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Project 1

Written Report:

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What is sophistication as it pertains to online media sources?

By: Ryan Alan

Sophistication is a seemingly simple term; however, when one begins to consider how to judge sophistication, he or she quickly realizes that the term is anything but simple. For example, to be sophisticated in society can require becoming part of an upper class, yet this is not always the case. Academics often write lengthy and verbose pieces that can be seen as sophisticated, yet many people cannot fully comprehend these pieces. So, how can something be sophisticated if a mass audience cannot understand it? Judgment becomes even more difficult when observing online media sources because websites contain more than just text; online sources also contain an interface for navigation, images, and often other media. This report will attempt to explain how to accurately analyze sophistication in online media.

In working with a group of other students (expert group), we attempted to decide what sophistication is in text media. Many topics were debated and the discussion became largely philosophical. This should not have come as a surprise when discussing a topic that is very open to interpretation. There was even a debate over the definition of text. Some group members believed that text could take many forms as long as it conveyed a message. Others (including myself) believed text to have a more concrete definition and, although written work can always be interpreted in many ways, text needed to be codified into a given set of characters and implemented using specific rules and conventions. The discussion moved onto selecting specific criteria on which to judge a website's level of sophistication.

The group began by brainstorming a list of different areas on which websites can be judged. Independent research was carried out and our list was combined with online criteria for judging sites. These criteria included:

- Author and site sponsor are identified and contact information is available
- The work is dated
- The site's purpose is clear (business, entertainment, news, information, etc.)
- Content is well organized
- Interactivity that increases the content's value is present
- Users can easily tell what site they are visiting
- A navigation system is present and useable
- Any audio, graphic, movie, or other media files are useful and serve a purpose
- The site's format remains consistent
- All aspects must be integrated

This list was compiled from Karen McLachlan's *WWW Cyberguide Ratings for Web Site Design* and her *WWW Cyberguide Ratings for Content Evaluation*. The importance of consistency was emphasized because consistency allows users to navigate sites without becoming confused. (Gaffney) This allows users to take in content without frustration. All of this research confirmed much of what the group had discussed.

After all of this discussion and research, I have come to understand sophistication as a very fluid topic. For the purposes of evaluating Canadian online news media sources, it must be understood that sophistication is in the eye of the beholder. The best and most sophisticated sites will reach the broadest audience while still telling a full story. This means that the sites must combine readable text content with a logical navigation system.

A site cannot be considered sophisticated if either one of these aspects is not in place. For example, a site that has excellent content but no viable means for navigating this content is certainly not sophisticated. Similarly a site with a powerful navigation system but has no relevant content is also not sophisticated.

The combination of content and an effective interface makes it extremely difficult to quantify the level of sophistication in an online media source. There are tools to evaluate text in terms of reading level, spelling, grammar, et cetera, but there is no such tool to evaluate a user interface. These tools do not exist because interfaces are often real-world metaphors. As the World Wide Web has matured, it has created its own metaphors for navigation and these generally understood forms of navigation continue to change. Due to the fluidity of what is generally accepted as a useable interface, it is necessary to survey users to see whether or not an interface is effective.

What is text analysis and markup?

By: Greg Atkinson

My topic was “What is text analysis / markup.” I joined that specific expert group out of a personal and naïve interest in the TAPoR project. I hoped to gain an understanding of what text analysis actually is. Beyond finding a simple definition of the term “text analysis,” I had no expectations of this group. After the first class, I discovered that the unique structure of this course prevents me from forming expectations. My expert group quickly discovered that text analysis is a highly philosophical subject area. The rhetorical nature of digital text created conversations that lasted for entire classes, and continued on well into the night via email. I believe that an initial lack of guidance and leadership caused this. This is not a criticism of the course structure, and I do find the

philosophical end of multimedia to be of great interest; however our discussions about the rhetorical nature of digital text documents proved to be a progress-blocker. Initially, nobody was in a position to take a leadership roll as we were all naïve and perhaps insecure. It was not until our final two meetings that we took leadership initiative – we had discussed enough philosophy, and read enough articles that it became time to end discussions that produced information irrelevant to our home group debates.

I learned the simple definition of text analysis and some of the tools used in that particular field of study. I also learned that a great deal of leadership is required in an unstructured setting – namely our expert groups. I learned that before any progress can be made on the principle issue, a group leader must first affirm that each member of the group has the same basic understanding of the topic at hand. A leader is also required to ensure that the discussion stays relevant to the subject. Research deadlines are also crucial. I would have liked to have spent more time discussing the philosophical nature of digital text with my group, specifically within the ontological framework, but our findings would not have contributed much to our subject.

Our expert group concluded that text analysis is analysis and synthesis, and that it is a computer assisted concordance. Markup is a means of representing data to a computer through a mutually understandable language.

I took these definitions back to the home group, only to decide that our use of text analysis in analyzing sophistication would not extend past a simple “grade level analysis” of news articles. This was disappointing initially, because I felt that the time spent on my expert topic warranted a larger role in the debate. However, this was an erroneous mentality for a problem-based learning course. The process of obtaining the results was

of more educational value to me than the results alone. In realizing this, I feel that my expert group should have questioned the subject relevance to the debate at hand, especially since there was another expert group researching the tools of text analysis. I feel that my expert group should have asked ourselves “why do we need to produce a definition of text analysis?” This question could have produced a much more relevant and thorough answer to the debate at hand.

Although I will not conclude here as to which news site is the most sophisticated, I will conclude that delimiting a problem is the first and most essential step to problem solving within a group framework, and the second most essential step is ensuring that each group member understands what the problem is – that is to say, we all need to check and see if we’re on the same page, speaking the same language, and viewing the issue through the same eyes, otherwise its easy to get off track.

What tools are available for text analysis?

By: Tom Dang

When the term text analysis tool comes into mind, one may wonder what that term really means. That was how most members (including myself) felt when we were formed into our expert groups. Initially, our expert group had a slow start. This may have been due to a lack of leadership or our lack of knowledge regarding text analysis tools. We started to brainstorm on what a text analysis tools are (i.e. HyperPo), what kind of functions they provide (i.e. word count) and how text analysis tools can help us determine whether the news site is sophisticated or not. With no guidelines or structure, the brainstorming process really helped a lot, as it involved everyone in the group and ideas were coming in one after another.

Some of the text analysis tools that were mentioned in our expert groups are HyperPo, TAPoR, Concordancer, Flesch Kinkaid, Text Analyzer and Auto Summarize. Each member of the expert group was assigned to a particular text analysis tool. We researched and experimented with our assigned tools. In our next group meeting, we discovered that different text analysis tools could give us different results. For example, one text analysis tool may give us results such as the number of five letter words that occur in an article or average words per sentence, while another tool may evaluate an article's word choice.

One member from our expert group took a similar article from three different news sites and compared them with HyperPo. HyperPo takes a link (or text file, etc.) provided by the user and analyzes it by displaying a summary of that particular article. The text analysis tool will show results such as the total number of words, the average word frequencies, the number of sentences/paragraphs and so on. By analyzing the summary, the sophistication of content can be quantified.

At the beginning of this project, I did not know anything about text analysis tools. After a couple of group discussions, meetings and reading information from the blog postings, I now have a fairly good understanding on what text analysis tool is, what functions they offer, why they are being used and how this tool can 'help' us determine if the news site is sophisticated or not.

How do issues of accessibility and affect text media?

By: Drew Garvey

My expert group was focused on the topic of authorship, legitimacy, and accessibility. This topic covered such issues as who is responsible for an online source,

who may or may not use an online source legally, what constitutes legitimacy in itself, and how that can be applied to news media in general. Issues of bias, as well as who is allowed to access an online source, and how were also considered. In order to manage these issues, my expert group divided the topics into those pertaining to authorship, those pertaining to legitimacy, and those pertaining to accessibility. The expert group itself was then divided into three smaller groups, each being responsible for one group of issues.

My sub group was responsible for discussing the issues pertaining to accessibility in online media, and was to report our findings back to the larger group. We had to define what accessibility meant in relation to online news media. We decided that one obvious definition was that accessibility referred to who could or could not access a particular site. For example, did a user need a password or subscription to view online content, or was the site open to anyone? Then we decided accessibility should also mean whether or not a site was accessible to users with physical disabilities. An example of a site being accessible in this way would be if it included some sort of dictation software, or could interface with various peripheral devices used to assist the visually impaired. Upon further discussion, we decided that accessibility should not only mean who was able to perceive the online media, but also who was able to absorb that media, and to what extent. For example, we decided that an online news source that published articles focusing only on topics relevant to only one geographic or socio-economic group, could not be considered as accessible as a source that was relevant to all users. We also decided that this same line of reasoning would pertain to the language registers of the articles themselves, rather than just the subject matter.

After my group had decided on our definition of accessibility, and its implications for evaluating online news media, we reported our findings back to the rest of the expert group, and in turn heard what the other groups had discovered about their topics.

From the group dealing with issues of authorship, we learned that a responsible definition of authorship should not only include the person or persons that wrote or designed a specific piece of online media, but also who they are affiliated with, and what their individual motivations for producing their work may have been. Closely related to this were the findings of the group responsible for issues dealing with legitimacy. This group decided that there was more involved in an online source being legitimate than simply being widely accepted by the public. It was decided that a media outlet should also be evaluated on where and how they get their facts, and by what types of, and how much of a bias is evident in the content and distribution of their media.

From what I learned in my expert group I believe I will be able to help my group substantially in deciding which of our chosen sources should be considered most accessible. As a group we will need to decide how much weight the authorship, legitimacy, and accessibility criteria are given in deciding a source's sophistication. I feel that what I learned in my expert group, and the process by which I learned it, will be very useful in determining which source should be considered most legitimate, accessible, and ultimately the most sophisticated.

Communicating Results:

By: Jim Chisholm

When this project was first conveyed it seemed very ambiguous and open to interpretation. The objectives and goals of the project were not clear or defined for any of

the groups (home groups). The class and groups collaborated and came up with certain factors that would be necessary in studying the sophistication of electronic text. These factors allowed my group to focus and understand what it was that we were to accomplish in this project. Our group was to research methods of communicating the results and findings of the project.

When my expert group first met, we were unclear of our group's topic and role in this project. Initially, I thought it was our job to figure out how web sites presented electronic texts and presented their content, but as our group discussed the topic we discovered a different interpretation. My group (expert group) realized that it was our job to decide on how to present the information given to us by our home group. My expert group outlined what factors were important and necessary for us to convey to our home groups.

When my expert group first discussed the topic of communicating results, we thought it was important to outline a clear marking scheme for this project. Since this project had no guidelines or marking criteria we thought it was a good idea to divide the project's evaluation into certain aspects. Each member of the expert group had different versions of the marking scheme, but most were very similar. Along with input from my home group, I chose the following evaluation criteria:

Proposal 20%
Peer Evaluation 20%
Paper 40%
Presentation 20%

I thought this kind of marking scheme would give my group a certain direction and would allow for the more important aspects of the project to be weighed differently.

The first aspect my expert group discussed was whether or not to make a proposal or some kind of outline sheet for the project since there was not one given at the beginning of the assignment. I thought it was best to use a proposal to state what kind of work my home group would produce and how it would be conveyed to the class and professor. My expert group decided that it was important to give a certain percentage to peer evaluation. The peer evaluation would allow each group to give emphasis on individual effort and provide a chance for the group to give feedback on individual performances in the group. The bulk of the mark for this project would be given to the written report. My home group felt that the paper was the most important aspect of the project as the project's main objective was focused on the process (the way in which we came to our conclusions). The paper would allow my group to show and explain the process of this project most convincingly.

The final aspect of this project was presenting the final results in one form or another. This was the most open-ended aspect of communicating results because there were many ways in which each group could present their findings. My home group decided to use an online-based presentation to show our results. My group felt an online presentation would be most appropriate in illustrating the applications of our findings. I also thought it would be beneficial to survey people in order to gather information regarding the web sites that were to be analyzed. The survey would provide a good indication of what sites were more sophisticated.

At first the project seemed very open ended and confusing, but as we gave the project structure the main objectives for the project became clearer. The way in which each group decided to convey and communicate results became very similar. This

occurred through discussions and consensus of what was important and relevant to the over all goals of the project. Each home group seemed to take similar guidelines and aspects from the expert group. With no original plan of action I felt my expert group as well as our home group were able to convey an accurate interpretation of how and what to convey about the sophistication of online text.

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