

# The public library catalogue as a social space: Usability studies of user interaction with social discovery systems.

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# Introduction

## Today's library catalogues

- Important and fundamental medium between users and their information needs
- Competing against powerful alternatives for information discovery that allow user-contributed metadata (e.g., tagging, ratings, and reviews) and user interaction with each other.
- These alternatives raise user expectations of library catalogues, where user-centred design and usability are seen as more important than information organization.



# Social discovery systems

Vendors are providing social discovery systems for use by public and academic libraries, with enhanced features such as:

- Predictive searching (or, "Did you mean ...?")
- User-contributed content such as tags, reviews, and ratings
- Faceted navigation of results
- RSS feeds of stored searches, results, new postings, and so forth
- Sophisticated ranking algorithms based on variables such as item count, popularity, field weighting, and so forth



# Research problem

There have been no comprehensive studies to evaluate the use of social discovery systems in public libraries in Canada.

The actual value of social features of these social discovery systems, such as tags, reviews, and ratings to the end user has not been examined:

- Why *would* users post tags, ratings, and reviews in a public library catalogue?
- These systems are costly to implement and to maintain: If we provide users with the ability to contribute content to catalogue records, will they actually do so?



# Scope of our research agenda

**Current project:** To examine which social features (e.g, tags, ratings, or reviews) are used in social discovery systems by users

**Future research:** To examine:

- How social features are used in social discovery systems (e.g., to look for items or to contribute content to catalogue records);
- Users' motivations for using (or not) social features in social discovery systems; and
- Users' perception of, and satisfaction with, the benefits of the social features in social discovery systems.



# Participants

Two principal social discovery systems used in Canada:  
AquaBrowser & BiblioCommons

Halifax & Edmonton public libraries

- Due to the nature of the funding project and time restrictions, this part of the study was deliberately limited in scope, especially since permission is needed to access server logs.



# Research questions

How do public library users interact with social discovery systems?

How does usage between the two social discovery systems compare?

Does the use of social discovery systems change over time?



# Methodology

- Transaction logs of the social discovery systems used by Halifax and Edmonton were compiled from June-August.
- August data are not yet available, so we can present only preliminary results. Detailed data analysis is scheduled to start later this month.





# Types of data gathered

Type of search used (e.g.,  
keyword, subject)

Use of tagging features

Use of posted reviews

Use of ratings features



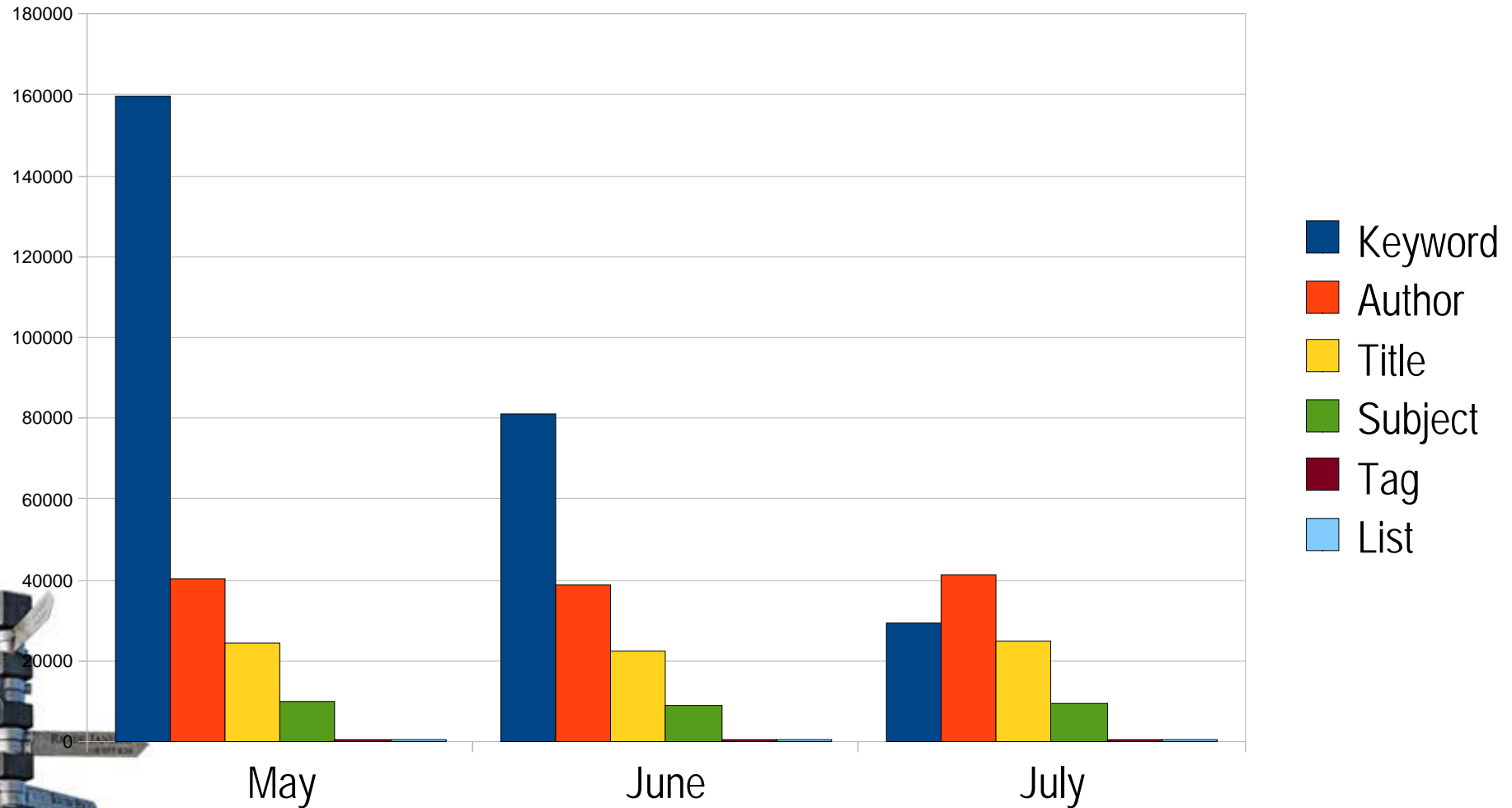
# Tracking user-contributed metadata

A set of 50 monograph records was examined (weekly) in both systems to track changes to tags, reviews, and ratings assigned by the clients.

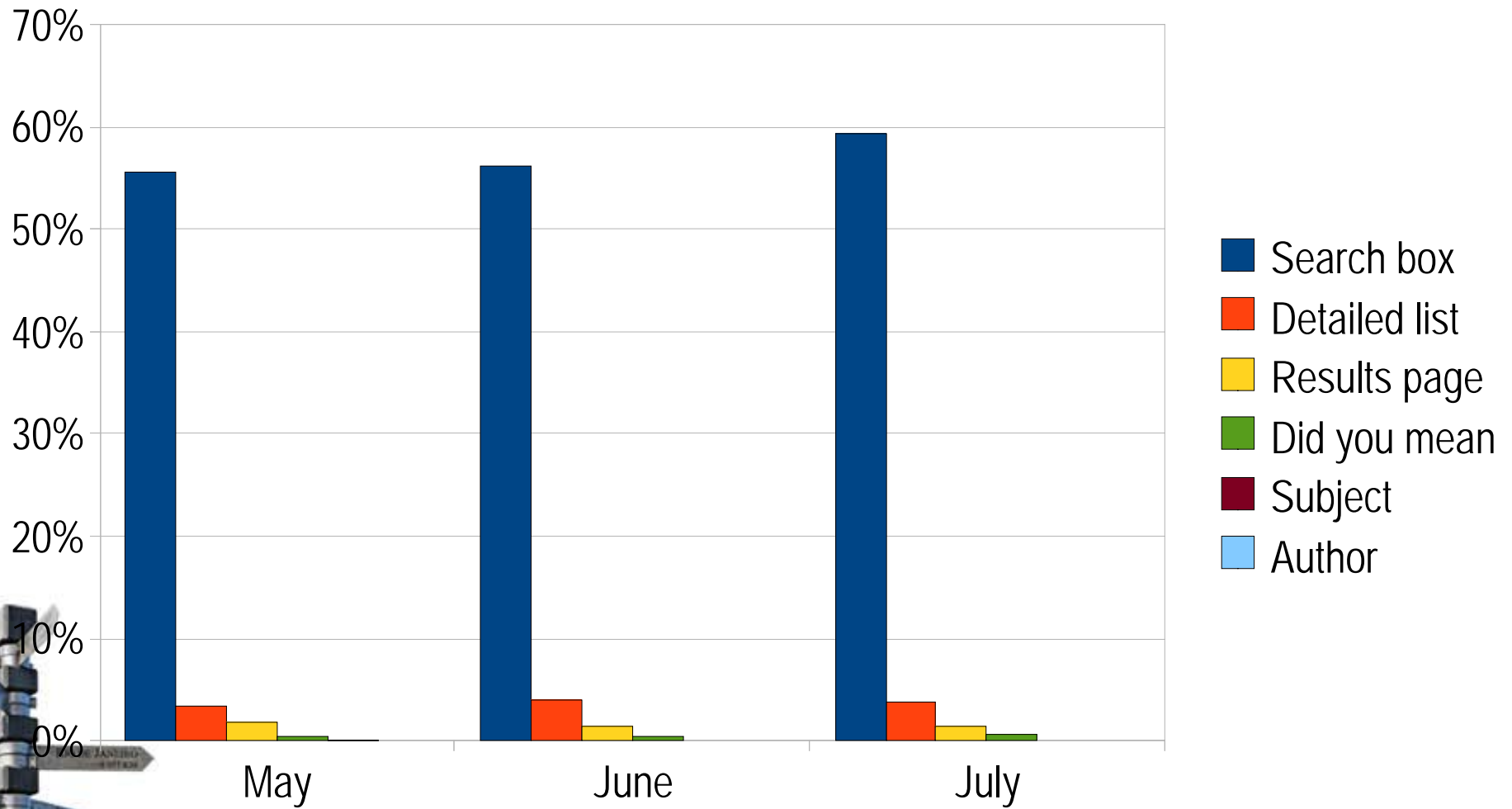
- 10 Adult fiction
- 10 Adult non-fiction
- 10 Children's fiction
- 10 Children's non-fiction
- 10 Graphic novels



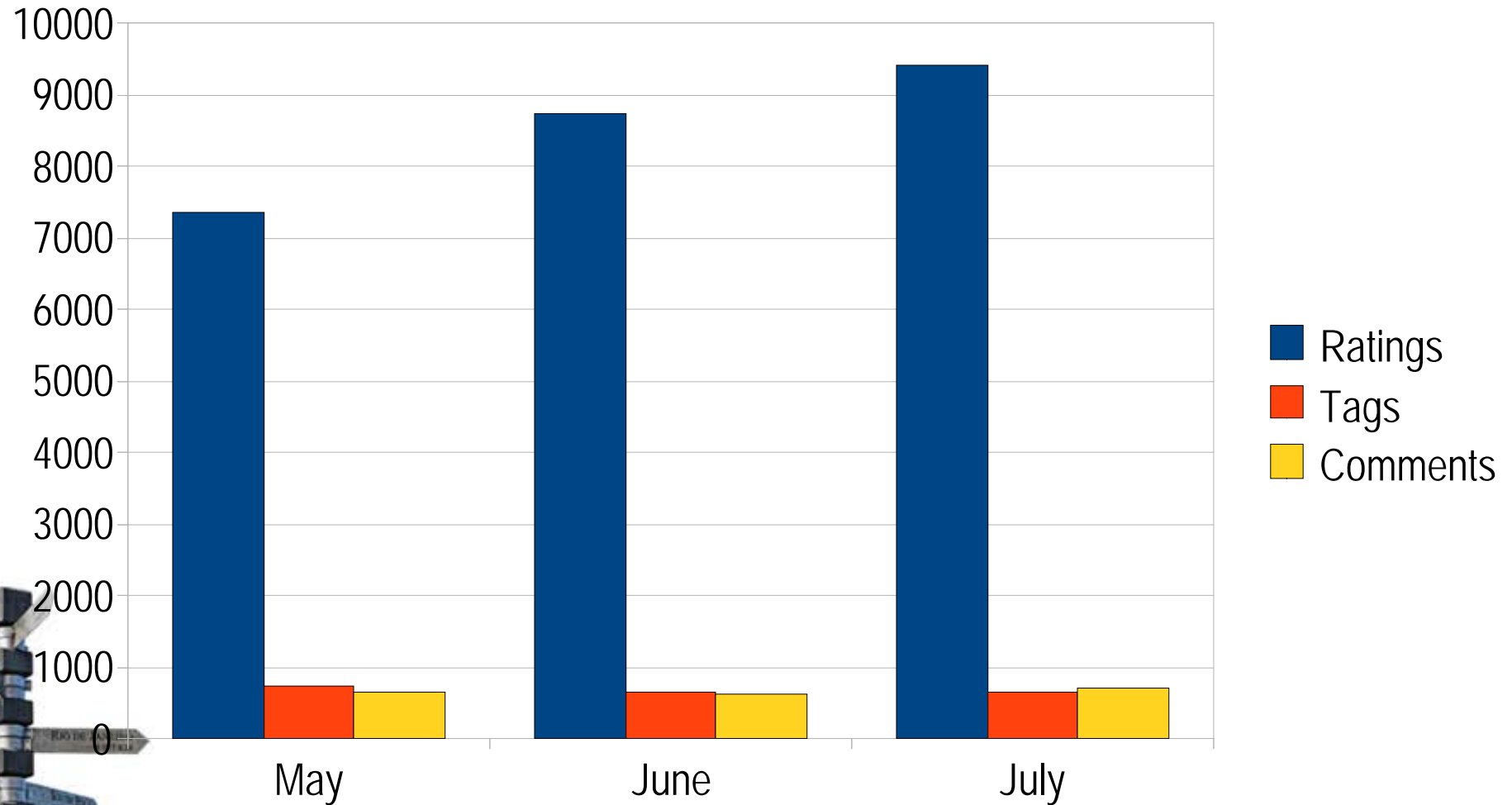
# EPL search methods



# HPL search methods



# EPL click through user-generated metadata



# User-generated content in the 50 selected records: Tags

**HPL:** Only 5 records have been assigned tags (10%).

- 2 records have 4 tags
- 3 records have 2 tags.
- No growth in the number of tags to the 5 records

**EPL:** Only 1 record has been assigned tags (0.02%)

- 1 tag
- No growth in the number of tags over the 4 months



# User-generated content in the 50 selected records: Ratings & Comments

**HPL:** Only 1 record has been assigned ratings (0.02%)

**EPL:** 27 records have been assigned ratings (54%)

**HPL:** No records have been assigned comments/reviews

**EPL:** Only 7 records have been assigned comments (14%)

- 2 records have 2 comments each
- 5 records have 1 comment each.
- No changes in assignation of comments from the first week of observation.



# Preliminary observations: Search type

Traditional keyword searching continues to be used as the primary search mechanism. The enhanced search features, such as tag and “did you mean” show negligible use.

Unlike EPL, HPL does not provide a “tag” field in the advanced search option. It is difficult to search via tags in HPL, since there is no listing provided for tags, nor is there an overarching tag cloud that pertains to all records. This explains also why the log analysis from HPL does not record tag searches, since these data are obtained via designated search functions.





# Preliminary observations: User-generated content

While EPL data suggests that clients do click through existing user-generated metadata to obtain information about records, the tracking of the 50 records suggest that social features are used “passively” for information retrieval, rather than “actively” to contribute data to existing records.

HPL does not show click through rates, but our observation of the 50 records once again suggests that there is very little active use of the social features available to the clients.



# Limitations of transaction log analysis

- The nature of the data gathered differs by vendor, so one cannot compare results easily between the two systems.
- Log analysis shows only which features are used and how frequently. In the case of user-generated metadata, we cannot determine specifically how or why these metadata are used.
- Log analysis does not tell us why clients use these features and, perhaps more importantly, why they do not. The dearth of “active” use of social features suggests that further studies are necessary to determine motivations for use.



# Future research

Two phases:

- (a) Distribute a questionnaire to all Canadian public libraries who use social discovery systems
  
- (b) Conduct focus groups in a selection of public libraries across Canada that use social discovery systems.



# Future research

Examine the following questions:

- (a) which social features (e.g, tags, ratings, or reviews) are used by users;
- (b) how social features are used by users (e.g., to look for items or to contribute content to catalogue records);
- (c) users' motivations for using (or not) social features
- (d) users' perception of, and satisfaction with, the benefits of the social features in social discovery systems



# Acknowledgments

- Funding for this research study is provided by the OCLC/ALISE Library and Information Science Research Grant Program.



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