Self Reflection

Throughout the whole semester of studying COMM 5961 Topical Studies in New Media, I started to build a systematic framework of designing a data driven website. This self reflection will analyse what I have learnt and established during the first semester. Explanations will follow the weekly timeline.

When I first attended the pre-workshop before the official start of the semester, I was scared by all the coding things. I have had very little knowledge of coding and computational thinking during my undergraduate studies, as I was doing pure journalism and the only sip of building a website was to use Wordpress to do simple editing and the website layout. However, with the first semester already passed and me having completed (not very ideally though) the final project, I would say the three months was, although very challenging and sometimes frustrating, very worthwhile.

The first two weeks had familiarized us with the framework of HTML and CSS. Since week 3, we have been taught about the methods (such as to use ParseHub and OpenRefine) for data gathering and cleaning. It was very useful as I had no idea of how to get bulks of data and present it in an organised way.

For assignment 4, I designed a sliding puzzle game. It was very challenging for me as I wanted to create something different than a simple counting / maths game. I had encountered a lot of bugs, but fortunately, after days of trying, I managed to present a simple sliding puzzle.

In week five and six, we learned to embed Airtable and $getJSON in the website. It proved to be very useful especially for the final project, which used much Airtable embedding.

In terms of Airtable, it is another precious tool that I would like to recommend to a lot of my friends. I have been always bored by the complicated Excel thing, and Airtable is so convenient (although it needs VPN in Mainland or

otherwise it will load very slowly) and multi-functional with its different views, filtering and embedding functions.

The final ‘tiny assignment’ before the big project trained our capabilities to design a responsive map and a chart which visually demonstrates the data. Makers could be added to the map to show detailed information about each location. In addition, the website is supposed to be mobile first and is responsive to different screen sizes. This is very crucial to the final project, as the final report shows that most of users entered my website via mobile devices.

Besides the weekly assignments, it is also worth to note that we have learnt about utilising the design thinking and computational thinking for the product and services design. During the semester, we’ve studied theories about User Journey Mapping and the importance to know users’ needs. The figure showing elements of user experience is now carved in my mind. To better design a product, we should be aware to logically link stages of MVC (model, controller and the view) that meet users’ needs.

Reflection on the final project is more specifically explained in the final project report, but here I want to note that although each assignment is challenging to some extent, they are dots linked together that help create the final project. The website is a logical combination of all the knowledge covered, from data gathering, Javascript and Jquery to view modification.

Certainly, I am still very immature in terms of coding and computational design. For the final project, I used much help from Bootstrap (another great tool) for the layout design, or otherwise I would not (or spent much longer time to) create such an organised and simplified website. Nonetheless, the most important thing is that I started to understand the elements of coding, and I started to build a new way of seeing and organising things, besides my original perspective established on my solely social science background.

Thanks to this semester, I have been more aware of my weakness and I will work on improving myself further on:)