CS498-SOCIAL VISUALIZATION

READING 1 - Visualizing Conversation, Medium Effects: Turn-Taking and Back Channels, and Managing the Virtual Commons: Cooperation and Conflict in Computer Communities

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Visualizing Conversation

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This manuscript argues on design of graphical representations for on-line persistent conversations. It claims that textual social achieves are inherently persistent and given the interactions possible through keyboard are highly adaptable. These achieves are as well searchable, but understanding social structures based on those may not be easy. The main problem addressed is how salient social data could be queried and represented accurately and intuitively. This approach, visualizing social information for social purposes has been entitled as Social Visualization. It is argued that social visualization is different from data visualization since the former deals with inaccurate and/or subjective context. Furthermore this visualization is highly accustomed to social cues.

Two very different graphical interfaces, Chat circles and Loom are introduced for synchronous and threaded conversation respectively and the underlying concepts of design and use of these interfaces for synchronous and asynchronous conversations are discussed. In a part of the work, application of avatars as a solution for problem to presence has been critiqued and it is argued that they may destroy expression by providing a single expression overlaying all users’ communication. I think this argument is not entirely valid since the way avatars are used may be highly subjective and their effectiveness may vary from one person to another. There is not enough data in the paper to prove this. A series of design issues are addressed which include the choice of data, the way data is generated, mapping of data and the impact they carry. I think these issues are the major steps which need to be addressed in the content of social visualization; however among these the impact of visualization is the most important one. How the visualization technique can reveal interactions and the efficiency of it still need to be both quantitatively or qualitatively measured and demonstrated.
Medium Effects: Turn-Taking and Back Channels

By Lynn Cherney

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This chapter has a very interesting discussion on some important elements of interactivity, turn taking and back channels. Even though the discussions are somewhat out-of-date, still I found many of the finding relevant to interactivity. Something that has cleverly been discussed in this chapter is the emphasis on textual communications and some of those arguments made could be applied to interactions among on-line users on a regular basis. The examples of differences of chat media and face-to-face conversations are also interesting. In my opinion at the time that this chapter was documented, the notion of mediator or a central speaker has been an issue since in MUDs, everyone could type concurrently and this could make conversations chaotic and will affect the turn taking. In current chat media, e.g., Yahoo! or Microsoft Live, these problems have already been addressed since the notion of presence has been resolved. Now any user can see who online (of course is if intentionally a user has not appeared as off-line), who is idle (the avatar by the userID will change). Furthermore if two users are concurrently communicating with each other and one is typing, with a simple communication status, the other use will be informed that he/she should be expecting a new message from the other party and this will definitely help with turn taking. This issue in face-to-face conversation is easily dealt with, since an attendee may need to wait for another party to finish the talk and not to interrupt.

One of the interesting things addressed in this chapter is specific interactions in MUDs where multiple players can write instant messages at the same time without accounting for turn taking. In this situation, the order of responses may be completely different of that of the questions or statements posed. With many users or long conversations, tracking appropriate responses may not be easy and needs a lot of close attentions. Another interesting issue in this chapter has been various discussions on back channels. Something that is perhaps not perfectly addressed in current group chat applications. Some applications such as GoToMeeting have private chatting; however there is minimal or no visual cue which could be effectively used without interrupting someone. For example, some emoticons are useful for this case, but if there is no feedback, the speaker may think that the listener or listeners are bored. Yahoo! has recently added a series of emoticons that perhaps could be more useful.
Managing the Virtual Commons: Cooperation and Conflict in Computer Communities

By Peter Kollock and Marc Smith

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In this paper, computer-mediated communication systems are introduced as a new media for interaction among people which dissolve social hierarchies and encourage democratic participations. However these media have been associated with new political, practical, and sociological challenges. It is argued that Social dilemmas and the most famous model for it entitled as “Tragedy of the Commons” is the main problem that these systems have tendency to create.

In my opinion, the paper of Hardin (1968) and its example indicated and referred in this paper has been cleverly chosen for this. However in this paper, the notion of free-riders has persistently been discussed and a question has been posed on how the problems associated with such situations could be resolved. I think one of the concepts that could be helpful in finding ways to solve this issue is to look into communities that share codes with each other (Open-Source) codes. I guess this community is considerably established and it may carry good examples to be followed on how this issue of free-riders could be properly dealt with.

Another interesting issue which is pointed out in this paper is the notion that UseNet as a medium for coordinating exchange of information cannot capture private messages people may send to each other and how these dynamic interactions work. So the question is can Social Visualization of these sources of information really capture and visualize all the fundamentals details of collaborations? Or even if the underlying data used is a proper baseline for finding rationales? The direct connection of users through emails and phones are certainly important aspects of social interactions however there is no proper medium to capture those without intriguing over privacy issues, which in my opinion has been obvious and that is why it is not discussed in the paper.

Further, the facts that everyone’s behavior is visible and identifiable and therefore this could potentially minimize free-riders, and also that this may be a cheaper solution have certainly been interesting. Moreover the discussion on sense of belonging has certainly been interesting.