Flash Forums and ForumReader: Navigating a New Kind of Large-scale Online Large-scale Online Discussion

Flash forums are large size forums where authors of posts are not important, there is a tight focus overall with overlapping topics between threads, and a short timeframe for conversations. ForumReader helps users find areas of interest within flash forums by combining data visualization with automatic topic extraction. The interface combines a visual navigation tool and automatic topic extraction technology.

I really liked section 3.3 Time Limits. In this section, the authors mention that because flash forums have time limits, users are encouraged to post sooner since later posts are less likely to be read since they will be posted closer to closure time. Slashdot has a time limit of 14 days, while IBM Jams has a time limit of 3 days. I would’ve liked to know the reason why Slashdot does 14 days and IBM does 3 days. There is a big difference between both time limits and it would’ve been interesting to know the motivation behind both time limit choices.

In the Components section I think it would have been beneficial if the authors had provided images to illustrate the different components of ForumReader. When they describe the text view component and how the text is indented by an amount proportional to its depth in the thread tree, it would’ve been nice to have a figure illustrating this concept. The sentence after the description of the text indentation is “…the text view component automatically scrolls sideways as the user scrolls vertically, thereby centering the messages in view.” I don’t really understand this concept. It seems as if the user would be confused by this concept. If the user is scrolling vertically, the text should also scroll vertically.

In the discussion section it states that authors used the color-by-author feature to search for their own posts. I think this is an interesting finding since in flash forums authorship is not supposed to be important. Even though it isn’t important it seems like authors still want to know what they are posting.

I thought it was interesting that the navigation logs suggested that the thumbnail visualization encouraged a non-sequential navigational style, while the outline view encouraged a linear navigation even though it provides an easy non-sequential navigation up and down the thread. I liked how the authors provided a possible explanation for this finding. The explanation provided is information foraging theory, which suggests that users are more likely to move to a new “patch” of information when the visibility of more promising patches increases.
**CodeSaw: A Social Visualization of Distributed Software Development**

CodeSaw allows software community developers to visualize their contributions. It does this by visualizing contributions to code repositories and to project communication. In the visualization, the timelines represent the developers. The top of the axis shows code contribution, while the bottom represents project communication. Users can drag developers into the main area of the visualization to compare them. By hovering over a developer, the user can see the top 5 files changed by that developer. In this paper, the authors describe studies they conducted and the results that they gathered from these studies.

An interesting finding was that people tended to focus on people. Developers were interested in seeing how other people compared to them as far as how much code they had written. They were also interested in seeing when they were most active. They also tried to think of reasons behind the results they found in CodeSaw; for example, less activity in December because of the holidays and more activity around release time. The authors described how they went about plotting release names in order to help users determine whether or not there is a correlation between the amount of code submitted and release time. Another interesting finding that seems expected is that 1-2 people do most of the work in each project. This makes sense since in most projects there are usually a couple of people who stand out as being the “leaders.”

I liked how the authors walked through the Gaim visualization, describing the interaction between two different users. It was interesting how they were able to make inferences based on the visualization. For example, one of the developers started contributing a lot of code after a while, which made the researchers wonder if the other developer had somehow convince him to code for this project. I would’ve liked to read a follow-up interview with both of the developers in the Gaim project to see if the inferences made by the researchers were correct.

I also like how CodeSaw allows users to use spatial messaging. This would be very useful if bosses were interested in viewing this report. If a user had a period of inactivity, he/she could post a message reminding their boss that they were sick at that time. It could also be used for peer reviewing. For example, if a user notices that his/her colleague is submitting a lot of code, he/she can leave a message to their boss saying how impressed they are with how much work their colleague has done.

From the studies conducted, it seems like all the people who were interviewed are people that contribute a lot to their project so they are happy with the recognition that CodeSaw provides them. I think it would be interesting to interview people that “free ride” and see what their opinions are on CodeSaw (probably not good). I think it would’ve been appropriate to also interview more than one project manager or boss to see what his/her opinions are on CodeSaw. I’m interested in knowing how they think CodeSaw would affect their interactions with their employees and if they would be more or less inclined to use it than the developers.
Building the Gap: A Genre Analysis of Weblogs

In this paper the authors analyze blogs. They compare the properties of emergent blog genre with respect to offline genres and with the broader genre ecology of the Internet. Their analysis suggests that blogs are not unique nor reproduced entirely from offline genres. They believe that blogs constitute a hybrid genre that draws from multiple sources (including other Internet genres).

An interesting finding from their research on a random sample of 125 blogs is that popular news stories are the most common topics of discussion. Other research was done to analyze the patterns of posting to a community news blog during the week after 9/11/2001. This study found that the daily number of posts increased from an average of 28 posts a day to 75, while the number of links per post decreased from an average of 1.89 to 1.16. The authors of this paper don’t elaborate on the meaning of the number of links per post decreasing, but in my opinion it seems as if after 9/11/2001 people were posting more insightful posts, as opposed to “I found this cool site about this new game that’s coming you. You should check it out.”

In the same study mentioned above it was found that the average number of comments remained the same (about 17 per day). According to Krishnamurthy, “the posts that are most insightful or controversial get the most comments.” This comment seems inappropriate because after 09/11/2001 there should have been a lot of insightful posts (more than before), but the number of comments remained the same. So if Krishnamurthy’s comment were correct, the average number of comments left on blogs per day would have increased after 09/11/2001.

Another study suggests that among adult bloggers, 63% are male while among teen bloggers, 58% are female. The paper states that it is beyond its scope to analyze variations within categories but I think it would’ve been really interesting to analyze this particular finding. I would like to know what motivation they believe each audience has for writing blogs and common trends found among them. For example, adults are more inclined to want to inform people while teens seem to want to write about their feelings. And then after explaining their motivation, the authors could’ve made a hypothesis as to how the motivation correlates with each age group being predominated by a certain sex.

The authors describe how weblogs can change the way people think about the Web. It can do this since they do not require knowledge of HTML so anyone can use them. Blogs also enable users to post comments, making webpages interactive. Also, the flexible and hybrid nature of blog formats allow different users to express a wide range of genres. I think this is a really interesting point. Weblogs allow non-technical users to be active on the web; comments encourage collaboration and interaction on the web; and being able to customize their blogs allow users to express themselves as much as possible.