Doing the LibraryThing™ in an Academic Library Catalog

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Keywords: LibraryThing; social tagging; controlled vocabulary; library catalogs

Many libraries and other cultural institutions are incorporating Web 2.0 features and enhanced metadata into their catalogs (Trant 2006). These value-added elements include those typically found in commercial and social networking sites, such as book jacket images, reviews, and user-generated tags. One such site that libraries are exploring as a model is LibraryThing (www.librarything.com) LibraryThing is a social networking site that allows users to "catalog" their own book collections. Members can add tags and reviews to records for books, as well as engage in online discussions. In addition to its service for individuals, LibraryThing offers a fee-based service to libraries, where institutions can add LibraryThing tags, recommendations, and other features to their online catalog records.

This poster will present data analyzing the quality and quantity of the metadata that a large academic library would expect to gain if utilizing such a service, focusing on the overlap between titles found in the library's catalog and in LibraryThing's database, and on a comparison between the controlled subject headings in the former and the user-generated tags in the latter. During February through April 2008, a random sample of 383 titles from the University of Minnesota Libraries catalog was searched in LibraryThing. Eighty works, or 21 percent of the sample, had corresponding records available in LibraryThing.

Golder and Huberman (2006) outline the advantages and disadvantages of using controlled vocabulary for subject access to information resources versus the growing trend of tags supplied by users or by content creators. Using the 80 matched records from the sample, comparisons were made between the user-supplied tags in LibraryThing (social tags) and the subject headings in the library catalog records (controlled vocabulary system). In the library records, terms from all 6XX MARC fields were used. To make a more meaningful comparison, controlled subject terms were broken down into facets according to their headings and subheadings, and each unique facet counted separately. A total of 227 subject terms were applied to the 80 catalog records, an average of 2.84 per record. In LibraryThing, 698 tags were applied to the same 80 titles, an average of 8.73 per title. The poster will further explore the relationships between the terms applied in each source, and identify where overlaps and complementary levels of access occur.

References

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