

Chapter 3

The Influence of Social Networking and Library 2.0 as a Gateway for Information Access and Knowledge Sharing in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The chapter tries to highlight the influence of social networking and library 2.0 in providing access to information and knowledge sharing in Africa. It further discusses the panorama at which the information environment is changing from traditional to electronic, where access to information and knowledge stands to benefit all. The chapter, however, exhibits that in most developing worlds today the electronic information environment is gradually spreading and obviously will take time to be fully integrated into the systems, especially in Africa. The chapter provides a highlight on the value, usefulness, access to information, and knowledge sharing, which has become a necessary component for human existence and development. The premise is that librarians' role is to facilitate this effective management and promote access to information and knowledge sharing through the influence of social networking and library 2.0; this in turn will strengthen and empower the African people to be among global players in the knowledge-based economy. The emergence of Web 2.0 principles and technologies that has given rise to social networking and library 2.0 offer libraries and information centers many opportunities for sharing information and knowledge among people regardless of distance or geographical areas. This reaches out beyond the walls of the library and Websites of any library or institutions. These developments make it possible for people to share knowledge and information online, borrow locally, and buy or sell on a global scale as appropriate to their needs and circumstances.

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INTRODUCTION

It is evident that the world has experienced transformations in information and knowledge development since time immemorial. These transformations cut across different civilizations and eras (i.e. from stone ages through the electronic/digital ages and information society of today). Allmand, Balantyne and Ngwira (2001) observed that in this new millennium the information world faces an era of great changes, which influence directly the way scientific information and knowledge are produced, processed by intermediaries, distributed and accessed. They noted that information and communication technology and especially the Internet have made a huge impact. It was therefore stated that information services, traditionally responsible for managing this information, are passing through a process of change. In this present time, information and knowledge are coordinated and transferred through the electronic information environment. This environment is a human centered and latest innovation of the development in information and communication technologies (ICTs). This environment could also be regarded as a creation of mind and a place of imagination. There are a number of factors that constitute this environment which include: computer, Internet, electronic resources, World Wide Web, social networking, and so forth. Electronic environment is one of the leading and rapidly growing information environments. This environment is sometimes called avatar or information resident, where different virtual activities take place.

The electronic environment is said to be a computer based communication channel and information and knowledge outfit that enables new ways of communication, collaboration, and coordination by the Internet in three dimensional environments by Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) (Gajendara, Sun and Ye, 2010). In this type of environment, people interact, share with each other through e-mail, Yahoo Messenger, instant messaging, facebook, online games, Lib 2.0,

blogs, Wikis, AJAX, RSS, Mashups, etc. All of these allow people to access, share, and transfer information and knowledge.

Access to information and knowledge sharing has become a necessary component for human existence and development. Over the years, information and knowledge experts have been trying to develop some framework or methodology upon which to effectively and precisely access and analyze relevant information. The information and knowledge arise in the technical, marketing, social, cultural, political, and legal activities of humankind. This information and knowledge is mostly created and delivered through various media, in both print and non-print, such as television, radio, newspaper, bulletin, pamphlets, electronic, and digital media. In today's information environments, access to and sharing of information and knowledge incorporates the use of computers and other electronic equipments for efficient communication of information among different user groups. These technologies apply scientific information to the end-users needs.

Information and knowledge has been identified as one of the basic resources required for the improvement of humankind. They are also said to be a resource that must be acquired and used in order to make an informed decision. Those who possess appropriate and timely information and apply knowledge appropriately will make a more rational decision than those without. The various information and knowledge users can be categorized as policy makers and planners, researchers, extension staff, educators and students, industrialists, services staff, rural people and farmers, and so forth. It was also observed that each of these sectors mentioned above contribute directly to the improvement and development of society, hence relevant information and knowledge provided to each category of these user populations will contribute positively to the development of any nation. Information and knowledge are potential ingredients for the advancement of any nation's political, economical, social, cultural, technological,

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