CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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A blog is in many ways a continuing conversation.

- Andrew Sullivan

Blogs are mediums of communication on the World Wide Web, facilitating people to communicate freely. Blogs represent a platform reflecting the diversity and freedom of speech which is essential for a truly liberated and developed society. Blogs offer an easy way to add and share content with an interested audience becoming an important avenue for knowing, learning and sharing opinions. This interchange of information amongst the bloggers and the readers has given rise to a community involved in exchanging of ideas and discussions. Sullivan (November, 2008) on *Why I Blog* states,

> ... as blogging evolves as a literary form, it is generating a new and quintessentially postmodern idiom that's enabling writers to express themselves in ways that have never been seen or understood before. Its truths are provisional, and its ethos collective and messy. Yet the interaction it enables between writer and reader is unprecedented, visceral, and sometimes brutal.

Blogs have survived the rapidly changing Web 2.0 technologies for more than a decade giving rise to an increase in research on various aspects of blogs. The 2011 edition of *Technorati State of the Blogosphere* finds that the type of information influencing blogging has shifted from conversations with friends, which was the primary influence in 2010, to other blogs, which for 68% of bloggers are having more of an influence in 2011.The 2010 edition of *State of the Blogosphere* had found blogs in transition—

... no longer an upstart community, now with influence on mainstream narratives firmly entrenched, with bloggers still searching for the next steps forward. Bloggers' use of and engagement with various social media tools is expanding, and the boundaries between blogs, micro-blogs, and social networks are disappearing. As the blogosphere converges with social media, sharing of blog posts is increasingly done through social networks—even while blogs remain significantly more influential on blog content than social networks are (Technorati, 2010).

Recent developments and adoption of newer social networking communication media such as Facebook and Twitter have had an impact on the number of blogs sustaining themselves. Bruns and Burgess (2012, p.1) in *Doing Blog Research* have stated that "... what has been left behind by the wave of mass adoption is a slightly smaller but all the more solidly established blogosphere of engaged and committed participants".

Clyde (2004, p.188) had stated, "It will be interesting to look at library weblogs again two or three years down the line, to see if or how this new technology has evolved in libraries". From 57 in 2003, 198 in 2004 (Clyde, 2004), 470 in 2007 (Bar Ilan, 2007) to 1303 in 2011 (Crawford, 2011), the Library and Information Science (LIS) blogosphere has seen a steady rise in the number of LIS blogs, shaping what we read and how we read it.

1.1 Definitions

Blog

A blog is defined as, "a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer" (Merriam-Webster, 2013). A more comprehensive definition of blogs is offered by Jill Walker. Based on her entry for *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (2005), a blog can be described as having the following features:

- ✓ A frequently updated website consisting of dated entries.

- ✓ Arranged in reverse chronological order so that the reader sees the most recent post first.

- ✓ Each entry in a weblog tends to link to further information.

- ✓ The style is typically personal and informal.

- ✓ Freely available tools on the World Wide Web make it easy for anybody to publish their own weblog,

- ✓ There is a lot of variety in the quality, content and ambition of weblogs

- ✓ A weblog may have anywhere from a handful to tens of thousands of daily readers.

- ✓ Weblog authors also link to other weblogs that have dealt with similar topics, allowing readers to follow conversations between weblogs by following links between entries on related topics.

- ✓ Readers may start at any point of a weblog, seeing the most recent entry first, or arriving at an older post via a search engine or a link from another site.

- ✓ While reading a weblog, readers can read in several orders: Chronologically, thematically or searching by keywords.

- ✓ Weblogs also generally include a blogroll, which is a list of links to other weblogs the author recommends, and

- ✓ Many weblogs allow readers to enter their own comments to individual posts.

In addition, blogs may also be:

- ✓ Focused

- ✓ Written by experts and/or experienced people in their work areas

3

- ✓ Active and vibrant discussion platforms for current or specific topics

- ✓ They are not restricted by the medium of information. Different media such as streaming media, videos, photos, and podcasts maybe incorporated in the same blog.

- ✓ They do not require any subscription; can be considered as open access information sources.

The word 'blog' is used both as a noun and a verb. People who maintain a blog are called bloggers. The act of posting to a blog is called blogging and the distributed, collective, and interlinked world of blogging is the blogosphere (Duffy & Bruns, 2006).

LIS Blog

An operational definition of LIS Blog has been taken as a blog maintained by a library professional, library association or a blog with library related topics.

LIS Blogosphere

The universe of blogs, bloggers and commenters contributing specifically to the Library & Information Science (LIS) blogs encompass the LIS Blogosphere.

1.2 Blog Content Contributions

Blogs are now being accepted as a new medium of scholarly publications as revealed by the study done by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) to highlight interesting examples of digital scholarly resources, and their contribution to the scholarly process. The study reported faculty reading scholarly blogs daily or weekly, further stating that:

4

Blogs add value to resources focused on other sources of content and include blogs as a supplemental form of content. Some blogs provide a vehicle for conversation among scholars in a particular field or specialty. Though blogs are an informal method of scholarly communication, restrictions on who can post, allow them to maintain a degree of quality control and content vetting. However, unlike discussion lists where all readers of the list are also potential contributors to the list, blogs tend to be a more "controlled" form of informal scholarly communication, allowing a limited number of authors to post work to a much wider audience. (Maron and Smith, 2009, p.16)

This is further validated by the OCLC Report (2012), *A Snapshot of Priorities & Perspectives: U.S. Academic Libraries,* wherein it has been found that half of academic library staff read blogs to keep current with library trends.

Blog content displays the bloggers ability to express and share his/her thoughts. The content reflects several motivations behind the blogger's attempts. A few have been illustrated below:

I blog about all sorts of stuff - most often about new professionals issues, hot library topics, social media, marketing libraries, guides to online platforms and that sort of thing. The blog is my main online presence which anchors everything else, and this site is really just in support of that; it houses my papers, some presentations, plus a bit more info about me and the stuff I'm involved with.

(Potter, 2009)

What I did not have before the Blue Skunk was a convenient way for people to respond to my writing or presentations. This blog affords such a means. It serves as a sounding board for ideas I am currently thinking/writing about. You may see some Blue Skunk entries as parts of a published article or book.

(Johnson, 2005)

I love the clarity of thought that is forced by blogging and the challenge to get a message clear before one reaches TL; DR (Too Long Didn't Read) zone. I love the record it keeps of both thought and fact. I love the feeling that someone is reading what I write or maybe that no-one is, and the conversation that is sparked when readers share what they know.

(Greenhill, 2006)

Blog content is increasingly becoming very subject focused and scholarly. The Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (CIBER) in its study on *Social Media and Research Workflow* encompassing responses from 2,414 researchers in 215

countries concludes that social media users see informal tools as a complement to the existing system of scholarly publishing, not as a replacement, adding further,

> Good papers increasingly turn up in the social-media networks, according to people in these focus groups and social media are 'being used as an alternative to the existing system by young researchers who feel frustrated' by the tight control that senior scholars and traditional publishers have over the selection and dissemination of research.

(Howard, 2011)

As shown in the above examples bloggers motivations for blogging are manifold, directly influencing the blog content. Within the LIS blogosphere earlier findings (Bar-Ilan, 2007, 2010) have established that blogs can and do serve as new information channels for LIS community, not only do these blogs concentrate and filter their information content, they can also be viewed as one-stop information kiosks or information hubs. With the LIS blogosphere gaining stability, there is increased visibility of blogs with a specific subject focus.

Blog content becomes more accessible and retrievable by identifying comprehensive blog categories. Bloggers use categories to organize their blog content. Categorization of blog content helps in the survival of the blog, as the blogger's sustained interest is fuelled by the ability to draw the reader's attention to current updates on topics or subjects central to the blogger's interest areas.

1.3 Problem Statement

The relative ease in posting content on the blog without any knowledge of programming language or technical know-how has encouraged many bloggers to author content. Blog content has gradually developed into becoming more focused and at the same time there are blogs with multi-topical content. Bloggers are categorizing their subject

6

content to facilitate easy retrieval, but the blogs themselves have not been categorized according to the subjects represented in LIS. Identifying the blogs on the basis of the core content would help us in knowing the representation of LIS subjects on the LIS blogosphere.

Blog content can be divided into the main post, commentaries, and links. Over a period of time textual blog content has been supplemented with the aid of images, videos, audio files, and hyperlinks to articles on other blogs as well as websites, web pages and other media. This has created a vast resource of enriched content.

The differentiating point between a regular website and a blog is the facility to comment on the content of the post. This feature gives an advantage to the blog content as the blogger is welcoming the opinions of the reader instantly giving rise to engaging discussions on subject trends resulting in content which is not entirely edited, moderated or modified. Identifying the subject trends through these posts, comments & responses and links helps us in observing the growth of a subject and its evolution. As a blog gets older it becomes instrumental in documenting the growth of the subject through the discussions which have taken place on different topics within a subject.

The ability to deliver timely content on the blog posts and to retrieve older posts archived on the blog site is an additional advantage as it helps a reader track a specific discussion topic. The bloggers' expertise in the subject is also often displayed on the blogs through links to their publications which would help in validating the blog content found on the blog. Although blogs do not undergo a peer review process the publications of the blogger becomes an essential component in ascertaining the authority of the blog content.

While an analysis of this rich and dynamic content of the blogs in different subject domains is a very useful and interesting area of study, but such studies are still very few and limited. The aim of the present study titled "Library and information science blogs: A content

analysis" is to address this knowledge gap and analyze the content of the LIS blogosphere to gain an understanding of the content categorization of the blogs into subject categories, to explore the subject trends being discussed within the broad subject categories and to identify the publication trends of the bloggers in formal channels of communication.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of the blogs on the LIS Blogosphere. This study would help in categorizing blogs of LIS into specific and broad subject categories and also help us in understanding the methods employed by LIS bloggers in facilitating and promoting blog content through tags and links.

This study will also assist in identifying the subject trends being discussed within these broad subject categories. The researcher believes that this study will be helpful for librarians and information scientists as it would help them in navigating the LIS blogosphere with a specific subject approach.

1.5 Research Questions

The present study is proposed to find answers to some questions that emerged after exploring the LIS Blogosphere and analyzing the available literature on blogs. The primary research questions are:

- Which broad subject categories of Library and Information Science are posted on the LIS blogosphere?

- Which subject trends can be identified through the analysis of LIS blog content and comments?

Further the study has explored the following:

- What are the attempts made by bloggers to enrich the content of the LIS blog?

- Is there a link between the LIS blog content and the formally published content? In other words, are the LIS bloggers authors of other published works?

1.6 Objectives of the Study

The basic objectives of this study are:

- To categorize LIS blogs into broad subject categories.

- To rank LIS Blogs on the basis of the number of links found in each broad subject category.

- To identify the subject trends in selected blogs in each broad subject category.

- To analyze the comments within these selected blogs to identify their contribution in the development of subject trends.

- To identify the percentage of LIS bloggers who publish in formal channels of communication.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

1.7.1 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study was to study active, English language, text based LIS blogs. Blogs maintained by library professionals, library associations and blogs with library related topics have been considered as LIS blogs. Promotional blogs of libraries have been omitted from the study. Blogs which have been inactive for more than two months were not

considered for this study. Often the blog postings contained personal information as well. Blogs where all the postings were personal were excluded.

1.7.2 Limitations of the Study

There are a few limitations in this study. Firstly this study is a basic, descriptive, and exploratory examination of blogs in only one discipline, i.e., Library and Information Science. Although the sample has been taken from an existing study by Crawford (2011), it is difficult to say whether Crawford's universe is a comprehensive list of all LIS blogs. Crawford mentions the count of the LIS blogs to be 1303, which the present researcher has accepted and no attempt has been made to verify the veracity of this claim.

Secondly, the categorization of blogs according to the broad subject categories has been derived from the 'about' section or the front page (categorization on the side bar). The authors of the blogs sometimes do not state their exact scope of coverage, and even if they do, the topics and format may drift over time. In the event of the bloggers change of subject focus over time, the researcher would not be able to control the categorization error that may have inadvertently occurred.

Thirdly, blogs being a personal medium of communication were found to be discontinued at the will of the blogger, resulting in data error. The original Crawford (2011) sample of Group 1 had 442 blogs which was reduced to 342 blogs in this study when it was conducted in 2012, as 100 blogs had closed since the time the Crawford Study was conducted. Thus, all the data gathered was and is time bound and representative of the possibilities only. Due to the ever changing nature of the blogosphere the researcher does not have control over the closure of blogs and cannot assure access to the cited blogs in the future. The ephemeral nature of medium therefore limits the data collected, to real time only.

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