

Blogs Application in Developing Library and Information Services

H N Prasad

Shuchita Singh

Abstract

The paper discusses the importance of blogs as a tool for communicating information to the users community. Presents the developments relating to blog technology and usage. Examines the blog applications in libraries. Discusses the users' expectations. Presents the Indian scenario of the web logs in Libraries of India. Analyses the different applications of web logs in Indian universities and IIT libraries

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1. Introduction

According to Jill Walker "A weblog, or blog, is a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so that the most recent post appears first (see temporal ordering)." . Anyone can post information on the web even without having the knowledge of HTML language or any other web authoring tools.

A blog, therefore, can be a very useful tool for communicating new ideas and thoughts to a large number of people quickly. From the library perspective, a blog can be used to broadcast useful information to library users in any specific subject areas or it can be geared toward a general audience within the university community.

Blogs are one of the easiest ways to set up a web page on the internet, taking a novice only a few minutes. This ease of set-up was incorporated by Blogger in 1999, and Blogger was bought out by Google in 2003, dramatically furthering its use. Since that time a number of other companies have been specializing in blog and blog-like products. This ease of set-up and use has made blogs the fastest growing area of the web, with a new blogs created, on average, every second of every day. The blog search engine Technorati (see www.technorati.com) claims to track 44.3 million blogs and 2.5 billion links. This is further exemplified by the fact that in March 2005, there were only around two million blogs worldwide. According to the most recent Pew Internet Survey, blog use now accounts for around 27 percent of all internet use.

Blogs can incorporate text, images, audio and video, the latter known as vlogs, and are of three general types:

1. aggregators that collect other blog postings and writings from various digital media;
2. personal narratives; and
3. a synthesis of the two.

With the growth in popularity of blogs has come the equally rapid and unwelcome growth of blog spam, known as splogs. This information “noise” either takes the form of junk comments, which for large and popular blogs often necessitates turning off the comment feature, or wholly junk blogs. Splogging is a real and growing problem, crowding the information byways with useless data that is designed to drive readers towards commercial sites. Blog engines have responded with various tactics, ranging from requiring non-machine readable verification before a comment can be posted to platform-specific filtering software such as WordPress’s Spam Karma.

1.1 Blog Demographics

Demographics of blog creators and users are of interest. A survey conducted of 17,000 blog readers by BlogAds (see www.blogads.com/survey/blog_reader_survey.html) found, among other things, that a majority are males over 30 years of age, describe themselves as “an opinion maker”, and read blogs for “news theyI can’t find elsewhere”.

In contrast to the “mostly white, mostly affluent” statistics from BlogAds, the physical infrastructure necessary for internet access continues to grow around the world, as do the voices in the blogosphere, representing viewpoints from a diversity of cultures, and allowing glimpses into people’s lives that have never before been possible. An example is the blog A Star from Mosul (see <http://astarfrommosul.blogspot.com/>), which is authored by a young woman who was 16 when the Iraqi war began. She writes with incredible clarity, candor and immediacy about teen life during wartime. With internet access being a key component to the furtherance of these voices, institutions such as public and university libraries continue to be critical doorways to the blogosphere. Good content will drive readers to key blogs authored by women, minorities, and other marginalized populations, allowing for rich discourse and an abundance of primary sources of information.

1.2 Blog Influence

Blogs continue to exercise their influence in the “real” world, with some recent examples being the resignations of Trent Lott as Senate Majority Leader and Dan Rather as CBS news anchor, as well as continued pressure to investigate WMD claims and Iraq War civilian casualties – issues picked up by blog writers and readers after being dropped or ignored by mainstream news organizations. This people-powered, citizen-led pressure has translated into renewed interest in these, and many other topics, by media organizations, and has ultimately led to genuine consequences and on-going investigations.

Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art (artlog), photographs (photoblog), sketchblog, videos (vlog), music (MP3 blog), audio (podcasting) and are

part of a wider network of social media. Micro-blogging is another type of blogging which consists of blogs with very short posts.

Now a day's libraries are also interested in creating weblog for their libraries in order to make their users aware about new programmes and services of the library and to provide a common platform to all their clientele for posting their views and valuable suggestions on the library services.

2. Blogs Applications in Libraries

WWW has had a major impact on how librarians and library users alike access information. New developments in technology have occurred that have moved us from the early web to Web 2.0. As the web evolves, so too must librarians. In the ever-changing environment that is the web, it is critical to stay abreast of technical developments, as well as user behavior and expectations. Now it is time to consider how librarians can take advantage of these new developments and help their libraries to evolve in a similar direction.

Web 2.0 is a term that has been used to label new web technologies (O'Reilly, 2005) that allow users to create, personalize, and share information in ways that were not possible a few years ago. These technical developments include blogs, wikis, and web sites such as Flickr (a photo sharing site), MySpace (a site for watching and sharing original videos). The use of these sites is continually growing. According to a June 2006 comScore Media Metrix report, MySpace saw over 51 million unique visitors in May 2006. YouTube had over 12 million visitors and Flickr welcomed over five million[1]. The popularity of these sites indicates a real interest in the ability to share and communicate with others who have similar interests.

Over the past five years the evolution of the web into Web 2.0 has been shaped by four major trends that have acted as primary drivers of the ever-evolving information landscape. These drivers not only affect the high-tech sector, but the consumer technology sector as well. Their influence can be seen in countless web-based services, computer hardware, software, handheld devices and cell phones:

- ◆ Personalization.
- ◆ Self-service.
- ◆ Mobility.
- ◆ Technology.

As new technologies and information services become available and popular, user expectations evolve along with them.

2.1 User Expectations

Thanks to web sites such as Google, Amazon, eBay, and others, users of the WWW, especially younger people, have come to expect a different kind of experience when they interact with the

world of online information. Google's search interface is a perfect example of some of the changes that have occurred. Compared with the Lexis/Nexis or Dialog search screens of ten years ago, a Google search is simplicity itself. There is one box-type in a few words and go. There is no need for instruction, complicated search protocols, or an intermediary. Speed is another key element of the new web experience. Google searches billions of web pages in a fraction of a second. And people expect that the answer they seek will be the first link, or at least "above the fold." While the link a user selects might not be the best in the best of all possible worlds, it is generally close enough to satisfy most people in most cases. The simplicity, speed, and satisfaction of this experience have helped to drive user expectations in all their interactions with information on the web.

2.2 Personalization

Users have also come to expect to find information in an environment tailored to their personal needs and interests. Amazon serves as a good example of the personalized web experience. When users search for a book on Amazon, they get not just author, title, and a few subject terms, but also links to editorial reviews, the ability to browse sample pages, and a list of other books cited within the work. Based on a customer's past search history and aggregated purchasing data from other customers, Amazon proposes similar or related materials that a person might enjoy in the hopes of stimulating additional interaction with the site.

Personalization and customization of information continue to be a challenge for libraries. Librarians have been staunch defenders of their patrons' right to privacy and have implemented procedures which protect users' reading and search histories. It may, however, be time to seek a new balance between information privacy and service. When interacting with the commercial web, our patrons accept, and in many cases embrace, the need to share personal information in order to receive personalized service. Libraries could allow users to create identities and profiles that, given the right technology, could be used to tailor a patron's view of library content and services. Based on user profiles or accounts, library systems could recognize patrons and adapt search results and content alerts to their unique search and borrowing history and expressed interests. It will be necessary, of course, to continue to safeguard patron privacy, but ideally within a context that allows options for personalized information services. As searching the entire WWW becomes an experience tailored to the needs and interests of individuals, library users expect the same kind of experience when they visit the library's information space.

Some libraries have sought to personalize the look and feel of their web sites by creating portals to information services. One example is MyLibrary at North Carolina State. With MyLibrary, users can create a personalized interface to the information resources available at the North Carolina State University Libraries. Although the site has been available for the last six years, it does not offer personalized information services beyond current circulation and request status, and links to course materials.

One area in which libraries have been making great progress by taking advantage of new technologies is in providing customized content in the form of really simple syndication (RSS) feeds to users. RSS is a process that uses readily available software to automatically deliver web content to registered users. A fine example can be found at the Georgia State University Library. Here users can choose from 20 separate feeds broken down by academic discipline. Giving users the option to receive only the information on topics that interest them is an important first step in personalizing the library user's experience.

Personalization is taken to the next level as users of major web sites are encouraged to contribute their own content. For example, users of Amazon can contribute their own comments, reviews, or suggestions about books, movies, and CDs. They may also create their own tags. Tags are keywords, or categories that label content users may want to return to in the future, or that help other users find similar or related content. Sites that provide a means for users to share, and tag content with others such as Flickr, MySpace, and del.icio.us, have seen particular growth in the past couple of years. Del.icio.us, for example, provides participants with a means to share links to their favorite content on the web with friends and family, but also with a broader community of people around the world. Users can identify others with similar interests, explore the most popular tags, or view recent additions. Based on the growing popularity of these types of sites, it appears that there is a real interest in sharing personal content and information and finding and communicating with like-minded people in a world-wide community.

Libraries have not traditionally offered patrons the opportunity to contribute content to their catalogs, but that is changing. OCLC, Inc. has recently added a feature to the public interface of their WorldCat database. Registered users can add comments and reviews to the existing bibliographic data for any resource in the catalog. This capability increases user-to-user communication and builds a sense of community around the library's collections.

Communities can also be built around information shared through blogs. Blogs are personalized web sites through which individuals can share anything from their thoughts on world trade to what they had for dinner the night before. Blogs also create community in a number of ways. Although the posts themselves generally come from one person, or institution, readers can create a dialogue through comments on posts, and, via RSS, the content of blogs can be easily tracked as it is updated.

The web is overflowing with great examples of innovative and dynamic blogs created by all types of libraries. A title search on the Google Blog Search site for the word "library" yielded over 250,000 results. With the increasing popularity of free, hosted blog solutions such as Blogger and Livejournal, the barriers to blog creation are non-existent. It is no longer unusual for the local public library to publish several blogs tailored to specific audiences or topics such as children, young adults, and adult reader services. One example can be found at the Darien Library, Darien, Connecticut. Here

the library publishes eight blogs devoted to specific groups such as teens and children as well as topics like movies, town events, and even books.

A more ambitious blog application can be found at the University of Minnesota Libraries with their UThink blog site. In this case, the library provides faculty and students with an account where they can have access to what is in effect a blogging sandbox. UThink is a free area where students and faculty can create blogs related to classes as well as personal interests. The result has been the creation of a vibrant, ever-changing community of bloggers. After one year in existence on April

Libraries can use the blogs in the following ways:

- ◆ as a current awareness service;
- ◆ to highlight news or resources of interest;
- ◆ to post book reviews from students, faculty, and staff members;
- ◆ to list new acquisitions;
- ◆ to announce library news and events
- ◆ for selective dissemination of information.

3. Indian Scenario

A survey has been made for analyzing the web logs in the Indian Central Universities after analyzing the websites of the 18 Central universities. Out of 18 Central Universities, only following mentioned 11 Central Universities have their web logs.

- ◆ Aligarh Muslim University
- ◆ Allahabad University
- ◆ Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University
- ◆ University of Delhi
- ◆ University of Hyderabad
- ◆ Indira Gandhi National Open University
- ◆ Jamia Millia Islamia
- ◆ Jawaharlal Nehru University
- ◆ Maulana Azad National Urdu University
- ◆ Nagaland University
- ◆ Visva-Bharati University

The webpages of the following mentioned 8 I.I.Ts of India were also surveyed for the same purpose.

- ◆ I.I.T., Kanpur
- ◆ I.I.T., Roorkee
- ◆ I.I.T., Bangalore
- ◆ I.I.T., Madras
- ◆ I.I.T., Bombay

◆ I.I.T., Kharagpur

◆ I.I.T., Guwahati

The remaining central universities are not having their web logs on their websites. The above mentioned universities are also not having specifically their library web logs on their sites.

3.1 Method of Analysis

The websites of the above mentioned universities were consulted/accessed/downloaded for analyzing the web logs and then tabulated for the study.

3.2 Analysis

The collected data are analyzed and tabulated for deriving the conclusion.

(i) Analysis of Format of Web Log

The web logs of the libraries were analyzed on the basis of their format such as the name of fields included and nomenclature used.

Name of the University	Name	Address	E-mail	Query /feedback	Suggestions	Comments	Message
Aligarh Muslim University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	_____	_____	
Allahabad University	Yes		Yes	Yes			
Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	
University of Delhi	Yes		Yes	Yes			
University of Hyderabad	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes
Indira Gandhi National Open University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Jamia Millia Islamia				Yes	Yes		
Jawaharlal Nehru University							

Maulana Azad National Urdu University	Yes		Yes			Yes	
Nagaland University			Yes				
Visva-Bharati University	Yes		Yes			Yes	

The analysis shows that the above mentioned universities are not having web logs in a predefined format like entries related to the list of news and notices but they are having their web logs in the form of the queries, suggestions, comments and messages for getting feedback from the students and faculty members and other personnels.

(ii) Analysis of Nature of Web Log

The nature of web log can be analyzed according to their purpose. The table shows that most of the universities are not having their web logs for the library purposes except the Jamia Millia University who is having the web logs for their library also.

Name of the University	General in Nature	Specially related to the queries	Specially for library
Aligarh Muslim University	Yes		
Allahabad University	Yes		
Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University	Yes		
University of Delhi	Yes		
University of Hyderabad	Yes		
Indira Gandhi National Open University		Yes	
Jamia Millia Islamia	Yes		Yes
Jawaharlal Nehru University	Yes		
Maulana Azad National Urdu University	Yes		
Nagaland University	Yes		
Visva-Bharati University	Yes		

The analysis shows that only one University is having web log for the library related queries on the library webpage.

(iii) Analysis of Format of Web logs of IITs of India

Name of the University	Name	Address	E-mail	Query/ feedback	Suggestions	Comments	News Blogs
I.I.T., Kanpur				Yes (having news item on the webpage of the Library)			Yes
I.I.T., Roorkee				Yes			Yes
I.I.T., Delhi				Yes			
I.I.T., Bangalore						Yes	
I.I.T., Madras	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		
I.I.T., Bombay					Yes (Book Suggestion Forms)		
I.I.T., Kharagpur				Yes			Yes
I.I.T., Guwahati							Yes

The analysis of the data given in the above table shows that only some of the IITs have started using blogs for interacting with the users as an integral part of their library websites which is ample evidence of the initiatives from the IIT Libraries.

4. Conclusion

The study shows that the web blogs are becoming quite popular these days. But there is need to specify the web logs for providing the pinpointed and comprehensive user services in the libraries. Libraries in U.S.A., U.K. and Canada are moving towards the library web logs and so many public and academic libraries are having their own library web logs with special aim to provide news, information and links to Internet resources for library users.

In India, there is need to take initiatives by the Indian University libraries for providing the interactive service through library web logs. The University libraries may make use of library web logs for news clipping services, CAS and SDI services, library notices, explaining the library rules and regulations and for getting the feedback and for conducting the online user orientation programmes also.

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About Authors

Prof. H N Prasad, Head of the Department of Library & Information Science at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.

Dr. Shuchita Singh, Professional Junior, Central Library, BHU, Varanasi