Social tagging and communities of practice: Two case studies
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Introduction

In investigating the use of social tagging for knowledge organization and sharing, this paper reports on two case studies. Each study examines how two disparate communities of practices utilize social tagging to disseminate information to other community members in the online environment. Through the use of these tags, community members may retrieve and view relevant Websites and online videos. The first study looks at tagging within the Code4Lib community of practice. The second study examines the use of tagging on video sharing sites used by a community of French teenagers. Uses of social tagging to share information within these communities are analyzed and discussed, and recommendations for future study are provided.

Social Tagging in the Code4Lib Community

The first case study explores the social tagging practices of the Code4Lib community of practice. Social tagging can be described as “the collective assignment of keywords to resources” (Trant, 2006). The free-form nature of social tagging tools allows users to assign their own verbal descriptors (Kipp 2006). It has been suggested that once enough user-generated tags have been supplied, social tagging could lead to interesting folksonomies with benefits similar to a formal controlled vocabulary (Shirky 2005). However, people have varying motivators for tagging (Hammond, et al. 2005) and often use tags for purposes other than assigning subject terms. Kipp and Campbell (2006), for example, found that people often use time and task related tags such as “toread.”

Online communities of practice may use a specific tag on social bookmarking sites that enable resources to be “advertised” within that community. Through the study of these tags, it is possible to investigate the community’s influence on the individual’s choice of tags, and to what extent community members consider community while tagging. If members of a community do not tag differently for the community than they do for themselves, is it truly social tagging?

Code4Lib is an organic community consisting of librarians and library software developers. One way Code4Lib shares information is by bookmarking items in del.icio.us, a popular social tagging Website, with the tag code4lib. Once an item is tagged with code4lib, it is shared in three ways: on a Web page created through the del.icio.us site, on the Planet Code4Lib blog aggregator, and on the Code4Lib IRC channel. It is assumed that members of the Code4Lib community want to share an online resource with the community if the set of tags applied to the bookmark includes the tag code4lib. Conversely, it is assumed that community members are bookmarking resources for their own personal use when they do not include the code4lib tag in the set of social tags they assign.

Tags of fifteen Code4Lib members who bookmarked at least five items with the tag code4lib on del.icio.us were reviewed. All users whose tags were reviewed are active
community members and are aware that items tagged with code4lib are shared with the community. Ten recent bookmarks tagged with code4lib (community) were analyzed. If community members tagged less than 10 items with code4lib, all bookmarks with the tag were reviewed. Ten items bookmarked by these members that did not include the code4lib tag (personal) were also examined.

All tags (n=872) associated with bookmarked resources were analyzed according to Golder and Huberman’s (2006) seven categories of tags. Sets of tags were separated by user and were placed into categories based on the inclusion or exclusion of the code4lib tag within the set. Both the overall number of tags and the numbers of tags in each category were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranked tests to determine if there was any statistical difference in kinds or number of tags used. While casual observation shows differences in how some individuals tagged for themselves (set of tags which did not include code4lib) versus for the community (set of tags which included code4lib), overall, there was no significant difference in types of tags used in each set.

However, a significant difference in the number of tags applied in each set associated with a bookmark was found. The average number of tags used in a set when code4lib was included as a tag was 3.70 compared to only 2.97 when code4lib was not included. However, it is notable that when the tag code4lib is excluded from the count of tags for these resources, the difference does not turn out to be statistically significant. This may mean the only difference is the inclusion of the community tag.

The results of this study call into question the idea that people tag differently when they tag for communities versus when they tag for themselves. One explanation is that, regardless of whether they are actively tagging for a community, community members always take into account how other people use their tags. Conversely, community members may never take into account how the community of practice will use tags, even when these members are actively sharing bookmarks with their peers.

**Social Tagging in France: Communities of practice**

The second case study in this paper examines the tags associated with uploaded videos created by and for a community of counter-culture French teenagers. Current French teenagers are very comfortable with new communication-rich technologies though the use social networking resources like blogs and cell phone text messaging.

Certain French high school students are engaging in dance battles in a movement called Tecktonic Killer (Lazimi 2007). Members of this counter-culture community of dancers have Mohawks, listen to techno music, and try actively to out-perform their peers in these dance battles. The merging of the online and offline world is a part of the French net-generation reality (Vincent 2007). Beside the analog competitions, dancers make videos of themselves in their homes and upload them to video sharing websites. Postings include videos, social tags, and descriptions. Community members then view and comment on each other’s videos, recreating the competitive environment that exists in the analog
For the current study, twelve videos of Tecktonic Killer dancing that encouraged community interaction by using tags and enabling comments were selected from three video sharing sites used by the French. Reasonable attempts were made to select homemade videos from each of four categories: average dancers, popular or highly rated dancers, beginners, and parody videos.

Use of the tags by this community reflect established social tag usage in the Anglo world (Kipp & Campbell 2006). A total of 77 tags were assigned to the twelve videos. Tags included numerous proper nouns such as personal names of dancers, video site usernames, dance club affiliations, and city/country names. There were also 28 generic terms designed to help users navigate to the pages. Of the name of the dance mentioned in tags, there were 13 variants of spelling and terminology, many in the same tag set. There were a total of seven terms that used English-language words including dance, fake, and fashion. The parodies averaged 12 tags per video; the serious ones averaged between four and five tags, with many having only two or three tags.

Community members who post videos are actively tagging for the community and not strictly speaking for themselves. They are in search of the notoriety that comes from a well-received and often-viewed video, and actively solicit viewers and comments. Viewers contribute to the community process by adding comments, marking videos as favorites, rating the quality of the dancing in the video, or making the poster a “friend.” By participating in the feedback loop, viewers actively contribute to the success or failure of a dancer’s video.

Implications for future study specific to this community are many fold. Studying the Tecktonic Killer tags in other Web 2.0 environments as identified by Technorati (Le Deuff 2006) would also serve to show how these users act in different social tagging environments. Using only the video posting sites as the focus of study, one community member’s tags, comments, and favorites could be studied, or the interaction of users with others videos and other tags would also be considered and compared. As the phenomenon becomes mainstream and perhaps if it moves outside of the Hexagon, its adaptation and migration can also be studied via the use of community-based social tags.

Conclusions:

These two different studies on disparate communities of practice show similarities in the way social tagging can be used for knowledge organization and information retrieval. The Code4Lib and Tecktonic Killer communities both take advantage of tagging techniques in order to share information with other community members. They both use tags not only to describe a document, but also to assign ownership and promote sharing. The Code4Lib community does this using Golder and Huberman’s (2006) ownership tags while Tecktonic Killer participants tag items with generic terms and proper nouns that advertise affiliations and community. Further study on larger communities would help determine how people consider their community of practice when tagging. Lastly,
community taggers could themselves be interviewed and studied to understand better their motivations and their strategies of use.

Bibliography:


