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הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
הספריה ללימודי מידע

Content Analysis of Talkbacks in Articles Dealing with elderly's Abuse, Violence and Neglect / Tzipi Cooper

Abstract

In the internet era, journalist reports are published daily in the news web sites and are being read by many. The topics of the journalist reports, the scope of coverage and its nature, are decisions made by newspapers editors, who set the agenda for the public. These decisions may have a cognitive effect on the readers (Caspi, 1993).

Readers not only read such web news reports, they also react to them. A tool which allows such reaction is the talkback. The talkback is a Web 2.0 based tool which allows internet users to post a response for journalist reports or other publications. It is composed of three parts: the headline, the writer's name and the content of response. The writing register combines both written and spoken language. The discourse style is a product of the talkback writer's culture and his personality traits. The number of talkbacks and the discourse style are the two factors which affect newspaper editors' categorization and filtration of the talkbacks, in different web sites.

The talkback is constantly on the agenda and serves as a topic for discussion among journalists and newspaper editorial boards, politicians, lawyers, academy members, artists and others. In a survey made In Israel by Cartography Ltd. and was published on 2009, it was found that about two thirds of those who read news on the web, read talkbacks on a regular basis and about a third of them also write talkbacks.

The talkback contributes both to the journalists/the newspaper editors and the talkback writers. Its contribution for journalists becomes clear when a large number of talkbacks refer to a specific journalist report and thus indicate its significance. In addition, the information included in these reports may lead to new stories or ideas for writing (Nagar, 2011). The talkbacks writers themselves also benefit from the talkback, since it allows them to share their opinions and knowledge with others, to influence others' attitudes and views, and even to change the political discourse (Houston, Hansen, & Nisbett, 2010).

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The talkback enables every individual, regardless of his race, religion, sex and age, to express his opinion regarding different issues discussed in the web reports, to deliver authentic information and to further his understanding of social phenomena by being exposed to different opinions. One of the current negative phenomena in the Israeli society is the maltreatment of the elderly. The Israeli society, like other Western societies, is getting older, due to the technological development and a decrease of the birth rate. According to recent forecasts, the number of the elderly is expected to double itself until 2030.

The literature which deals with the elderly presents different attitude to old people in different societies and cultures, as well as an ambivalent attitude towards them at the emotional, ideological and occupational-social levels (Hazan, 1984, 2011; Levenstein, 2003a). The modernization and the technological changes the Western society has undergoes in the last decades created the ageism phenomenon, age-based discrimination. Studies show that in Israel, ageism is institutionalized and exists among adults, young people, women and men alike.

In order to create a change of view and attitude, macro-level changes should be made (at the society and the state level) as well as micro level changes (at the individual and family level) (Doron, 2011; Meshunis, 1999; Spector-Marzel, 2006; Bytheway, 1995). Ageism is part of the wider phenomenon of violence, abuse and neglect of the elderly.

The purpose of the present study was to discover the characteristics of the talkback by using reports dealing with abuse, violence and negligence of the elderly.

In the present study we analyzed talkbacks written as a reply to web reports which dealt with abuse, violence and negligence of the elderly. Dealing with the topic of talkbacks related to phenomenon of violence, abuse and neglect of the elderly allowed us, on the one hand, to increase the awareness to the social phenomenon, and on the other hand, to spot and describe the characteristics of talkbacks which refer to the phenomena of abuse, violence and negligence of the elderly.

For the purpose of the present study we searched and found 50 reports of different news web sites regarding abuse, violence and negligence of the elderly, which included a total of 3,463 talkbacks. All reports were drawn from http://www.tbk.co.il/.

The methodology used was content analysis based on a set of categories taken from previous studies which dealt with talkbacks, supplemented by new categories which were found during our data analysis. The

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categories which were examined were: length of talkback, discourse type, talkback writer's style, name/nickname of the writer, the relevance of the talkback to the topic of the report, the message quality and content of issues relevant talkback. For the data analysis we used Excel and SPSS.

In the research findings that examined all the talkbacks that were collected for research we found characteristics which related to the entity behind the writing of the comment, to the quality of the message, and to comparison between a short talkback (name and heading only) and a long talkback (heading, name, and content). Regarding the characteristics that related to the entity behind the writing of the comment it was found that most of the writers are adults, did not state a place of residence, and used a negative style of discourse. Regarding the quality of the message, it was found that although most of the talkbacks arouse interest, the quality of the message in them was low, whereas regarding the comparison that was made between a short talkback and a long one, it was found that the writers of short talkback make less use of the space designated for the writer's name/nickname, the style of their discourse is moderate, concise, and most of them do not relate to the topic/issue of the article.

By means of the discourse that was conducted only in the relevant talkbacks (those which related fully to the topic/issue that was raised in the article) we examined the underlying strata (the meaning and the intention) of the message. This examination related to the nature of the comments and to the social phenomenon that we researched. Regarding the nature of the talkbacks it was found that the talkbacks serve as a source of knowledge, they constitute a tool for social reflection, provide a holistic picture of a specific topic, and make it possible to locate the kernel of the social phenomenon and problems related to it. Regarding the social phenomenon that we researched – abuse, violence and neglect of elderly people – it was found that there is a lack of information and knowledge about everything related to the nutrition of elderly people, and also that the society in which the talkbacks are written is a capitalist, ageist society where elderly people feel lack of physical security and experience economic and social damage from the establishment and from individuals.

Three conclusions can be drawn from the results of the present study. The first is that while the characteristics we found while examining all the talkbacks collected for this study can be related to the phenomenon examined, the characteristics which were identified while examining talkbacks dealing with a

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comparison of talkbacks and those which were identified in the discourse of the relevant talkbacks, can be related to the talkback characteristics as a tool, in general.

The second conclusion is that the critics' attitude regarding the quality of the talkback discourse stems from their focus on the surface layer of the talkback message, rather than on its deeper layer. The third conclusion is that in spite of the fact that the talkback discourse is mostly negative the talkback raises, directly and indirectly, social and cultural issues, and constitutes an inseparable part of the constant struggle between the replier and his social and cultural setting.

We see talkback as an important and necessary communication tool, and believe its use will increase in the future.

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