



Evidence Summary

The LIS Blogosphere Contains Tags that Can Be Categorized and It Disseminates Professional Content

A Review of:

Aharony, N. (2009). Librarians and information scientists in the blogosphere: An exploratory analysis. *Library & Information Science Research*, 31(3), 174-181.

Reviewed by:

Virginia Wilson
SHIRP Coordinator
Health Sciences Library, University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada
Email: virginia.wilson@usask.ca

Received: 29 Nov. 2009

Accepted: 12 Jan. 2010

© 2010 Wilson. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons-Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike License 2.5 Canada (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly attributed, not used for commercial purposes, and, if transformed, the resulting work is redistributed under the same or similar license to this one.

Abstract

Objective – This study analyzes library and information studies (LIS) oriented blogs to determine the content, and looks at tags and folksonomies of these blogs to determine whether they form a consistent, coherent scheme or whether they are lacking in internal logic.

Design – A qualitative content analysis of tags assigned to 30 LIS blogs.

Setting – The research took place on the internet from May to July, 2008.

Subjects – Thirty LIS blogs were examined, each of which was written by a librarian or an information scientist.

Methods – The researcher reviewed 100 blogs that were found by browsing the Top 25 Librarian Bloggers as published by the Online Education Database in 2007 and by searching Technorati, one of the main search engines for blogs, using the term “library and information science.” Thirty blogs were chosen for analysis based on two criteria: the blog had to be written by a librarian or an information scientist, and the blog had to be active during the period studied (May-July, 2008).

A content analysis was undertaken on the tags assigned to the 30 blogs by categorizing the tags that appeared as tag clouds (visual representations of user-generated tags in which the tags used more frequently are depicted in larger, bolder font) in Technorati. In order to validate the Technorati tags, the

researcher's coders read and analyzed all the blog posts over the given time period. The categorization consists of five major categories, each with several subcategories. The categories were developed using a clustering approach, with new categories coming into being when a tag did not fit into an already established category.

Main Results – The tag categorization resulted in five broad categories, each with several sub-categories (a few of which are listed here):

1. General (Nouns, Disciplines, Place Names)
2. Library-related (Web 2.0, Librarians' Activities, Catalogues)
3. Technology-related Products, Technology – Types, People)
4. Information-related (Access to Information, Information Sources)
5. Social web-related (Names of Blogs, Names of Social Networks)

The tag analysis resulted in the following percentages of distribution:

- 33.62% of the tags associated with LIS blogs were general in nature
- 20.21% of the tags were technology-related
- 19.12% of the tags were library-related
- 14.60% of the tags were information-related
- 12.90% of the tags were related to the social web

These percentages add up to 100.45%. The author makes no mention of this oddity and it is assumed to be an error.

The researcher attempted to determine if tags and folksonomies form a consistent scheme. In reporting her findings, she concluded that four major categories of professional-related content were revealed, which reflect the blogger-librarians' fields of interest. The prominence of the general category revealed that bloggers' personal interests and experiences were written about more often. As well, it appears that although bloggers seem to assign non-related tags randomly, the analysis shows that tags still can be categorized.

Conclusion – The researcher concludes that this study is helpful for librarians and information scientists because it can help them to navigate the LIS blogosphere. She reports that the categories of tags beyond the general category, which mainly contains tags related to bloggers' personal interests and experiences, shows that blogs can contribute to professional development. Although more informal in nature, the research has shown that LIS blogs do contain professional information, and it behooves professionals to become familiar with the tag scheme in topic oriented blogs, and to try to work within the scheme to make use of the content within. The researcher suggests further ideas for research, including the differences in LIS blogs written by a single blogger as compared with blogs written by multiple authors, as well as gender differences between male and female authored blogs. The author also suggests further research on multimedia blogs such as photoblogs, and audio and video blogs.

Commentary

An analysis of LIS blogs for content is an interesting concept. The categorization of the tag clouds by using grounded theory and content analysis came up with some fruitful results. That the "general" category was the most prevalent suggested that blogs are indeed the casual information dissemination medium that they appear to be. Additionally, the four other categories, along with the sub-categories, which relate to professional practice, illustrate that content that falls within these categories is being disseminated in the LIS blogosphere. One drawback is that other than listing the sub-categories and examples of tags which fall under each, the researcher does not explicitly define the tag categories. The article contains a very thorough literature review broken down by various topics pertinent to the research.

The researcher uses tables to outline the categories and their sub-categories. It would perhaps have been helpful to also include this information in the narrative portion of the

article in order to more directly associate the tag categories with the results given.

The section on main results ("Findings") could have been more robust, as there are gaps in the details that would be helpful to know. The author mentions coders in the data analysis section, yet there is no mention of how many coders were involved in the research or who the coders were. As well, there were no details given about the analysis of each blog post undertaken by the coders in order to confirm the Technorati tags. The method section ("Procedures") would have been enhanced by greater detail on this aspect of the research.

In the data analysis section of "Procedures," the researcher discusses how she chose the tags to analyze, stating that not all the blogs she chose to analyze provided tags, so she used Technorati tags, "which are given to Technorati by bloggers" (p. 176). It is unclear what this means. Does the researcher mean that the tags are some kind of blogging controlled vocabulary? If the reader is unfamiliar with the way in which Technorati works, this section will prove to be confusing. More detail about Technorati and the implications of its tagging system and how it relates to this research would have been helpful.

The discussion contains a lengthy comparison of this research study with a similar study the author did on 30 educational-technology oriented blogs. The author does not mention that she will be undertaking this comparison, and its sudden appearance could give the impression that the researcher feels that the current study perhaps does not have enough substance to stand on its own.

This research is useful for those who are interested in and want more information about the LIS blogosphere, and who might want to contribute their own content to the general knowledge-base via a blog. It is also useful for bloggers who want to think more carefully about their tags and folksonomies. Perhaps the categories and sub-categories developed during this research can provide bloggers with an idea of how to structure their own folksonomies. The ideas for further research are intriguing, such as focusing on multimedia modes of blogging, looking at blogs written by single authors as opposed to multiple authors, and looking at blogs written by males and females. One gets the feeling that more work is in the offing from this particular researcher.