

Disaggregating Quality Judgements

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Example 1: Apples



- It makes sense to talk about a “*good quality apple*”, we know that any such apple will be (at least) ripe, tasty, and not be rotting or full of worms.
- These features of a quality apple are:
 1. (pretty well) common to its potential consumers and
 2. relate to the usefulness of the apple to these consumers
- However it makes even *more* sense if the context of use is made specific, e.g.: a good eating apple, an ideal apple to go with cheese, apples good for cooking with etc.

Example 2: Words



- It does not make sense to talk about a “*good quality word*” since the usefulness of a single word depends on the specific context of use.
- There is not much:
 1. commonality of needs for words among users
 2. the use of words is too varied
- If the context of use is closely specified and we are talking about chunks of text then it is more meaningful to talk about their quality, e.g.: a *good* campaign speech in an election.



The Pragmatic Roots of Quality

- Thus **quality** can be seen as originating in *a commonality of judgments* across a group or community, which in turn is strongly related to *the needs or usefulness of the items* to each of them.
- But because it is linked to usefulness and commonality in a community, it makes more sense when the **context** is more specific.
- However, over time, what is considered of good quality may become abstracted from this origin and/or the judgements may be delegated to a select group which may have different needs to others (e.g. what is a *great* opera).
- People can learn what is “considered good” and is sometimes distinguished from what “I like”.



The Quality Heuristic

1. There is some need to select among many potential items or choices
2. There is some commonality as to the usefulness, appropriateness etc. of these items across a particular community
3. This commonality allows for meaningful, generalised quality judgements to be made for/by this community
4. And can be used by members of this community instead of having to assess the items themselves individually



The Usefulness of this Heuristic

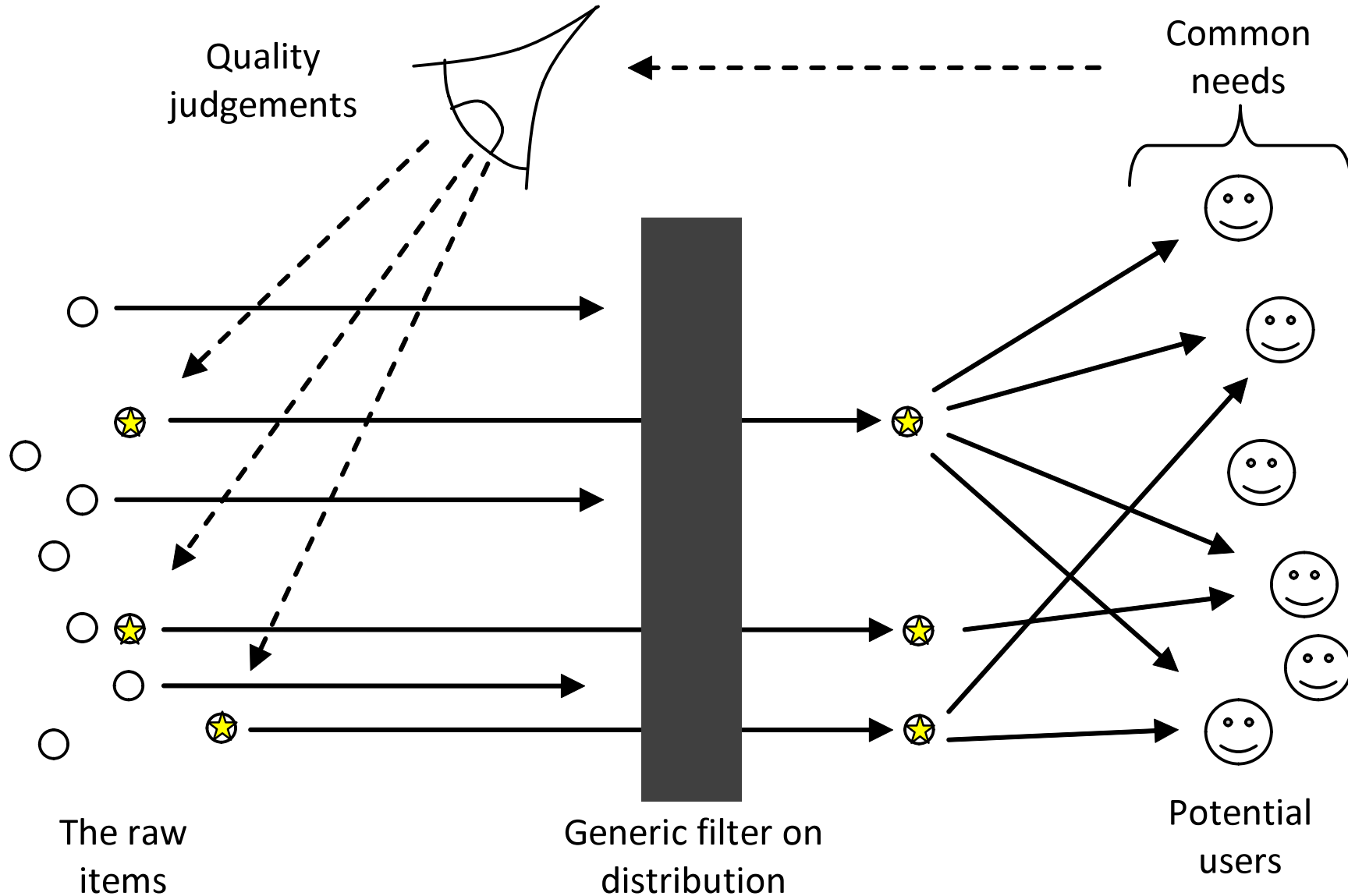
- *If* one could access, assess and select between all the items oneself then one would not *need* the quality judgements of others (although they might still be meaningfully definable and one might *choose* do so for reasons of solidarity, fashion, etc.)
- Common Quality Judgements become more useful when:
 - Costs and/or bottlenecks make any individual selection process difficult
 - There is good agreement upon some of the usefulness of some properties of the focus items



The Case of Academic Journals

- As soon as the academic community became large and professionalised the cost of distributing papers from author to reader were significant
- (Once a consensus on what a good academic paper was) it was sensible that the transmission of such papers would be restricted to such papers
- A binary quality judgement (publish/reject) on academic journals is the result

Generic Filtering on Quality





With the Advent of the Internet

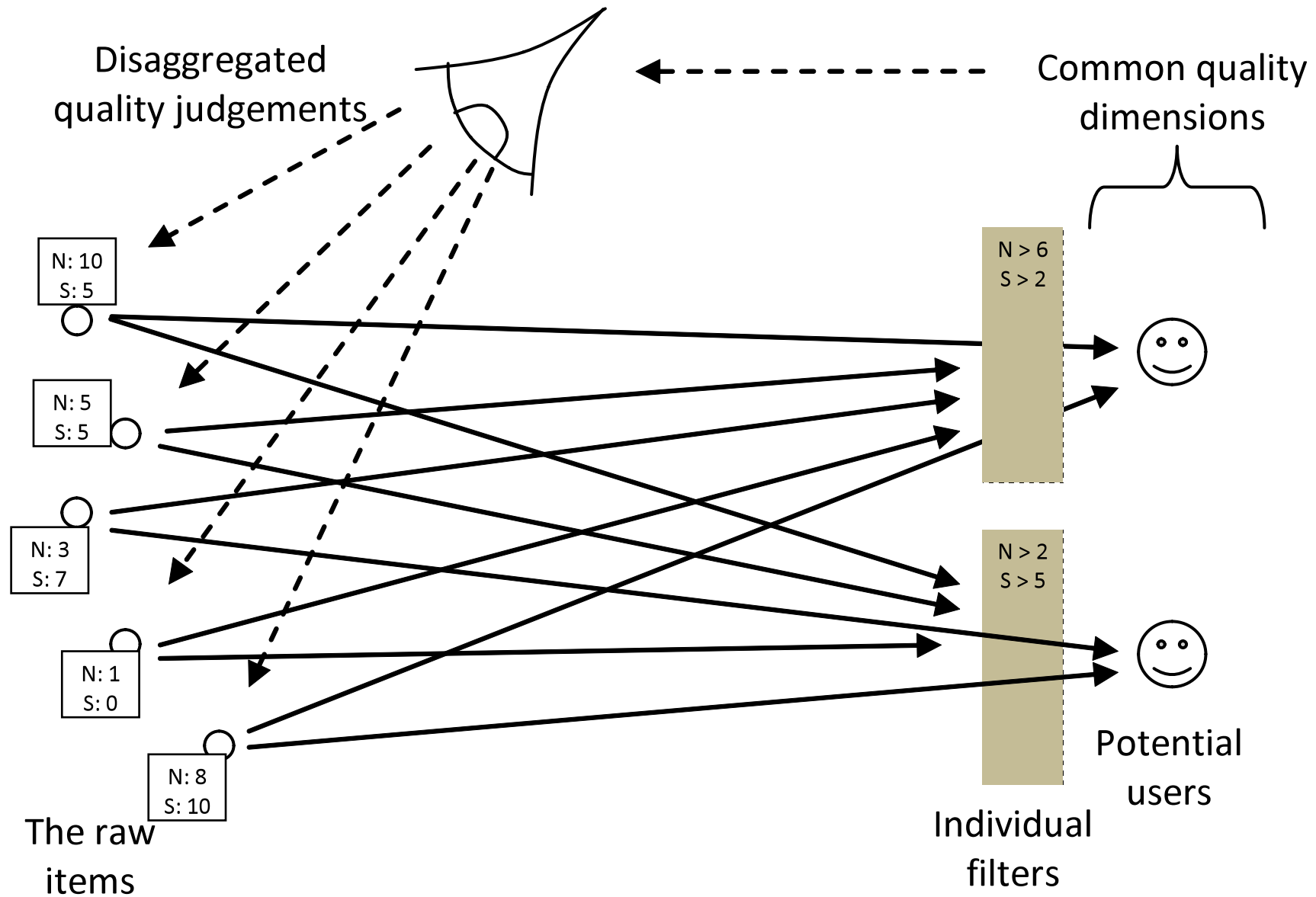
- Distribution and production costs have drastically reduced
- There is an explosion in the number of papers out there for one's selection
- There is no longer a need for the restriction of publication but there is a need for help with finding the articles that one would want to read
- The commonality between readers has become weaker due to:
 - the fragmentation in academia
 - the greater variety in what is read (no established canon or universally read journals)
- Thus the selection problem is more acute



A Proposal: Disaggregating and Distributing Quality Information

- Multi-dimensional quality judgements are already made (making judgements on originality, soundness, completeness, clarity, etc.) but are not, *at this level of detail*, available to a reader
- Why not capture this information, store it, and make it available to users so they can filter their searches as to their particular needs, for example:
 - Wanting new ideas (high originality but not necessarily completeness, clarity etc.)
 - Wanting an introduction to an area (high completeness and clarity etc.)

Individual Filtering on Quality Dimensions





A Vision (basic outline)

- All academic papers are on public archives
- When reading a paper, reviewers, can press a button on their browser, enter their judgement on a side window and submit it
- This information (along with information about the reviewer) is stored associated with the reviewed paper on the archive
- As an add-on to a search engine one can specify ones requirements (e.g. in “advanced options”)
- Then the papers returned are filtered according to the judgements (e.g. average values) and offered to the reader
- There are no journals anymore, but there might be trusted communities (e.g. review boards)

Possible Judgment Dimensions



- The following might be captureable and used in specifying which kind of paper are desired:

- formatting
- standard of language
- clarity of structure
- soundness
- originality
- importance
- completeness
- date of publication
- version number
- date of review
- reviewer's field
- reviewer's qualifications
- where presented

All this in addition to the information in the paper and meta-data captured during archiving

Comments and Options



- It would be important to make the process of capturing quality judgements easy
- Users could specify from which pools of people they wish to rely on their judgements (which fields, review boards, association members, general public etc.)
- Reviews could be as minimal as simply logging that a certain person has read the paper, enabling collaborative filtering and suggestions
- The results could be interlaced with, say, those of Google Scholar, as an “enhancement”
- The transition to this is hard as there is the problem of establishing coverage and trustworthiness
- There are other, social, reasons than information selection for deciding what to read (common reference, solidarity etc)

The End



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