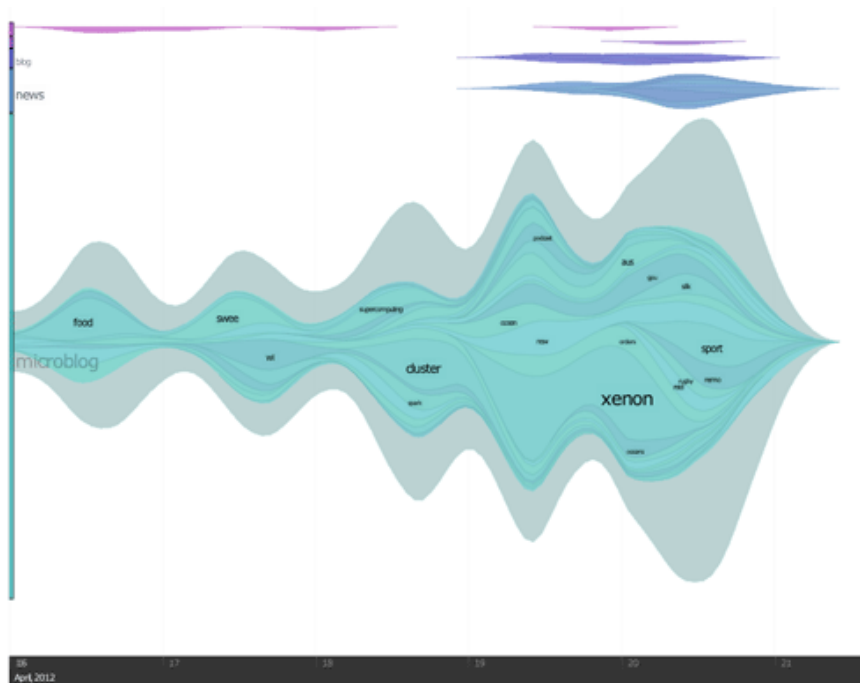


Social media ‘barometer’ to help gauge community concerns

Responding earlier to bushfires and helping address mental health issues are just two of the benefits forecast with the introduction of new social media software from CSIRO.



Credit: CSIRO

The social media analysis software is helping organisations make sense of massive volumes of social media traffic, according to a services research specialist speaking at this week’s Big Data Conference in Sydney.

CSIRO’s Alan Dormer said that, with millions of posts and countless conversations happening every minute, organisations trying to make sense of social media can easily find themselves overwhelmed.

‘There are 11.5 million Facebook accounts in Australia and more than two million Twitter accounts, so analysing social media posts to find relevant information is like looking for a needle in a haystack,’ Mr Dormer said.

‘It’s a classic big data problem. But with our research in data mining, textual analysis and data visualisation, we’re well placed to tackle it,’ he said.

Organisations have been using social media analysis for three main reasons – reputation management, exploring topics and issues important to the community, and early detection of emergencies or outbreaks. Early results show signs that the tool is helping organisations to improve efficiency and productivity.

Professor Allan Fels, Chair of the National Mental Health Commission, said he has found social media analysis gives his organisation insights into community thinking on mental health and wellbeing.

‘We believe mental health and suicide prevention is an issue for all Australians. The CSIRO social media engagement tools help us identify key issues on a daily basis and provide social media reports which are easy to understand and quick to produce.’

The Commission plans to use the software to gauge community response to their report cards on Australia’s mental health issues and services. The first is due out later this year.

CSIRO used its social media analysis tools to identify false claims about coal seam gas research that appeared in social media, allowing the organisation to quickly address the misinformation.

And a CSIRO software tool to analyse Twitter posts recently gave Queensland fire services an extra 25 minutes’ warning that a grass fire was threatening an outback hospital.

Tweets about the fire emerged well ahead of any official alerts. Within minutes, details such as the fire’s location and direction were appearing on Twitter, allowing emergency managers to evacuate the hospital safely.

Mr Dormer said the Australian Government Department of Human Services is a key partner in the development of the social media analysis tools. Business is also starting to show interest.

‘We’ve formed an early adopters group of innovators in government to help us develop the social media tools beyond the prototype stage, trial them in real situations, and give us feedback to make them more useful,’ he said.

Source: CSIRO

From ECOS online <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC12464>