

Library 2.0: revolution or evolution?

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Library 2.0 is a controversial concept that stirs debate on many fronts. As the concept continues to arrest the attention of most library users and practitioners, a number of issues relating to its real nature emerge. One of these is the character of change it represents. While many library scholars and practitioners agree that Library 2.0 represents a change, they disagree on the nature of this change. Using a critical review of documentation and arguments on this subject, the authors identify three points of view on this change. Whereas some feel that the change is revolutionary and may drastically transform the profession – including renaming – others see it as an evolution of the current best practices to mould a better, user-centred service using modern technology. Still others see Library 2.0 as neither revolutionary nor evolutionary. This paper seeks to clarify these three points of view on the character of Library 2.0 change in libraries, as institutions, and in librarianship as a profession. It also recommends that while Library 2.0 should be seen as the latest instance in the development of the library and the services it offers, its role in facilitating participatory user-centric services should not be ignored.

Keywords: Library 2.0, digital libraries, library technologies

I Introduction

The information and communication technology revolution as exemplified by the Internet is rapidly changing the patterns of communication as well as expectations of its management and delivery (Limb 2004). Libraries and the profession of librarianship may be strongly affected. For instance, the new technologies offer applications that facilitate easier information creation, organisation, searching and use (Smith 1990; Casey and Savastinuk 2007). Furthermore, technology adept users, and their number is rapidly increasing, find it easier to go to Google⁴ to seek information than drive to the library (Casey and Savastinuk 2007), leading to a looming reduction in the number of library users in due course (OCLC 2005). Similarly, the ratio of digital over print resources is continually rising (Limb 2004). Consequently, contemporary library users have greater expectations for better usability and convenience as well as faster response to customer needs with better products than before (Casey and Savastinuk 2007).

A drastic change in the information seeking behaviour of library users has also been reported by several researchers. Center for Information Behaviour and Evaluation Research (CIBER) (2008), for instance, reports that modern library users seem to have embraced a new information seeking behaviour that is based on the digital as opposed to the hard copy paradigm. It further reports that this behaviour is characterised as being horizontal, bouncing, checking and viewing in nature and involves “a form of skimming activity, where people view just one or two pages from an online resource or site and then ‘bounce’ out, perhaps never to return” (CIBER 2008). The research also reports that these users 1) are generally more competent with technology, pick these skills on the move through trial and error and expect a lot from ICTs; 2) prefer interactive systems and are turning away from being passive consumers of information; 3) have drastically shifted to digital forms of communication such as texting rather than talking; 4) multitask in most, if not all, areas of their lives; 5) prefer infotainment approaches to traditional information provision; 6) have zero tolerance for delay in the

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4. One of the leading web-based search engines, accessible at <http://www.google.com>.

provision of services; 7) find their peers more credible as sources of information than authority figures and structures; 8) feel the need to remain constantly connected; 9) believe everything is on the web; and 10) are format agnostic.

As the pace of technological change gathers momentum, librarians have realised, as never before, that they are unable to control it and must seek strategies to keep pace (Bell 2007). Many have adopted ICTs in designing and delivering services through what some scholars call the “Internetization” of the libraries (Herring 2008). Whereas some scholars laud the adoption of Internet and related tools by the libraries and report that it has increased the number of users and frequency of use of library services (Jørgensen 2004), others believe that the inclusion of these tools in the library information services is not well researched and is based on myths rather than facts (Herring 2008). They argue that the Internet does not have everything, as claimed by its proponents; lacks organization and quality control; and that its access is really neither ubiquitous nor free, even in developed countries (Herring 2008). Garry Price (Price 2003) also points out that the Internet only provides links and emphasises that “a link to a possible answer is still not an answer”.

But new trends in the environment in which libraries operate are not just technological. Libraries are also facing the momentous challenge of how best to manage a shifting world of formally published, self-published and unpublished materials as well as new licensing and business models. In a digital information world that is characterised by massive choice, easy access and simple-to-use tools, it is not surprising that librarians are feeling anxious (CIBER 2008) as they are being pushed out of their comfort zones (Casey and Savastinuk 2007). There also exist socio-economic and political changes that affect the operations of libraries and the lives of their users such as various elements of censorship, privacy challenges and reduction in staffing levels, to mention but a few (Casey and Savastinuk 2007). There is also a wide array of other changes in the lifestyles of the library users relating to family, work and recreation which have significant implications on their library use and expectations (Casey and Savastinuk 2007).

How libraries respond to and manage these changes and perceptions is critical for their survival. Most library scholars and practitioners agree that professionally, the nature of work in library and information services has changed and is continuing to change (Underwood 1990; Crawford 2006; Casey and Savastinuk 2007). However, there are divergent views regarding the nature of this change. On the one hand are those who assert that libraries need to take revolutionary measures to adjust their services – how they are designed and delivered. On the other hand are those who feel that these changes are not unique and should be dealt with in the same way libraries have handled myriad environmental and technological changes over the centuries. Yet others are of the view that the changes in libraries have not been managed well and have generally failed to meet the customers’ needs (Casey and Savastinuk 2007). There is consensus, however, that an approach that could prove effective in containing this change is to make libraries relevant to what the users want and need in their daily lives (Albanese 2001; Abram 2005; Blyberg 2006; Miller 2006; Walter 2006; Casey and Savastinuk 2007) so as to make the library a preferred destination and not just an afterthought. To do this, libraries need to offer traditional services more efficiently and new services which appeal to those comfortable with new ways of accessing information (Casey and Savastinuk 2007).

This paper considers Library 2.0 as the embodiment of the changes currently witnessed in libraries and librarianship and discusses the big question on whether it represents an evolutionary or revolutionary transformation of the library profession and/or institution.

2 But what is Library 2.0, anyway?

The label and meaning of Library 2.0 as a concept remain debatable (Miller 2006; Rothman 2006; Casey and Savastinuk 2007). It is a “mushy” term (Plutchak 2006), an amalgam of ideas (Blyberg 2006), and so there are many contrasting views about what it really ought or ought not to be (Crawford 2006). But beyond the controversies and rhetoric about Library 2.0, Meredith Farkas (Farkas 2008) identifies five points that summarise the essence of Library 2.0. These are: 1) Getting to understand user needs and wants through a culture of self-assessment and changing services, systems and tools to meet those needs; 2) Believing and trusting users, listening to them and giving them a role in helping to define library services that meet their needs; 3) Being able to learn and experiment, learning from failures and continuously working to improve services based on user feedback; 4) Being aware of emerging technologies and opportunities, trends and experimenting with them; and 5) Looking outside the library world for applications, opportunities, inspiration and understanding of the culture of the technologies and how they are used by the public.

The term “Library 2.0” was introduced by Michael Casey and debuted at *Internet Librarian 2005*⁵ in a speech by Michael Stephen (Crawford 2006; Habib 2006) to refer to the application of interactive, collaborative, and multi-media

5. Conference for information professionals who are using, developing, and embracing Internet, Intranet, and Web-based strategies in their roles as information architects and navigators, Webmasters and Web managers, content evaluators and developers, taxonomists, searchers, community builders, information providers, trainers, guides, and more held at Monterey, CA – October 24-26, 2005.

web-based technologies to library services and collections. It is a spin-off of the term “Web 2.0” (Abram 2005; Walter 2006) which was coined by O’Reilly Media in 2004 and is a term often applied to a perceived ongoing transition of the World Wide Web from a collection of websites to a fully-fledged computing platform serving web applications to end users (Abram 2005; Miller 2006; Walter 2006). Ultimately, Web 2.0 services are expected to replace desktop computing applications for many functions, using newer tools such as social networking sites, wikis⁶, communication tools, and folksonomies⁷ that emphasise online collaboration and sharing among users (O’Reilly 2005). Though the term suggests a new version of the Web, it does not refer to an update of Internet or World Wide Web technical standards, but to changes in the ways they are used. Though most of the definitions of Library 2.0 do not emphasise its reliance on Web 2.0 technologies, many note that these tools play a significant role in a library’s ability to keep up with the changing needs of users (Casey and Savastinuk 2007).

Apart from the debate around its real meaning, Library 2.0 has also provoked other fresh controversies. For instance, Crawford (2006) draws a distinction between what he calls Library 2.0 and “Library 2.0”. He explains that while the former is the new model seeking to improve current library services, the latter is a confrontational bandwagon movement deriding today’s libraries and librarians as rigid and unchanging. He posits that “Library 2.0” is unfortunate and adds no value to the existing concepts but detracts and creates division where none is necessary. The jury is still out on this debate (Habib 2006) and perhaps may never return. Other controversies revolve around the role of technology in Library 2.0 as well as whether or not it can be adopted by all types of libraries and how it should be implemented (Chad and Miller 2005; Miller 2006). Some librarians also suggest that Library 2.0 advocates have misplaced priorities and are unfairly dismissive of those who do not agree with them (Cohen 2007).

There is a consensus, however, that the heart of Library 2.0 is user-centered change (Albanese 2001; Abram 2005; Blyberg 2006; Cohen 2006; Miller 2006; Rothman 2006; Walter 2006). There is also general consensus that the change ought to be constant (Albanese 2001; Abram 2005; Blyberg 2006; Cohen 2006; Crawford 2006), inviting user participation in the creation of both the physical and the virtual services they want (Miller 2006), supported by consistent evaluation of the same. It is also an attempt to reach new users while offering better services to the current ones through improved customer-driven packages. Each component by itself is a step toward better user service (Crawford 2006). However, it is through the combined implementation of all of these that Library 2.0 can be attained (Casey and Savastinuk 2007).

In response to the need to guide its adoption and distinction, various library and information scholars have proposed more than ten principles of the Library 2.0 librarianship. Whilst a number of them have caused controversy, the following four have been accepted by the majority as critical to the development of the Library 2.0 discourses and practice:

1. *The library is everywhere.* A number of scholars posit that the Library 2.0 facilitates the provision of services at the point of need. Library 2.0 libraries and their services are visible on a wide range of devices, and integrated with services from beyond the library such as portals, virtual learning environments as well as e-commerce applications (Chad and Miller 2005; Stephens 2005; Casey and Savastinuk 2007). With Library 2.0, libraries move beyond the notion of “library without walls” in which they offered a destination web site where physical library services were digitally reproduced (Miller 2006). Instead, relevant aspects of that library experience are reproduced wherever and whenever the user requires them. Crawford (2006), however, suggests that libraries have never been primary information sources for all people. He asserts that a library that attempts to be all things to all people, to serve all information needs under all circumstances, is a library that will fail: its human and other resources will be stretched too thin to do anything well.

2. *The library has no barriers.* The Library 2.0 approach also ensures that information resources managed by the library are readily available and that barriers to use them are minimised (Chad and Miller 2005; Miller 2006). In the Library 2.0 model there is an active presumption that use and re-use of resources is both permitted and actively encouraged (Miller 2005). With many governments adopting Freedom of Information policies, expectations of users’ rights to access information held by libraries have drastically risen. Library 2.0 is about working with these users and other library stakeholders to increase the availability of information. Modern librarians must constantly work to reduce barriers to their services and libraries (Stephens 2005).

3. *The library invites participation.* Library 2.0 invites and facilitates the culture of participation, drawing on the perspectives and contributions of staff, technology partners and the wider user community (Miller 2006). This concept is exemplified in wikis, blogs, RSS⁸ and social bookmarking systems currently on the Web 2.0 platforms.

6. Wikis are online information resources and sites that allow users to add and edit content collectively.

7. Folksonomy is the practice and method of collaboratively creating and managing tags to annotate and categorize content.

8. Stands for Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary. It is a format for sharing web content among different web sites. It is a system that scans and aggregates contents of blogs and other tools that are updated regularly and avails the same to registered users.

4. *Library 2.0 uses flexible best of breed systems.* This model requires a new relationship between libraries and a wide range of partners, in which all parties together push the limits of what is possible while ensuring that core services continue to operate reliably (Chad and Miller 2005; Crawford 2006; Miller 2006). Library 2.0 challenges the conventional procurement procedures in which detailed specifications of tendered services and products are given to the vendors. Instead, components are innovatively mixed. Librarians rely on the expertise and expectations of their users and other stakeholders to identify, acquire and install suitable systems effectively to deliver their services.

In conclusion, therefore, Library 2.0 describes a subset of library services designed to meet user needs caused by the direct and peripheral effects of Web 2.0 (Crawford 2006; Habib 2006; Casey and Savastinuk 2007). It is a way of thinking; a way of operating (Casey and Savastinuk 2007). It is not just about searching, but finding; not about mere access, but sharing (Albanese 2001). In the words of Scott Walter (2006), Library 2.0 is a commitment to assess, improve, integrate and communicate library services using the newest information technology and the tried and true “human technology”. It is any service, physical or virtual, that successfully reaches users, is evaluated frequently, and makes use of customer input (Casey and Savastinuk 2007).

3 Is Library 2.0 evolutionary?

Many library scholars and practitioners hold the view that Library 2.0 represents an evolutionary change to the way library services are designed and delivered. They argue that though the use of technology may enhance the speed of library and information service delivery, these uses do not constitute novel approaches. The use of e-mail, for instance, does not revolutionise message transmission as the message still arrives at the mailbox, albeit electronically. The essential nature of the service – passing information from source to destination – is not changed (Underwood 1990).

Others also aver that it would be shortsighted to think of the Internet as some radical, newfangled innovation (Shuman 2001). They explain that computerised storage and retrieval of library files – the salient aspects of the Internet – have been in use for many years now. In their view, the integration of e-mail and hot links to the Internet technology is merely a refinement of what libraries have been making available to their patrons for generations. In this school of thought, therefore, the emergence and adoption of new ICTs in libraries complements rather than replaces the existing approaches (Underwood 1990; Shuman 2001).

Limb (2004) also adds that no radical changes will be experienced in the library scene as a result of Library 2.0, as the new libraries will remain syncretic combinations of traditional and digital collections and operations. Others also point out that apart from technology libraries have also made strategic changes over the centuries to adapt their services and collections to the dynamic needs and environments of their patrons. They mention opening access to library collections as one of these changes. In comparison to the medieval and monastic libraries where books were literally chained to the shelves, thus restricting their access and use, modern libraries are quite liberal (Noruzi 2004).

Proponents of this school of thought conclude that although the form and delivery of information through libraries has changed, the basic functions of a library remain to identify, acquire, process, arrange and make available information. Consequently, libraries continue to perform essential operations such as material selection, acquisition, cataloguing, circulation, maintenance, preservation, reference and document delivery. The level of transformation in these functions is mere evolution and not a revolution (Limb 2004).

4 Is Library 2.0 revolutionary?

Those who see Library 2.0 as representing a revolutionary change reason that though libraries and librarians have continued to evolve over the years in response to the ever-changing community needs, the current scenario requires newer strategies, models and tools of service (Courtney 2007) that are alien to the profession. They point to the Web 2.0 tools and other social media as some of the examples of these. These tools and the way they are used represent a vital deviation from the old order of things and point to a revolution.

They also argue that emerging technologies offer the library a myriad of threats and opportunities (OCLC 2005). Consequently, they suggest that adequately to handle these technological threats and opportunities, librarianship as a profession will need to change drastically and may even require renaming. The title “Cybrarian” has been proposed by some to describe the new generation librarian operating in cyberspace; using high precision data mining techniques while combining both online and offline collections to satisfy the needs of their patrons (Shuman 2001).

Others also state that ICT is multiplying the channels through which information can flow from the creators to the users, and that some channels can circumvent libraries and information services as traditionally conceived (Underwood 1990). To harness this technological potential effectively, libraries have to undergo a revolution to embrace open access, move beyond physical walls as well as cede some control of the library tools and processes to the users (OCLC 2005).

Some also point out that the ratio of digital over print resources is continually rising to take advantage of the economies of scale and superior capabilities of the new information technologies, leading to a steady rise in the proportion of digital resources in modern library collections (Limb 2004). They further argue that just like the invention of printing, the digital revolution will catalyse the conception and birth of a new library (Casson 2001; Limb 2004). Limb (2004) further suggests that the digital nature of information resources is now introducing a paradigm change in collection development, from a focus on acquisition to mere access, where nothing is borrowed or needs to be returned. He suggests that this is revolutionary.

Proponents of this school of thought generally conclude that the current changes, together with those that are yet to emerge, will definitely mark a critical milestone in the history of the ever-evolving libraries and librarians seeking out the newest technologies to enable them to offer timely and user-centred services to their communities (Plutchak 2006; Courtney 2007) and thus start a revolution. In their view, this transformation is so deep that it is no exaggeration to speak of a new paradigm in library operations and services (Limb 2004).

5 Library 2.0 is neither revolutionary nor evolutionary

There is yet another school of thought which posits that past, current and future changes in library services are neither evolutionary nor revolutionary. The adherents of this school point out that these changes ride on user-centricity which has always been a basic tenet of library services (Solomon 2001). They reason that in spite of the environmental changes the core functions of the library still remain much the same. For these reasons, they conclude that Library 2.0 is neither an evolution nor a revolution (Crawford 2006).

On his part Anthony Grafton (2007) also points out that the Internet and related technologies are themselves continually changing. For instance, the very foundation of Library 2.0, Web 2.0, is a mere change in the way the Internet and World Wide Web are used and not in technical standards and protocols. Consequently, it is difficult to label developments based on them as either evolutionary or revolutionary (Grafton 2007). Also citing search engines, which moved from just informing the users about top layers of web pages (home pages) to include the deeply buried pages as well, as an example, he posits that Internet technologies are constantly in a beta⁹ mode and neither represents a revolutionary nor an evolutionary change.

Grafton (2007) further suggests that it is less likely that technology-facilitated services in libraries will replace traditional ones any time soon; maybe never. He is of the view that users will have to employ both service deliveries – in a hybrid format – at the same time and concludes that this is only possible because the use of newer library service models is not intrinsically different from the traditional ones.

Some scholars also argue that the impact of techno-based library service models like Library 2.0 is less because of technological illiteracy, poor information and retrieval skills as well as lack of organisation of Internet resources, among other impediments. Consequently, the services have remained more or less the same except for instances where convenience and speed of service delivery have been improved through the emerging technologies (Swanson 2008).

6 Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that while Library 2.0 represents a model change in library services, it is largely of a nature close to the tradition and mission of libraries (Crawford 2006), and enables them to respond effectively to constantly changing user needs (Casey and Savastinuk 2007). It enables the effective organisation and access to information across society, the sharing of that information, and its utilisation for the progress of society (Albanese 2001; Miller 2006).

Library 2.0 is in fact merely a description of the latest instance of a long-standing and time-tested institution in a democratic society. Still, it should be noted that although Library 2.0 concepts like change and user participation are not new to the profession, using them together in the new (Library 2.0) model helps to keep the libraries relevant in the wake of rapidly changing user needs necessitated by technological and socio-economic trends (Casey and Savastinuk 2007). It is the marriage of Web 2.0 and librarianship, presided over by librarians and users (Albanese 2001; Abram 2005; Crawford 2006; Habib 2006; Cohen 2007).

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