Shirky Has made a very convincing case about the use of classification on the internet, he believes that user generated classification is the way of the future and static inflexible hierarchies that work for libraries have little use in the online world. Shirky works hard to challenge the reader’s thoughts on classification and really makes the reader think about the organisational structure of the Internet.

Shirky argues that with formal classification systems such as those used in libraries it is not the categories that are being optimised it is the number of books on the shelf, this is why in the Dewey decimal system has religion categorised with 200 to 290 on Christianity and 290 to 299 for other religions, because this is what was most prominent at the time and what took up the most shelf real estate. I believe Shirky is correct here as with the Internet this sort of classification would not be appropriate, the physical limitations of a library do not exist on the Internet. If a user were to use a classification system such as the Dewey decimal system to search for information on Islam, then they would be faced with mountains of information crammed into a single group they would have to sift through thousands of pages on other religions to find what they are looking for, this simply does not work in this instance.

Shirky also argues “East Germany actually turned out to be an unstable category. Cities are real. They are real, physical facts. Countries are social fictions.” However I feel that he has misunderstood the context of this categorisation, yes the country no longer exists, but it did exist exactly the same as the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia, should we remove those categories and pretend they never existed, no they are part of history, they have information about them and we should not just merge all the information about East Germany into Germany. Just the same as the information about the roman empire is not categorised under italy.

I believe that Shirky is correct in his thought on folksonomies, and the use of them to categorise the internet. A system where the users dictate what terms mean is far more powerful than any system that could be professionally created, this is because the use of folksonomies doesn’t confine the user to specific groups. Using folksonomies to
search using a term that the user is familiar such as ‘soccer coaching’ will display the results for that search, but it will also suggest other terms according to user popularity that may be relevant to their search, where as in a classification system the user probably would not find the grouping of ‘soccer coaching’ because 90% of the world call it football. This sort of discrepancy is one of the major downfalls of professional classification and one of the major benefits of folksonomies.

Shirky writes a lot about the fact that there is no shelf, he believes that most classification systems believe there is a shelf for books to be on and a book can only be in one place at a time, therefore this is not a suitable model for the internet. I believe this is correct, for a classification system to succeed on the internet the creator/s have to understand the fact that there are no such physical limitations on the internet. Folksonomies are a prime example as the system they work on is based almost entirely on links, The ability to link pages to each other is one of the internet's greatest features, it is effectively like having all the books in a library at arms reach. So why would we try to separate pages and try to maintain that physical distance when we can have all relevant knowledge on a given topic at our finger tips.

Shirky talks about the use of controlled vocabulary in classification systems, stating that they can result in signal loss, this is because there could be many names for the same information or there could be different information for the same name. This is where folksonomies work well as the user can select which terms are relevant to what they are looking for. With folksonomies the users tell the system how to work where are classification tells the users how to work with it.

In one section of his work Shirky criticizes Yahoo, “Yahoo is saying "We understand better than you how the world is organized, because we are trained professionals.” Shirky obviously has misunderstood yahoo’s decisions here; I don’t believe Yahoo is saying this at all, Yahoo has realised that to implement a classification system for the internet they have to make some assumptions about the way they classify the information, and by doing so they are setting a standard to which its users must follow. I don’t believe they are intentionally trying to portray themselves to have a better understanding of information classification; they are simply trying to put boundaries on their system to maintain some sort of usability and order.
In Shirky’s conclusion he states” by letting users tag URLs and then aggregating those tags, we're going to be able to build alternate organizational systems, systems that, like the Web itself, do a better job of letting individuals create value for one another, often without realizing it.” This summarises the article well as the most important point to consider in any system like this is who knows the users better than the users, no one does, so by allowing the users combined tagging efforts to find information we are much more likely to find exactly what we were searching for, and if we could adapt this model to the entire web, it would be a much more successful research tool and much more user friendly than it currently is. The best part of a world wide folksonomy model is that it doesn’t require users to change the way they decipher information because as Shirky states “As long as at least one other person tags something they way you would, you'll find it”
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