CHAPTER 2

LIS BLOGOSPHERE:

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

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LIS Blogosphere: Conceptual Issues

"My sense is that liblogs are maturing. No longer the shiny new toy, they've become an established mechanism that works well for people with something to say. Those who still use them may use them less often but to more effect".
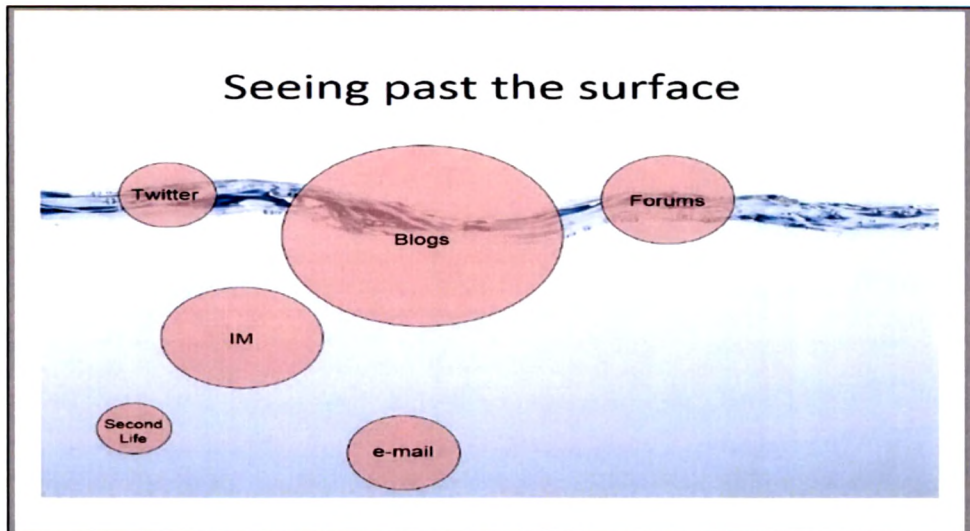
(Crawford, 2008)

A decade of blogging has substantiated the impact of the LIS blogosphere as a small but powerful medium of communication being adopted and sustained by the LIS community. The researcher through this chapter attempts to highlight the role of the various contributors to this entity of the LIS blogosphere. We begin with the experiences of the bloggers expressed in their own words followed by a brief overview of the stakeholders involved in the formation of the LIS blogosphere such as the LIS blogs, LIS bloggers, LIS blog directories/lists/aggregators, LIS blog literature and LIS blog research, culminating in a glimpse of the future of LIS blogging.

2.1 Voices from the LIS Blogosphere

Blogging as an activity has evolved due to the effortlessness in communicating informally with likeminded people. New knowledge is actively being generated through the informal communication actively seen on the blogosphere which forms a major part of the online community as can be seen in Figure 2.1.

Fig.2.1 Cranefield's Informal Online Community (Cranefield, 2013)

The participants of the blogosphere are chiefly the bloggers, commenters and lurkers (the people who only access content online but never post content). According to the Nielson Survey (2006) the blogosphere consists of 90% lurkers. Cranefield (2013) calls the lurkers who choose to remain invisible as Follower- feeders who follow the Connector-leaders (core members of the blogging community) and she further states that lurkers play an important role in the generation of new knowledge in online communities. Her study indicates that the follower-feeders "fed *how* solutions upwards" whereas the connector leaders "fed *why* ideas downwards". Cranefiled further goes on to list three core events happening on the blogosphere:

- ✓ Increased rate of professional dialogue
- ✓ More spaces that required reflection
- ✓ New norms and expectations

[Cranefield, Slide 27]

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The voices on the LIS blogosphere reflect the hopes, opinions, expectations, achievements, and uncertainties of the bloggers and the readers. Some notable excerpts from the blog posts have been collected and presented below to help in capturing the essence of the collective phenomenon of the LIS blogosphere.

"First, how many amazing people I've met who have enriched my professional and personal life to a degree I never would have considered possible. Second, a surprising amount of work has come my way as a result of me having a public professional presence. Certainly some of this is the result of what I say and how I say it in person as well, but a lot of the public speaking I currently do has come about as a result of my blogging".

(West, 2007)

"Concerns that informal, unpolished ideas posted on blogs would be mistaken for formal scholarly output may have made some scholars reluctant to post on blogs early on, but the general scholarly community appears to be increasingly coming to understand that, while blogs may be an interesting (and citable) record of the development of scholarly thought, they represent interim stages, not a final product".

(Potter, 2012, May 22)

"... each blog represents a viewpoint and a voice and a perspective that is unique. For a profession that is steeped in tradition, entrenched in "norms"... these blogs provide an avenue to explore opinions and viewpoints, some of which are guaranteed to resonate with you on some level or challenge you on many levels. All will certainly make you think".

(Powers, 2012, June 06)

2 .2 Traversing the LIS Blogosphere

The term LIS blogosphere as defined in Chapter 1 is a term used to collectively describe the LIS blogs and the people who blog (also referred to as bloggers and/or bibliobloggers). The term 'Biblioblogosphere' (Farkas, 2005) has also been used to describe the LIS blogosphere. The library profession was one of the early adopters of the blogging phenomenon.To understand the universe of the library blogosphere an attempt has been made by the researcher to address all the stakeholders who comprise this LIS blogosphere in trying to know the how, who, where and what of the LIS blogosphere.

2.2.1 LIS Blogs - How many

2.2.2 LIS Bloggers - Who

2.2.3 LIS Blog Directories, Lists and Aggregators -Where

2.2.4 LIS Blog Research and Blog Literature - What

2.2.1 LIS Blogs

Different terms have been used to describe LIS blogs. In the present study the term LIS blogs has been used to denote both LIS blogs and LIS weblogs. Hauschke, Lohre & Ullman (2007) used the term 'Biblioblogs- blogs with library focus' whereas Crawford (2011) used the term 'Liblog' ,

> ...to refer to blogs that are either by self-identified library people (librarians and special cases like me) or about library-related topics (expanded to include archives and museums), but are not "official" blogs, those formally representing libraries and library organizations. (p. 2)

How many English language LIS blogs are there on the LIS blogosphere? Due to the complexity of the medium a comprehensive list of LIS blogs is not available.

Although there is no known fixed number of LIS blogs, recent blog studies such as Crawford (2011) has listed 1304 blogs and Daniel Torres et.al (2011) have listed 1108 LIS blogs listed through Libworm. The Salem Press Blog Directory lists approximately 1300 LIS blogs.

Blog metrics in detail have been presented by the Crawford (2007-2011) study for a dataset of 607, 521, and 1304 English language LIS blogs respectively. Blog data for twenty two quantitative metrics, viz., age of the blog, total number of posts, length of the posts, average post length, total number of comments, comments per post, number of illustrations/figures per post and growth of blogs followed by new metrics added in the 2010 study such as longevity and visibility. Crawford studied longevity in the context of the number of years the blog had survived and for visibility he looked at the Google Page Rank of each blog which would indicate the traffic to the blog.

2.2.2 LIS Bloggers

LIS blogs are predominantly written by individual LIS bloggers who are information professionals, working librarians and academicians. The blogs are either individually owned or institutionally sponsored. There are blogs on various subject categories as is specified by the current research. Blogs may be written by a single author or multiple authors.

Farkas (2005) in her 'Survey of the Biblioblogosphere' posted blogger demographics, on her blog *Information wants to be free*. The results of her survey of 839 LIS bloggers demonstrated a high percentage of women bloggers (58.2%) as compared to male bloggers (41.8%), the majority of library bloggers were under 40, with many over 40 as well. The survey also gave demographical statistics for country of origin, educational qualifications,

and type of library the blogger is working in with the designation. It also revealed that the length of employment of bloggers working in libraries ranged from 1 to 20 years.

An interesting insight into LIS worldwide blogging is available on Infobib.de (http://infobib.de/). Christian Hauschke, Nadine Ullmann, and Sarah Lohre made an attempt from April 23, 2007 to assimilate the LIS blogs from all over the world through a series of postings, where guest authors from different countries around the world introduced the library and library related blogs of their own country. Representations from LIS bloggers of 30 countries were made. The authors categorized LIS bloggers into the following:

1. Individuals

    1.1 Individuals who communicate personal interests, in their own right and without institutional order

    1.2 Persons acting in an institutional order, often with a very narrow thematic focus or a specific target (customer loyalty, public relations, etc.)

2. Bodies

    2.1 Corporate blogs, which are operated by companies

    2.2 Blogs by not formally organized groups of people, often stakeholders

    2.3 Blogs by associations, clubs and other non-profit organizations

Crawford (2011) concluded that by looking only at five large English-speaking nations, Australian libloggers were most active (3.5 blogs per million people), with the U.S. and Canada roughly tied for second (2.8 and 2.7 blogs per million).

2.2.3   LIS Blog Directories, Lists and Aggregators

Clyde (2004, p.184) had experienced that "Finding out about weblogs in general can be a matter of serendipity. There is no single source of information about all weblogs". Close to a decade later there is still not a single defining source for finding a LIS blog. Searching for a specific blog is like searching for a needle in a haystack. Due to its distributed, unorganized, multilingual, and informal format, it is difficult to prepare accurate, comprehensive and up to date directories of blogs, unlike scholarly publications. Bloggers close down blogs sometimes without intimating their readers or may restart a blog after a gap of few years. LIS Blogs have been listed in various LIS blog directories or lists. These lists cannot be stated to be completely comprehensive. Dedicated blog search engines such as Technorati, Bloglines, Icerocket, etc. and many others exist along with the general search engines like Yahoo and Google who have separate blog directories. These are listed as under:

Blog Directories

- Yahoo Blog Directory –(http://dir.yahoo.co m/reference/libraries/weblogs/) a list of LIS blogs is found under the category of 'Librarian Weblogs'

- Dmoz Blog Directory –
  http://www.dmoz.org/Reference/Libraries/Library_and_Information_Science/Weblogs/

- Salem Blog Directory- (http://salempress.com/store/blogs/2012_blogs.htm) has blogs which can be searched by audience, focus and type. There are 32 foci under which the blogs have been categorized under 'Focus.' The 'audience' category has blogs placed under General, Academic, Public, School, Special and Local Patrons.

Blog Lists

- Donna Scott's 100 best library blogs- accessible at http://www.bachelorsdegreeonline.com/blog/2009/100-best-blogs-for-librarians-of-the-future/ (Last accessed October 1, 2013) - posted on August 3, 2009 prepared for library students has blogs broadly categorized under Technology and Education, School and Academic Librarians, Library Issues and Advocacy, Research and Reference, Innovation and Information, Reading and Literature Blogs, Media and Communication, and Professional Blogs. The blog URL with a short annotation is also provided.

- Online College.org - This is a list of 100 best blogs for school librarians prepared by Online College.org posted on July 7, 2009 and available at http://www.onlinecollege.org/2009/07/07/100-best-blogs-for-school-librarians/ (Last accessed October 1, 2013). The site states that this list has been updated for 2012.

- Open Education database - A list of top 25 Librarian Blogs is provided by Open Education database based on which blogs are the most popular, according to visitor traffic and site trackbacks. The list is available at http://oedb.org/ilibrarian/top-25-librarian-bloggers-by-the-numbers/ posted on September 4, 2007(Last accessed October 1, 2013).

- LIS News - They brought out the series '10 Best Blogs to Read' from 2006 to 2010. These lists are available at http://lisnews.org/10_librarian_blogs_read_2010 (Last Accessed October 1, 2013).

- LIS Wiki - http://liswiki.org/wiki/Weblogs - A detailed list of LIS blogs is present on LIS Wikis where English and non-English LIS blogs have been listed. Blogs with Google Page Rank of 7 or more are shown in bold.

- Blogger and author Walt Crawford has given a comprehensive list of 1303 LIS Blogs in his book 'Liblog Landscape 2007-2010' with blog metrics posted on his blog *Walt at Random.*

- Older lists of blogs related to LIS discipline include Peter Scot's Libdex (http://www.libdex.com/weblogs.html), an old list of libraries having blogs which has not been updated since 2008, and BlogBib (http://blog-bib-liblogs.blogspot.in/) which was last updated on January 2007.

Blog Aggregators

Given the complexity in locating blogs, blog aggregators play an important role on the LIS blogosphere. Planet Cataloguing, is an automatically-generated aggregation of approximately 66 blogs related to cataloging and metadata designed and maintained by Jennifer Lang and Kevin S. Clarke (http://planetcataloging.org/).

Library Associations hosted blogs such as IFLA (28 blogs), CILIP Blog Landscape, American Library Association (ALA), Libraries Interact (Blog Central for Australasian Libraries) also aggregate their blog posts. IFLA aggregates posts from its 28 blogs representing its various sections and groups. On the other hand the American Association of Libraries (ALA) has an aggregated service for 19 blogs associated with its various divisions with the magazine *American Libraries* doing a regular feature on the Best of the ALA Blogs and Best of the ALA Members Blogs. Prior to closing down the feed aggregate service in

June 2013, CILIP Blog Landscape hosted about 100 blogs from selected CILIP members and staff. The list is still available through the Internet Archive Wayback Machine.

2.2.4 LIS Blog Research and Literature

LIS Blog research and literature constitute an integral part of the LIS blogosphere. Research and experiments related to the library blogosphere have been done at various places. Literature dealing with concepts related to LIS blogs such as historical, ethnographic, use and user, structural, need, technological has been discussed in detail in the succeeding Chapter.

Susan Herzog's annotated bibliography on blogs 'Blogbib'(an update of her poster session presentation at the ALA conference in 2002) includes links to definitions, articles about blogging and library blogs, books on blogging, studies on blogging, links to samples of library blogs, tools for creating and using blogs is available online at http://blog-bib.blogspot.com/. While most entries are from the United States of America, it also includes blogs from Canada, Europe, and Australia. There is no current update seen on the website. Bargmann (2012, June 10) has prepared a bibliography of articles and books on Weblogs, Podcasts, Vodcasts, Micro blogging, Twitter, and RSS in Libraries.

Laurel Clyde, Meredith Farkas, Walt Crawford, Brian Kelley, Michael Stephens, Noa Aharony, Bar Judit Ilan amongst others have studied the LIS blogosphere from several perspectives and published literature which has been reviewed in Chapter 3. Some bloggers choose to publish their blog related experiences, opinions and experiments on their blog itself. Meredith Farkas, Walt Crawford and Brian Kelly have discussed their results and findings on their own blogs, *Information wants to be free*, *Walt at Random* and *UK Web Focus Blog* respectively. Brian Kelly of the *UK Web Focus* blog has been conducting blog

experiments and posting the results on his blog along with general issues of interest related to blog services within institutions. He has discussed ways of measuring the impact of blogs and suggested possible approaches to forming blog policies stating, "issues which, although possibly alien in nature to some of the early pioneers in blogging, may need to be addressed in the wider public sector environment" (2007, February 5).

2.3 The Future of LIS Blogging

In response to the question "Is it the end of an era for librarian blogging?" asked by Ned Potter (2013) of the blog *the wikiman*, 35 comments were generated from bloggers summing up the thoughts on the future of blogging as a means of communication.

> "I think it's a changing of the guard. Some prominent librarian bloggers have moved on, gotten burned out, gotten busy. Found that they don't like writing blog posts, but would rather talk in real-time via Twitter/Facebook/etc. And others are starting to slowly appear/emerge, as they develop a consistent voice.
>
> Twitter is great for tiny things or for discussions. Actual published articles and books are great for putting a LOT of thought and time into something. What's in between that? Right now, I think it's still the blog format. It's still a great way to push a half-formed thought out and still get some feedback (though now, that feedback is spread amongst comments/tweets/facebook comments/etc.)."

(King, D., May 22, 2013)

> "Blogging and reading blogs has replaced the professional journals I used to devour as the bloggers are real people in real jobs dealing with the issues I am also dealing with right now. I also think to an extent it has also reduced the need for face to face professional learning, and helps those who are isolated, connect and learn from others without too much effort".

(McKenzie, D., May 22, 2013)

Powers, a new entrant to the LIS blogosphere, since May 2011 presents an interesting categorization of blogs on her post on *Navigating the library blogosphere and why it matter's* (June 06, 2012). She has divided blogs into three broad categories viz. For The Enthusiastic,

Older Crowd, For The Thirty-Something Crowd and For the Disenchanted. She further elaborates,

> "that library blogs represent the conversations that are not happening—but should be happening—in our own libraries in our own communities. And if you visit these blogs and take part in the conversation, you may very well find yourself more able to take part in the real conversations that are happening where you live and where you breathe. If nothing else, library blogs provide a safe venue to explore the strength of your own voice and the ways in which you can best use it to enable very real change where it counts most".

> (Powers, June 06, 2012)

Kottke (December, 2013) in his post on 'The blog is dead, long live the blog' which is part of the Predictions for Journalism 2014 - a project of the Nieman Foundation at Harvard Lab Series states that,

> The Stream (Blog) might be on the wane but still it dominates. All media on the web and in mobile apps has blog DNA in it and will continue to for a long while. Over the past 16 years, the blog format has evolved, had social grafted onto it, and mutated into Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest and those new species have now taken over.

Crawford wrote (March 7, 2013) as a continuation and possible culmination of the 'Liblog Project' - one of the most in-depth study of library blogs in a post entitled *"Broadening my library horizons: A blog-reading experiment"* has concluded that, "I'm reading some things that I wouldn't have encountered before." A decade and more of blogging has generated a vast amount of content which is very unique and informal in nature. This content which is dynamic, unedited (to some extent) and primary (in some cases) is accessible through the open access mode. Organizations and individuals discussing preservation issues related to blogs highlight the importance of this very small yet significant medium of communication.

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