**Patron 2.0: Characterization of the dotcom library user**

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**Abstract**

Library users have changed with the information environment. As a matter of fact, many library user studies indicate that the pace of this change is faster now than ever before. Consequently, a new breed of library users, known as Patron 2.0, has emerged. This study, conducted through documentary analysis, unveils the core characteristics of these users and how librarians can support them to maximize the benefits of their library usage.

**Keywords**

Library 2.0, Patron 2.0, Web 2.0, information seeking behaviour

**Introduction**

Many studies have demonstrated that the environment in which library services are offered has changed drastically. In fact, some scholars have described the situation as ‘the climate of ceaseless change’ (Giesecke, 1994; Haricombe and Lusher, 1998). For instance, Rainie (2009) notes how the volume of information has grown drastically; the variety of information, its sources and format of presentation have increased; the speed of information flow has increased; times and places to experience communication media have expanded; the number of information perspectives and points of view has exploded; and people’s interest in and alertness for information has grown. One other element of this change is the emergence of a new information-seeking behaviour that involves a kind of skimming activity, where patrons peruse just one or two pages from an online resource or site and then ‘bounce’ out, perhaps never to return. With this new information-seeking behaviour has also emerged a new brand of library user, described as Patron 2.0, who generally finds it easier to “Google” than drive to a library. With some studies

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also indicating that many such users are reducing their level of use of traditional library services, it is important that librarians continue to understand the key elements of the information-seeking behaviour of their patrons, including those designated Patron 2.0. Such an understanding will enable librarians to satisfy the information needs of these patrons, keep them as users, and encourage a stronger recognition of the added-value to be gained from using a library. Through documentary analysis, the authors highlight the characteristics of these emerging users and relate them to the Web 2.0/Library 2.0 debate.

Many user studies show that library users’ needs are changing faster than ever before

Salwasser and Murray-Rust (2002) conducted a needs assessment of the users of the Oregon State University libraries and found that the users wanted to find, retrieve, integrate and synthesize well organized information, quickly. The study also found that although many scholars of librarianship and practitioners recommend the involvement of the relevant stakeholders early and, indeed, at all stages of new library developments, the common approach still seems to be to ignore the users (Salwasser and Murray-Rust, 2002). Salwasser and Murray-Rust (2002) also cite a study conducted in 1998 at the Archaeology Data Service at the University of York in the United Kingdom which found that archaeologists want large quantities of varied kinds of information. The same study also revealed that the archaeologists wanted free access to such content and services (Condron, Richards et al., 1999). Farkas (2008) also explains that the user studies which she has conducted recently reveal that users wanted to have more full-text articles available online so that they didn’t have to use interlibrary loans, a notion she calls self-sufficiency.

OCLC’s (2005) report and other statistics (Aiken, 2006) also indicate that libraries are rapidly relinquishing their place as the top sources of inquiry (Chad and Miller, 2005). Indeed, a sizable number of current library users indicate that they will reduce their library use in due course (OCLC, 2005). This change can be attributed to the constantly shifting expectations of users, especially revolving around the time and convenience of use of library services and collections (Ramos, 2007; Farkas, 2008). Fundamentally, modern library users simply expect to be able to access any information they want any time, anywhere (Yu, 2007; Pauli, 2008). They want the library service to fit their lifestyle and not vice versa (OCLC, 2005).

The OCLC (2005) research highlights very unflattering perceptions of the modern library user about the library and its resources in the light of the digital revolution: 1) A large number of users begin their information searches with search engines, not librarians or catalogues; 2) People who have used both search engines and librarians for information searches admit that both approaches yield results of more or less similar quality; 3) Libraries are about the provision of outdated, dirty, bulky and often unavailable books, not information; 4) The library is not the first or only stop for many information seekers, and although this is not an entirely new finding, the situation is worse now because more alternatives to the library exist; and 5) Information seekers are not satisfied with the library experience and desire that it should stretch beyond books, crowded noisy reading areas, limited parking, bureaucratic limitations on the use of resources, need to travel, as well as unfriendly, unavailable and inadequate library staff.
Mostert (2009) also explains that library users tend to measure the quality of services and products based on the library’s level of investment in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). She also adds that users perceive the library’s relevance to emerging needs based on the currency of the information tools available for the users in the facility. Webster (2002) supports the view that library users are beginning to evaluate the usefulness of libraries in terms of the availability of ICT tools and how accessible they are to the patrons.

But there are scholars who caution that the library’s central core identity and role have and will remain the same. They argue that although methodology changes with technology, meeting user needs has and remains the crucial role of libraries even when looking into the future. Although they admit that technology makes it possible for almost any place to become a library, they assert that physical libraries will continue to serve as destinations for people who wish to engage with other people and artefacts in the pursuit of understanding. They suggest that library buildings should continue to include traditional reading rooms which are cherished by all ages of readers and are likely to remain over time. Nonetheless, they propose that these reading spaces should be adjusted to accommodate new trends and technology in information seeking and use. For instance, provision of less formal rooms with soft chairs that provide group study spaces enabling users to work together as teams have been recommended. It is also being suggested that fewer books be housed in the immediate proximity to readers, but that more space be created for refreshments and users’ personal gadgets, such as iPods or laptops (Blyberg, 2006; Pauli, 2008; Eager, 2009). Some users also demand more ICT tools such as Digital Video Disc (DVD) burners, unrestricted Universal Serial Bus (USB) access on Personal Computers (PCs), little or no restrictions on Internet access, the ability to install their own software, unrestricted quotas on network facilities, and MPEG-1 Audio Layer-3 (MP3) file sharing terminals (Webster, 2002; Stephens, 2007).

Isaacson (2006), on the other hand, argues that libraries should only seek to meet the needs of users, not their wants. There is contention, however, on who and how to determine library users’ needs and wants. Isaacson (2006) justifies his view by explaining that a library should not try to compete with Barnes & Noble, which is interested in direct profits. He concludes that libraries should not experiment with populist ideologies but should be brave to tell the users that some questions need to be sifted, refined, checked in multiple sources, and perhaps even reframed before they can be answered adequately. He admits that there are occasions when the librarians may be wrong, but he also emphasizes that the users cannot also always be right. He cautions that there is no need for “Wal-Mart greeters” in libraries.

Other scholars also point out that some librarians are importing terminology used in the private commercial world into librarianship without adequate consideration of the implications. For instance, they argue that the concept of customer care as used in the commercial spheres where products are sold to clients cannot be applied to library users casually. They describe this as a rhetoric dissonance which is oblivious of the fact that libraries do not serve the same need as retail outlets. They do, however, clarify that there are many techniques that librarians can learn from the commercial world. Nonetheless, they point out that such adoptions should not only be appropriate, but also proper (Hoadley, 1999; Hernon and Nitecki, 2001; Budd, 2005).
Significantly, many librarianship scholars agree that there is a new emerging breed of library users which some authors have described as very different from past users in various perspectives. These differences are manifested through their expectations about access to, availability and findability of information; time use; personal efficacy and effort to enhance their library usage; as well as the rewards and challenges of networking for social, economic, political and other purposes (LaGuardia, 1996; Zimmerman and Tu, 2003; Rainie, 2009).

Key characteristics of Patron 2.0

The concerns of the new breed of library users are immediacy, intricacy and interaction. Indeed, a study conducted by CIBER (2008) found that the new breed of library users exhibit a unique information seeking behaviour which is perceived as being horizontal, “promiscuous”, diverse and volatile. The findings of the study further suggest that the new breed of users: 1) Is generally more competent with technology, pick up these skills on the move through trial and error and expect a lot from ICTs; 2) Prefer interactive systems and are turning away from being passive consumers of information; 3) Have drastically shifted to digital forms of communication such as texting rather than talking; 4) Multitask in most, if not all, areas of their lives; 5) Prefer infotainment approaches to traditional information provision; 6) Have limited tolerance of delay in the provision of services; 7) Find their peers more credible as sources of information than authority figures and structures; 8) Feel the need to remain constantly connected; 9) Believe everything is on the Web; and 10) Is format agnostic. Evidently, Patron 2.0 is comfortable with and enthusiastic about technology; expects instant gratification; prefers downloading or getting information digitally; has no time; prioritizes convenience; desires easy access; and prefers discovery (Ramos, 2007; Ayre, 2008; CIBER, 2008; Kiran and Singh, 2008; Rainie, 2009).

Clearly, Patrons 2.0 are not just content consuming library users. They are content creators, creating their own content and augmenting existing material through annotations (adding tags or comments) or cross-referencing (adding links) within a dynamic and collaborative information space (Pienaar and Smith, 2007; Dussin and Ferro, 2009). Searchable tags supplied by users, and in their own language, could be more useful than those developed through conventional means. Some scholars have also argued that to this breed of users, conversations, research and learning never end (Primus, 2009). The users interact and create resources with each other and with the librarians and thus blur the lines between the user and librarian, creator and consumer, as well as authority and novice (Maness, 2006). Consequently, they appreciate efforts to empower them to create or manage content (Casey and Savastinuk, 2007). Furthermore, these users are creative. In fact, many of them create as much as they consume and want to share and collaborate. They want library systems to be easy, quick, recognizable and flexible (Pauli, 2008). Patrons 2.0 view the library as a platform where user-contributed content is being used to add value, is fun to work in and has something for everyone (Ayre, 2008). Though most of the information searching and delivery tools embraced by Patrons 2.0 are free, studies indicate that these users are also ready to pay for any information, product or service they consider valuable.
Patrons 2.0 prefer to be given appropriate options for information format, method of delivery, and fulfilment type, including loan, copy, digital copy, and purchase (Ayre, 2008). These users also would like to be able to personalize their spaces (whether digitally or physically), for instance choosing the background colours of the website, font sizes and faces, or greetings. Even though boundaries are inevitable, Patrons 2.0 prefer experimenting with the widest range of options. Being given options gives these users the feeling that they are in charge of their usage. Patrons 2.0 relish being in control (Ramos, 2007). It is also a perspective of self-service where the patrons conceptualize, actualize and review their own usage. Basically, Patrons 2.0 are also described as visual learners; have a low threshold for boredom and memorization; need customizable learning experiences; enjoy active or hands-on learning; and are hyper-text, not linear thinkers (Wheeler and Harris, 2006).

The emerging breed of patrons perceives library use as part and parcel of their lives and applies a multiplicity of approaches and technologies to seek and use information. To them, boundaries between social and work information seeking activities are blurred and they apply several different methods of communication to satisfy their information needs. This explains why they are more comfortable with infotainment than conventional communication. They play video games, listen to music and use library information all at the same time. They are adventurous and live on the edge of emerging technologies. Thus, to them, email is dated; Instant Messenger, Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace are the tools to use to seek, use and share information. They also exhibit an expectation/desire to use their own equipment such as phones, laptops, or applications. So, they expect the library to have facilities which will enable them to plug in and use their own appliances easily (Primus, 2009; Saecker, 2010). Libraries which provide more social information resources such as video games have registered an increment in usage, especially among the younger people. But again, the same libraries have experienced reduced usage from older patrons (Kirriemuir, 2007).

Patrons 2.0 appreciate an information experience that is responsive and fuelled by questions; provokes conversation; is built on identity; measures with currency; demands personal investment; and is guided by safely-made mistakes (Warlick, 2010). Significantly, they prefer to remain in constant touch with their colleagues and librarians through myriad communication tools and techniques. They value feedback mechanisms enabling them to provide suggestions and comments about the services and products of the library. So, whether it is rating or reviewing information resources through tagging or responding to user surveys, the emerging breed of library users would like open and seamless communication systems between them (library users), the library and beyond, encompassing alerts, updates, feeds and social networks (Rainie, 2009). Critically, they also want their suggestions or comments acted on and when the suggestions are not implemented, they would like dialogue on the decision (Casey and Savastinuk, 2007). Effective feedback mechanisms build relationships with the users and enhance their ability to contribute to and benefit from the library services. When users understand the library’s plans and activities, they fit better with the library’s mission and do their part in facilitating its fulfilment (Metz, 2002; Singer and Griffith, 2010).

The new breed of users does not see the library as the centre of their information environment. These users rely more on networked information systems such as the Internet and the World Wide Web. This partly explains why most of the library users now turn to the Internet instead of
travelling to the library. However, some library scholars are quick to point out that this apparent overreliance on the Internet as the trusted source of ready information may be misguided. For instance, Zimmerman and Tu (2003:120) explain that the new breed of library users often uses inadequate search engines and obviously get “a morass of disorganized, incomplete and sometimes inaccurate information”. Sadly, they explain, the users seem to be “perfectly happy with the results”. A better approach, however, should balance the usage of the different forms of information sources. The librarians should educate the users on how to identify and use credible Internet information sources. Although the new breed of users may exhibit a know-it-all-attitude, the librarians should impress upon them the fact that not all the ready pieces of information accessible via the World Wide Web and other sources are authoritative, especially on sensitive subjects.

The new breed of patrons is accustomed to the notion that books and coffee go together just like movies and popcorn. They view the library space as useful for collaboration, entertainment and refreshment. They want information about their friends and submit personal updates to their friends, share events that they could go to, and wish to know what their friends are reading, who their friends know, and what movies their friends are watching. Libraries should therefore create spaces with a warm and welcoming ambiance and decor where users love to linger longer. The effective use of such spaces also requires effective programming to schedule activities such as book talks, software demonstrations, discussion groups and performances (stand-up comics or yoga) which create a platform to engage the users (Dilevko and Gottlieb, 2004; Issacson, 2006). The greatest challenge in creating these socializing areas is space constraints in most libraries. Some libraries, especially in the West, have already begun modifying their structures to accommodate this emerging need (Dilevko and Gottlieb, 2004). But as the libraries take on these new roles, they are apparently admitting that they can no longer attract users with their collections alone. Similarly, debate is still ongoing as to whether attracting more people through social programming would translate to improved use of the library collections and services. Some scholars have also pointed out that though coffee and books may go together, they cannot mix together on tables - coffee damages books (Marshall, 1998). Nonetheless, the important issue here is the emerging opinion that library services will soon be established together with other services. Thus, the library will no longer be a stand-alone institution, but a conglomeration of several entities providing integrated services.

Most Patrons 2.0 have embraced what some scholars have described as “mobility”, drawing them deeper into the digital world to the extent that they feel a sense of obligation to stay connected and cannot afford to be off the grid (Ramos, 2007; Rainie, 2009). They are nomadic and expect services where they are when they need them. They own mobile devices which have converged technologies such as video, audio, Geographical Positioning Systems (GPS) and/or wireless Internet connectivity, enabling them to remain connected anytime anywhere. In essence, the library is where the mobile device is. Whether on the train or in the grocery shop or restaurant, this breed of users can seek and use information from a wide array of mobile computing devices (Morgan, 2009; Tarulli, 2010). It is therefore incumbent on the library to deploy services, such as text message (SMS) referencing or mobile search applications, and content which are downloadable on mobile devices such as iPhones, iPads or Blackberries. Specifically, the library services should take into account the applications, interfaces and
connectivity options most of their patrons use. With the soaring uptake of mobile telephony services, libraries can no longer ignore these devices. The potential of mobile devices to extend the reach of the library and enrich its feedback mechanisms cannot be overemphasized. Already, several libraries worldwide are delivering various library services on mobile devices. Even in sub-Saharan Africa, some academic and research libraries such as the University Pretoria in South Africa and International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Kenya and Ethiopia are using social networking applications to deliver references, provide access to downloadable research publications, and disseminate library notifications, among other services on mobile devices.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the library users have and will continue to change. Currently, the library institution is faced by a new breed of users that exhibits unique information seeking behaviour which is inconsistent with the conventional library tools and systems; is generally ICT-savvy; seeks instant gratification and is intolerant to any forms of delay; wants the library services at the point of presence; wants to be in charge of information seeking and use; relies heavily on and collaborates with peers; multi-tasks; loves adventure and discovery; and enjoys infotainment. Table 1 below summarizes these attributes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Patrons 2.0</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Generally young or middle-aged.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tolerance</td>
<td>They exhibit a know-it-all-attitude and low tolerance for delays in getting the services or products they require.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICTs</td>
<td>They glorify ICTs, have much trust in ICT tools, generally more knowledgeable in ICTs, and feel the obligation to remain connected constantly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information seeking</td>
<td>Skimming in nature - they cherish instant gratification, are easily bored. They often multitask and can easily move on to the next activities if the current one is not fully engaging.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Constant links with peers in whom they trust; little relationship with librarians; value feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library space</td>
<td>Rarely come to the physical library because they are nomadic. However, they are attracted to physical libraries with comfortable seats, space for collaboration, socializing and programming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>They frequent libraries that they find fun to use; they are not generally drawn to the library by its collection per se.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>They want to be in charge of their usage; appreciate personalization and prefer using their own equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>They are highly creative and prefer to contribute as much content as...</td>
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they consume.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mentality</th>
<th>Their thought process is in “hypertext”, not linear.</th>
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Table 1: Key attributes of Patrons 2.0

Source: Authors

Conclusion

Whilst scholars agree that the fundamentals of librarianship (collecting, preserving, organizing, providing access to information) have not changed, Allen (2008) suggests that they (scholars) admit that everything else has. Thus, responding to changing user needs may require some adjustments in existing library services, job descriptions and organizational structures (Haricombe and Lusher, 1998), requiring new skill-sets and attitudes. Indeed, some librarians are already urging their colleagues to embrace an attitude of openness, flexibility and willingness to learn and grow in tandem with the changing times while still remaining committed to the timeless tenets of librarianship by facilitating free and open access to information regardless of format, location or method of access (Allen, 2008). Librarians are being called upon to focus more on breaking down barriers to resources, involving single sign on, unifying workflows and liberating metadata for re-use (Pauli, 2008).

It is also being suggested that in the emerging circumstances, librarians should be more inspiring and engaging. This is in recognition of the fact that libraries bring people together to dialogue and learn from each other. Librarians should actively facilitate this engagement (Eager, 2009). Consequently, some scholars have proposed changes to the librarianship training curricula to build new skills in areas such as marketing, public relations, ICTs and training to help librarians engage more with users (Mckay, 2001; Gupta, 2006; Musoke, 2007; Musoke, 2008; Mostert, 2009). These suggestions are based on the understanding that libraries should not just be mere reservoirs of information resources. Conversely, they should get embedded in the day-to-day lifestyles and aspirations of the users as much as possible to remain relevant (Durrani, 2008; Morgan, 2009).

Library scholars have also conducted studies which have confirmed that many new breeds of library users conduct bad information searches using inadequate tools in a disorganized way, but are perfectly happy with the results. The expectations and habits of the users are constantly changing in tandem with the ways they interact with content and services, creating new and original ways of exploiting them (Dussin and Ferro, 2009). Librarians need to help these self-sufficient users by playing the role of educator, mediator, human face and guide to the right information. The librarians must prepare the users adequately to face the wide variety of information resources available to them, especially through the Internet and related technologies (Zimmerman and Tu, 2003). Evidently, library users now need more assistance from librarians than ever before. For instance, they need help to move quickly between electronic and traditional resources and knowledge and to fully utilize machine interfaces and search protocols to navigate the ever expanding body of knowledge, evaluate information quality, and develop research strategies (Giesecke, 1994).
It is also noteworthy that libraries will continue to serve the older breed of users, a proportion of which is actually increasing in some countries. In recognition of the fact that some older people may not be comfortable with some of the emerging trends and preferences of library use, librarians need to be more cautious in implementing changes which may be disruptive to this category of users.

References


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