Argumentation Analysis of User Generated Content

Argumentation is the study of the attempt made by a person to reasonably persuade an audience of his/her position (standpoint) on some subject-matter. A direct consequence of this commitment to reasonableness is that arguers make an appeal to their listeners/readers’ capability of making reasonable decisions, weighting arguments and considering their strength. They do not just want to win their cause; they want to do it in a motivated way. Analyzing argumentation, thus, means identifying the standpoint that an arguer has put forward, and the arguments that support it, including the relations between these arguments and the overall structure of the argumentation. At a more fine level, doing an argumentative analysis means making the internal inferential configuration of each single argument explicit, that is understanding on which logical-inferential pattern it relies, and which premises it is founded upon. This level of micro-analysis, based on a combination of tools from logic, linguistic pragmatics, and rhetoric, is necessary to evaluate the strength of the arguments themselves, that is: to understand whether or not they conclusively support the standpoint that has been put forward. Evaluating arguments is the art of understanding which strong and weak points a certain message has.

Examples

Studies conducted by De Ascaniis et al. [see references] have shown that travel-related User Generated Contents often contain very articulated and well-refined texts: users do not simply put forward a standpoint, but they support it with reasons (arguments). Tourists’ recommendations can be understood as standpoints, which are supported by reasons based on actual travel experiences. Having access to these reasons, and being able to study them, carries a lot of implications at the practical level. As a prime factor, it means understanding which features of a certain tourism product or service are appreciated by tourists themselves, and why; then, on this basis, it means to improve the product or service itself, and its promotion.

De Ascaniis (2013) conducted a wide study of the argumentation put forward in Online Travel Reviews. According to this study, there are three typical inferential principles employed by reviewers to make their point.

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1 This article is downloaded from the IFITT e-Tourism Wikipedia: http://www.ifitt.org/resources/wiki
The first inferential principle is the “argument from position to know”, which exploits the authority of the arguer who ‘knows’ the facts because s/he was there; according to this principle, the reader should trust the reviewer’s opinion and follow his/her recommendation because the reviewer experienced the product or service in advance, and can testify about it.

A second inferential principle is the “argument from parts to whole”, in which the properties of constitutive parts of the whole are attributed to the whole itself, as it happens when a destination is evaluated on the base of some of its attractions, typical food, tourism service.

The last inferential principle represents the basic scheme for practical reasoning – the advice of performing some course of action is justified by its consequences, that is the possibility to reach a desirable/good goal (“Visit destination X, if you want to have a good time!”).

References


