

# CAIS Paper - OPACs, Users, and Readers' Advisory: Exploring the Implication of User-Generated Content for Readers' Advisory in Canadian Public Libraries

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**Abstract:** An analysis of user-generated content (UGC) of 22 adult fiction titles in 43 Canadian public libraries that use BiblioCommons, SirsiDynix, and Encore was conducted to examine the contribution of UGC on readers' advisory services. Findings indicate that UGC provides insight into the affect, subject, and protagonists of a work.

**Résumé:**

## 1. Introduction

Social media websites allow users to connect with each other over various themes and topics. This popularity extends to the use of libraries, books, and reading-related culture; for example, sites like Goodreads (<http://www.goodreads.com/>) and LibraryThing (<http://www.librarything.com/>) provide popular platforms for people to share and discuss their reading interests. Public libraries, too, are social environments that encourage the interaction, sharing, and communication of ideas, opinions, and many other types of information. Various library catalogues are integrating social discovery platforms, such as BiblioCommons (<http://www.bibliocommons.com>), SirsiDynix (<http://www.sirsidynix.com/>), and Encore (<http://encoreforlibraries.com/overview>), which allow users to connect with each other through user-generated content such as reviews, comments, recommendations, or tags.

The traditional readers' advisory (RA) model is based on a face-to-face discussion initiated by the reader or librarian, and is based very much on the reference interview. The use of social discovery platforms can provide an online environment where users can establish a social space to share and discuss common reading interests. User tags and reviews can serve as added access points by which users can search for items of interest. Social discovery platforms may also benefit RA staff, as these platforms can help with communication, interaction, and act as informal RA tools.

This paper examines the contribution of user-generated content on RA services in Canadian public libraries. Grounded Theory was used to conduct a content analysis of

user-generated content about a selection of adult fiction titles in Canadian public libraries that use the BiblioCommons, SirsiDynix, and Encore social discovery platforms to address the following research questions:

- a) What kind of content do users contribute about adult fiction titles, i.e., tags and reviews/comments?
- b) What categories of access points do users provide about the content of adult fiction titles, e.g., location, subject, genre, and so forth?

## **2. Literature review**

The traditional RA model typically consists of a personal encounter between a librarian and a reader. Yet this model may not always work optimally for a variety of reasons (Hollands and Trott 2006; May, et al. 2000; Stover 2009; Trott 2005, 2008). Possible issues may include a reluctance for public discussion, shyness, a lack of awareness of the service, a perception of librarian as authority figure, fears of not relating based on gender, age, or cultural differences.

In the tradition of cataloguing, the assignation of access points to works of fiction can be problematic for a variety of reasons. In catalogue records, attempts at neutrality are normally manifested in the careful selection of subject headings by cataloguers - normally Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) - that provide what is perceived to be a balanced and unbiased opinion about the content of the work. Library subject headings may not change quickly enough to match the language of readers or changes in, and growth of, literary genres. The provision of neutral, unbiased reviews by professional reviewers is flying increasingly in the face of the growing popularity of sites such as Goodreads and Amazon, where readers freely add their own reviews (Hoffert 2010).

RA librarians can make use of social reading sites such as LibraryThing, Goodreads, and Shelfari (<http://www.shelfari.com>), which allow readers to document, discuss, and share their reading interests. Librarians can easily consult these social reading sites for reading ideas, regardless of whether any data are imported to their catalogues. The use of social discovery platforms to provide librarian-led RA services to readers is a natural progression from recent developments discussed above. Stover points out that social reading sites are very popular amongst readers and that “a Web nation of feral readers’ advisors is being born, who in turn will inform their friends and colleagues of good books to read using the language we’ve provided in our tags, bookshelves, reviews, and annotations” (Stover 2009, 246). Trott (2008) points out that RA staff have competition from services such as LibraryThing, Shelfari, and Goodreads, and that they need to consider how best to blend the concepts of reading appeal with the idea of readers tagging books with their own headings.

### 3. Methodology

The entire population of Canadian public libraries (n=43) using BiblioCommons (n=33), SirsiDynix (n=3), and Encore (n=7) social discovery systems (the most popular in Canada) was examined. From the final set of library-located bibliographic records (n=831), the unique user-generated content in the form of subject headings, tags, and reviews/comments was extracted to determine what type of content users contributed to the records. The bibliographic records for 22 unique adult fiction titles, selected from shortlists and winning lists of major literary prizes, were examined in the 43 social discovery platforms. In total, 4541 tags, 3501 Library of Congress subject headings, and 632 reviews were extracted from the base sample of 831 records from January-March 2013. The subject headings and user-generated content extracted from the bibliographic records were assessed and analyzed separately by the research team, comprised of three principal researchers and two research associates. Two researchers independently derived categories from the tags and subject headings from each record using the Grounded Theory method (Hollan, Hutchins, and Kirsh, 2000; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Walker and Myrick, 2006). Each researcher coded independently and inductively, allowing categories to emerge from the dataset. Similarly, two other researchers worked independently from each other to derive categories from the user reviews and comments. In both cases, a third researcher, who was not involved in the first round of analysis, independently coded for categories for the tags, subject headings, and reviews. This researcher subsequently assessed the three sets of categorical analyses of the tags, subject headings, and review data and examined them for overlap, clarity, exclusivity, and relevance. These three sets of independent categories were assessed for similarity and subsequently grouped into one finalized set of categories.

### 4. Findings

Overall, more tags were assigned in total to the titles (4541) than were subject headings (3501). While many tags and subject headings were assigned overall, it is important to reflect on the gaps noted from the data. Sixty-eight bibliographic records of the 831 sampled (8.2%) were not assigned any subject headings; on average, per title, 3.09 records were not assigned any subject headings. Of the 831 bibliographic records for the 22 titles, 259 (31.17%) do not contain any user-generated tags; on average, per title, 11.77 records did not include tags. The average number of user tags assigned per record ranges from 0.09 to 11.60. On average, more user tags (4.95) were assigned to the individual bibliographic records than subject headings (4.07). The number of unique subject headings per title ranged from 5 to 25. Of the 831 holding libraries' records, 678 (82%) contain user reviews; within these holdings, there are 632 unique reviews.

Of all the categories represented by the subject headings, *Genre* represents the largest proportion (48.84%), followed by *Period* (21.81%), *Topic* (18.06%), *People* (15.73%), and *Location* (11.68%). Of all the categories represented by the tags, *Topic* represents the largest proportion (28.36%), followed by *Awards* (19.24%), *Genre* (14.42%), and *Tone* (10.09%). Of all the categories represented by the reviews, *Readability* (22.23%) represents the largest proportion, followed by *Tone* (17.64%), *Protagonists* (16.10%),

and *Historical events* (12.25%). The top two categories for the reviews place an emphasis on the affective aspects of the work, namely its readability, and tone.

## **5. Conclusion**

Where the cataloguers want an objective stance on what the title conveys, readers provide a complete picture of the title – what it contains in a factual sense and what it contains in an emotional or reading experience sense. User-generated content serves to complement the MARC bibliographic record; while the latter provides greater emphasis upon the genre and format of a book, user content provides more insight into the subject of a work, its protagonists and, perhaps most importantly of all, the affect the book has on its readers. User-generated reviews go further in this sense and can thus serve to add valuable additional information to a bibliographic record, particularly in conveying the affective or emotional impact of a book.

An important next step is to measure the impact of user-generated content on both readers and library staff. Do library staff use this content to understand better the reading interests of their library community? Does this content impact decisions relating to the purchase of library materials and the content of bibliographic content? This research can be expanded to other geographic areas outside of Canada, and to non-public library settings. The consolidated findings from all the stages of this research can provide useful models for mining user-generated content to enhance both RA and cataloguing services to provide readers with optimal tools or infrastructures to support their reading.

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