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ECER 2014: The Past, the Present and Future of Educational Research in Europe

ECER 2014 "The Past, the Present and Future of Educational Research in Europe" took place at the University of Porto from 1 - 5 September 2014.

A Contribution to the Study of the Process of Content Curation as an Emergent Skill for Personal Knowledge Management

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Conference: ECER 2014
Network: 21. Emerging Researchers' Group (for presentation at Emerging Researchers' Conference)

Format: Paper
Session Information
ERG SES D 09, **ICT and Education**
Paper Session
Time: 2014-09-01
13:30-15:00
Room: FPCEUP - 248
Chair: José Pedro Amorim

https://eera-ecer.de/ecer-programmes/conference/19/contribution/31961/

Contribution

Content curation, "the process of sifting through information on the Web and organizing, filtering, making sense of it, and sharing the very best content with your network" (Kanter, 2012, p.7) is an emerging theme. It went beyond its thriving areas of online marketing and social media (Rosenbaum, 2011) and is being adopted in education (Minocha & Petre, 2012), and training. It is the expression of a movement toward the consolidation and organization of content on the Web, with tasks undertaken by a curator assisted by new suitable Web tools. Curation can "help a specific group of people make sense/learn or be updated on a specific topic" (Good, 2012). When performed in a systematic way, curation is a form of conscious and methodical participation. O'Connell (2012) believes that content curation should be investigated, understood and adopted as part of users information literacy strategy.

Curating is a demanding task which involves a coordinated set of multidisciplinary skills along with the use of proper curation Web tools, the most important attribute of a curator is subject matter expertise, something already acquired by academics (Good, 2010). Curation may also endow a practitioner with the necessary experience and familiarity with a specific topic.

In this study we utilized Kanter's tripartite framework for content curation: "seek, sense, share" (2011b) an adapted model of personal knowledge management by Jarche (2010). "Seeking" is the process of keeping up to date in one's field; "sensing" is making sense of information by placing it into context; "sharing" is the process of exchanging resources, ideas and experiences with networks and collaborating with colleagues.

By "Personal Knowledge Management" we mean "A set of processes, individually constructed, to help each of us make sense of our world, work more effectively, and contribute to society" (Jarche, 2012). Knowledge emerges gradually from the interlinked activities of seeking out information sources, making sense of them and sharing with others to confirm or accelerate our knowledge.

As content curation constitutes a form of sense making of a particular topic, it can be based on the "seek, sense, share" model and serves personal knowledge management.

The main objective of the research was established as a contribution to the study of content curation process and its potentials as a skill to manage personal knowledge in online education. The specific objectives to attain the overall purpose were defined as follows:

1. Determine whether agents involved in teaching/training used any form of content curation;
2. Inquire about the type of content curation practice;

3. Determine whether the undertaken process of content curation contemplated the three main skills activated by the practice of curation, namely: "seek, sense and share";

4. Determine whether the practice of content curation has a positive contribution in the development of personal knowledge management processes.

For this study we chose the curation service Scoop.it, (available at http://www.scoop.it/) as it holds features that propitiate a more comprehensive and complete process of implementation and promotion of content curation. It was launched to identify content that matched users' interest, letting them edit and published content in a magazine format. The curated content can be shared to a diversity of social media networks and there's the possibility of connecting with a community of curators on similar interests. The way users curate their posts (or scoops) determines the type of curation performed.

Method

A qualitative/interpretative approach was followed in order to achieve the main objective of the research: contribute to the study of content curation potentials to personal knowledge management in online education. Initially, the accomplishment of the specific objectives was arranged through textual analysis and observation. In a second moment, we intent to apply a questionnaire to confirm our analysis and to clarify the results. So far the study has only covered the first part of our research work. In the first part of the study, the participants in the sample were a group of Scoop.it users followed by the researcher, also holding an account on the same service, featuring topics of educational nature and/or with a connection to learning or instruction. Most of the topics analyzed curated content about technologies to enhance teaching and learning. A formal consent to the Scoop.it page analysis was obtained from all the users whose content was used for the present study. Four main research questions were formulated to fit the four specific objectives mentioned above, these guided us in the setting of categories to analyze each user Scoop.it page profile and topic. As in any research technique, the first procedure consisted in collecting information about the user's profile as these might have an influence on the type of curation undertaken. To determine whether there was evidence of a type of content curation that activated all the three components theorized in the literature review, we stipulated categories and items likely to reveal the presence of elements of the triad skills "seek, sense, share". After obtaining the planned number of Scoop.it users that confirmed their consent for their page analysis in the curation service, we proceeded to a manual approach for collecting and register data. The previously outlined question items were arranged in an Excel spreadsheet, and the responses were released there, along with appropriate statistical analysis and presentation of results in graphs. Data from 35 page topics of Scoop.it users was

subjected to observation and register. For each topic, the corresponding profile page (homepage) was also observed to collect data on the user's profile. In a second moment we intent to apply a questionnaire for data collection as a way of getting feedback from users actually engaged in curation practice. We expect to collect information so that we can characterize and explain some factors, such as the reasons and benefits of content curation activity.

Expected Outcomes

We can infer that the content curation activity on Scoop.it is a practice used by agents linked to education and training. The type of content curation practiced attempts to be an activity that contributes positively to knowledge management for the benefit of its curator and for other followers of the Scoop.it curation service. The analyzed data lead us to deduce that the three skills were present along the phases that characterize the process of curation. Users searched and created a significant number of posts, even though many users curated more than one topic and often republished other users' posts. The diversity of sources is an indicative of openness, diversity and a broader view regarding the basis of the "seek"/search skill. Sense-making was built when posts converged to the topic theme, and when a large majority of posts are not simply aggregated or republished by the curator. A large amount of the posts were adapted, which is representative of the curator's accuracy to mark an intention, to interpret and understand content. The large majority of users shared posts using well known social networks, like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. The fact that all topics contained evidence of "Thanks" shows that the curator's work in a specific topic is being acknowledged as valid by others. Two users made use of one of their Scoop.it topics to republish their own content from other sites, demonstrating the need for a service or tool that enables a better organization of their content. There was evidence of the use scoop.it for personal knowledge management. The next step of our study will focus on applying a questionnaire so that we can cross data and in order to better sustain the thesis that content curation has a positive contribution in the development of personal knowledge management processes.

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