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The Web 2.0 Contradiction: Commercial and Library Use

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Introduction

Library literature seems to take criticisms of the Web 2.0 into consideration only to a small extent. This is understandable in the light of the sweeping popularity of Web 2.0 applications among potential library users and especially younger generations.

Exercising criticism of the Web 2.0 is not enough to achieve 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 the Web 2.0 cannot be the main goal. However, critiquing it helps to identify the most plausible goals and to find the most useful tools that can serve library goals. A critical attitude towards Web 2.0 also serves as a basis to digital literacy education that answers current needs, as being critical is undoubtedly important constituent of information and digital literacies that have to become integral part of libraries' daily life.

Taking these deliberations into account, this paper addresses first the main motives of the Web 2.0 that contributed to its commercial success. Among the critical topics the question of amateurism is of pivotal interest.

The second part of the paper deals with library use of Web 2.0, stressing that the concept of the Library 2.0 has to be properly understood. Last but not least, literacies expedient in the era of the Web 2.0 are identified.

The Commercial Motives of Web 2.0

There seems to be no need to repeat the tools and services of the 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 definitional issues have plagued the concept.

The Web 2.0 is an uncertain term, not because there are competing definitions for it. It covers many different things, some in conflict, some overlapping with each other, but in any case ontologically non-compatible. The Web 2.0 can be labeled as a conceptual frame, including ideas, behaviors,

technologies and ideals. Many current Internet developments, activities, applications and can be understood as examples of Web 2.0 however they do not themselves constitute it (Allen, 2008).

The library world must be aware of the opportunities and threats of the Web 2.0. 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 the Web 2.0 on the library profession are far from clear (Bawden et al., 2007).

Even though not as profoundly as some of the proponents of Web 2.0 indicate, "the growth in user or self-generated content, the rise of the amateur and a culture of DIY will challenge conventional thinking on who exactly does things, who has knowledge, what it means to have élites, status and hierarchy" (Anderson, 2007: 53).

The Problem with the Suffix '2.0'

One of the widely discussed issues related to Web 2.0 is its name, especially the suffix '2.0'. It is subject to heavy criticism, especially as the term 'Web 1.0' has been never used and it is not clear to which degree it occurred (Allen, 2008). The implied '1.0' suggests that there is some kind of 'old version' of the web. Such approach, however, decontextualizes the Web historically and culturally, which results – among others – in the fact the Web 2.0 has been said both to harness collective intelligence but also to encourage mob stupidity (Everitt & Mills, 2009).

There is no need, nonetheless, to repeat all criticism directed towards the 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 easily 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 and Foo, 2004).

As to the role of amateurs in producing content, an investigation of *Flickr*, a photo sharing site, shows that its central value is not photography, but its social features. Flickr serves to encourage more and more photos to be taken as advertisers want more and more members and more and more activity. 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 (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). Form our viewpoint 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.

Library use of Web 2.0

Library 2.0 properly understood

According to Secker (2008), at the heart of Library 2.0 is user-centered change, although the terminology itself is controversial. Crawford (2006) found 62 different views and seven distinct definitions of the term. He is of the opinion that there are concepts that make up Library 2.0 and there is the bandwagon called 'Library 2.0'. They are different. In the case of the bandwagon there are several concepts behind the name and they provoke confrontation. These concepts attract both the ones who are eager to dismiss today's libraries and librarians and those who are in favor of continuing to improve and extend library services.

It is important to stress that all the discussion above does not negate the fact that applications based on Web 2.0 techniques and developed by libraries are of outmost importance in virtue of their ease of use and their PR effect on users. This aspect has obtained considerable interest in the LIS literature (e.g. Joint 2009). If large advertisers use social media for their activities, it is natural that libraries should also do it. Besides of that they could take part in conversations and discussions on these sites (Casey & Stephens 2008)

Literacies in the Era of Web 2.0

Ideas of participation appeared in the LIS literature much earlier that the idea of the Web 2.0. This was the concept of the *information player*. It is based on the idea that while library patrons 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).

Traditional approaches towards literacies 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 and media literacy include production.

Digital literacy is more receptive towards production, partially due to its multimodal nature. As Cordes (2009: 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 decreased. This is especially characteristic for the Web 2.0 environment. Badke (2004) is of the opinion that on the Web, gatekeepers are no longer required. He underlines that gatekeepers still exist, and they still have great value, even tough we can publish without them. In his opinion the Web is more a vehiclefor information than a content-provider. It is still used for transmitting products that have gone through rigorous quality control. He points towards a broader context of gatekeeping: the nature of electronic documents.Besides the well-known features, like perpetually contemporary look, instability of content and form, etc. 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.

Besides of *information literacy*, which is a relatively well known subject to librarians, *digital literacy* is also present in the professional literature. It is multimodal, i.e. requires fluency in a broad range of competencies that enable us to consume and create texts in visual, audio, and written formats, to evaluate messages that are constructed in a variety of media with a proper social awareness of the global society (Cordes, 2009).

Digital literacy integrates various other literacies, including information literacy and the effective use of information and communication technologies, while not being restricted to them. A distinctive feature of digital literacy is that it "touches on and includes many things that it does not claim to own. It encompasses the presentation of information, without subsuming creative writing and visualization. It encompasses the evaluation of information, without claiming systematic reviewing and meta-analysis as its own. It includes organization of information but lays no claim to the construction and operation of terminologies, taxonomies and thesauri" (Bawden 2008: 26).

Let us add that – on the one hand – it seems to be of lesser importance whether literacies of the information age are called information literacy or digital literacy (Bawden 2001). On the other hand information literacy and especially the *lack of information literacy* 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 and Robinson, 2009, Shenton, 2009).

What is crucial, however, that different groups of users require different literacies. One of the main lines of division between differing needs seems to be 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. Professional goals characterize first of all different groups of professionals, teaching staff and researchers, and – partially – students. Professional contents have to be offered to students, teaching staff and researchers when they are fulfilling their professional roles.

Amateur content that dominates the Web 2.0 is useful mainly for purposes of entertainment and to library users in their quality of consumers.

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