Blogs and blogging in libraries

Mohd. Aqil*
Mohd. Asad Siddique**

ABSTRACT

Weblogs or blogs has got a great potential in the present web world. It is a very effective synchronous tool for sharing and communicating the information. Libraries in the 21st century can not ignore the potential of this great tool to communicate ideas, opinions, resources and news. Blogging could be an efficient and effective alternative for information and knowledge transfer, resulting in a more productive workforce in libraries. Blog culture may affect every aspect and services of Library phenomenon from collection development to reference services; Current awareness services, as a marketing tool of Library services, as Library Newsletter, as a communication channel among the Library staff as well as among the user community.

Keywords: Blogs, Blogging, Web 2.0, Social Networking, Libraries, Librarians

WHAT IS BLOG?

Since its inception so many people tried to define the blog. We still do not have most authoritative and the most inclusive definition of blogs. The reason is how a single definition could be inclusive enough to define the blog written by a subject expert on law and a blog written by teenage girl about her personal life. Many people think blog as a diary or journal but this also ignores institutional and professional blogs. Blogs is simply a technology, a medium which does not define the content goes into it.[1] The term blogs / weblogs are defined to be web sites that present a reverse chronological ordering of posts. Posts are defined to be relatively short chunks of content, anywhere between a few sentences to a few paragraphs. Blog entries can contain news items, photographs, information, and links of interest based on the subject coverage. Personal blogs are often used as a means to share opinions and editorials covering events of interest to the writer. Subject-specific blogs can focus on a single topic, or on broader discipline divisions in which issues of interest to those working in that area are posted.[2]

A *Weblog* is defined by Blood (2002) as "a format: a Web page with new entries placed at the top, updated frequently."[3]

"A blog (short for web log) is a user-generated

Author's Affiliations: *Web Librarian, E-Service & Web Portal Department, E-mail: aquilsiddique@yahoo.com, ** Web Librarian, E-Service & Web Portal Department, Deanship of E-Transactions & Comunication, Building No.31, 1st Floor Office - 1077, P.O. Box 2454, King Soud University, Riyadh - 11451, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, E-mail: asadsiddique92@gmail.com.

Reprints Requests: Mohd. Aqil, Web Librarian, E-Service & Web Portal Department, Deanship of E-Transactions & Comunication, Building No.31, 1st Floor Office - 1077, P.O. Box 2454, King Soud University, Riyadh - 11451, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, E-mail: aquilsiddique@yahoo.com.

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website where entries are made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. Blogs also provide readers with the option to leave comments, which makes it possible to start a discussion around a blog post."[4]

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BLOGS

Like with the start of many things, early bloggers did not have a name for what they were doing. While it took some time for the genre and the name to develop, blogging has been around since the beginning of the internet. Dave Winer, creator of Scripting News and current Harvard weblog editor, writes that the first weblog was the first Web site created by Tim Berners-Lee, http://info.cern.ch/, while he worked at CERN. Berners-Lee used the site to point to Web sites when they first appeared. Rebecca Blood suggests the "What's New?" site from Mosaic, which ran from June 1993 until June 1996, laid the foundation for what blogs would become. The site provided links to the newest and most interesting Web sites out there, and was updated a few times a week (Blood 2002).[5]

On the other hand popular use of the term Weblog as we know it today came from Jorn Barger of the weblog Robot Wisdom (robotwisdom.com) in December 1997. The short form, "blog," was coined by Peter Merholz, who jokingly broke the word *weblog* into the phrase *we blog* in the sidebar of his blog Peterme.com in 1999. Open Diary launched in October 1998, soon growing to thousands of online diaries. Brad Fitzpatrick, a well known blogger started Live Journal in March 1999. Evan Williams and Meg Hourihan (Pyra Labs) launched blogger.com in August 1999 (purchased by Google in February 2003). Some blogs were an important news source during the December 2004 Tsunami such as Medecins Sans Frontieres, which used SMS text messaging to report from affected areas in Sri Lanka and Southern India. In the United Kingdom, *The Guardian* newspaper launched a redesign in September 2005, which included a daily digest of blogs on page2. Also in June 2006, BBC News launched a weblog for its editors, following other news companies. In 2007, Tim O'Reilly proposed a Blogger's Code of Conduct.[6]

CHARACTERISTICS OF BLOGS

Some common characteristics and features of the blogs could be listed here as under:

• *Frequently updated*: Usually blogs updated very frequently by its user community.

• *Dated entries:* All entries are dated and usually also have a time stamp.

• *Archives:* Listings of past blog entries are usually organized by date, although some software also lets readers browse by category.

• *Reverse-chronological Postings:* Postings are arranged in reverse chronological order.

• *Categories:* Archiving blog posts under certain categories makes it easier to retrieve them at a later date.

• *TrackBacks:* These are messages sent from one server to another, letting a blogger know when someone else has referenced one of their blog posts.

• *Often theme or topic oriented*: Most often blogs are topic or theme oriented.

• *Search functionality:* Many blogers today let readers search their archives for specific terms; this functionality is built into most blog software.

• *Permalinks:* Links that let others link directly to each post.

• *Many allow comments:* Users may comment to specific blog posts.

• *Sense of community:* Since so many people from the same area or from different areas are

sharing & posting their ideas through the weblogs, so it is surely create a sense of community among the members or the user community.

- *It seems a website, but for non-techies:* It seems a website for non technical users, doesn't know the programming languages etc.

- *It is very easy to create, update*: As so many blogging software available, it is very easy to create manage and update a blog.

- *Very interactive, can embed cool stuff:* Blogs is a very interactive tool for sharing ideas and opinion on a particular issue, so it creates new ideas, knowledge and healthy environment to learn.

HOW TO BLOG IN LIBRARIES?

In order to fulfill the basic ethics of the Library, Librarians may develop a proper guidelines or policy for blogging purpose. The policy should strictly adhere with the interest of the organization as well as with its user community. It must also ensure that blog must well reflect on the objectives and purpose of a particular Library serving a particular user community. It should also offer the guidance to blogers on what is and is not appropriate to putting on the blog.[7]

A general blogging policy by Charlene Li which can also been adopted and implemented in libraries with necessary modifications is given here as under:

- Make it clear that the views expressed in the blog are yours alone and do not necessarily represent the views of your employer.

- Respect the company's confidentiality and proprietary information.

- Ask your manager if you have any questions about what is appropriate to include in your blog.

- Be respectful to the company, employees, customers, partners, and competitors.

- Understand when the company asks that topics not to be discussed for confidentiality or legal compliance reasons.

- Ensure that your blogging activity does not interfere with your work commitments.[8]

WHAT CAN LIBRARIES DO WITH WEBLOGS?

Library Weblogs can be building blocks for communicating news, information, events and propagating the library services to its user community. Libraries are using the blogs to share the information, to get the feedback from the user community, for communication among the Library staff, as a reference service tool etc. Blogs can also be used to encourage and appreciate the work of Library staff by the supervisor or the director of the library. Blogs have many implications for libraries. Library managers need to be aware of what they can do to promote the library and its services (Clyde, 2004). Some of the implications of the blogs vis-à-vis libraries and information centers can be discussed under the following points:

BLOG AS COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT TOOL

Blogs may be considered a tool for the collection development in Libraries. Though as a source of Library's core collection, the authenticity of the contents of the blog is still questionable, specially the content which is posted by the anonymous and non experienced users of the subject, but many are nonetheless integral productions in a body of knowledge, and the absence of them in a library collection could soon become unimaginable thing. This will, of course, greatly complicated collection development processes, and the librarian will need to exercise a great deal of expertise when adding a blog to a collection (or, perhaps, an automated blog-collection development system), or may be in the future

Libraries a team of experts consisting Library patrons and Library staff will be assigned to take care of the authenticity, reliability, usefulness of the content.[9]

BLOGS AS A SUBJECT GUIDE

Subject blogs which offers news and information on a single subject are particularly useful for academic liaison librarians, Medical Librarian, Law Librarians, Corporate Librarians and special librarians who focus on a specific subject. However they can be use in any library with the need and the staff to run blogs on several different subjects. Nanyang Technological University Library[10] is a model for the use of subject blogs in academic libraries. The Library offers several blogs on various subjects ranging from Engineering to Humanities, Science, Arts, Languages, Business studies etc.

REFERENCE SERVICES

The reference team of any library must regularly communicate all sorts of items, schedules, shift reports, breakdowns, changes to information resources, and other items of day-to-day library life. Again, e-mail and face-to-face discussion is often the communication vehicle of choice. However, e-mails in an already overflowing inbox can often be overlooked, and it's difficult to keep everyone up to speed when meetings and face-to-face encounters do not always involve the whole team. A reference blog is one alternative that could possibly help this situation. A blog, like others previously discussed, can be quickly setup with permissions granted for all members of the reference team to post to and comment. Postings, given simple subject headings and concise topic headings, will be automatically filed in the online archive, browsable by subject or date, and keyword searchable at the stroke of a hand. A

blog was created for the staff of the University of Alberta Libraries' Knowledge Common, and has become a welcome tool for both training and communication amongst its members.[11]

CAS & SDI SERVICES

The very purpose of the current awareness services is to make a user aware about the new items and resources of his/her interests acquired by the library. Here blogs may play a vital role to provide this kind of services. Library may put the information on its blog regarding the new arrivals and new titles added in the Library collection. Also library may post list of the recently published items by various publishers in a particular area of subjects. This is going to very helpful for the users as it is going to update user community about their area of interest and at the same time it will save lots of time of the user community. For example Drexel University library physics blog is offering current awareness service about the new items added in the Library collection.[12]

LIBRARY EVENTS AND NEWS

The information regarding the library events and news may be communicated by the Library via its weblogs to its user community. For example if a library is going to conduct a conference, seminar, meeting or an exhibition. Not only the dates of the events could be shared but also archives of the past meetings and events could also be organized and accessed through the blog, which is again going to be very helpful for further reference that what is been decided and discussed during the last event, meeting conference etc. A good example of this kind of service could be the blog of University of British Columbia (UBC) Library's Reference and instruction committee.[13]

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW SERVICES

Librarians can post the information about the new services; library is going to start in near future via its blog. In this way library may seek the opinion of the Library community about the new service through its blog. How the user community of the Library is going to be more benefited. What are the improvements are required in a particular library services etc. kind of the opinion Library can achieve through the blog more effectively and efficiently.

IMPORTANCE IN CIRCULATION

The blog could be a very important tool for activities like sending reminders, notification about the due dates, informing the users about the items returned, posting the updates on the circulation policies etc. Circulation section can post list of the over due items possessed by the user community, Library may also post the notification about the items returned and already reserved by other users. Reminders might be sent to a group of library users though the library weblogs.

LIBRARY USER FEEDBACK

As blogs are interactive and synchronous tool of communication and information sharing, it could be used as an effective tool for getting the feedback from the user community. User's may give their feedback about the various library services, their satisfaction level from the services, what are the measures should be taken in order to further improve a specific Library service. Users may also give their feedback about the library staff and their attitudes etc. Infact blog is an interactive tool and in the blogsphere users may comment on each and every comment posted on the blog unless restricted otherwise but one of the most important issue arises here and that is question of the privacy of the users. Most of the time users do

not want to disclose their identity but they do want to comment on a particular problem. Also usually users do not want to comment directly anything about the library staff.

STAFF INFORMATION TOOL

The weblog is also an effective channel for inter staff communication purpose. What are the problems faced by the staff in a particular span of time or during the daily working hours may be shared with other staff through the library weblogs. This kind of information could be very useful for the library staff for the future reference like for example during the start of the semester , mid semester or end of the semester what was the trend of user's information demand in a particular subject area and how library staff had served the information need of the particular user community. This kind of things could be recorded and archived in the Library weblog for the future reference of the Library staff. Also this could be done through the internal blog only and which are made available only to people within the organization. The other user community should not have access to this type of blog; instead it should be used as a method of communication among the library staff only.[14]

USEFUL FOR NEW LIBRARY USERS

The importance of weblog can not be denied for the new user community. The Library staff can put the video presentations on the weblog regarding the library orientation, what are the various kinds of services library offering, Library hours, information about the library staff etc. kind of the information could be shared through the library weblog for the newly enrolled users.

NEW BOOKS, LINKS TO USEFUL WEBSITES, HIGHLIGHT SPECIFIC E-RESOURCES

The library weblog could be used for sharing the information like weblink of useful websites in a particular subject area, information about the specific e-resources, open access journals, online journals and databases subscribed by the library.

BOOK REVIEWS

Book review is a measurement tool to judge the strength and weaknesses of a particular title. Library staff as well as user community can post a book review about a particular title on the library weblog. In this way overview of a specific title in the form of book reviews could be shared by so many users through the library weblog. This book reviews could be very useful for the user community to judge the relevancy of the book on a particular topic and in a particular area of subject / discipline. Library staff may post the information and book review on library blog about a particular title which are not used or remain unused from a long period and Librarian thinks that it is worthy to read for particular user community, so books reviews along with the access location like classification no. may be posted on the Library weblog for easy access. Also this can be helpful for acquisition department in the collection development process.

BLOG AS A MARKETING TOOL OF LIBRARIES

As Dr. S.R. Ranganathan said in his first law of Library Science "*Books are for Use*"; in the current phenomenon we can say all the resources and services of the libraries should be used by the Library users and for that purpose we must aware the library users about the availability of the various library resources and services. We must tell the importance of the library services and resources to its user community. Earlier traditional marketing tools like printed catalogues, Classification no. notice boards, leaflets, pamphlets etc. were used to propagating the library services. Now Librarians and information managers can propagate the library services via Internet and other interactive tools like weblogs. Library Blogs can be used as an effective marketing and promotional tool for propagating the various library services among the user community especially the web based users. Weblogs are one of the fastest ways to reach its user community. Librarians may put the posts and presentations, video presentations on the weblog in order to promote the various library events and services. It may increase the library membership and in this way it will attract the new library users and it will increase the visits of the existing library users. It may also increase the usage of various library services and less used and underused library services like the less used collections of the library could be promoted by posting the review articles and features of it on the library weblogs. Through the weblogs librarians may also encourage the user's participation in the various library activities and events organized by the library. Librarian may also post their monthly and annual library reports and monthly news letter of the library on its weblog to promote the library services and its achievements in the past and future plans as well.

Also these activities will definitely going to enhance the leadership role of the Librarians and reputation of the libraries as a whole among the user community.

AS A LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

Libraries may use Blogs to publish its newsletter. The various blogging formats allows for timely publication and the ability to make updates easily. This also allows for comments from readers and easy navigation to archived stories. Publication costs are minimal (no color print costs!) and there is no limit to the length of the paper, allowing for more user's participation.

AS A LIBRARY CONSORTIUM

A Library consortium could be described as a

group of Libraries who come together to fulfill a combined objective that usefully requires co-operation and the sharing of resources. A library Consortium formation can be local, regional, state, national and inter institutional level. The emerging web utilities with added features like blogs and blogging has revolutionized the concept of consortia. Libraries may share the information related to collection development, cataloguing, various services like reference service, interlibrary loan, through blogging in more efficiently. Users of the consortia organizations can see and comments on the activities of the member organizations. User may post their reference query on the blog which can be served by any member library. Member libraries can discuss their day to day problems related to the cataloguing, classification, circulation, Serial control, issues related to the collection development etc. through the blogs and share it among the other members too.

LIBRARY DISCUSSION FORUMS

Library weblogs could be a great place or a platform to discuss the various issues among the user community having the similar interests or those belong to the similar subject area; they could share their ideas and opinions and it is very helpful and effective for the research purpose. Also all their ideas and opinion are going to be archived on the library weblog which will be beneficial for the other future users having the similar area of interests.

CONCLUSION

Blogging could be an efficient and effective alternative for information and knowledge transfer, resulting in a more productive workforce in libraries. This is affecting every aspect and services of Library phenomenon from collection development to reference services; Current awareness services, as a marketing tool of Library services, as Library Newsletter, as a communication channel among the Library staff as well as among the user community. Librarians can also assist the user community in creating and maintaining their own weblogs like students may post their assignments and project work on the blogs. This is sure that blogs are going to be integral part of the future libraries, but still there is lots to be done as blogs are getting popular day by day in the libraries of developed world but it is not so popular in the libraries of third world countries.

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