Neighborhoods on the Web

We can rate a website's credibility according to what "neighborhood" it's in on the web. It's not a foolproof method of evaluation, but one of the good things¬†about it is that you already know that it pays to take neighborhoods into account in a geographical community. And you're used to doing it.
For instance, you already know that geographical residential neighborhoods have general economic and architectural realities. They affect how things are¬†built and decorated. That's just like personal web pages, blogs, and social media pages having an underlying structure on the web.

Yet sites in both places--digital and geographic--still manage to express the personal taste and interests of the individuals who live in them. Consequently, residences in either space often differ a great deal from others in the same neighborhood. And one person's personal web page or blog or geographical¬†residence shouldn't be considered any more authoritative than that--it's only one person's opinion.

You also already realize that sales people in stores and corporations are likely to put a positive spin on information about what they're selling. That's true on the web, just like in your geographical community. They may know their products very well, though, and be willing to share a lot of that information with you.

We expect newsstands in the geographical community to carry a wide variety of journals, magazines, and newspapers. On the web, the information from¬†that neighborhood is even broader. And just as in the geographical community, traditional U.S. newspapers and broadcast news outlets online know their¬†users expect them to be objective.

We don't have that same expectation about advocacy groups--either online or in the geographical community. That's because we know it is their mission¬†to present information that fits with the ideas, issues, and behavior they promote. On the other hand, when we want straight information that's designed to educate us rather than persuade us, all of us turn to schools, libraries, museums, and government agencies. That's true on the web as well as in our geographical community.

You also know that entertainment sites in your own community may be relaxing and fun. But at the same time, you know they're sometimes quite expensive¬†and that sometimes things get said there for effect rather than to convey exact truth. The same is true for that neighborhood on the web.

It shouldn't surprise us that the web we've created mirrors many of the geographical neighborhoods we created first. As in the geographical community,¬†when we're looking for information on the web we just have to remember to go to the neighborhood that suits our needs and expectations.