Understanding College Students’ Thought Toward Social Events by Qualitative Meta-Synthesis Technologies

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ABSTRACT

It is necessary to consider community opinions about social events and respond with proper actions. Support is needed to acquire a basic or rough idea of community opinions quickly. In this paper, the authors show how to elicit main points from community opinions with a simple word association test on college students about the highlighted social events in China in 2010. Two supporting technologies for qualitative meta-synthesis CorMap and iView are applied to analyze the opinions. Unlike basic descriptive statistical figures, CorMap/iView help identify the structures of opinions, which show the primary concerns of students or features of events, as a simple way to acquire a rough synthesis of public concerns rapidly.

Keywords: College Students, Community Opinions, CorMap, iView, Qualitative Meta-synthesis, Social Events

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, diverse new media technologies (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, etc.) bring out tremendous growth of both size and speed of information sharing. Those new media are sources of extremely up-to-date information about what is happening in the world and capture the wisdom of community and cover a broad range of domains. Researchers started to use Twitter or Facebook to effectively track public concerns about H1N1 flu and accurately follow real-time disease activity (Savage, 2011) after using Google search query to predict flu outbreaks (Ginsberg, et al. 2009) Local social events spread widely as those new on-line social media become so popular. In China, public opinions expressed via Internet are more of governmental and business concerns for different missions. It becomes a necessity to face the community opinions about the social events and response with proper actions to avoid worse situations for governmental officials at different levels in China. College students are regarded as a
special group who hold specific visions toward social events. There are obvious difference between their cognition of risk and those from other groups by both age and profession (Tang, 2009). Their concerns reflect their cognition and responses toward those social events, if captured correctly in time may be helpful to make reasonable and timely interventions for better management and healthy growth of the youth. How to acquire a basic or rough image toward the college students’ opinions is an important issue even quickly collecting those opinions is quite easy. Qualitative research taken in social and psychological studies analyzes the first-hand materials based on hypothesis, and conclusions may be affected by the experiences and judgments of the researchers. Rather than beginning with a hypothesis, grounded theory (GT), proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1960s, investigates the actualities in the real world and analyses the data with no preconceived hypothesis. “GT data analysis involves searching out the concepts behind the actualities by looking for codes, then concepts and finally categories” (Allan, 2003). Grounded theory aims to generate theory from data, which may show a systemic vision toward the concerned problem and helpful for problem solving. Even with software, the process mainly relies on the analysts and is time consuming, which then has limitation to emergency response. Computerized support is needed not only for storing the results of each phase during the GT working process, but also better to help analysts generate concepts and categories. If we understand the process of grounded theory is a kind of qualitative meta-synthesis, we apply computing technologies to implement qualitative meta-synthesis to achieve the systemic vision of the concerned problem.

In this paper, we show how to elicit main points from community opinions with a simple word association test about the highlighted social events in or relevant to China among college students in 2010. We select “Expo 2010” and “Foxconn Suicides” and collect relevant associated words from both college students and graduates. With collection of those students’ quick thoughts toward those events, we apply two supporting technologies for qualitative meta-synthesis CorMap and iView to the analysis of their opinions toward two social events. Unlike basic descriptive figures from those opinions, we conduct exploratory analysis by CorMap/iView to identify the structures of opinions, which may show the primary concerns of students or features of events, just a simple way to acquire an image of public concerns rapidly during qualitative research.

At first, we introduce the supporting technologies for qualitative meta-synthesis.

2. QUALITATIVE META-SYNTHESIS SUPPORTING TECHNOLOGIES: CORMAP/IVIEW

Qualitative meta-synthesis is one type of meta-synthesis, which refers to either a system approach toward complex problem solving proposed by Chinese system scientist Qian Xuesen and his colleagues over 20 years ago (Qian, Yu, & Dai, 1990) or the results of meta-synthesis system practice. Another two types of meta-synthesis denote qualitative-quantitative meta-synthesis and meta-synthesis from qualitative understanding to quantitative validation, which actually indicates a working process of MSA to complex problem solving.

Gu and Tang (2005) discussed how to achieve three types of meta-synthesis by a synchronous-asynchronous-synchronous process while each type of meta-synthesis can be achieved at the respective phase. Activities held in Synchronous Stage I denote to achieve qualitative meta-synthesis, i.e., perspective development or hypothesis generation for meta-synthetic systems modeling. Divergent group thinking is the main way at that stage. Methods oriented to acquire constructs or ideas toward the concerned problems are regarded as qualitative meta-synthesis methods. Then many methods for a systemic vision of the concerned problem can fulfill qualitative meta-synthesis, such as
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