

Week 4 Reading Response - We Feel Fine and Searching the Emotional Web

In this response, I will be giving my understanding as well as a few critiques of the *We Feel Fine* article, written by computer scientist Spandar D. Kamvar and artist Jonathan Harris. I will also compare this project to *Google Trends*, both have common ground yet different features.

To my understanding, *We Feel Fine* is an interactive website that scavenges the web every few seconds to pick up how people are feeling. This grants the software data that can be related to specific events and the demographics of the users to produce interesting results. To me, this web project was a genius idea. Learning how the internet is feeling on a given day is an interesting topic. There is a sense of comfort as well in seeing other people sharing the same feelings as you. Moreover, the data visualization through spots of color is a genius design decision. One picture immediately gives a sense of how the public's emotions.

Having analyzed the *We Feel Fine* article, I noticed several similarities with the *Google Trends* software. *Google Trends* is a software that allows users to learn which search queries are popular/unpopular in any country (and state). It's used often in marketing to find trending topics and search engine optimization. If one is curious about bananas, one can use Google Trends to learn how many people in the past day/month/year have searched for the fruit on Google.

Google Trends and *We Feel Fine* are similar in their objectives. They aim to obtain a deeper understanding of public opinion. Therefore, both deal with Experiential Data Visualization, which is data that "helps people better understand themselves and others". Both software are also relatively unbiased. As the goal of each is to learn about internet users, there is no incentive in distorting the data. Finally, both can serve the same purpose. If one wants to know how many people are depressed on a given day, one may use *We Feel Fine* and count the dots related to sadness, or one may use *Google Trends* to see how many people have searched depression-related terms.

Of course, since both software have different approaches to learning about the users, they will shine in their respective situations. *Google Trends* deals with interests, while *We Feel Fine* deals with feelings. Some hot topics may trend on Google, however, *Google Trends* won't know the reason why. Not all hot topics are popular for good reasons (ex: tragedies).

One critique I would have about *We Feel Fine* is that its terms are too specific. The words "feel" or "I am feeling" are not in everyone's vocabulary. Therefore, a lot of potentially valuable data is ignored. Perhaps, widening the search queries to target adjectives would grant more effective results.

