Using Multiple Strategies to Find Connections in Digital Archives: Making Sense of Historical Data

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Problem

As historians moved into digitization of archival collections, the initial excitement of having ready access to rare documents and images took precedence over search and analysis problems that also accompanied this undertaking. Recent conference presentations and white papers demonstrate acknowledgement of these problems and advance solutions that call for greater collaboration between historians and archivists to write more detailed metadata and offer textual analysis tools for understanding larger datasets.

Historians have followed the lead of digital literature scholars in the utilization of data mining and text analysis tools [Nelson, Torget, Nesbit, 2012], but we believe that historians need to view the results of such tools in context with other documents in order to gain insight into their broader meaning.

The Intersection of Scholarship and Sensemaking

RICHES MI addresses a number of issues previously raised by digital historians and moves into the realm of analysis through the Connections tool. Still in its early stages of development, Connections intersects with scholarship on sensemaking that is most frequently associated with intelligence analysis and journalism [Pirolli and Card 2005 and Pirolli and Russell, 2011]. In the model advanced by Pirolli and Card, “the sensemaking process is organized into two major loops of activities...a foraging loop...[and] a sensemaking loop.”

Our system seeks to address some of these challenges posed by the search for relationships between data and apply leverage to some key points of the sensemaking processes.

Summary

By following well-known sensemaking processes, our system supports digital research that more closely replicates the archival experience across multiple collections and large data sets.

REFERENCES