Measuring and analyzing write-in comments

From surveys to social media postings, the best way to analyze write-in comments is sometimes a combination of human and electronic methods.

Communicators have many options for analyzing survey write-in comments (free-form responses), each with advantages and disadvantages. The traditional way is to have a person read and categorize them by nature of the content and whether the comment is positive or negative. Figure One shows an example of human categorization conducted for one of my clients by California Survey Research Services (www.calsurvey.com). At a deeper level, this report showed that within the "characteristics of communication" category, 10 percent commented positively on the highly informative content. "Timeliness" was mentioned by 27 percent, about three times as many. This report also broke out comment content by business units, locations and job levels.

Figure Two shows an analysis of just the positive comments from the same client's survey using GoAmbition's Human Language Technology (HLT) platform. "HLT is able to automatically mine large volumes of speech or text data for automatic measurement of positive/negative sentiment and identification of key opinions and topics," according to GoAmbition's founder Pawan Jaggi (www.GoAmbition.com). One possible output uses type size to demonstrate how frequently various key words appear in the text. This is popular with clients because it looks similar to cloud content visualization. In this example, the human and HLT analysis of the relative proportion of positive comments on timeliness and being informative match up well, with "timely" looking about three times bigger than "informative."

"Easy" also appears relatively large in Figure Two. The human analysis showed that "easy" applied five times more often to the ease of intranet navigation – a distinction that's valuable for communicators to know. After seeing the results of the human analysis, we could adjust the GoAmbition software to distinguish between these two types of "easy." The HLT software can also be used for analyzing speech, such as recorded interviews and focus groups.

Another type of software tool illustrated in Figure Three is exemplified by Nvivo. The figure shows the results when searching through comments using the query: "How do employees perceive **leadership communication** in a **business unit** with **shift workers**?" The software displays the comments that include all three bold-faced pieces of information in the same comment, allowing communicators to see the actual detail of the comments, which might include actionable suggestions. "Nvivo can do a lot of coding automatically and help you sort through data quickly," says consultant Keith Munkejord, "but as with any qualitative software (including modern sentiment analysis software), deep insights still require some manual brain work" (www.frontalsolutions.no).

Figure Three: Content analysis through Nvivo.

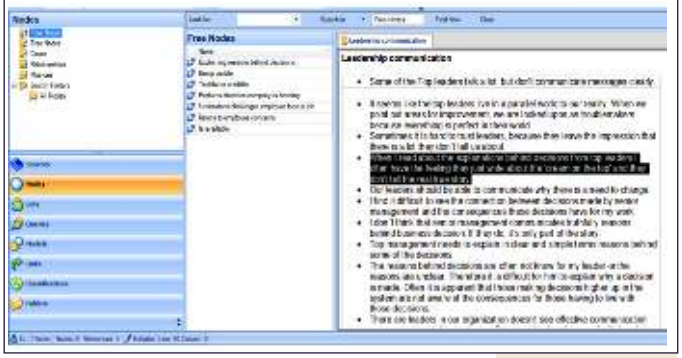

Figure One: Human analysis of survey comments.

Characteristics: Positive comments primarily on how informative (10%) and professional (7%) communication is; negative comments on needing more data and relevance, and better structure.

Communication: Positive comments primarily on intranet, newsletters and email; negative comments on having too many methods.

Topics: Positive and negative comments fairly evenly spread among all of the surveyed information topics (e.g. company goals, sustainability, customer satisfaction). Negative comments asking for more detail and volume on some topics.

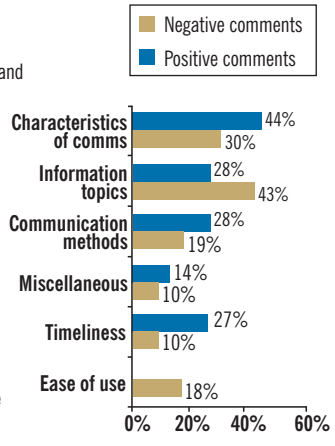

Figure Two: Sentiment analysis by software.

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