Social Tagging and Self-Tagging for Impression Management

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ABSTRACT
We provided means for people to apply tags to one another within an online corporate directory. Seventy-nine percent of the participants used the system to apply tags to themselves, and 51% applied tags to no one other than themselves. We relate these findings to Goffman’s concept of impression management.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
H.5.3 [Group & Organization Interfaces]: CSCW, Web-based interaction.
H.4.3 [Communications Apps]: Information browsers.

Keywords
Social tagging, people-tagging, social computing, social software, impression management, reputation management.

1. INTRODUCTION
Tagging has recently become popular as a lightweight and democratic approach to sharing information and collaborating. It has been applied in a variety of applications, from shared photos to web pages to email (see [3,5,6] for review). This poster presents preliminary results of “people-tagging” for a prototype system where people could tag entries in an online corporate directory.

An existing online corporate directory, which stored automatic and self-authored information about each person in the enterprise, was enhanced with features that let users create tags (one-word or one-phrase labels) assigned to anyone listed in the directory.

Figure 1. Analyses of Tagging Behaviors, presenting the mean number of tags per taggee as assigned by Taggers. A. Between-persons comparison of people who tag Others only vs. Others+Self vs. Self-Only.

B. Within-persons comparison of Other vs. Self in the Others+Self group.
This tagging feature was similar to other social-tagging applications in use within the company, such as [ANON1] (an experimental, internal version of the popular practice of tagging online resources – see [6]) and [ANON2] (an experimental system that linked person with person through shared authorship or shared interest in online objects – see [3]). In [ANON1] and [ANON2], the crucial operation was the assignment of a tag by a user to an object. By contrast, in the prototype, the crucial operation was the assignment of a tag by a user to another user.

2. Procedure
The experimental service was introduced on an internal company collaboration-services server, and was announced at several large meetings attended by predominantly technical and software engineers (about 100 people in each). Access was simple: People executed a link to an internal web page, authenticated with their internal corporate ID and password, and began to use the service through their browser.

When we accessed the server in mid-April, it contained data for 401 people (Taggers) who had written tags on 2650 people (Taggees) in 3778 records (format: Tagger, Taggee, tags), using a total of 1913 unique tags. We reduced the dataset for this report according to two principles. First, to focus on the community of active Taggers, we excluded data in which the Taggee had never tagged anyone (i.e., all Taggees had to have acted as Taggers at some point), resulting in 320 Taggers/Taggees in 862 records. Second, to increase the likelihood that Taggers understood the use of tagging, we excluded people who had not participated in [ANON1], a social-tagging service which has achieved considerable popularity within the company [6]. These restrictions produced a dataset of 217 Taggers/Taggers who had tagged one another in 714 records, using a total of 506 unique tags.

3. Results and Discussion
We were surprised to find that 79% of the people tagged themselves. As shown in Figure 1A, 46 people (21%) tagged only other people (Other-only), 61 people (28%) tagged other people and themselves (Self+Other), and 110 people (51%) tagged only themselves (Self-only). As a rough measure of the effort that people put into tagging, we compared the mean number of tags per Taggee that were used by each Tagger. Figure 1A shows a significant overall difference among Other-only, Self+Other, and Self-Only (F(2,220)=5.003, p<.008), with the significantly fewer mean tags in Other-only than in the other two groups, according to the Least Significant Difference test (at p<.05 level).

These results may be interpreted as showing that individuals put more work into self-tagging than they did into tagging others, as measured by both between-subjects (Figure 1A) and within-subjects (Figure 1B) analyses. These results are consistent with the phenomenon of impression management described by Goffman [4]. Goffman proposed an analysis of individuals’ behaviors in organizations in terms of dramatic performances,
in which the organizational actor was concerned in part with how s/he was perceived by other members of the organization. This theme has continued in contemporary CSCW research (e.g., [2]).

We performed a content analysis of the tags themselves that extended previous work [5], to look for differences in the tags used for self and for others. We developed the following high-level schema of tag use:

- **Characteristic.** Something about the person e.g. *eager*.
- **Content.** Places/repositories for content e.g. *blogs*
- **Division-Group.** Name of a division or group
- **External.** Name of an external organization e.g. *uchicago*
- **Hobby.** Physical or virtual hobby e.g. *amateur-radio, second-life*
- **Informal-Group.** Informal grouping of people, e.g. *communities*
- **Knowledge-Domain.** Something a person knows or domain a person is associated with e.g. *ucd*
- **Location.** Physical place e.g. *Austria*
- **Name.** Person’s name or acronym e.g. *bob*
- **Project.** Project the person is in or associated with.
- **Role.** Formal or informal role e.g. *architect*
- **Skill.** Something a person knows or does, e.g. *blogger, screendesigner*
- **Sport.** Sport e.g. *bike-rider*
- **Technology.** Particular technology or technology domain e.g. *rest, security*

Each tag was evaluated in alphabetical order and assigned to one of the tag categories. Information about Tagger, Taggee or any other kind of identifier was hidden during the classification. We analyzed a total of 459 unique tags that we could clearly categorize, many of which were used more than once. Including non-unique uses, there were 417 tags that had been used with Self and 793 tags that had been used for Other. These numbers were translated into percentages for each tag. A comparison of the tags which exceeded a criterion of 5% overall frequency, revealed a preference to use tags referring to technology for self over other (60% cf 40%). There was a preference to use tags referring to project, role or division-group for Other over Self. Given that the group of taggers were primarily employed in or associated with a technology role or project these data are consistent with a view that self-tagging helps publicize or reinforce a preferred public persona.

### 4. Conclusion

While this kind of impression management might appear to be a matter of vanity or self-promotion, we understand it as a kind of organizationally responsible behavior for people in a knowledge-intensive company (e.g., [1]). Knowledge work often involves finding opportunities to contribute to collaborative work, and one way of finding those opportunities is to “advertise” one’s skills to other members of the organization. Self-tagging would support the creation and refinement of such a public persona. Our results so far encourage us to look for other uses of tagging (e.g., of objects [6]), for evidence of
similar attention to how the Tagger may be perceived by colleagues. The next steps in our research will examine that hypothesis in other collaborative media.

5. REFERENCES