

LogiLogi: The Quest for Critical Mass

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1 Introduction

In this abstract, and more so in the poster-presentation, we will report on the process of, and the problems involved in, gaining a critical mass of users for an interactive, hypertext-based Digital Humanities application. The aim of any DH application ultimately is to be used, but for collaborative ones, the contributions and interactions of existing users are what make it worth while for new visitors. Gaining an initial critical mass of users for such applications is especially important, and notoriously hard.

First of all LogiLogi, the system on which we are going to try to get a community started, is briefly introduced. Next the strategy for gaining users, some possible improvements, and attempts so far, are explicated. Here we will also discuss the kinds of users we target, and the possible size of the application's critical mass. We finish with an overview of the usage-data that our poster will report on.

2 System

LogiLogi is a Web 2.0 application that tries to find an informal middle-road between good conversations and journal-papers by providing a form of quick, informal publication, peer-review, and annotation of short philosophical texts. It is intended for all those ideas that one cannot turn into a full sized paper, but that one deems too interesting to leave to the winds.

It does not make use of forum-threads (avoiding their many problems), but of tags and links that can also be added to texts by others than the original author. And it features a rating-system modelled after Journal-based review. Well-rated texts earn authors more

voting-power within their so called peergroup (of which there are multiple).

LogiLogi is Free Software, and has been under development by between 2 and 10 people for 3 years. A public beta is already online and fully functional at www.LogiLogi.org.

3 Strategy

Things that have been done so far to gain users are, first of all, making sure that it works properly. LogiLogi has been extensively tested and improved at the LIRMM lab of the University of Montpellier this September. And it was used there by about 30 active users for internal discussions until the end of October. Secondly, some seed-content has been added (about 100 philosophical texts, some of which are part of larger essays). And finally, since October, it has been made possible for users to easily track new replies, annotations, and votes for their documents, both through a personalized RSS feed, and e-mail alerts — thus making LogiLogi practical to use for the first time.

3.1 Target Audience

LogiLogi has not yet been advertised widely, and changing this is one of the first things we will do next. LogiLogi aims for a wide audience of scholars, students, and people interested in philosophy, but to set the right tone, we first aim for people with academic credentials (students and scholars). Among them, most success is expected with students, both because of their limited access to other publishing channels, and their greater average computer-literacy. Possible places to reach them, are forums, newsgroups, and (limited)

advertising via Google Adwords.

3.2 Process

Then, as part of user-driven, agile development, feedback will be collected from users on possible improvements. Both ongoing, from users on the web, and from a small group of philosophy-students in an usability test. Some of these improvements will then be implemented, after which we plan to repeat the process, with another round of usability testing and improvements.

3.3 Improvements

A possible improvement so far identified is simplifying the application, for example by (temporarily) limiting the number of voting-communities (peergroups) to one. This would have the additional advantage that the size of the needed critical mass would be reduced, because votes are no longer limited to, and divided between groups. While it is hard to determine what the critical mass of LogiLogi would be, from what we saw in the LIRMM case, it most likely lies between 30 to 60 active users per peergroup (or for the whole site, if there's only one peergroup). To examine this further a small literature study of the notion of critical mass, and of the factors influencing its size (especially for hypertext based applications, close to the humanities) will also be done.

Another place for improvement is the editing and annotation process. Especially its responsiveness could be improved. LogiLogi currently requires people to open a new page when they want to insert annotations or links. While it would be a lot easier if this could be done while reading the text. At least for simple annotations. And finally, a demo-video will be created, which quickly explains what LogiLogi is, and how it can be used.

3.4 Report

In our poster we will present LogiLogi, explain the notion of critical mass, and report on developments in the number of users. In addition the strategies and improvements we ap-

plied, and their practical, and causal relationships will be shown, where possible. Also we will not just be reporting the number of registered users, or unique visitors, but also on the number of documents, annotations, replies, and votes given over the time-period from December 2009 until June 2010. Thus a detailed view will be given of the process of gaining critical mass.

4 Conclusion

Whether we succeed or not in gaining a critical mass for LogiLogi, there will be meaningful results from this experiment; as it not only involves presenting, or further improving an already quite usable interactive Digital Humanities application, but foremostly trying to give it a critical mass of users, and exploring this process, producing insights and a valuable case-study (of success or failure) for future Digital Humanities projects to learn from: projects which will, most likely, be more interactive than their predecessors, and thus will sooner or later face the same challenge of gaining a critical mass of users.

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