered it as very important, followed by 8% for whom it was not important at all. (Figure 13)

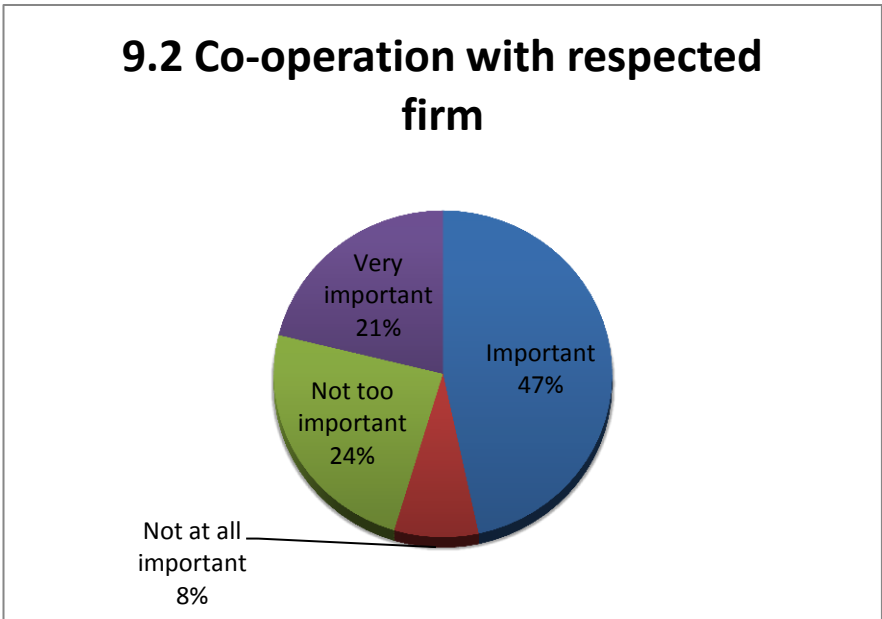


Figure 13. “Website co-operates with a firm I respect”

The third factor examined if the recommendation of the webpage by somebody the respondent trusts could have an effect on the evaluation of credibility of the website. For 76% of the respondents this was an important or a very important factor. 20% found it as not too important and for 4% this factor did not matter at all. (Figure 14)



Figure 14. "The Website was recommended to me by somebody I trust."

The fourth factor asked how important is it if the contact information is stated on the website. For 51% of the respondents this was important and 32% considered it as very important. 14% of all participants did state that it is not too important for them and for remaining 3% of respondents it was not at all important. (Figure 15)

9.4 The website provides their contact information

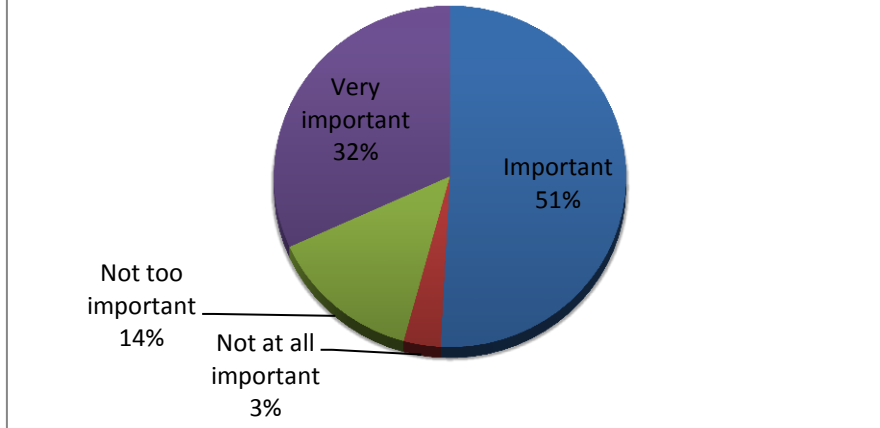


Figure 15. “The website provides their contact information.”

The fifth factor which was evaluated concentrated on the importance of the structure of the text (bias free, style of the writing, presence of typos) For 89% of the respondents this was either an important or a very important factor. Only 11% thought it is not too important or not at all important. (Figure 16)

9.5 Structure of the text

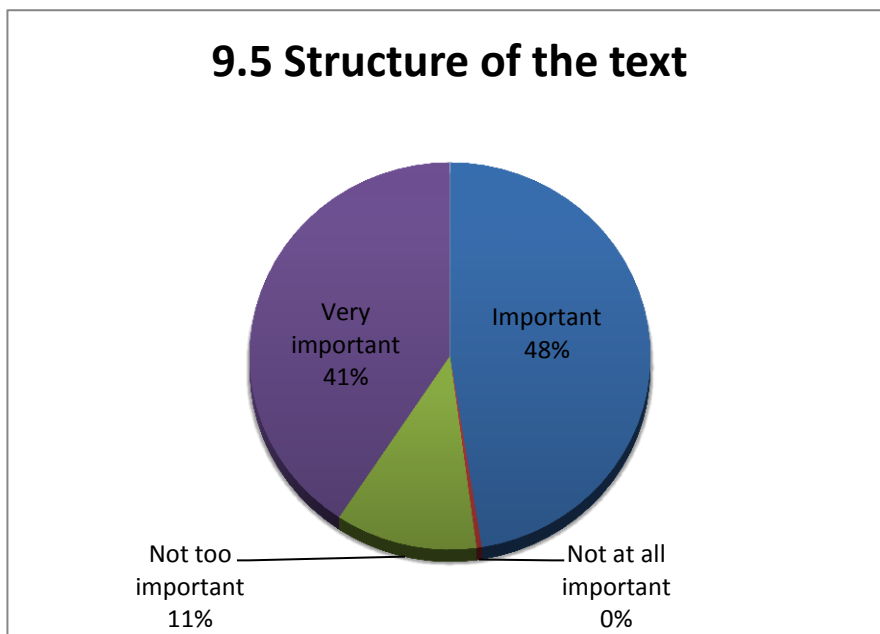


Figure 16. “Structure of the text (Bias free, Style of the writing, Presence of typos)”

A very similar response rate was found also in the sixth factor – functionality of the links provided by the website. 87% of the respondents considered it as to be important or very important and just 9% of the responses stated it is not too important or not important at all. (Figure 17)

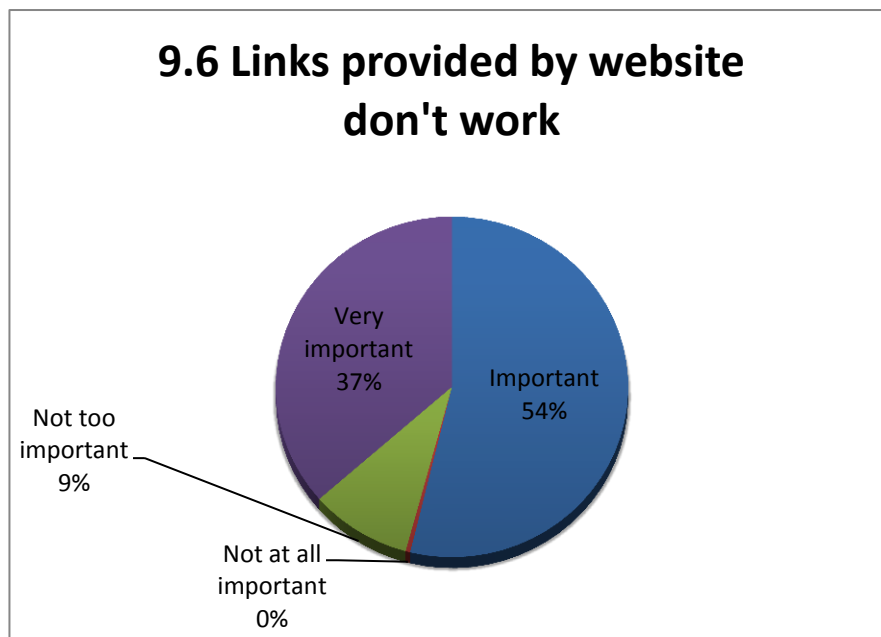


Figure 17. “Links provided by website don’t work.”

The seventh factor aimed to examine if regular updates of the website are important for credibility evaluation. 87% of the answers stated that it is important or very important followed by 11% for whom this was not too important. For the remaining 2% this was not important at all. (Figure 18)

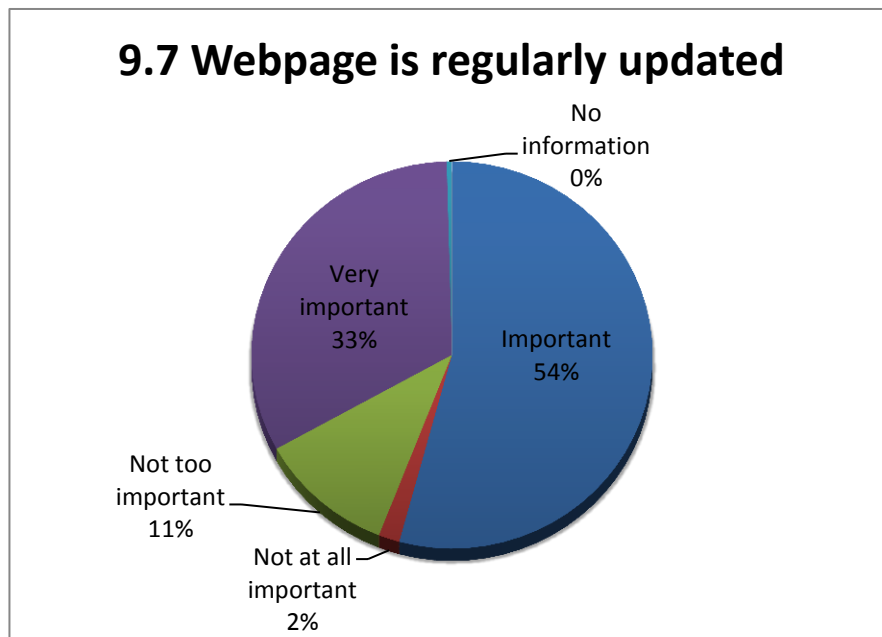


Figure 18. “Webpage is regularly updated.”

The eighth factor examined if it is important that the website provides access to their archives and articles published in past. Interestingly, opinions about this factor differed a lot. 50% of the respondents thought it is very important for them and on the contrary whole 25% of the respondents stated that this is not too important, followed by 21% for whom it was not important at all. (Figure 19)

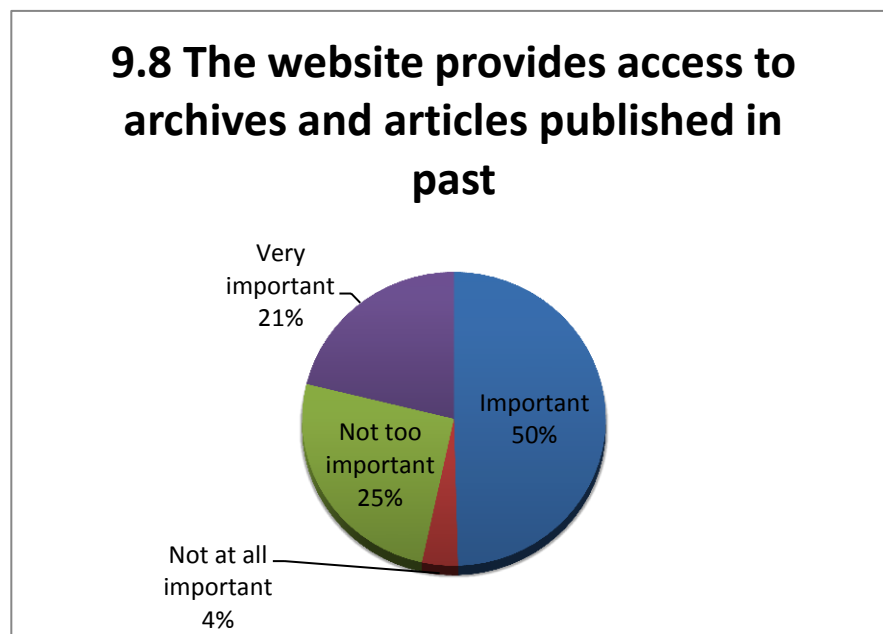


Figure 19. “The website provides access to archives and articles published in past.”

The last factor of this question was “ranking in search output”. 42% of the respondents felt that this was not too important factor whilst for the 32% of respondents it was important. 13% of respondents considered it as very important factor and 12% as not at all important. (Figure 20)

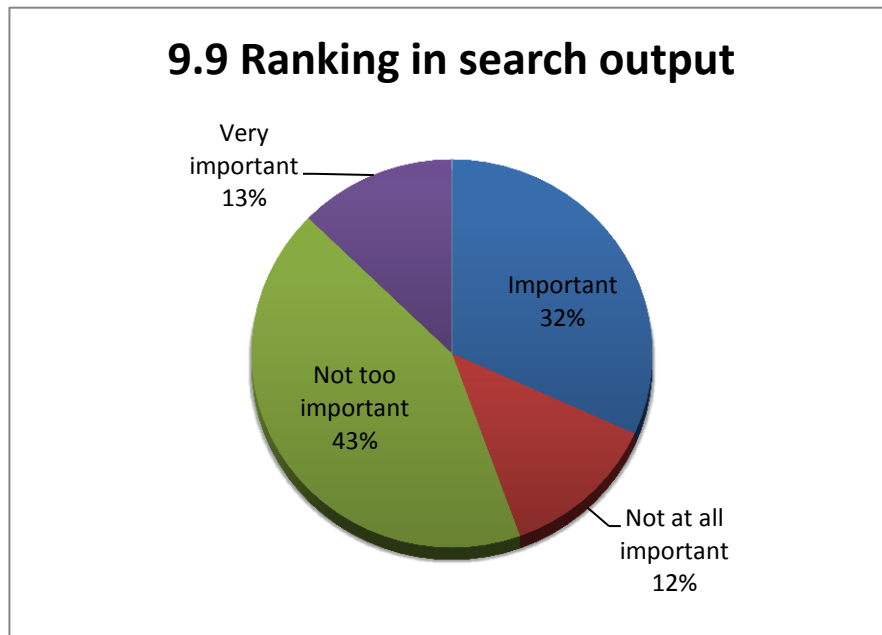


Figure 20. “Ranking in search output.”

In question 10 the respondents were asked if they think that credibility perception might change, depending on in which medium the information is presented. The majority of respondents (76%) answered that credibility might change, whereas 24% of the respondents did not agree and answered negatively. (Figure 21)

10. Do you think the used medium can change perception of credibility?

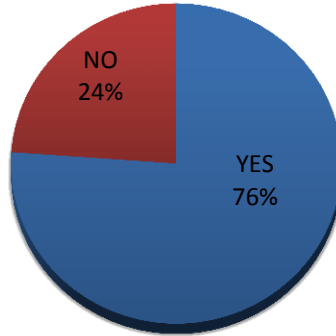


Figure 21. “Do you think the used medium can change perception of credibility?”

The eleventh question tried to elucidate what source types the respondents considered to be the sources of the most credible information. Whereas question 6 tried to find out if the internet is perceived to be a suitable medium to search for information, the purpose of this question was to further specify what information source, the respondents find as most credible, if they can choose from multiple options.

65% of the respondents considered books and scientific literature to be sources of most credible information. Even though in question 6 the majority of the respondents stated at first that they agree and strongly agree (81% in total) that the internet is suitable tool for searching for credible information, as could be seen from Figure 22, only 19% of the respondents considered the Internet to be the source of the most credible information. Newspapers and magazines were mentioned in 8% of answers, followed by TV (5%) and radio (3%). (Figure 22)

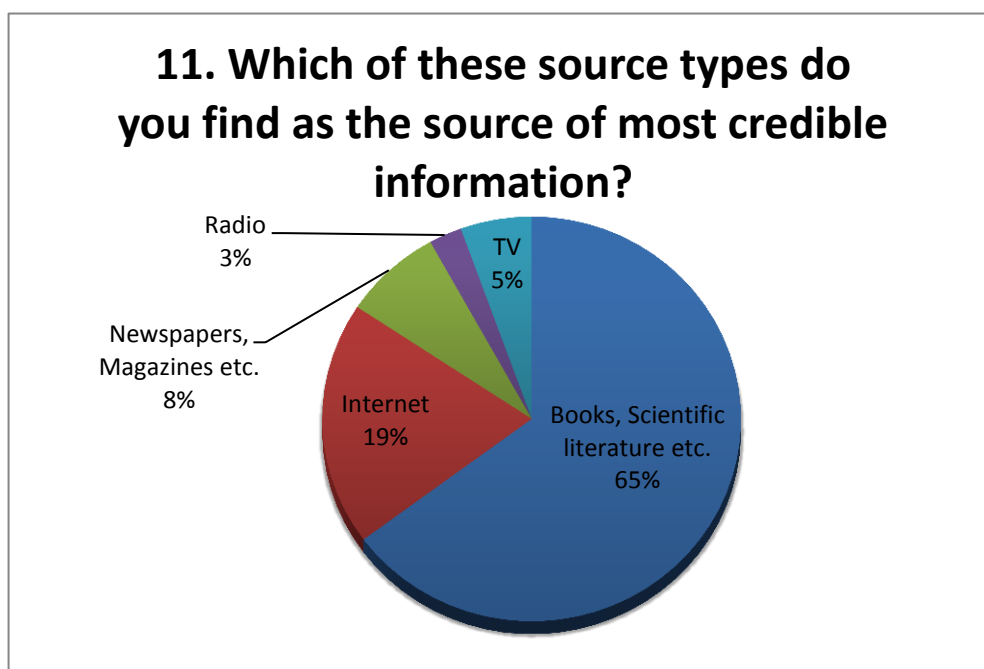


Figure 22. “Which of these source types do you find as the source of most credible information?”

In the twelfth question the respondents were asked to choose which of the mentioned factors play the most important role for them when deciding if a website is credible. The aim of this question was to compare the findings with previously done studies and compare if the results would be somewhat similar. (as presented in chapter 4) The selection of factors was based on the literature and chosen were those which were commonly mentioned there. As the goal of this question was to find most important factor, the respondents could choose only one factor.

Even if many sources attributed particular importance to design quality, the results of this research did not show the same inclination. As could be seen in Fogg’s study (2003a) most of the respondents (46.1%) considered the design to be the most important attribute of the website; whereas in this research only 4% of the respondents considered the design to be the most important element.

The results of this research show that information quality is not only the factor which most of the respondents noticed first but also the most important factor (57%) when deciding if the website is credible. The next most important factor was if the site was created by experts in the field (20%) followed by the reputation of the website. (8%) For 6% of the respondents the most important criterion was that the site was recommended to them by a friend, for 3% that another firm they respect mentioned this website. The rest of the respondents (2%) would pick other option.

If the respondents picked “other” they could have further specify their choice. Factors “None of these”, “Links to scientific research/papers”, “Proved and evidence based arguments”, “Regularly updated (books get old quickly)” and “The author is credible, I can find information about him” were mentioned. (Figure 23)

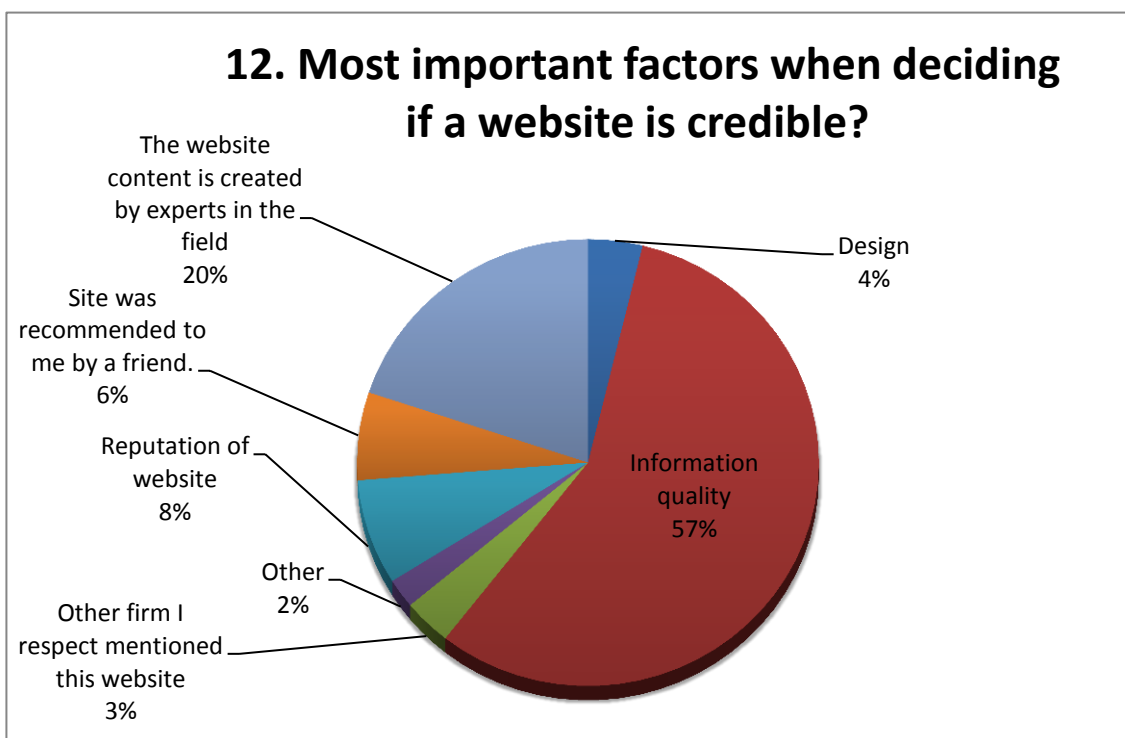


Figure 23. “Which of these factors play the most important role for you when deciding if a website is credible?”

The goal of question 13 was to find out what might be the main reason to leave the website within a few seconds. 40% of the respondents would leave because the search did not match their expectations, 23% respondents would leave because the link led to a fraudulent website. 13% would leave the site because the presented information was not true, 12% because the site contained typos or the domain name did not correspond with the content. 6% of the respondents would leave because the design quality was poor and the remaining 4% because of the presence of bias and strong language.

2% of the respondents would leave from the website for “another reason”. The listed reasons were “The text insulted me or contained pornography”, “So many ads and pop-up windows that the text couldn’t be even read”, “All of the above mentioned”, “Conspiracy based website”. (Figure 24)



Figure 24. “If you decide to leave from the website within few seconds it’s usually because..”

In chapter 5 “Critique of credibility assessment” research done by Metzger (2007) was presented. The aim of question 14 was to find out if similar results would be achieved and if the credibility factors really are not evaluated that diligently on daily basis. It was somewhat surprising to find out that results of this research did not correspond that much with the results of the research conducted by Metzger. Generally, in this research the respondents were probably more active while checking the factors, as could be seen from results presented below.

The first factor was “Website provides their contact information”. 32% of the respondents stated that they check that contact information was provided only sometimes. 30% stated to check this factor often and 20% rarely. (Figure 25)

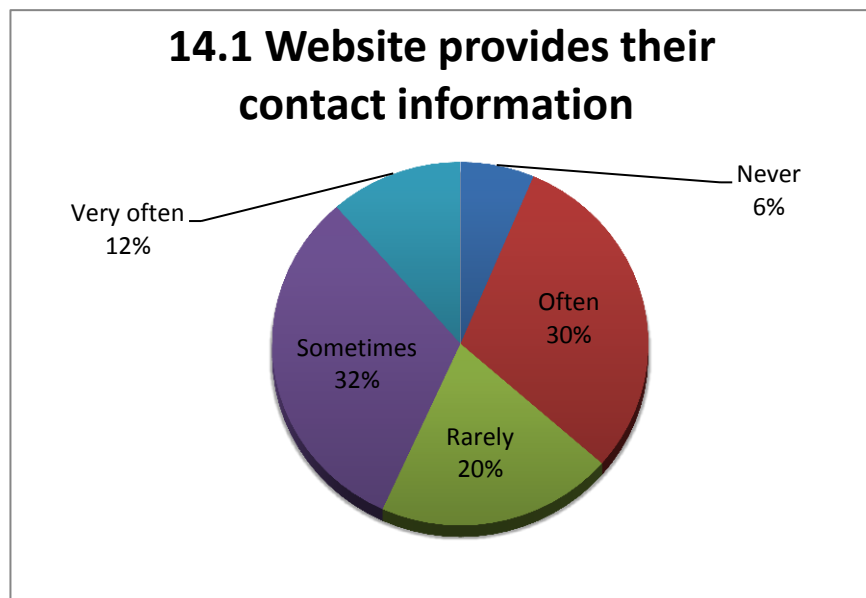


Figure 25. “Website provides their contact information”

The second factor inquired about the frequency of checking the functionality of the hyperlinks. 38% of the respondents stated that they check this often, followed by 37% who check functionality only sometimes. (Figure 26)

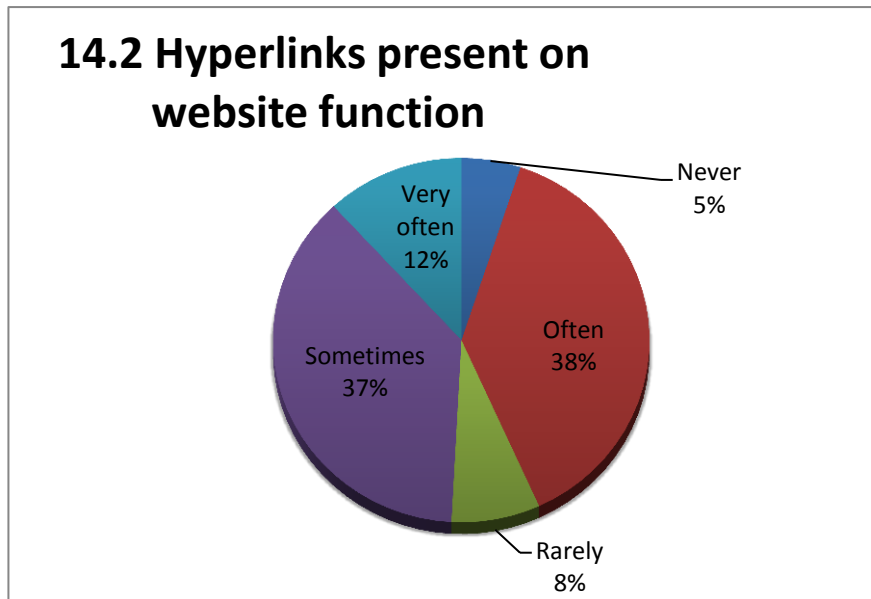


Figure 26. “Hyperlinks present on website function”

In the third factor 45% of the respondents stated that they check if the website provides access to archives only sometimes while 23% checked it often. (Figure 27)

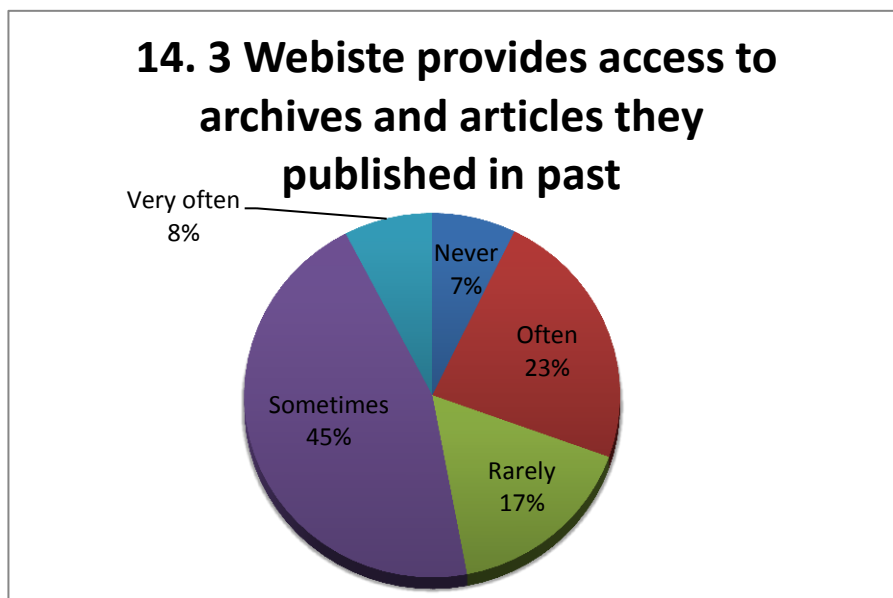


Figure 27. “Website provides access to archive and articles they published in the past.”

The veracity of awards and certificates the website claims to possess was stated to be done either rarely (25%) or never. (24%) (Figure 28)

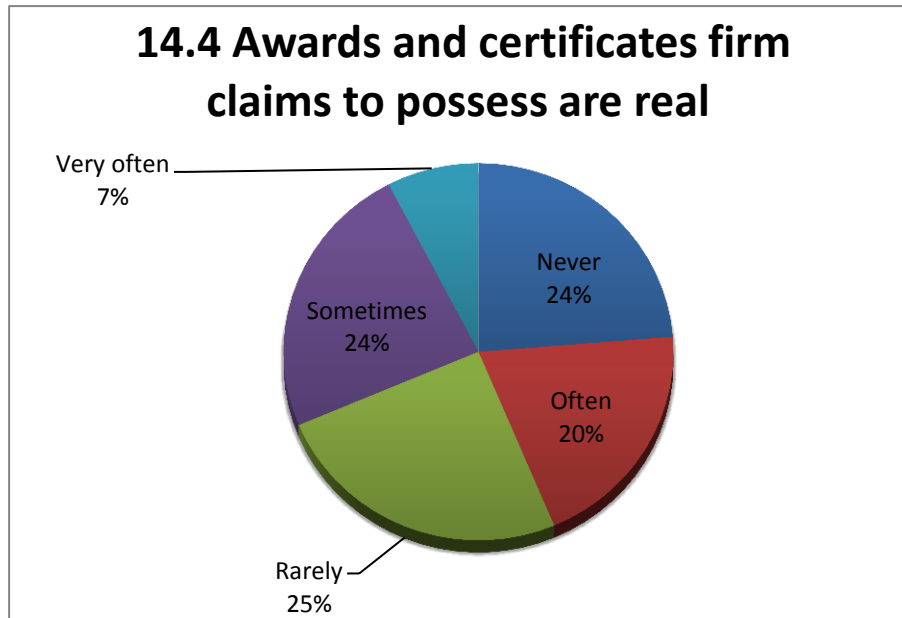


Figure 28. “Awards and certificates firm claims to possess are real.”

The date when the website was updated the last time was equally stated (31%) to be done often or sometimes. (Figure 29)

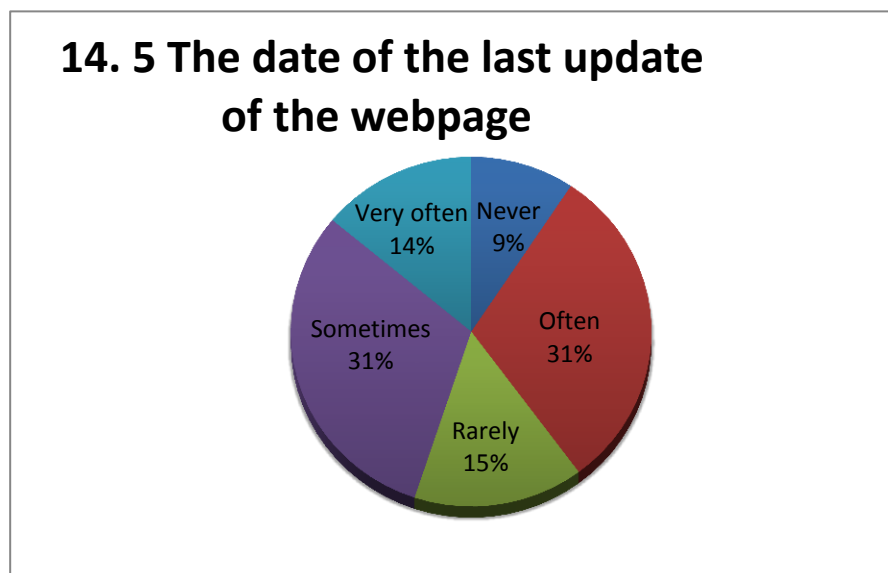


Figure 29. “The date of the last update of the webpage.”

The aim of question 15 was to test the hypothesis of the “Dual processing models” presented by Metzger (2007)

45% of the respondents in this research stated that they agree with this claim, 22% stated that they are not sure and 27% of the respondents claimed to either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. The remaining 9% strongly agreed. Therefore it could be assumed that the hypothesis of the “Dual processing models” was shown to be true. (Figure 30)

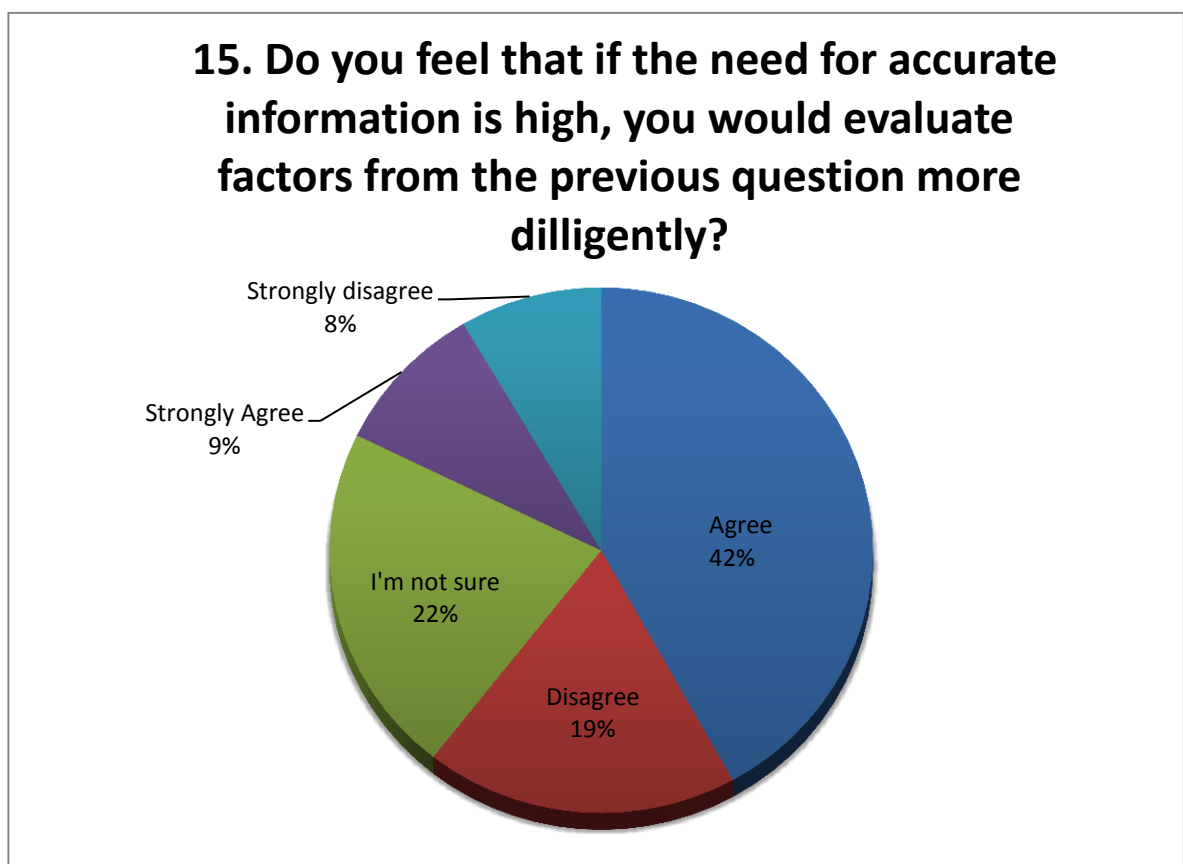


Figure 30. “Do you feel that if the need for accurate information is high, you would evaluate the factors from the previous question more diligently?”

9 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

9.1 Conclusions

This thesis tried to compare the existing theories and their use in real life and create a helpful guide on how to create a credible tourism website. As could be seen from the results, it is positive that the internet as a medium is perceived to be quite a credible tool when searching for information, even if the majority of the respondents would still prefer to search for credible information in books or scientific literature.

As the most important credibility factor which is also noticed as first was considered the quality of the information and expertise. Therefore a solution for how to improve the view of credibility on the internet might be the producing of high quality information which would include sources to scientific literature produced by experts in the field.

Moreover, another positive finding of this research was to ascertain that ranking in the search output does not seem to be initially that important for the users. This is very beneficial and encouraging especially for smaller or starting webpages.

The results showed that for acquiring a credible status, regular maintenance of the website is crucial. Users found that it is important that the website is regularly updated; all the links provided by the website function and also the contact information could be found on the website. The website should also have a pleasant graphic design and the text should not only be bias free and without strong language but also well-structured and well readable.

Generally, as the most common reason for the user to leave from a webpage immediately was the reason that the search did not match his/her expectations. Website administrators should try to prevent users' disappointment and eliminate the rate of immediate exits by concentrating on better definitions of tags describing new articles added onto a website. If the tags are better defined users would be

more satisfied with the search output and the possibility of leaving from the website would be lowered.

9.2 Research question

The importance of credibility factors (as presented in Chapter 4) was confirmed also by this research. Even though this researched came to the same conclusion, the users in this study assigned more importance to different factors than in the previously conducted studies. This was somewhat surprising; however, this difference might have been due to the fact that the previously done studies had bigger amounts of participants, so that might have been one of the reasons for differing results. Also, as mentioned by Fogg (2003a) the results might change with the time.

The answer to the next section of the research question is that critique of the credibility factors, as presented by Metzger (2007) is somewhat true. However, as the results of this research showed, this sample was more active in the checking these factors on day to day basis.

The hypothesis that the user with a higher need for correct information would evaluate factors more diligently turned to be true, as the majority of the respondents agreed with the claim.

9.3 Suggestions for further research

As mentioned previously not that much literature and studies concerning website credibility has been published. Therefore, further research on this problema would be needed. Especially studies which would offer large amounts of responses could be very valuable and hopefully could explain more about the understanding of website credibility.

The trend of using the internet is constantly growing so the importance of this topic is growing. Further research could not only help web administrators to understand how they should design websites so that they would be perceived as most credible, but it might lead to a better understanding of users' needs and even start

an era where all the information would be more personalized to the concrete user and the whole experience of being on the internet could be brought to a new level.

Also, further research for business specific fields could be very beneficial as, of course, the credibility requirements change depending on the topic of the website.

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APENDICES

Appendix 1. – Questionnaire

• Basic information •

1. Gender
 Woman Man

2. Age
 <18 36-45
 18-25 46-55
 26-35 over 55

4. What is your highest completed education?
 Basic education Master's degree
 High school education Doctoral's degree
 Bachelor's degree Other

3. Country of origin

• Internet •

5. On average, how much time do you spend on internet daily?
 Less than one hour a day 5-8 h
 1-2 h 9 h and more
 3-4 h

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I feel that internet is suitable medium to search for credible information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I feel I'm aware of possible threats on internet (malicious websites, scripts, malware etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

• Credibility assesment •

(How do you decide if you can trust to the website.)

8. What factors you notice first, when visiting a website?
 Quality of design The website is easy to navigate through
 Quality of information stated on webpage URL suffix of the website (.org, .edu, .com...)

If you would pick something else, you can specify (optional):

9. How important are the following factors to you when evaluating credibility of the website?

	Not at all important	Not too important	Important	Very important
Website is professionally designed (slick graphic, colour use, readability of text,...)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Website co-operates with firm you respect.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Website was recommended to me by somebody I trust	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Website provides their contact information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Structure of the text (bias free, style of the writing, presence of typos)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Links provided by website doesn't work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Webpage is regularly updated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Website provides access to archives and articles they published in past	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ranking in search output	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix 2. – Graph – Country of origin

