Abstract

Music streaming sites are growing rapidly and not enough attention has been paid to the ways in which site users organise, explore and present their music. Folksonomy is a social tagging strategy that exemplifies the innovation of dynamic social web interfaces but is surprisingly scarce in music streaming interfaces. Folksonomy inhabits sites that allow for user-made content, where users categorise music in their own words. The challenges it poses for taxonomical organisation in music streaming interfaces is worthy of discussion.

This thesis asks, *how do current music streaming services incorporate folksonomy into their music discovery functions and how important is it in their interfaces?* In answering this, the characteristic tensions of folksonomy and taxonomy are discussed. Deleuze and Guattari's *Rhizomes* and broader areas of Systems Thinking are drawn from to illustrate the tensions that influence music discovery in streaming. *Rhizome*s are an expression of the organic and lateral, comparable to folksonomy. On the other hand, taxonomy (*Arboreal* as the French philosophers suggest) is a planned, hierarchical and binary system. Low degrees of folksonomy can sustain asymmetries of control. On the other hand, too much folksonomy may make streaming interfaces anarchic and difficult to navigate.

The type of systems used in music streaming interfaces (rhizomatic/folksonomic or arboreal/taxonomic) influence music discovery experiences. Streaming services are not only music providers but influencers via song recommendations and *playlisting*.

This research finds a continued tension between folksonomy and taxonomy. Streaming services present themselves as either host sites *or* curated services. Nonetheless, folksonomy and taxonomy can be synergised in music streaming interfaces in wayfinding functions used for self-guided and collaborative music discovery. Without avenues for folksonomy, music streaming may become less culturally diverse, disadvantaging the visibility of artists and users.

This thesis advocates for the untapped value of folksonomy for self-guided music discovery. Current music streaming interfaces are scrutinised for the degree of user-made content hosted and for functions that allow user contributions. Research involved methods including online observation; site testing; trend analysis using big data tools (Hashtagify); and review of press articles, forum threads, and academic literature. Additionally, the UX tool of Wireframing is employed to deconstruct each interface to show the degree of folksonomy-friendliness. By drawing attention to folksonomy, user interaction is deeply considered in a push towards the possibilities of imaginative new music streaming interfaces.

Keywords: Music Streaming Interfaces, Folksonomy, Control, Music Discovery, Rhizomes