Reading critique 1
Communities: Flash forums and ForumReader: navigating a new kind of large-scale online discussion by Dave, Wattenberg, and Muller

The four characteristics of flash forums defined by article authors are diffuse in authorship, large in size, focused in topic (not really...) and constrained in time. And the most significant difference between Usenet and flash forum is in users’ posting behavior. There are fewer replies-to-replies but gathering larger number of viewpoints due to time constrain in flash forum. These features make users difficult to trace topics that they’re curious about because they counter the problem of disorientation.

ForumReader is designed with many different interfaces to encounter the problem of disorientation and to provide better navigation experience. However, too many features would make users confusing and tend to be afraid of the system. There are thumbnail visualization, highlight selection, text view, search box, scatter plot and tree view panels on the page. This may be a proper design for experts but way to complex for regular web browsers to adapt to.

The other factor that not be considered in this paper is that people has different reading habit toward different topics. For example, if users’ goal is trying to get a general view of how people think about a controversial question, they may need a tool that give them overview and detail in the same time or easily switch between them, then, thumbnail view is extremely useful especially if the color of rectangulars means something (Not so sure if their shade been designed by viewers’ evaluation.) But if users’ goal is to finding a specific answer of something, then they may still go through the whole articles linearly. Under these circumstances, highlighting is more useful and I think this should be done automatically if the users continuous reading several articles under same topic.

I have an idea after reading the users’ performance test section. The authors depict reading performance and navigational behavior by four methods in Figure 3. The outcome shows that using text analytic and visualization in the same time reduce performance. I wonder what’s the result would be like if the text analytic and visualization is actually combined in the same panel. Since switching between this two features is time-consuming and users would not choose to approach in this way. If we provide thumbnail visualization directly on the text and add in zoom in/zoom out buttons to reach the overview and detail function, they may feel more comfortable in using two features together. Thumbnail visualization could be either depict by the ground color of messages or add in a bar next to texts.
Reading critique 2

CodeSaw: A Social Visualization of Distributed Software Development

by Gilbert and Karahalios

I have to admit that I don’t really know how people working together in writing open source software. But I assume that this would be quite like student group project in a larger scale. The great enthusiasm is certainly an important part in the development, so ways to keep and strengthen coordination in the group is extremely valuable.

CodeSaw deals with two contrasting information sources: code repositories and project communication. I think the feature of CodeSaw is that it deals work part and the community part together. This features would not only benefit the original community to have a closer communicate channel inside the group but make it easier for new comers to melt in.

The problem in code repositories part is quite similar to that in Wiki: Dealing with multi-authors and maintain a reviewed version for everyone wants to keep track of the development. CodeSaw use color and peak to remark each person’s contribution in time axis. This would somehow arouse the competition and thus increase the production. I like this part but I would like to add in a round to represent the whole project (or one for one file) which has colored dots in different area size to represent contribution of each member. They could choose their own colors. And for all passbys and anonymous would be represented by a certain color. Hope this could improve the problem of not reflect the community in a whole and encourage more programmers to join the group.

Another interesting thing about the development is the coherence of e-mail peak and the production peak. “Developers do maintain awareness of one another” could be proof by this trend. I think maybe there’s other way to boost production by reveal other’s progress.

A problem often occurs to me that whether or not report my current work status to other members. One concern is that they may like to focus on their own part of work rather than share my progress. Second is that there’s often subgroups in a group that is closer in work areas. It’s always a problem deciding to discuss with some members or all members. If you always discuss with a few people in the group would definitely make the other part feel not involved. However, the communication and discussion would be more efficient since only closely relative people are in. The spatial message maybe ideal for fix this problem. Telling others what you are doing and maintain some privacy to discuss with some members seems to be a good solution to me.