THE BLOG

An Affectively-Based Alternative to the Air Force's RSTC Approach to Blog Analysis

By Marty Kaplan
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Here's the money quote in the news that the Air Force is funding Versatile Information Systems, Inc. to the tune of $450,000 to perform an "Automated Ontologically-Based Link Analysis of International Web Logs for the Timely Discovery of Relevant and Credible Information":

"This analysis is based on what Versatile Information Systems calls the RSTC approach to blog analysis — relevance, specificity, timeliness, and credibility. 'Relevance involves developing a point of focus and information related to a particular focus,' [Versatile's president, Dr. Mieczyslaw M.] Kokar said. Timeliness has to do with immediacy — how important is a topic now. 'Credibility,' he continued, is the amount of trust you have in an information source.' Finally, specificity can provide value to information analysts depending on how general or specific they need the information to be."

While the development of the RSTC approach is clearly a bargain at less than half a million dollars, I fear that this analysis system — which is ontologically based, meaning that it's focused on the very *being* of blogs — misses a crucial aspect of the blogosphere. No, put your hands down, I don't mean its epistemological basis; I'm talking about its *affective* nature. Blogs are emotional. And for just a few dollars more, I think the Air Force could really get a bigger bang for its bucks if it also developed the PILR system.

P stands for pointing. Blogs passionately call attention to things. This is the "Can You Believe This Shit Is Actually Going On?" axis.

I stands for impugning. Blogs try to understand the motives and mindsets of public officials, mainstream media outlets and other bloggers. This is the "How Dumb Do They Think We Are?" vector.

L stands for legitimizing. Both in the news-o-sphere, and online, repetition is a warrant for belief. This is the "I Make Things Up" dimension.

R stands for raging. A key distinction between blogs and other forms of discourse is that while the latter may lack them, the former invariably contain tacit or explicit "Stop the Madness!" and/or "Shut the Fuck Up!" messages.

Finally, since blogs are an excellent illustration of the "knowledge network" system of distributed intelligence, commenters are hereby invited to contribute additional analytic elements to this framework. Your federal dollars at work, folks.

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