

Week 5 Notes - The Spheres

November 23, 2009

Why cyberspace?

- “In order to emerge as a medium of freedom, the Internet became cyberspace in the mid-1990s” (Chun, 2006)
- Similarly, one could ask, why the blogosphere? What (ideological) connotations does the term carry, and what expectations do these create?

Foundational Narratives

- Disintermediation: blog software as facilitator of independent voice.
 - in the view of disintermediation, media twists reality; bloggers will bypass this process
 - “Weblogs bring the Web - in theory a leveler, a democratic medium - to The People.” (Blood)
 - * the onset of actual two-way communications
 - ‘Blogosphere’ coined (again) in 2002, lineage of ‘logos.’ See also: geometry.
- Revitalizing journalism: blogging as incisive media commentary and conventional reporting.
 - when is a blogger a journalist?
 - * Josh Wolf - made video of protests, published it on the web. California subpoena’d him to obtain the source tapes. He refused, citing the “shield laws” that protect journalist sources.
- Remaking the public sphere: blogosphere as yardstick for public opinion. Blogger as voice “from the ground.”
 - the realness/authenticity of the blogger’s voice

How are they often studied?

- Blogs as new genre, as news and empowering voice.
- Blogs as 'genre' (recognizable with reverse chronology), and constructed / reified as genre by software.
 - Intermediation: Does blog software serve the needs of engines?
- Blogosphere as parasitic on news, and obsessed with MSM.
- Blogs and blogosphere as organizers of public voice (Sony RM) and authenticator of voice (Iraqi bloggers).
 - example: beingboing's campaign against Sony DRM rootkit

How else to study them?

- As engine-demarcated spaces with particular qualities.
- The term 'sphere' recognizes its most famous example, the blogosphere, as well as scholarship on another, 'Web sphere.'
- Approached in terms of comparative media studies, or cross-spherical analysis. Compare engine results across spheres.
- Inquire into qualities of each sphere, blogosphere, Websphere, newssphere, tagosphere.

Cross-Spherical Analysis

- Word Choice is very important.
- medium-specific analysis
 - treat the categories of media differently.
 - Coverage, Absence presence, and Prominence
 - * different in each medium

newspapers

- Editorial authority:
 - headlines
 - section

- length of article
- dedicated journalists
- more...
- in Google news, it is text analysis that determines how to categorize news, rather than editorial control

Google News

- news clusters are ranked according to “aggregate editorial interest”

Article ranking within a cluster

- “Fresh and New”
 - Recent, substantial, original, and focused on the topic
 - op-ed, satire, press-release and subscription are not eligible to lead clusters
- Duplication and Novelty Detection
 - credit to original and novel content
- Local / Personal relevancy
 - weighted by section and story and more credit to local sources
- Trusted Sources
 - boosts for trusted sources
 - section and edition

google news (again)

- Algorithmic authority:
 - crawl, group, rank
 - grouping: categories and locations
 - Ranking:
 - * Story ranking: “aggregate editorial interest”
 - * Article ranking: fresh and new, duplication and novelty detection, local and personal relevancy, trusted sources based on “aggregate user behavior”
- based on “registrational activity”

Methods

1. Feed the HTML source of the search results for an engine into the Harvester.
 - (a) make sure to select 'unique sites only' and 'exclude Google and YouTube links'
2. Feed that URL list into Google Scraper URL list.
3. Place keywords into Google Scraper Keywords list.
 - (a) for Google News, make sure to uncheck 'Only Query discrete sites'; also an option for others
4. The Lippmanian Device: tag clouds.