

Sustaining the Social

Connecting the lives of the Drupal community

Iain Emsley, David De Roure
Oxford e-Research Centre
University of Oxford
Oxford, United Kingdom
iain.emsley@oerc.ox.ac.uk

Abstract—The Drupal content management system has a vibrant, widely distributed community that develops, documents and evangelizes the software. It supports itself through the main site, the DrupalCon conferences, user groups and an association. We discuss the use of social coding and software credit to develop the software community and social documentation to provide documentation and tutorials. We argue that there are sub-communities, using different social machines, which are linked as a concept.

Index Terms—Social coding, social documentation, Drupal, social machines, software credit

I. INTRODUCTION

The Drupal content management system has a vibrant, widely distributed community. It supports itself through the main Drupal sites[1], the DrupalCon conferences, user groups and the Drupal Association.

The Getting Involved Guide states “[w]e depend on our diverse community of passionate volunteers to move the [Drupal] project forward” [2]. We might infer that the community is a homogenous entity through the use of the singular. We present work in progress exploring how homogeneous it is or whether it is an umbrella for heterogeneous communities. If the latter, then do the sub-communities interact with each other? It is implied that there is more than one community and we conduct exploratory investigations into types of community using web mining.

Looking at related works from social coding and social documentation, we discuss how these sub-communities support the main community. We focus on a sample of actors who bridge these social machines, “processes in which the people do the creative work and the machine does the administration”[3], that are emergent socio-technical entities, such as GitHub.

II. RELATED WORK

GitHub users are interviewed in [4] about social coding but the scope is limited. The network effect of developers within

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GitHub is explored in [5]. Loose social links between projects and developers in GitHub are discovered in [6].

The role of social media in the shared writing of formal and informal documentation with the use of YouTube is discussed in [7,8] to use screen casts as an alternative to traditional documentation. The authors discuss the use of social media to write documentation but not the intersection with other parts of the community.

III. METHODOLOGY

We focus on the intersections of three data streams, YouTube, GitHub and Twitter, focused on keywords taken from the Drupal community during September 2015. DrupalCon Europe was being held in Barcelona and Drupal 8 was being prepared for release.

We focus on the committers due to the difficulty of matching identities. Their Drupal profiles are used to discover their Twitter names and verified these by looking them up. As the YouTube data was small enough, we identified a unique list of all names and checked these against Twitter as well as intersecting them with the Twitter identities.

IV. RESULTS

Out of the 8 committers, only 3 link Github and Twitter and they are associated with the new release. We discover a maintainer of an older branch and project maintainer linking YouTube and Twitter, but organizations are the more significant entries. There are no matches across YouTube and Github in this data set.

V. DISCUSSION

Social coding [10] is the application of social media practices to software development. The Drupal community uses this model within its own issue queues where developers may subscribe to updates through subscription or contribution. This practice enhances the distributed community through ensuring that interested parties are involved in the discussion process.

Commits can be made by project owners or co-maintainers[11]. This latter group is made of users who participate across a project and its issues and must also have significant patches committed to the relevant codebase. Becoming a co-lead requires interaction with the relevant community and work contributions, suggesting a strong focus on developing a sub-community.

Patches committed to the code base reflect this social spirit. The commit messages link to the Drupal issue and attribute all contributors, so software credit is embedded into this sub-community. There is a standard format:

Issue #[issue number] by [comma-separated usernames]: [Short summary of the change]. [12]

This model also encourages the tagging of organizations who funded the developer or for whom the work was done [13]. Organizations must have an account on the Drupal site to be tagged. This initiative encourages those entities to promote themselves and the developer community to promote those organizations on the main Drupal site.

We expected the maintainers to be more active across the social machines than they are in this snapshot. The ones who have community roles as well and this would suggest a stronger focus on the development community than the “Drupal community”.

Social documentation is the application of social media to documentation, such as YouTube videos. Tutorials and talks are posted to the social media sites as enhancements.

The DrupalAssociation [14] channel presents the talks from DrupalCon Barcelona, covering business and technical development, and Drupal 8. Set up to support and develop the community, it is key factor in sharing practices and promoting the concept of a community. The use of Symfony [15] components in Drupal 8 requires the communities to adopt new practices and code, such as PSR-4 [16]. As the Drupal Association publish the videos, the internal conversation becomes external and showing the community expertise and experiences, where individuals focus on demonstrating their talents.

VI. FUTURE WORK AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the social machines of GitHub, YouTube and Twitter are relatively new, they build on existing social and technical practices. Future work includes extending the model of contributors to companies and machines. We want to look at the community over a longer time period and look at other communities, including Symfony.

YouTube provides a community driven, multimedia experience building on the documentation at [1], although it does not always link to project. We want to look at StackOverflow to view any overlaps and changes in practice.

Social practices are more apparent within the more focused development group where it is encouraged as part of practice. The Drupal project is at a watershed with new and old code and documentation requiring maintenance. The sub-communities sustain themselves and are linked by a small group who have gained social and technical trust. The community presents itself as homogeneous but is a loosely coupled, heterogeneous set of communities.

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