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Library 2.0, information and digital literacies in the light of the contradictory nature of Web 2.0

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Abstract

Desk research was done to examine the importance of raising awareness of differences between professional content and content produced by the amateurs of the Web 2.0. The commercial nature of Web 2.0 was briefly explained. Questions related to amateurism have been raised and amateur contents characterizing Web 2.0 were contrasted to professional ones. The results show that some principles can be laid down. First of all, the need in literacies of students, teaching staff and researchers is different from that of other categories of users, when the former are fulfilling their professional roles. These needs can be satisfied mainly by services that traditionally have been provided by academic and special libraries, while making use of Web 2.0 tools could mean moving towards the goals of public library users. Second, information literacy and digital literacy alongside with adequately defined Library 2.0 are expedient in the era of Web 2.0 to support user needs by the provision of appropriate library resources and services.

Keywords

Information literacy; Digital literacy; Amateur content; Professional content; Public libraries; Academic libraries

Introduction

This opinion paper based on desk research aims to prove the hypothesis that raising awareness of differences between professional content and content produced by the amateurs of Web 2.0 is of extraordinary importance in providing adequate library services, be it in the form of offering content services or information literacy (IL) and digital literacy (DL) education. Beyond describing phenomena we will argue for setting preferences and laying down principles that can be converted into practical measures. This is especially important in the light of the enthusiasm of libraries and librarians in adapting new technologies into their work. Doing this, they have to remember that technological advances alone do not determine and bring about effective and relevant library services, but it is user needs that are decisive. We know that Web 2.0 and Library 2.0 can attract library users and can render a number of useful applications. Yet they should not be

adopted merely because they are cutting-edge technology. We have to evaluate their ability to meet user needs, instead ([Hendrix, 2010](#)).

One of the main lines of division between differing information needs can be found in the professional or amateur use of information and that these needs have to be met by offering library collections and services, supplemented by information and digital literacies education, which are differential in accordance with user needs. To achieve this, traditional differences between the needs of public library users and those of academic and special libraries have to be taken into consideration.

Being critical

LIS literature seems to take criticisms of Web 2.0 into consideration only to a neglectable extent. This is understandable in the light of the sweeping popularity of Web 2.0 applications among potential library users and especially younger generations, even though taking critical stance would be advisable. Being critical is not identical with exercising criticism on Web 2.0, because this kind of criticism is not enough to obtain a balanced view, if we do not attempt to discover its use for purposes that properly serve different library constituencies. Raising awareness of some disadvantageous features of Web 2.0 thus cannot be the main goal. However, a critical attitude helps to identify the most useful tools that can serve library goals. Considered that being critical is essential component of IL and DL it also serves as a basis for providing adequate information literacy and digital literacy education.

Taking these deliberations into account, this paper is going to address the main features of Web 2.0 that contribute to its commercial success. We will also examine some other critical topics: the question of amateurism, the differences between amateur and professional contents, including their role in library services and in regard to IL and DL, as well as Library 2.0.

The commercial nature of Web 2.0

There seems to be no need to repeat the tools and services of Web 2.0. There is ample literature on the subject (e.g. [Anderson, 2007](#); [Secker, 2008](#)) and a number of papers that address a particular segment of the application of Web 2.0 also provide overviews. However, we do not have to forget that Web 2.0 is an uncertain term, thus definitional issues have plagued the concept not because there are competing definitions for it, but because it covers many different things, some in conflict, some overlapping with each other, but in any case ontologically non-compatible. Web 2.0 can be labeled as a conceptual frame, including ideas, behaviors, technologies and ideals. Many current Internet developments, activities and applications can be understood as examples of Web 2.0 however they do not themselves constitute it ([Allen, 2008](#)).

Many raise the question if we should pay attention to this uncertainty. On the one hand, it is true that we can accept and use Web 2.0 without discussing its liquid boundaries. On the other hand, libraries traditionally have been collecting trusted information and this fact motivates librarians to use clear concepts and employ proven and safe tools. This does not allow us to accept Web 2.0 without criticism, and not without reason. We are in a situation, which is somewhat similar to the case of relevance judgments on Internet search engines' hits. From the viewpoint of the information professional, many of them are far less acceptable than we see it done by the general public and especially younger people. As [Keen \(2007\)](#) points out in his provocative and thought-provoking book, "The Cult of the Amateur," many young people believe in Google just like in the Gospel. Beliefs aside, we know that the Web is a competitive arena where authors and especially companies seek to promote their Web content, at all costs, not excluding the abuse of topical metadata, thus

search engines must act in self-defense, treating keywords and topical metadata as irrelevant ([Brooks](#), 2003). This is entirely justified from their side. However, libraries can accept this only as a makeshift arrangement and should remain wary. Taking a metaphor to describe this situation, we can say that using search engines is just like sitting on a barrel. The problem is that we do not know if it is full of wine, or it contains gunpowder. In the first case we need a spigot, in the latter it is dangerous and even expressly prohibited to smoke or use naked flame. By analogy, this is also true for many Web 2.0 tools and services. Whatever barrel we are sitting on, the library world must be aware of the opportunities and threats.

Beyond this there are complex issues and sometimes paradoxes that are related not only to technology. Many questions are thus matter of debate, including whether Web 2.0 developments threaten traditional library services or not. It is extremely difficult to answer this and similar questions as the long-term effects of Web 2.0 on the library profession are far from clear ([Bawden et al.](#), 2007).

Altogether, we do not have to repeat all criticism directed towards Web 2.0, its applications, its philosophy and the issues of security. However, the nature of participation and amateurism deserves scrutiny.

Participation and amateurism

As [Livingstone](#) (2004) points out, content creation is easier than ever, because the same technology can be readily used for sending and receiving messages, thus many are already content producers. As a consequence, we witness an explosive growth of online publishing, with an increasing number of writers ([Beeson](#), 2005). In this environment writers have to realize that they are reaching a much wider and more varied audience, that comprises both specialists and laymen ([Chan & Foo](#), 2004). This also means that there is a visible growth of content, generated by amateurs, carrying their do-it-yourself culture into the foreground. The nature of this amateur production can be highlighted if we draw the lessons from an investigation of [Flickr](#), a photo sharing site. The results show that the central value on this site is not photography, but social networking. Flickr serves to encourage more and more photos to be taken as advertisers want more and more members, who show more and more activity, while the quality of interaction is immaterial. Probably these are the reasons why Flickr fits only poorly into the traditional framework and the social worlds of amateur photography, thus it lacks the structures and culture to support a critical learning. The predominance of commercial motives makes it uncritical and participation is not a primarily an aesthetic pursuit in it ([Cox](#), 2008).

Lessig defends Web 2.0 amateurism with the following words: "I think it is a great thing when amateurs create, even if the thing they create is not as great as what the professional creates. I want my kids to write. But that doesn't mean that I'll stop reading Hemingway and read only what they write" ([Lessig](#), 2007). From our point of view there is no need to defend amateurs. What is needed is an approach that makes difference between content created by amateurs and professionals taking the goals of production into consideration. The essence of Lessig's argument would also be that.

Library use of Web 2.0

Whatever the content, amateur or not, Library 2.0 may be a vehicle to convey that content. To get closer to this function, it seems to be useful to compare two definitions of Library 2.0. [Maness](#) (2006) defines Library 2.0 as "the application of interactive, collaborative, and multi-media web-based technologies to web-based library services and collections". In their definition [Casey and Savastinuk](#) (2006) speak about a model of library service. Both agree in its user centeredness in the sense that users participate in the creation of the

content. Maness adds that this is a dynamic process, thus the roles of librarian and user are not always clear. Librarians in this environment might act as a facilitators, although not necessarily. Both definitions stress constant and purposeful change although this seems to be much more a requirement, set against Library 2.0 than its characteristic feature. Maness expressly adds that this feature is foundational of libraries as a community service. Last but not least, while Maness stresses the provision a multi-media experience, Casey and Savastinuk point out that it can be also a new physical service or operation. These definitions together form a concept that is both operational and acceptable, provided that we stress that Library 2.0 is a model of library activities.

Literacies and participation

The two most promising literacy concepts are information literacy and digital literacy. The former is a well known concept among information professionals. In fact, information literacy and especially the *lack of* it has always seemed to be of more importance to information professionals, especially academic librarians, than to any other players of the information and especially the education arena, where its implications are particularly obvious ([Bawden & Robinson](#), 2009; [Shenton](#), 2009). Let us add that - on the one hand - that it seems to be of lesser importance whether literacies of the information age are called information literacy or digital literacy ([Bawden](#), 2001).

Ideas of participation appeared in the LIS literature much earlier than the idea of Web 2.0. This was the concept of the *information player*, which is based on the following idea. While library users (in the more traditional sense of the word) take what they are offered, and make the best of it, players are much more active. They take part in deciding what they need, and what should be provided for them and they may even start to supply information to other players. The concept of the information player brought a new view on potential new roles for librarians and information specialists: functioning as managers, coaches or trainers ([Nicholas et al.](#), 2000).

Despite of this, traditional approaches towards information literacy tend to see ordinary people as receivers of information and give less attention to the active part, i.e. of being senders of messages. That is the reason why not all definitions of information literacy include production.

Digital literacy is more receptive towards production, partially due to its multimodal nature. As [Cordes](#) (2009, p. 4) points out, multimodal literacies require "in part a new sensibility, one that promotes a self responsibility for the acquisition and use of knowledge that is flexible, exploratory, and ethical." This self-responsibility appeared due to the fact that the role of gatekeepers has decreased in the Web 2.0 environment. Gatekeepers are no longer required, even though they still exist, and have great value, we can publish without them. Under these circumstances we experience that the speed and easiness of creating texts allows half-blown ideas to appear as if they were the more well-formulated concepts, just like the ones we would encounter in print documents. With this we lose certainty that was provided by the quality system applied to a part of publications that is applied in the print environment. Accordingly, the solution is that the readers themselves have to become the gatekeepers, provided that they enhance their evaluation skills ([Badke](#), 2004), that is acquire information literacy and digital literacy.

No doubt, the growth in user-generated content may bring with itself challenge and change in our thinking on a number of issues arise, including the question on the status of producing knowledge ([Anderson](#), 2007). We will have to see how profound these changes are and if they are as massive as some of the proponents of Web 2.0 indicate.

DL offers a framework for integrating various other literacies, including IL, while not being restricted to them. It touches on and includes many things that it does not claim to own. Such elements are the presentation, evaluation and organization of information ([Bawden, 2008](#)). It also includes awareness of the value of traditional tools in conjunction with networked media and social networks.

Different literacies to different user groups

One of the most crucial issues to providing IL and DL education is that different groups of users require different literacies. This may sound self-explanatory. However it is not taken into consideration to an adequate extent.

[Beard and Dale](#) (2009) point out that library space contributes users' literacies because it is one of the contexts of their use just like possible designs of writing have to correspond to different social and cultural contexts. Analogously we can say that the amateur nature of content creation gives also an important context. It is intriguing to observe that someone like [Carnaby](#) (2009), who stresses that there is an express need for preserving informal, citizen-created information separates it from formal and authoritative knowledge sources rather strictly. Let us add that in our opinion she does this reasonably, simply because amateur contents have to be dealt with differently from professional ones. As to user needs, our idea is that one of the main lines of division between differing needs is in the goals: whether users use information for entertainment or intend to use it for professional goals. In both cases it is important to know if users recognize this. Nonetheless, professional goals characterize first of all different groups of professionals, teaching staff and researchers, and - to a part - students. This is not required anytime. Professional contents have to be offered to students, teaching staff and researchers when they are fulfilling their professional roles. Their needs are thus different from that of other categories of users and they are (or could be) based on the well known tradition and strength of special and academic libraries that lies in providing highly specialized and reliable information for these user categories. It is useful to know that in many regards students are also professionals even though they are usually requested to show lower levels of performance than the one produced by teaching staff members and researchers.

Professional goals require higher level of reliability, accuracy and validity, with which they have a higher potential in the knowledge creation process. In this context IL and DL education should put emphasis on understanding disciplinary discourses and keep in view the importance of disciplinary knowledge ([Williams, 2007](#)). These are some of the reasons, why Web 2.0 applications and especially amateur contents are less applicable to achieve the aim of serving professionals.

Making use of Web 2.0 tools could mean fulfilling in particular the goals, set forth in points 3 and 5 of the [IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto](#) (1994). Key mission 3 stresses the need of providing opportunities for personal creative development, while key missions 5 is about promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements and innovations. Personal development is in many regards, although not exclusively, self-development that corresponds to the needs of amateurs of Web 2.0. The orientation towards culture and arts hardly needs explanation in this regard. Awareness of scientific achievements is highly valuable. Nonetheless, it usually does not include scholarship in a strict sense, the basics of which are acquired in higher education and which is practiced by researchers and university teaching staff members as a professional practice.

Public libraries always have been offering amateur content in the sense that it was not geared towards the needs of professionals. This is obviously not a question of quality, but shows different orientation towards providing value. It is well known, that public libraries

may offer valuable services that are designed for professional users, even though these users are typically served by special and academic libraries and in many cases public libraries cannot aim to fulfill the functions of these latter library types and usually there is no intention to do so.

All this is in accordance with the general mission of library services: to facilitate convenient access to documents and support the mission of the institution or the interests of the population served ([Buckland](#), 1992). In our understanding, the academic library and the special library are designed to serve both, as the university is roughly identical with its students, teaching staff and researchers. Similarly, a research institute's interests are basically the same as the ones of the researchers working there. The mission of the public library however is directed towards supporting the interests of the population served, but not the institution itself, at least not primarily.

A possible "Public Library 2.0" idea depicts an institution, which provides a platform for the storage and dissemination of local community knowledge, using digital technologies and also using Library 2.0 principles ([Chowdhury et al.](#), 2006). This does not contradict the principle of differentiating between amateur and professional content. Information related to local communities and especially to local history represents a mix in this regard ([Reid & Macafee](#), 2007) and it has been one of the vital components of public libraries and had a potential to reach wider audiences, especially as it has involved local non-professionals and professional researchers. Digitization and harnessing active participation of the users with Library 2.0 tools add a new dimension to this important segment of public library activities. On the whole, however, it does not change it substantially.

The question arises if the responsibility for information literacy education in the Web 2.0 era is solely up to public librarians or should all librarians take note ([Godwin](#), 2008). The answer seems to be obvious. It is integral part of all librarians' role, while we should not forget about the differences, outlined above.

Amateur content that dominates Web 2.0 is useful mainly for public library users, thus it could be offered, among others, to students in their quality of consumers, even though future research has to clear up to what extent young people differentiate between their roles of being students and being children. Some studies already suggest that even the younger generations do differentiate between using technology in institutional settings and using it at home ([Lohnes & Kinzer](#), 2007).

As public libraries serve people of all ages and provide facilities for them they can offer Web 2.0 tools in a playground manner with low risk of overlooking these differences. Thus, serving the amateurs is the closest possibility of using Web 2.0 properly, especially because the mission of the public library encompasses supplying its users with technologies that are easy to understand and easy to use ([Tóth](#), 2003). The world *playground* seems to denote the possibility of experimenting with Web 2.0 tools. On the content level this presents lower risks in public library settings than in academic ones. The latter have to be more careful with the content, while using Web 2.0 tools and encouraging user participation in general can have a good public relation effect, the importance and essence can be expressed by this sequence: "We are where you are".

Lessons to be learnt

When engaging into the above activities, it is important not to lose sight of the difference between "being where our users are" and "being useful to our users where they are" ([Farkas](#), 2006). This rule applies for all library types and user groups, even though it has to be stressed in the academic library sphere. We have to be aware of this, even if we know that new media user behavior can be characterized with the following sentence: "People

like to be where other people are" ([Scholz, 2008](#)) and this seems to be one of the motifs of participating in new media related activities, though the real motivations on the whole remain unclear ([Beer & Burrows, 2007](#)).

As [Johnston and Webber](#) (2003) stress it, IL is the adoption of appropriate information behavior. Consequently, it is not by accident that *information style* can play an important role. According to [Steinerova](#) (2009), information style is based on the analysis of an individual's information seeking preferences and perceptions, the characteristics of their use of electronic resources. Two main styles can be identified: the pragmatic and the analytic style. The former is dominant. It is characterized by preferences for simple access to information, simple organization of knowledge, low cost and fast access to electronic resources. Its representatives would not read extensive texts, they are experiential learners.

Those who represent the analytic style show deeper intellectual information processing. Reliability and verification of information are important for them. They use multidisciplinary terminology and assess information by its relevance, having experience in judging it. They use complex queries in contrast to intuitive, simple ones. Organization of information is integrative, based on expert knowledge and experience. The analytic style requires intellectual processing and the presence of doubts and interpretation is stressed instead of navigation.

In our opinion, the pragmatic style is compatible with amateurism, thus has a place in public library environments, while the analytic style is the ideal for academic users and literacies geared towards their needs should show preferences to this information style. If not, we are risking that the already existing lack of deep learning and critical thinking within academia will be aggravated ([Head & Eisenberg, 2009](#)). We cannot be satisfied with this and cannot accept that students behave like other digital consumers. They must be different if we want to educate them to be professionals.

Conclusion

There is no single literacy that is appropriate for all people or for one person over all their lifetime. Literacies require constant updating of concepts and competencies in accordance with the changing circumstances of the information environment ([Bawden et al., 2007](#)).

Using Web 2.0 for providing library services, including DL and IL education is appropriate if we recognize that the same tools can and should be used for different purposes according to differential user needs. We are competing for the attention of our users in a world where there is scarcity of attention ([Bridges, 2008](#)). This attention is the same that most Web 2.0 services want to attract in order to commodify them.

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