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Bron, M.; Nack, F.; de Rijke, M.; van Gorp, J.

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Ingredients for a User Interface to Support Media Studies Researchers in Data Collection

Marc Bron
ISLA, University of Amsterdam
m.m.bron@uva.nl

Maarten de Rijke
ISLA, University of Amsterdam
derijke@uva.nl

Frank Nack
ISLA, University of Amsterdam
nack@uva.nl

Jasmijn van Gorp
TViT, Utrecht University
j.vangorp@uu.nl

ABSTRACT

We describe our efforts to design an interface that supports media studies researchers in collecting data. Based on interviews about their search behavior we arrive at a set of search scenarios and for each we identify IR techniques that provide the required functionality. We end with a discussion about the implementation of such an interface and its re-usability across the humanities.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
H.5.2 [User interfaces]: User-centered design

1. INTRODUCTION

Research in the arts and humanities often follows an interpretative, associative method based on historic-cultural materials, including primary sources as well as secondary materials. Humanities researchers increasingly make use of online archives and libraries to collect and compare materials and this is changing the way they work [3]. Although the trend towards e-humanities is being addressed by computer science, current search tools remain ineffective in supporting humanities researchers in data collection [5, 17, 18].

Most support tools for e-humanities research focus either on supporting a single type of search process, are aimed at analysis and organization, or focus on a single collection of primary sources rather than the collection of secondary material across various sources and modalities. Letizia is an example of a user interface that assists a user in browsing the Web by pre-fetching related documents [10]. Flamenco is an interface that supports exploration of image collections through facets [20]. Imagesieve is an exploratory tool for museum archives based on entities [11]. See [15] for an overview of metadata enhanced interfaces for specific digital libraries. Other systems aim to support sensemaking of collected data. Combining, for example, is a creativity support tool for searching, browsing, organizing, and integrating information [9]. Visualization and text analysis tools provide a wider variety of methods to organize and analyze material, e.g., MONK1 and TaPoR.2.

In this paper we revisit the search scenarios in which humanities researchers engage. We follow a human centered approach to derive the search scenarios that a tool for data collection in the humanities should support. We focus on a specific group of users, i.e., researchers in the field of media studies. Media Studies concerns the study of production, content and/or reception of various types of media, e.g., social media, film, and television [12]. The search for data in different modalities and across a wide variety of sources make this an interesting group for our analysis. We perform a set of interviews to analyze the information search behavior exhibited by media studies researchers during their research. Our contributions are establishing a set of search scenarios based on these interviews, identifying suitable information retrieval techniques that support these scenarios, and a discussion about the challenges in incorporating these techniques in an interface and its re-usability for other humanities disciplines.

2. ESTABLISHING SEARCH SCENARIOS

Most research in the humanities starts out by gathering specific primary sources on a certain topic. When a selection of source materials has been made the search for additional materials starts in order to provide context for the source materials [1, 14]. In terms of information behavior a research project consists of successive information seeking processes each consisting of multiple search processes [19]. Each search process, whether for primary sources or other materials, consists of starting a search, several types of search actions, i.e., browsing, chaining, and monitoring, followed by differentiating, verifying and extracting information [7].

Each of these actions can be observed in the search processes of media studies researchers in various stages of their research cycle [4, 12]. However, the effectiveness of current search tools to support these actions depends on the goal of the search process and the organization of the material. For example, browsing is easily facilitated in an interface by providing facets over the metadata annotations of documents, but metadata is usually unavailable. We will focus on the contextualization stage of the research cycle of media studies, where the primary sources have already been collected and the search for additional material starts. In this stage multiple sources of different modality are searched for and we expect that the analysis of this process will provide search scenarios that facilitate the development of an appropriate search interface.

Interview method and analysis. We interviewed ten media studies researchers from 3 different institutes with varying levels of experience: 2 PhD students, 5 post-doctoral researchers, 1 assistant-professor, and 2 full professors. Several media are being studied: television (10), radio (2), news papers (2), and documentaries (1). The interview was conducted in a semi-structured style and consisted of three parts: (i) identification of a recent research project; (ii) open questions about search processes and research questions during the project; and (iii) an interactive part in which subjects

1http://monkproject.org/
2http://portal.tapor.ca/

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wrote down the search processes on index cards. Interviews lasted about 30 minutes, were tape-recorded and later transcribed. In our analysis of the interviews we focus on those questions that address the process of secondary material collection. We apply open-coding [16], to identify different types of material, the type of information needs the materials satisfy, and search strategies used by media studies researchers to retrieve the material. Given this data we then identify search scenarios on a more general level. Note that when using quotes, square brackets […] indicate modifications to the original quote to improve understanding or to protect the anonymity of the subject. For identification purposes interviewees are assigned a number, i.e., I1 to I10.

**Interview results.** We first consider the different types of materials that media studies researchers search for besides their primary source material, e.g., television programs. Table 1 shows the types of material mentioned during the interviews. The source that is most often used are newspapers. They provide relevant context in terms of: (i) reviews about a television program; (ii) information on events during the period in which a program was broadcasted; (iii) to reconstruct which programs were broadcasted during a time period; and (iv) whether a program itself caused some event or controversy. Interviews are used when the required information is not otherwise accessible. Interviews with directors and producers provide context in terms of productions information, e.g., why a certain format was chosen for a program. Interviews with people who watched a program that is no longer available provide information on the attitude of viewers in that time. Magazines and tv-guides are interesting mainly for the reviews of programs they contain or for reconstructing a broadcasting schedule. The context of homepages depends on the entity of interest. The homepage of the production company of a program provides production information, e.g., when it was broadcasted. Alternatively, a person mentioned in a program may be of interest and his/her homepage allows the researcher to find out more about that person. Wikipedia is also a popular source for this type of information. The main use for fora and blogs is to get a sense of people’s attitudes towards a certain program. Other sources used mostly to get production information are paper archives and internal reports. Books and other sites, e.g., history site, are used to provide historical context for a program. The lack of use of social media as sources is due to our sample of media researchers, who work mostly with television.

Next, we categorized the various types of information need that the materials satisfy into 3 types: (i) general background information on a topic; (ii) information on specific entities; and (iii) identifying conversational information about an event. Table 2 shows the number of times each type of information need occurred in each of the interviews. Searching for background information is men-

<table>
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**Table 1: Number of times a source is mentioned in an interview.** Frequency is the fraction of interviews to which a code applies.

In five cases interviewees engage in a conversational search, i.e., they look for the discussion around certain events. For example three interviewees mention that they look for controversies: (I2) “I searched in newspapers for controversies, you are actually searching in other media for reflection on what happened. And then you find the title of the program. You start with there was a fight, and you need to know what it was about” and (I10) “Of course the programs that are the most controversial, those that fuel public debate and get the most media attention, are the ones that I examined closest.” These quotes show how media studies researchers are interested in the reasons that cause a controversy. A similar type of information need is mentioned by two other interviewees interested in multiple views on a topic: (I3) “I was interested in the relation between political issues and whether news programs show multiple views on every topic, for example a government source and an opposition source” and (I4) “I chose to organize [political figure]’s story chronologically: her rise, moments of glory, and her fall.”

We find that of the information needs described above the search task of finding background information is exploratory, i.e., it is unclear what the actual goal is other than information about a general topic. Regarding the entity information need the search task is very specific, e.g., finding journalists’ specialism. The search task may be repeated multiple times for different entities, but the goal remains the same. In the case of conversational search multiple types of search task are required to satisfy the information need. For example, to find multiple views on a political issue, first, an exploratory
search task is required to find the people involved. Second, a more targeted search is necessary to find the attitude of each person towards the issue. We also note that these types of information need occur multiple times during a research project, e.g., (I3) looking for multiple views on political issues and the specialization of journalists reporting on those issues. Finally, we consider the search strategies used to collect material.

The tools used most often are web search engines, for example when searching for controversial documentaries: (I2) “I Google not for documentaries, because I do not know which are controversial. I use keywords of which I know that they are related to controversies such as: conflict.” Media studies researchers are trained in searching through archives and so also use various strategies when searching for additional material: (I1) “You have to search in different ways, of course... That was the same in the archive. When you can not find anything on a shelf organized per director, then use decades as a searching criterion. So you are always trying different angles.” Another example shows how chaining via web links is used to reconstruct the conversation about an entity: (I4) “right, you end up on a forum with a discussion about her biography. Where one post suggests to look at this and this. Another suggests you should read that. In this way you get a lot of pointers to links in a very organic way, and I collect it in a folder with interesting links.” Even for a specific information need such as the nationality of an entity several sources are searched: (I6) “Wikipedia is also a search engine. I needed to know the ethnic background of [people]. You can do this in all sorts of ways, for example fora, but also other sites that provided information about the nationality of [people].”

These quotes show how media studies researchers use multiple strategies and cover multiple sources to get at the information they need. The most popular tool are web search engines that while having characteristics in common with the examples, e.g., entering the name Michael Jordan usually refers to the basketball player, but the target could be a researcher or anyone with that name. Typing a name in the entity resolution component (1) and selecting a knowledge base against which to resolve the entity, e.g., Freebase, results in a list of possible targets for the entity. These targets, e.g., a Wikipedia page or homepage, provide an identifier for the entity and context information. This is also useful in the case of events, which only in special cases have specific names, i.e., named events. Possible target resources for query by example are video databases and news archives as items from different resources describe an event in different ways.

List completion supports a scenario where a researcher wishes to find a group of entities that all have something in common, e.g., members of the same political party, but he/she has only identified some members of this group. Providing a number of examples the list completion component (3) results in a list of entities that have characteristics in common with the examples, e.g., entering Wikipedia URLs as example entities returns other entities (URLs) from Wikipedia that share characteristics with the examples.

Entity resolution is necessary when only an entity’s name is known, e.g., the name Michael Jordan usually refers to the basketball player, but the target could be a researcher or anyone with that name. Typing a name in the entity resolution component (1) and selecting a knowledge base against which to resolve the entity, e.g., Freebase, results in a list of possible targets for the entity. These targets, e.g., a Wikipedia page or homepage, provide an identifier for the entity and context information. This is also useful in the case of events, which only in special cases have specific names, i.e., named events.

Query by example (2) supports finding information about a topic for which some information (context) is already available. Given a news article about a certain topic, find more documents that describe that same topic. Possible target resources for query by example are video databases and news archives as items from different resources describe an event in different ways.

List completion supports a scenario where a researcher wishes to find a group of entities that all have something in common, e.g., members of the same political party, but he/she has only identified some members of this group. Providing a number of examples the list completion component (3) results in a list of entities that have characteristics in common with the examples, e.g., entering Wikipedia URLs as example entities returns other entities (URLs) from Wikipedia that share characteristics with the examples.

Entity relation search. In some cases multiple types of search processes are required in order to satisfy an information need, i.e., to find multiple views on a topic exploratory and targeted searches alternate. For example, finding who are the opponents and proponents on a political issue and the reasons for their respective views. We propose an interface that facilitates viewing entities in context using dynamic snippets, see Figure 3. Whenever a search query is issued, a sidebar (1) on the left of the interface is populated with candidates. To locate candidate entities online named entity recognition results from multiple sources. A sidebar (2) shows a list of common information sources, e.g., Wikipedia. Checkboxes are available to select or deselect one or more sources from which results for the keywords are retrieved. Facets (3) are available on the right side and support the user in filtering the result set and learning about the topics covered in the results set. A typical issue for meta search engines is the aggregation of results from different sources. We propose to leave control to the user: for each source we display one result with the option to expand (4) a source and display its results. The user is able to drag and reorder the sources in the sources list in order to select the source that will be shown at the top.

Entity information search. Another scenario is when the goal of a search task is to find more information about an entity, e.g., the ethnic background of a person, or an event, e.g., reality shows causing a controversy. To support this kind of tasks we propose an interface that combines techniques for entity resolution [8], list completion [2] and query by example [21], see Figure 2.
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References


Our main next step is to take these requirements and realize an interface that supports the various information search tasks of media researchers and is re-usable across the humanities.

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