

Chapter 9

Library 2.0 and Personal Information Management: A Way Forward using Social Networks

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors review current literature on personal information management to analyze how it is understood with the aim of reviewing the way in which individuals try to manage their personal information and whether libraries observe the information behavior of their community members to learn which is the best way to offer their services. At the end of this process, they show that a role for library professionals could be devised in being information management mediators for their community members in the digital world, helping them make sense out of chaos. This role is clearly linked to the development of information literacy programs in libraries.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will try to review current literature on Personal Information Management to analyze how it is understood with the aim of reviewing the way in which individuals try to manage their personal information and whether libraries observe the information behavior of their

community members to learn which is the best way to offer their services. In this endeavour, it is necessary for us to discuss the ways in which people manage their information inside the Web 2.0 and, on the other side, display some examples of libraries using Web 2.0 tools to direct their users to the best possible solutions for them.

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Librarians are perfectly aware that they are facing now a Web 3.0 environment, but at least some of them are also convinced that it is still necessary to reflect on what they are experiencing as professionals, and our community members as individuals, while navigating in the Web and being confronted with multiple interesting pieces of information randomly scattered in the huge stacks of the deep Web. How do they put all these things together? Do they manage to retrieve again an interesting piece of information after they came across it the first time? Are librarians having, as information professionals, a role in this process, or even a responsibility in accelerating and improving the ways information is encountered, retrieved, accessed, stored, used, and disseminated?

At the end of this process, we will try to show that a role for library professionals could be devised in being information management mediators for their community members in the digital world, helping them making sense out of chaos, like skippers in the *mare magnum* of the Web. This role is clearly linked to the development of information literacy programs in libraries. In some sense, this is also connected with the evolution of the concept of library automation, from the application of the electronic catalogue in a single library, then to a library system, then, finally, to the global information environment we are now facing, but maybe not yet really accustomed to.

BACKGROUND

If we analyse the current scientific literature, the concept of “Personal Information Management” is usually referred to in two different meanings: as activity, and as a discipline (Jones, 2007). As an activity, it is used to identify all actions that an individual usually carries out to acquire, create, organize, manage, retrieve, use, and distribute information related to his/her needs and in order to complete his/her tasks, or to meet responsibilities in personal, social, or working contexts. As a

discipline, it investigates the kind of actions that occur during these practical activities, and its achievements are nurtured by frameworks and assumptions from diverse disciplines, such as, for example, Cognitive Science, Information Science, Artificial Intelligence, and Human-Computer Interaction.

Moreover, as a discipline, Personal Information Management is divided in two complementary threads. The first investigates the different kinds of behaviors that usually individuals display when dealing with personal information. On the other side, the second aims at proposing strategies and methods as to allow individuals to reach the nearest level of the ideal situation in managing their personal information, that could be summarized as follows: having accessed to the exact piece of information needed, in the optimal position, in the correct format, in perfect time of need, and as much complete and qualitatively adequate as possible to satisfy all the information needs that may emerge in their various everyday life contexts.

Nonetheless, the development of research in the field of Personal Information Management has been recently restrained by an important hindrance that originates in the same nature of the investigated topic: the fragmentation of personal information (Jones, 2007; Jones & Teevan, 2007). Normally, personal information handled by an individual in his/her daily life is fragmented in different respects. Either it is written in different formats (mainly on paper or in electronic form), or it is scattered in different kinds of documents (as for example texts, pictures, music, or video files). Finally, these multiple formats and kinds of documents has facilitated the rise of several strategies and tools that only partially help in keeping personal information in order, so that, on the contrary, they contribute to the consolidated practice of managing personal information in a fragmented way.

In some sense, this situation has also induced even researchers to investigate on Personal Information Management in a scattered way. In fact,

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