Potential Of Library 2.0 In Provision Of Information Services In Academic Libraries

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ABSTRACT

In general, library 2.0 is playing critical roles in provision of information services to support quality research, teaching and learning in institutions of higher learning. Traditional methods of information management practices have proved to be ineffective and inefficient in provision of information services to the clients or customers. Additionally, globalization, technological innovations and millennium development goals have introduced new developments and competing values in provision of information services in libraries. In the midst of all these realities the modern concept of library 2.0 becomes crucial in provision of information services in academic libraries in this emerging knowledge society. The purpose of this paper is to examine the potential of library 2.0 in provision of information services to support quality research, teaching and learning in institutions of higher learning in Kenya. This paper examines the current academic literature, document analysis, desk review guides and reports to assess the nature and development of library 2.0 in academic libraries. In addition, the paper examines the challenges facing academic libraries, and the strategies to develop and implement library 2.0 solutions. The literature review indicates that, although library 2.0 is a modern innovation in the emerging knowledge society, many academic libraries in Kenya have not embraced and adopted the concept. The paper proposes various measures that can be undertaken to successfully embrace library 2.0 practices including adequate financial resources and funding, investment in innovative technological solutions and customer focus. Fundamentally, the paper recommends implementation of library 2.0 with the view to provide quality services to the customers.

Keywords Library 2.0, Provision of information services, Academic libraries, University libraries, Institutions of higher learning, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Globally, library 2.0 is recognized as the contemporary or modern practice of handling and supporting information services in library and information establishments, although majority of academic libraries in developing countries are yet to embrace this new business paradigm. Library 2.0 provides the new business paradigm that is useful in providing and supporting information services in academic libraries. The digital environment has been rapidly changing the information landscape leading to new and competitive information services. Digital solutions have brought changes in the creation, storage, distribution, access and delivery of information in academic libraries. The online information environment implies the need for academic libraries to implement library 2.0 solutions.

Research results in United Kingdom (UK) indicate that academic libraries and information professionals are proactively involved in library 2.0 initiatives **(Shoniwa & HALL, 2008)**. In United States of America (USA), information work and activities in library and information centres have gone little beyond traditional information management practices (Marouf, 2004). There is more involvement of library and information professionals in library 2.0 practices in both public and private sectors. Recent studies in Canada, report that many information professionals are involved in design of information architecture, development of knowledge taxonomies, content management, internet and intranet systems, provision and dissemination of information services, intelligence information systems and research and consultancy services (Ajiferuke, 2003 & Sarrafzadehet al., 2006). In developing countries, there is increasing interest in library 2.0 practices among library and information professionals. Evidence from Taiwan reveals insufficient participation by information service units in corporate knowledge management projects including website and intranet initiatives (Chen, 2005). In African countries, there is evidence in implementation of library 2.0 solutions, with academic libraries in South Africa leading the process. Academic libraries in Kenya are slowly realizing the need to implement library 2.0 solutions with the view to enhance access and provision of information services to the clients or customers.

In the 21st century, provision of information services in academic libraries is handled and managed in terms of changes, developments and issues brought by library 2.0. Library 2.0 initiatives are basically driven by technology and information needs of the customers. Of critical importance is the application and use of library 2.0 solutions in supporting and extending information services in academic libraries. This discussion underpins the need for information professionals to be proactively actively involved in library 2.0 practices. The development of library 2.0 has a direct consequent on the practice of information work and services. In addition, information professionals have to deal with issues of information, knowledge and communication services in achieving the goals and objectives of institutions of higher learning. Library 2.0 has brought with it new business opportunities for reinventing the image of academic

libraries and information professionals. Implementing library 2.0 solutions implies that academic libraries will remain relevant in achieving the needs, demands and wisdom of the clients.

LIBRARY 2.0: THE NEW BUSINESS PARADIGM

In the present knowledge based economy, library 2.0 has emerged as one of the drivers, constituting the fundamentals of developing and building modern information services. The transition from industrial based economy to knowledge based economy in the 21st century, needs effective and efficient provision of information services that attain the goals and objectives of academic libraries. In the knowledge based economy, the main mission of academic libraries is to provide high quality information services to the clients. The real market value of library and information establishments is build on technological innovations and customer based services. This new business paradigm in handling and managing information services in academic libraries involves technology and customer needs. In particular, the development of library 2.0 has changed the information landscape in academic libraries perhaps forever. This development is a critical requirement because of the potential roles of library 2.0 in provision of information services in academic libraries. Library 2.0 provides the potential means of taking information services to where the clients, anywhere anytime.

Technological innovations or solutions have become the major focus for academic library and information centers. Innovation is the adoption of new ideas, behaviours, products and services in organizations (Herkema, 2003). The concept of innovation is directly related to change and entirely depends on the availability of right information and knowledge. Academic libraries that have embraced innovations have proved to be more successful in delivery of services. Technological innovations depend upon new ideas (technology and philosophy) to improve the performance, effectiveness and efficiency of information services in academic libraries. Library 2.0 solutions have been instrumental in the development of new information products and services as well as reinventing the image and status of information professionals in academic libraries. The aim is to bridge the knowledge gap between the source and the client.

Library 2.0 based on second generation of web based services is a relatively new concept that academic libraries have no choice but to adopt and embrace in order to remain relevant in the present and future information environments. Library 2.0 is an offshoot of web 2.0 technology that involves essentially a mash-up of traditional library services and innovative web 2.0 services, as a means for promoting and extending information services (Harinarayana & Raju, 2009).

Library 2.0 involves the use of social media software tools in provision of information services. This is the modern practice of managing and handling information services through participatory approach of involving the clients. The services are constantly updated and evaluated to best serve the needs and desires of the clients. This also involves open management practices of engaging and involving the clients through online participation and communication. This makes the library to offer two way communication or bi-directional information services that serves the needs and demands of the clients and the staff. This is made possible through the

development and use of web 2.0 technologies. Web 2.0 refers to second generation of web based services that includes social networking sites (such as Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Flickr twitter, wiki, blogs, bookmarking/favorites, federated searching, chat and instant messaging) and support systems (like online help desk) that provides online collaboration, participation, and sharing of information and communication services.

The development of library 2.0 puts libraries on the modern level or platform of socialization that is critical in the emerging knowledge society. Library 2.0 is deeply rooted in the concept of socialization that emphasizes best practices of handling information services through online collaboration and participation of the clients. The social library is confluence of knowledge management, content publishing, library workflow management and socialization (Green, 2010). In this respect, the library provides information services by incorporating the participation of the customers, and extending the services through the use of social media capabilities including web 2.0.

Figure 1: Social Library Components

Library 2.0 develops, creates, manages and preserves knowledge hubs or nets, and adds value to the services. This is normally achieved by involving and engaging the customers as well as providing competitive services. In traditional libraries, the information manager handles information services with little participation from the clients. Therefore, library 2.0 is the handling and provision of information services by involving the clients (lecturers, non academic study, community and friends of the library) using web technologies. The concept provides both the top-down and bottom-up social interaction crucial in the modern information environment. This new business paradigm creates interactive and social knowledgebase that serve the needs, desires and wisdom of the clients and the staff.

In the library context, this helps to enhance the value of information services, increase productivity, enhance effectiveness and efficiency, preserve and protect information as well as promote and extend delivery of services to the customers. The basic premise of library 2.0 is to

provide quality information services to the customers. The social media capabilities extend the value of information services to the clients through sharing and exchange of information and communication with information professionals. The focus is on the clients whose ultimate needs and desires should be fulfilled. In library 2.0, clients and information staff are members of a gated community deeply involved in use, access, retrieval and dissemination of information, knowledge and communication services. The library 2.0 provides a one stop access to information services.
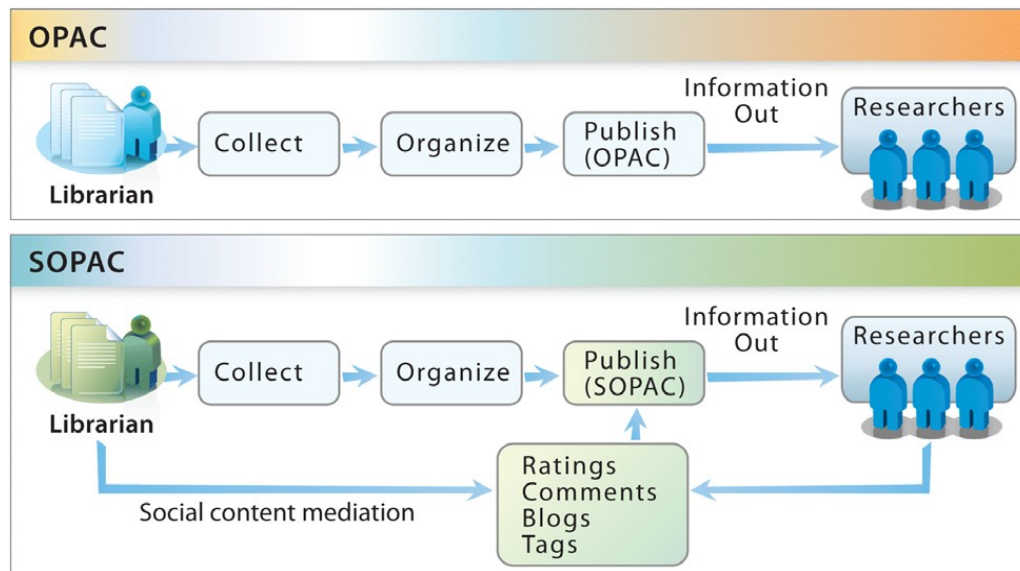

Figure 2: Social Online Public Access Catalog (SOPAC) (Green, 2010)

Generally, library 2.0 involves new ideas and philosophy of providing highly quality services to the customers based upon technology. Library 2.0 implies provision of information services that are technology driven and customer centered. Technology driven involves effective and efficient solutions to handle and manage information services. This is exemplified by the high degree of integration and use of web 2.0 solutions in provision of information services. Customer centered focuses on providing high quality information services that satisfy the needs and demands of the clients.

WEB 2.0 SOLUTIONS

Web 2.0 solutions provide swift access to forums for gathering and sharing information, networking and socializing through online participation and communication. Academic libraries all over the world are engaged in discussion forums that allow information professionals the opportunity to share and exchange information in order to improve and enhance delivery of services. The biggest potential of web 2.0 is provision of communication platform that connects information professionals and clients. Global business information deals are conducted and transacted easily using web 2.0 tools. Web 2.0 tools facilitate access to information, knowledge and communication services, and provide the universal platform for working groups to share and

exchange information and knowledge using online discussion forums. These tools empower and improve the morale of the information staff, provide the competitive services to the customers, enhance communication services and provide access to information and knowledge.

CUSTOMER CENTERED SERVICES

Traditionally, the response towards customer needs and demands in any library and information systems have never been given the desired attention. Information professionals have always been guided by the philosophy in the profession that clients normally use library services whether informed or not. This practice has always created a one directional approach that never takes care of the needs of the clients. The competitive information environment and new business paradigms have forced academic libraries to involve customers in provision of information services. In the online information environment, providing balanced customer centered services involves library 2.0 and web 2.0 solutions.

In the modern information world, academic libraries are seen as social systems that must engage and provide competitive services. Library 2.0 including YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, Meebo, Flickr, chat reference and instant messages are some of the solutions that provide effective and efficient means of providing information services. Technology provides the easiest platform for exchanging and sharing of information and communication. This helps information professionals to provide quality services to the clients. In general, establishing and nurturing customer services via technology helps to provide quality services, increases productivity and efficiency in information work.

POTENTIAL OF LIBRARY 2.0 IN PROVISION OF INFORMATION SERVICES

ADVANCEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

Library 2.0 provides clients with the opportunity to be proactively engaged in information work and activities through online collaboration, communication and sharing of information and knowledge. Web 2.0 systems have helped to bridge, expand and promote information services to the patrons in academic libraries. Academic libraries are change agents involved in advancement of knowledge through development, creation and preservation of intellectual information. Web 2.0 provides really social interaction and exchange of information, knowledge and communication involving the information staff and the clients.

In addition, the social media library helps to bridge the knowledge gap between the rich haves and the poor have-nots. Information is available to all provided the right information infrastructure is put in place. Modern academic libraries must provide multifaceted physical libraries that meet the information and the technology needs of the clients. This naturally attracts the young generation of clients to the library environment. In Kenya, university libraries of United States International University, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenyatta University, Strathmore University, Daystar University and Methodist University have built modern libraries that provide one stop access to information and technology needs and demands of the clients.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION OF INFORMATION SERVICES

Marketing and promotion of information services is among the approaches academic libraries must use in order to create and increase awareness to the clients. Marketing culture and philosophy in academic libraries should involve the customers. Library 2.0 provides the technological solutions to market, promote, sustain and strengthen provision of information services to the customers. In many ways, application and use of web 2.0 is one way of marketing and expanding information services in academic libraries. Social media library provides online communication forms that enable exchange and sharing of information. In general, library 2.0 creates online information environment that interactively engages the customers in face-to-face communication. The use of library 2.0 services like web 2.0 provides the means to market, promote and extend information services to the clients (Harinarayana & Raju, 2009).

PROMOTE EDUCATION AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Academic libraries have the mandate to develop, create, maintain and promote institutional repositories. In addition, academic libraries across the globe are increasingly expanding access to information resources and services through adoption and implementation of digital libraries (DLs). Higher education institutions (HEIs) is no longer restricted to on-campus students, as HEIs turn to distance and e-learning to bolster enrolments, and broaden the customer base (Bates & Bartolic-Zlomislic, 2000). In distance and e-learning models, DLs enable institutions to reach new learning markets scattered far from campuses, effectively without loss of quality. Besides providing more efficient storage and retrieval of information, DLs facilitate scholarly communication, collaboration, and other forms of interaction among information professionals, researchers and students on the process of academic knowledge creation and transfer (Kavulya, 2010, p. 219). In addition, the use of wiki allows clients to engage and collaborate in development and creation of intellectual records leading to knowledge hubs or nets. Information professionals also acquire training opportunities in a wide range of technological skills and competencies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Academic libraries in the country have no choice but implement modern library 2.0 and web 2.0 solutions. These systems are not new in the information environment, although many library and information establishments including academic libraries are yet to embrace these solutions. Globally, most academic libraries are effectively and efficiently utilizing library 2.0 tools to handle and provide information services. Numerous factors impact negatively on library 2.0 solutions such as limited financial resources, inadequate knowledge and skills among information professionals, inadequate support from the management and hard economic situations. Institutions of higher learning should provide enough financial resources, funding and budgeting to develop and support information infrastructure in academic libraries. Library 2.0 needs sound financial investment and support from the parent organizations or institutions. There is need to establish relevant library 2.0 solutions in the information environment. Academic

libraries and information professionals must implement library 2.0 solutions with the view to engage and provide competitive services to the customers. The best practice in implementation of library 2.0 solutions is to involve information professionals, clients and institutional management in order to provide the necessary resources. Information professionals need to understand the significance of library 2.0, and thereby make concerted efforts to transform university libraries into modern knowledge hubs and knowledgebase nets. The biggest challenge of library 2.0 environment is to provide technological needs that march the information needs of the clients.

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