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## Blogs and Social Networks in Libraries: Complementary or Antagonistic Tools?

Juliana Mazzocchi

*Università degli studi di Firenze, Biblioteca di scienze sociali (ITALY), juliana.mazzocchi@alice.it*

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# **Blogs and social networks in libraries: complementary or antagonistic tools?<sup>1</sup>**

Juliana Mazzocchi  
Università degli studi di Firenze  
Biblioteca di Scienze sociali  
ITALY  
email: juliana.mazzocchi@alice.it

## **Abstract**

Blogs are among the first Web 2.0 tools that libraries have used to communicate with their users. In recent years, however, they seem to have lost their role in favour of other tools such as social networks, especially Facebook. This article analyses the downward trend that library blogs (especially academic library blogs) are experiencing in relation to the explosion of social networks. The relationship between blogs and social networks as library's communication tools is also analysed.

## **Keywords**

Library blogs, social networks, Facebook, Web 2.0, library communication, academic libraries

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised English translation of the speech *Blog e social network in biblioteca: strumenti complementari o antagonisti?* at the conference *La biblioteca connessa. Come cambiano le strategie di servizio al tempo dei social network*, held in Milan, 13-14 March, 2014, published also in *Biblioteche oggi*, 32 (2014), 3, p. 20-27.

## Library blogs: theory and practice

Blogs were one of the first Web 2.0 tools to be analyzed to be used by libraries.<sup>2</sup> In fact, from the very beginning it was rather simple and quick to create and use a blog through free platforms without needing to know HTML or without interacting constantly with webmasters. Therefore some authors suggested how libraries could use this new tool: to publish information and news about the library, to promote library events, to announce new acquisitions, for reference service, for information literacy, to communicate between the staff and, especially for academic libraries, to promote the use of online resources and to provide assistance in case of problems.<sup>3</sup> However, what distinguished blogs from a more traditional website was its possibility to engage users in the "conversation" through the publication, more or less immediately and more or less moderately, of their comments to librarians' posts. Several authors also indicated the most suitable strategies to promote library blogs, to make them appealing and engaging for users.<sup>4</sup>

As a matter of fact, libraries began to create a great number of blogs and many of them were studied from the point of view of content, types of platforms used, functionalities and, above all, number and frequency of posts and comments. In various analyses related to blogs from different countries (especially from Anglo-Saxon countries) and carried out in different years,<sup>5</sup> the results show that in the vast majority of cases blogs are hardly updated or are not updated at all, that URLs

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<sup>2</sup> MICHELLE ALCOCK, *Blogs - what are they and how do we use them?*, "Quill", 103 (2003), 8, <<http://archive.alia.org.au/groups/quill/issues/2003.8/blogs.html>>; LAUREL A. CLYDE, *Library weblogs*, "Library management", 25 (2004), 4/5, p. 183; PHIL BRADLEY, *How to use Web 2.0 in your library*, London, Facet, 2007, p. 35; MEREDITH G. FARKAS, *Social software in libraries: building collaboration, communication, and community online*, Medford, Information Today, 2007, p. 14-16; ROSSANA MORRIELLO, *Web 2.0: la rivoluzione siamo noi*, "Biblioteche oggi", 28 (2010), 3, also at <<http://www.bibliotecheoggi.it/2010/201000300901.pdf>>, p. 14, 22.

<sup>3</sup> DARLENE FICHTER, *Why and how to use blogs to promote your library's services*, "Marketing library services", 17 (2003), 6, <<http://www.infoday.com/mls/nov03/fichter.shtml>>; TAHEREH KARAMI - TAHEREH OLOUMI, *Libraries and weblogs: the role of new phenomenon blogs in library services, research and learning*, in *Embedding Libraries in Learning and Research: 27th IATUL Conference*, Porto, Portugal, 22-25/05/2006, <[eprints.rclis.org/10824/](http://eprints.rclis.org/10824/)>; PHIL BRADLEY, *How to use Web 2.0 in your library*, London, Facet, 2007, p. 40-43; MEREDITH G. FARKAS, *Social software in libraries: building collaboration, communication, and community online*, Medford, Information Today, 2007, p. 29-47; JILL M. SODT - TERRI PEDERSEN SUMMEY, *Beyond the library's walls: using library 2.0 tools to reach out to all users*, "Journal of library administration", 49 (2009), 1/2, p. 103; AMANDA CLICK - JOAN PETIT, *Social networking and Web 2.0 in information literacy*, "The international information & library review", 42 (2010), 2, p. 137-142; PARTHA SARATHI MANDAL, *Blog and its role in library and information services*, "DESIDOC Journal of library & information technology", 3 (2011), 3, p. 156-157; RACHEL ADAMS, *Blogging in context: reviewing the academic library blogosphere*, "The electronic library", 31 (2013), 5, p. 664-677.

<sup>4</sup> MICHAEL STEPHENS, *Blogs*, "Library technology reports", 42 (2006), 4, p. 25-31; CONNIE CROSBY, *Effective blogging for libraries*, New York - London, Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2010; RONALD KAISER, *Library success with web 2.0 services: an introduction into the use of web tools as blogs, wikis, podcasts - a new generation of information services*, Berlin, Simon Verlag für Bibliothekswissen, 2012, p. 35-37.

<sup>5</sup> LAUREL A. CLYDE, *Library weblogs*, "Library management", 25 (2004), 4/5, 183-189; JUDIT BAR-ILAN, *The use of Weblogs (blogs) by librarians and libraries to disseminate information*, "Information research", 12 (2007), 4, <<http://www.informationr.net/ir/12-4/paper323.html>>; KAY JOHNSON, *Are blogs here to stay?: an examination of the longevity and currency of a static list of library and information science weblogs*, "Serials review", 24 (2008), 3, p. 199-204; TANIA P. BARDYN, *Library blogs: what's most important for success within the enterprise?*, "Computers in libraries", 29 (2009), 6, p. 12-16; MÁTÉ TÓTH, *Are users interested in library blogs?*, BOBCATSSS 2010 @ Parma, Italy, 25-27/01/2010, *Bridging the digital divide: libraries providing access for all?*, <<http://dspace-unipr.cilea.it/handle/1889/1259>>; JULIANA MAZZOCCHI, *Italian library blogs: A difficult trend to follow?*, "The International Information & Library Review", 43 (2011), 2, p. 99-109

often change and above all that users' response is almost nothing, even in the case of the most active blogs (for number and frequency of posts).<sup>6</sup>

Among the reasons for the lack of "conversation" between users and librarians, there is definitely the large amount of human resources and time necessary to keep blogs active and attractive. This is an aspect that is often underestimated both by the literature and by librarians, deceived by the gratuitousness and facility with which a blog can be created. That is why many blogs are inaugurated without any strategy and planning for their management and evaluation in the long term, running the risk of being neglected and quickly abandoned. The low number of comments, even in the most active blogs, makes the blog seem more as an "information" tool rather than a "communication" tool,<sup>7</sup> duplicating a function that in theory should already be performed by the official library website. Besides, the lack of users' participation shows how users are really not much interested in a dialogue with the library and often, as evidenced by some surveys,<sup>8</sup> most authors of the few comments are other librarians.

However, among the reasons why library blogs never "took off", some assume the arrival of social networks, especially Facebook, the explosion of which coincided with the beginning of the descending curve of blogs created by libraries.

According to a study carried out in the years 2006-2009<sup>9</sup> over one thousand library blogs (mostly academic library blogs) and librarians' blogs, mostly in English, indicators such as the number of active blogs and the number of published posts show that the descending curve of blogs began in 2007, continuing without interruption for the following two years, coinciding with the explosion of social networks. According to other studies, this trend is confirmed for blogs in general: on the one hand the same bloggers started to feel the threat of social networks, particularly Facebook,<sup>10</sup> on the other hand blogs started to be considered out-of-date compared to more up-to-date tools such as social networks.<sup>11</sup>

But can social networks really be considered antagonistic and competing tools compared to library blogs?

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<sup>6</sup> In rare cases the dialogue is not even allowed, because the possibility for users to enter comments is disabled, nullifying completely the "2.0" dimension of the blog.

<sup>7</sup> RACHEL ADAMS, *Bloggng in context: reviewing the academic library blogosphere*, "The electronic library", 31 (2013), 5, p. 672-673.

<sup>8</sup> LAUREL A. CLYDE, *Library weblogs*, "Library management", 25 (2004), 4/5, 188; MEREDITH G. FARKAS, *Social software in libraries: building collaboration, communication, and community online*, Medford, Information Today, 2007, p. 39; MICHALIS GEROLIMOS - RANIA KONSTA, *Services for academic libraries in the new era*, "D-Lib magazine", 17 (2011), 7/8, <<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/july11/gerolimos/07gerolimos.html>>.

<sup>9</sup> DANIEL TORRES-SALINAS et al., *State of the library and information science blogosphere after social networks boom: a metric approach*, "Library & information science research", 33 (2011), 2, p. 168-174.

<sup>10</sup> For example: FRANCESCA SANZO, *Blog o social network? Questo è il problema!*, "Liquida magazine", 26/11/2008, retrieved by Wayback Machine on 30/12/2013, <<http://web.archive.org/web/20100819080415/http://magazine.liquida.it/2008/11/26/blog-o-social-network-questo-e-il-problema/>>; GIULIETTA CAPACCHIONE, *Facebook ucciderà i blog?*, "Psicocafè" [blog], 21/10/2008, <<http://psicocafe.blogosfere.it/2008/10/facebook-uccidera-i-blog.html>>; DAMIANO ZITO, *I social network uccidono i blog?*, "Il fatto quotidiano", 11/04/2011, <<http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/04/11/i-social-network-uccidono-i-blog/103619/>>; MASSIMO LIZZI, *Facebook uccide blog e forum?*, "Massimo Lizzi" [blog], 27/05/2012, <<http://www.massimolizzi.it/2012/05/27/facebook-uccide-blog-e-forum>>.

<sup>11</sup> PAUL BOUTIN, *Twitter, Flickr, Facebook make blogs look so 2004*, "Wired magazine", 16.11, 20/10/2008, <[http://www.wired.com/entertainment/theweb/magazine/16-11/st\\_essay](http://www.wired.com/entertainment/theweb/magazine/16-11/st_essay)>; PAULIINA JAMSA, *Social networks vs. blogs: is social media micro-blogging pushing blogs out of fashion?*, "International digital marketing" [blog], 04/03/2011, <<http://internationaldigitalmarketing.com/2011/03/04/social-networks-vs-blogs-is-social-media-micro-blogging-pushing-blogs-out-of-fashion/>>.

## Social networks in libraries: theory and practice

Social networks too are Web 2.0 tools. They were born, like blogs, in the 90s, but their great popularity was reached in the 2000s, first with Friendster (2002) and LinkedIn (2002), then with MySpace (2003), Facebook (2004) and others, including the recent Google+ (2011).<sup>12</sup>

Social networks were devised mainly with the purpose of finding and putting in contact old friends, old schoolmates, relatives and people with similar interests.<sup>13</sup> However, many authors suggested that libraries can use social networks for a variety of other purposes: to promote services, to instruct users, for the reference service, to allow users to propose the purchase of documents or provide a feedback to the library, to show photo galleries of library events, but above all libraries can use social networks to create a community of users who actively participate in the library profile page and that, through their contacts, can enlarge the whole of the contacts of the library inside the social network.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, within the social network sites, such as in Facebook, it is possible to insert applications to search directly a library OPAC or other databases such as Worldcat or JSTOR.<sup>15</sup> Other authors gave suggestions also about the most suitable communication style in a social network for a library that wants to attract and retain users.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> DANAH M. BOYD - NICOLE B. ELLISON, *Social network sites: definition, history, and scholarship*, "Journal of computer-mediated communication", 13 (2008), 1, p. 210-230, also at <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x/full>>; JASON GRIFFEY, *Social networking and the library*, "Library technology reports", 46 (2010), 8, p. 34; ROSSANA MORRIELLO, *Web 2.0: la rivoluzione siamo noi*, "Biblioteche oggi", 28 (2010), 3, also at <<http://www.bibliotecheoggi.it/2010/201000300901.pdf>>, p. 20-21; *Social networking service*, in *Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia*, 29/10/2014, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_networking\\_service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_networking_service)>.

<sup>13</sup> LIGAYA GANSTER - BRIDGET SCHUMACHER, *Expanding beyond our library walls: building an active online community through Facebook*, "Journal of web librarianship", 3 (2009), 2, p. 112. Let us think at the slogan of Facebook: "Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life".

<sup>14</sup> MEREDITH G. FARKAS, *Social software in libraries: building collaboration, communication, and community online*, Medford, Information Today, 2007, p. 19-24; LIGAYA GANSTER - BRIDGET SCHUMACHER, *Expanding beyond our library walls: building an active online community through Facebook*, "Journal of web librarianship", 3 (2009), 2, p. 115; JILL M. SODT - TERRI PEDERSEN SUMMEY, *Beyond the library's walls: using library 2.0 tools to reach out to all users*, "Journal of library administration", 49 (2009), 1/2, p. 97-109; ANDY BURKARDT, *Social media: a guide for college and university libraries*, "College & research libraries news", 71 (2010), 1, p. 10-24; AMANDA CLICK - JOAN PETIT, *Social networking and Web 2.0 in information literacy*, "The international information & library review", 42 (2010), 2, p. 137-142; CLIFF LANDIS, *A social networking primer for librarians*, New York - London, Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> JENNIFER L. BEHRENS, *About Facebook: change at the social-networking juggernaut creates new opportunities for law library outreach*, "AALL Spectrum", 12 (2008), 6, p. 14-17, also at <[http://www.aallnet.org/main-menu/Publications/spectrum/Archives/Vol-12/pub\\_sp0804/pub-sp0804-facebook.pdf](http://www.aallnet.org/main-menu/Publications/spectrum/Archives/Vol-12/pub_sp0804/pub-sp0804-facebook.pdf)>; JILL M. SODT - TERRI PEDERSEN SUMMEY, *Beyond the library's walls: using library 2.0 tools to reach out to all users*, "Journal of library administration", 49 (2009), 1/2, p. 100; VIRGINIA GENTILINI, *Facebook: applicazioni per le biblioteche*, "Bibliotecari non bibliofili!" [blog], 24/01/2010, <<http://nonbibliofili.wordpress.com/2010/01/24/facebook-applicazioni-per-le-biblioteche/>>; VIRGINIA GENTILINI, *Da FBML ad iframe: applicazioni Facebook per le biblioteche*, "Bibliotecari non bibliofili!" [blog], 20/08/2011, <<http://nonbibliofili.wordpress.com/2011/08/20/da-fbml-ad-iframe-applicazioni-facebook-per-le-biblioteche/>>.

<sup>16</sup> RYAN DESCHAMPS, *Facebook and rapport*, "The other librarian" [blog], 10/09/2007, <<http://otherlibrarian.wordpress.com/2007/09/10/facebook-and-rapport/>>; BRIAN S. MATHEWS, *Libraries' place in virtual social networks*, "Journal of web librarianship", 1 (2007), 2, p. 71-74; VIRGINIA GENTILINI, *Facebook: decalogo di stile (e di buon senso)*, "Bibliotecari non bibliofili!" [blog], 10/08/2012, <<http://nonbibliofili.wordpress.com/2012/08/10/facebook-decalogo-di-stile-e-di-buon-senso/>>.

Several authors,<sup>17</sup> however, doubt whether social networks, in particular Facebook, are really the most suitable tool to reach users, given the many critical issues: a) the risk in the attempt to approach users of being too "pushy" or "aggressive" and making them go away, b) students' use of social networks for leisure activities in the context of which librarians may seem out of place, c) a fair number of librarians who consider inappropriate the use of Facebook by libraries, but, above all, d) the amount of time required to manage effectively a profile. On this last point even some<sup>18</sup> among the most enthusiastic authors about libraries on Facebook underline how the time required for the management should not be underestimated: for the daily check of the institutional page, for the publication of posts, to answer users' questions and comments, to keep up with the technical changes of the platform and the privacy policy, to monitor the correctness of users' comments. Instead, if users are allowed to publish on the library's profile not only comments but also posts, photos and videos (as Web 2.0 would require), the time necessary to verify that the contents posted by users are appropriate (and act accordingly if necessary) will be even more. Other authors,<sup>19</sup> on the other hand, underline that Facebook is a proprietary platform and a profit-driven company that, according to their own commercial interests, can suddenly make changes regarding the layout, the applications, the policies of access to the contents posted by users, the privacy, upon which libraries do not have any kind of control. Libraries do not have any assurance neither about the preservation and the exportability of contents (for example in case of shutdown of the social network) nor that the service will be free of charge forever.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the theoretical reflections on the possible uses of social networks in libraries (almost exclusively Facebook), on their advantages and disadvantages, on the best strategies to attract users, many articles were published including the results of surveys concerning in particular their use by academic libraries. In most cases the analyzed sample is not very large and concerns different countries and years. But some trends emerge comparing the results of the surveys. Firstly libraries on Facebook do not prove to be very active for the number and frequency of posts.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> LAURIE CHARNIGO - PAULA BARNETT-ELLIS, *Checking out Facebook.com: the impact of a digital trend on academic libraries*, "Information technology and libraries", 26 (2007), 1, p. 30; RUTH SARA CONNELL, *Academic libraries, Facebook and MySpace, and student outreach: a survey of student opinion*, "Portal: libraries and the academy", 9 (2009), 1, p. 31-33; DEAN HENDRIX et al., *Use of Facebook in academic health sciences libraries*, "Journal of the Medical Library Association", 97 (2009), 1, p. 46; ANDREA DICKSON - ROBERT P. HOLLEY, *Social networking in academic libraries: the possibilities and the concerns*, "New library world", 111 (2010), 11/12, p. 475-476; DIANNA E. SACHS - EDWARD J. ECKEL - KATHLEEN A. LANGAN, *Striking a balance: effective use of Facebook in an academic library*, "Internet reference services quarterly", 16 (2011), 1/2, p. 41-42.

<sup>18</sup> LIGAYA GANSTER - BRIDGET SCHUMACHER, *Expanding beyond our library walls: building an active online community through Facebook*, "Journal of web librarianship", 3 (2009), 2, p. 126; MARIA CASSELLA, *Comunicare con gli utenti: Facebook nella biblioteca accademica*, "Biblioteche oggi", 28 (2010), 6, p. 9, also at <<http://www.bibliotecheoggi.it/content/20100600301.pdf>>. From a survey on 140 academic libraries in Asia, North America and Europe (SAMUEL KAI-WAH CHU - HELEN S DU, *Social networking tools for academic libraries*, "Journal of librarianship and information science", 45 (2012), 1, p. 64-75) it results that, for an optimal management of the Facebook page, librarians complain the lack of time and the lack of skills to keep pace with technological changes, especially for older staff.

<sup>19</sup> JASON GRIFFEY, *Social networking and the library*, "Library technology reports", 46 (2010), 8, p. 36-37; MICHALIS GEROLIMOS, *Academic libraries on Facebook: an analysis of users' comments*, "D-Lib magazine", 17 (2011), 11/12, <<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/november11/gerolimos/11gerolimos.html>>; VIRGINIA GENTILINI, *Facebook: timeline, pagine e applicazioni*, "Bibliotecari non bibliofili!" [blog], 4/03/2012, <<http://nonbibliofili.wordpress.com/2012/03/04/facebook-timeline-pagine-e-applicazioni/>>.

<sup>20</sup> GERMANO MILITE, *Facebook gratis per sempre? Ecco la clausola che lo nega clamorosamente*, "You-ng", 02/11/2012, <<http://news.you-ng.it/2012/11/02/4334-facebook-gratis-per-sempre-ecco-la-clausola-che-lo-nega-clamorosamente/>>.

<sup>21</sup> LICIA CALVI - MARIA CASSELLA - KOOS NUIJTEN, *Enhancing users' experience: a content analysis of 12 university libraries Facebook profiles*, in ELPUB 2010 International conference on electronic publishing, Helsinki, Iceland, 16-18/06/2010, in "E-LIS", <<http://eprints.rclis.org/14678/>>; TERRA B. JACOBSON, *Facebook as a library tool: perceived vs. actual use*, "College & research libraries", 72 (2011), 1, p. 79-90; GANG (GARY) WAN, *How academic libraries reach users on Facebook*, "College & undergraduate libraries", 18 (2011), 4, p. 315.

Secondly, the number of users' posts (if allowed) and comments, is extremely low and sometimes most comments are by librarians themselves.<sup>22</sup> Lastly, the number of Libraries' fans (transformed in 2010 into "Like") is rather low (even on the most active pages) and a good part of them are often librarians who work in the library itself.<sup>23</sup>

## Blogs versus social networks?

Some surveys on the use of different types of Web 2.0 tools by academic libraries show that in few years (2008-2012) the percentage of libraries that use blogs and social networks changed, highlighting that social networks (mainly Facebook) grew dramatically while blogs dropped conspicuously, although blogs are still among the most used tools.

In some of these studies,<sup>24</sup> published in 2008 and in 2010, social networks are not even taken into consideration while blogs are among the most used Web 2.0 tools. In other studies,<sup>25</sup> published in 2009 and in 2010, social networks begin to appear among the most used Web 2.0 tools, although with much lower percentages compared to blogs. In 2011 in several surveys on academic libraries<sup>26</sup> social networks are the most used Web 2.0 tools while blogs are losing ground. This trend is also confirmed by other surveys on the use of Web 2.0 tools in libraries of any type, such as the 2011 and 2012 *Reports* of the American Library Association on the state of American Libraries,<sup>27</sup> which

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<sup>22</sup> LIGAYA GANSTER - BRIDGET SCHUMACHER, *Expanding beyond our library walls: building an active online community through Facebook*, "Journal of web librarianship", 3 (2009), 2, p. 126; LICIA CALVI - MARIA CASSELLA - KOOS NUIJTEN, *Enhancing users' experience: a content analysis of 12 university libraries Facebook profiles*, in ELPUB 2010 International conference on electronic publishing, Helsinki, Iceland, 16-18/06/2010, in "E-LIS", <<http://eprints.rclis.org/14678/>>; MICHALIS GEROLIMOS, *Academic libraries on Facebook: an analysis of users' comments*, "D-Lib magazine", 17 (2011), 11/12, <<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/november11/gerolimos/11gerolimos.html>>; TERRA B. JACOBSON, *Facebook as a library tool: perceived vs. actual use*, "College & research libraries", 72 (2011), 1, p. 79-90; NANCY KIM PHILLIPS, *Academic library use of Facebook: building relationships with students*, "The journal of academic librarianship", 27 (2011), 6, p. 520.

<sup>23</sup> DEAN HENDRIX et al., *Use of Facebook in academic health sciences libraries*, "Journal of the Medical Library Association", 97 (2009), 1, p. 46 (the authors point out that in one case 47 out of 139 library fans - corresponding to 34% - were librarians working in the library itself); MICHALIS GEROLIMOS, *Academic libraries on Facebook: an analysis of users' comments*, "D-Lib magazine", 17 (2011), 11/12, <<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/november11/gerolimos/11gerolimos.html>>; GANG (GARY) WAN, *How academic libraries reach users on Facebook*, "College & undergraduate libraries", 18 (2011), 4, p. 314.

<sup>24</sup> NGUYENH CUONG LINH, *A survey of the application of Web 2.0 in Australasian university libraries*, "Library Hi Tech", 26 (2008), 4, p. 630-653; YONG-MI KIM - JUNE ABBAS, *Adoption of Library 2.0 functionalities by academic libraries and users: a knowledge management perspective*, "The journal of academic librarianship", 36 (2010), 3, p. 211-218; MANORAMA TRIPATHI - SUNIL KUMAR, *Use of Web 2.0 tools in academic libraries: a reconnaissance of the international landscape*, "The international information & library review", 42 (2010), 3, p. 195-207.

<sup>25</sup> BONARIA BIANCU, *Italian Library 2.0? One question, many answers*, in "Slideshare", 07/03/2009, <<http://www.slideshare.net/bonaria/italian-library-20-one-question-many-answers>>; CHEN XU - FENFEI OUYANG - HETING CHU, *The academic library meets Web 2.0: applications and implications*, "The journal of academic librarianship", 35 (2009), 4, p. 324-331; ALTON Y.K. CHUA - DION H GOH, *A study of Web 2.0 applications in library websites*, "Library & information science research", 32 (2010), 3, p. 203-211.

<sup>26</sup> KHALID MAHMOOD- JOHN V. JR RICHARDSON, *Adoption of Web 2.0 in US academic libraries: a survey of ARL library websites*, "Program: electronic library and information systems", 45 (2011), 4, p. 365-375; MICHALIS GEROLIMOS - RANIA KONSTA, *Services for academic libraries in the new era*, "D-Lib magazine", 17 (2011), 7/8, <<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/july11/gerolimos/07gerolimos.html>>; PILAR GRANDE-GONZÁLEZ - PABLO DE-LA-FUENTE-REDONDO, *Bibliotecas universitarias españolas en la web social*, "El profesional de la información", 21 (2012), 6, p. 577-584. To be precise, in this last survey, which was attended by 27.6% of Spanish academic libraries, blogs and social networks are equal, resulting to be the most used tools with the same percentage.

<sup>27</sup> AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, *The state of America's libraries 2011: a report from the American Library Association*, digital supplement, [2012], <[http://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/mediapresscenter/americaslibraries/state\\_of\\_americas\\_librari](http://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/mediapresscenter/americaslibraries/state_of_americas_librari)

show that the percentage of libraries using social networks rises from 78.6% to 88.8%, while in the same years the use of blogs drops from 51.9 to 44.2%.

### Complementary in theory, antagonistic in practice

The results of the surveys on the use of Web 2.0 tools by libraries therefore confirm the assumption mentioned above, according to which the main cause of the drop in the use of blogs by libraries is the explosion of social networks.

However, although blogs and social networks have in common the fact of being popular Web 2.0 tools also outside libraries (even if blogs are falling off<sup>28</sup>), both capable to involve users in the "conversation" and in the "content construction", easy and free for anyone, blogs and social networks are, in fact, structurally different. Firstly the blog is a standalone website, where communication is primarily one-to-many and where users actually "have to go", while the social network is a site where anyone can interact with anyone else, where users "already are" and where the library enters to establish relationships with them. Secondly, libraries can exercise over the blog a higher or a lower level of control,<sup>29</sup> while over social networks the level is always nil. Lastly, even the possible uses of the two tools are different, so in theory they should be regarded as "complementary" to one another and to the traditional library website. The library website should contain all the institutional and stable information, always updated, while the blog could host occasional "conversations" with users on specific resources, activities or services, suitable for this type of interaction and selected so as to make them at the same time "sustainable" and "appropriate". Social networks could serve both as a "sounding board" to broaden the visibility of library services and library activities and to create around the library a community of users, both real and potential, but still interested in the life of the library itself who, through their contacts, may increase the knowledge of it in the community.

In practice, however, the use of blogs and social networks is the same, because in most cases libraries use them as one-way communication tools and not as "conversation" tools: to publish information about the library and to promote services and advertise events; all functions which, among other things, should already be carried out by the institutional library website.<sup>30</sup> In addition,

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<sup>28</sup> MASSIMO MANTELLINI, *Contrappunti: la fine dei blog*, "Punto informatico", 27/10/2008, <<http://punto-informatico.it/2452297/PI/Commenti/contrappunti-fine-dei-blog.aspx>>; DAMIANO ZITO, *I social network uccidono i blog?*, "Il fatto quotidiano", 11/04/2011, <<http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/04/11/i-social-network-uccidono-i-blog/103619/>>.

<sup>29</sup> The control is higher if the blog is hosted by the server of the institution to which the library belongs; it is lower if a free platform is used. Just think of the case of the Italian blog platform Splinder, born in 2001 and closed in 2012 with a notice period of only a couple of months which forced all those who had started a blog there to look for a new platform to export the contents to prevent their disappearance into thin air.

<sup>30</sup> JENNIFER L. BEHRENS, *About Facebook: change at the social-networking juggernaut creates new opportunities for law library outreach*, "AALL Spectrum", 12 (2008), 6, p. 14-17, also at <<http://www.aallnet.org/main->



the typical functions of Web 2.0 tools (user centricity, interactivity, participation, collaborative construction of content), which, compared to the traditional website, could provide something more, remain unused or underused, because the contribution of libraries to the dialogue is too often scarce and untimely, and, above all, because of the lack of participation of users.

The conclusion that can be drawn is therefore that blogs and social networks which are in theory complementary tools, actually become antagonistic because their use by libraries does not arise from a serious consideration and from a forward-looking program, but it arises rather from the desire to follow the latest trend in technology which on the one hand results to be too demanding for the limited human resources of libraries and on the other hand does not meet the interests of users, often becoming a mere diversion for librarians themselves.

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