

MAPPING THE AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL BLOGOSPHERE

Dr Axel Bruns, Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane, Australia – a.brun@qut.edu.au – <http://snurb.info/> – <http://gatewatching.org/>

Lars Kirchhoff, Thomas Nicolai, Sociomantic Labs
Berlin, Germany – lars.kirchhoff, thomas.nicolai@sociomantic.com – <http://sociomantic.com/>

1. Introduction

Crawling, scraping, visualising Australian political blogs:

- Based on growing list of blog feeds
- Custom-built content scraper
- Distinction between post content and other material

Timeframe:

- November 2007 to January 2008 – ~250 feeds (for Australian federal election on 24 November 2007)
- Second stage ongoing since January 2008

2. Method

- Identify blogs, subscribe to RSS feeds
- Follow RSS feeds, identify new posts
- Scrape entire blog page
- Isolate salient content – **blog post only** (plus comments?)
- Extract post text and links
- Map topics and link networks

Advantages over previous approaches:

- **Better data quality:**
excluding blog headers / footers / sidebars / ads / blogrolls
- **More than links:**
capturing content for automatic and manual analysis
- **Not retrospective:**
tracking and capturing activity as it happens
- **Diachronic, diatopic:**
comparing activity across timeframes and blogs / blog clusters

3. Results

- clear distinctions in topical focus of specific blogs
- moderate clustering tendencies
- links from mainstream online media very rare
- mainstream media blogger-columnists in a separate category
- left-leaning blogs more active than right-leaning blogs
- weekly and seasonal activity variations
- activity triggered in part by external events

4. Conclusions

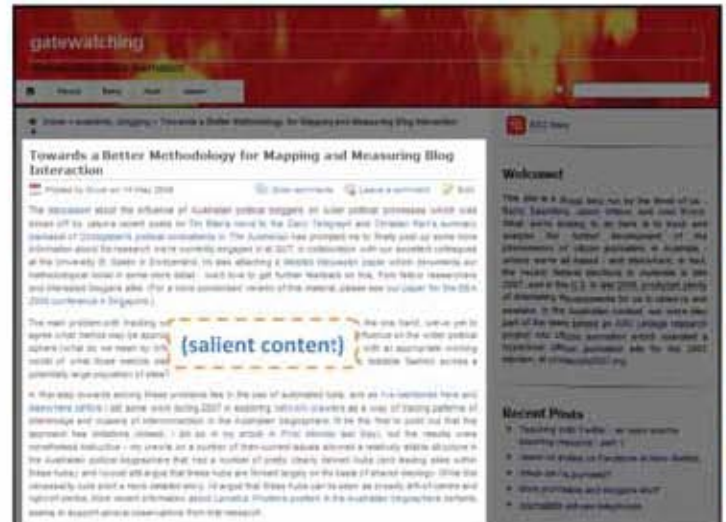
- successful proof of concept for our tools
- further tweaking of data outputs required
- able to provide weekly/monthly pointer to 'hot' topics/sites
- need to operate for 6-12 months to establish baseline data
- can be expanded to tracking activity in other user-led content creation spaces (*Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, ...*)

5. References

- Axel Bruns, Jason Wilson, Barry Saunders, Lars Kirchhoff, and Thomas Nicolai. "Australia's Political Blogosphere in the Aftermath of 2007 Federal Election." AoIR 2008 conference, Copenhagen, 18 Oct. 2008.
See <http://snurb.info/node/885>.
- Axel Bruns, Lars Kirchhoff, Thomas Nicolai, Jason Wilson, Barry Saunders, and Tim Highfield. "Discussion Paper: Network and Concept Maps for the Blogosphere." Discussion paper, 1 May 2008.
See <http://gatewatching.org/2008/05/14/owards-a-better-methodology-for-mapping-and-measuring-blog-interaction/>.

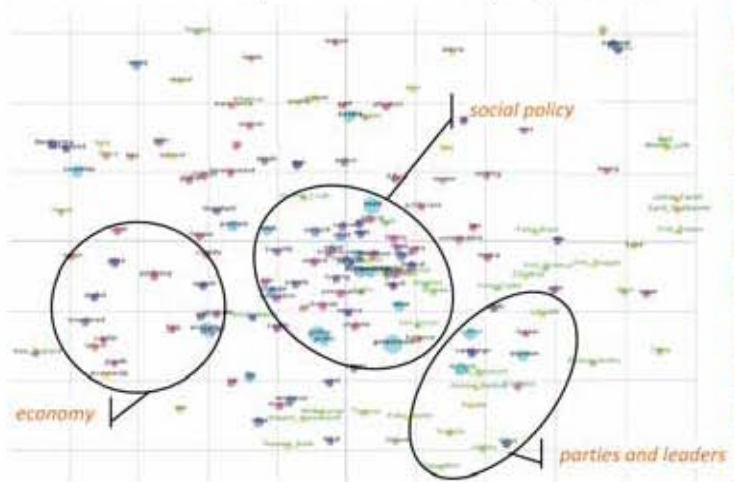
Data quality:

Only relevant, salient content is selected by the scraper.



More than links:

Automated and manual analysis of textual content – e.g. using Leximancer:



Diachronic comparisons:

Analysis of activity per timeframe – e.g. weeks before and after 2007 election:

