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Blogging - a Democratic Movement of Citizen Involvement or a Global Mass Attempt of Communal Self-Absorption?

A qualitative study of motivations for blogging

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Magisteruppsats
Påbyggnadskursen, vårterminen 2007
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Abstract:

Blogging has become a global mass phenomenon with a currently estimated total number of 70 million registered weblogs worldwide. The development of free blog software has tremendously lowered the barriers for mass amateur publishing. This study seeks to investigate the blogging phenomenon. Critiques refer to blogging as a collaborative form of navel gazing with little use to anyone but the self-important author. Others consider blogging an upcoming democratic mass movement of citizen involvement that has the potential to create a more egalitarian form of mass communication. This study comes to the conclusion that the average blogger is motivated to blog by less spectacular and rather mundane social reasons. As a matter of fact the analysis has often suggested the existence of parallels between blogging and offline forms of social interaction. Most of the recent discussion about blogging is focused on the so-called “A-list”. The A-list is a common term used to refer to the most popular weblogs. However the overwhelming majority of blogs are written by the average citizen. From the recently estimated 70 million weblogs worldwide only very few make it on the A-list. It is the private journal blog that represents the essential backbone of the blogosphere. This thesis seeks to illuminate the question of why people maintain weblogs. It is thereby focused on less frequently visited weblogs written by average citizens in journal style. Concerning methodology this thesis employs a qualitative research approach based upon online interviews that were conducted in German speaking countries. Both primary research and secondary research were used in order to illuminate the research subject. The former type of research is embodied by eight qualitative online interviews while the latter type is represented by the technical literature. The results of the interviews were analyzed in the context of the literature research’s findings. The analysis brought to light that bloggers are neither self-important narcissists nor does blogging represent a global movement of democratic self-expression. Rather blogging is motivated by diverse social motives that are rather mundane and unspectacular. For instance, some bloggers used their blogs for emotional relieve while others engaged with blogging to meet new friends or to work on issues of identity. Most of the time community feelings were only described as relevant in cases where the blogger was interacting with his or her “community“.

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Summary

In general one can currently find two major perceptions concerning blogging: at its best blogging represents a global mass movement of democratic self-expression thereby introducing an egalitarian environment for mass communication. At its worst blogging represents a collaborative form of navel gazing with little use to anyone but the self-important author. This study seeks to investigate motivations for blogging. However in this study no evidence could be found to reinforce the assumption that blogging represents an upcoming movement of communal citizen involvement. Neither could there be found evidence that would justify to describe blogging as a narcissistic and self-important form of amateur publishing with little importance to anyone but the author.

Although many bloggers interacted with each other the data did not suggest the existence of a global group identity. Blogging was often described as an individual experience where self-identity was not sacrificed for an overarching group identity. All the bloggers in the sample maintained certain levels of individuality. Most of the time community feelings were only described as relevant in cases where the blogger was interacting with his or her “community“. In addition none of the informants strived to have any wider influence on society. It proved that the informants had very low expectations concerning the impact of their weblogs on society. It came to light that they neither intended to challenge journalism nor did any of the statements allow to assume the existence of any political ambitions. On contrary to popular opinion, in this thesis it is assumed that weblogs represent much more a personal instrument of communication than a new communal and alternative form of mass communication. None of the informants were merely motivated to blog in order to make his or her name on the internet. Although this study has revealed that the bloggers were motivated by their audience, and that blogging is about expressing oneself in the light of the audience, many participants did not seek to reach a mass audience. In fact the majority did not perceive their weblog as a platform to promote their personal opinions that “the world had been waiting for“. In all cases blogging was motivated by more complex reasons. In pursuing the question of what motivates people to maintain their weblogs this study suggests that bloggers – at least the ones in this sample - were motivated by somewhat more mundane, simple, and less spectacular reasons. As a matter of fact, the analysis has often suggested the existence of parallels between blogging and offline forms of social interaction. For instance the majority of the bloggers expressed a preference for readers that they had a social relationship with. New contacts were made on the basis of shared interests while the communication with other bloggers in general was very selective. In terms of privacy, all of the bloggers were concerned with issues of privacy. The relationship to the audience was asymmetrical in that interactivity was only desired to limited degrees. Also the analysis brought to light that blogging played a role in the process of creating identity.

In fact most of the recent discussion about blogging is focused on the so-called “A-list“. The A-list is a common term used to refer to the most popular weblogs. However the overwhelming majority of blogs are less frequently visited weblogs, written by the average citizen in journal style. Nevertheless the private journal blogs represent the essential backbone of the blogosphere. This thesis seeks to illuminate the question of why people maintain weblogs. It is thereby focused on less frequently visited weblogs written by average citizens in journal style. Concerning methodology this thesis employs a qualitative research approach based upon online interviews that were conducted in German-speaking countries. It also follows a dual approach of data gathering where the interviews were among other things conducted against the backdrop of an extensive literature review. The findings were analyzed in the context of the literature research’s findings.

Introduction

Nowadays weblogs are everywhere and give millions of people the space to define themselves - or at least their online selves – as their very own “Speaker`s Corner”. The development of free easy-to-use blog software has tremendously lowered the barriers for mass amateur publishing. Technological progress and the increasingly widespread admittance to the internet have made it possible for many people to share their ideas and thoughts with a global virtual public through blogging. Thereby the blogosphere is characterized by different genres and a huge diversity of content.

Recently blogging has often been described as an upcoming movement of communal citizen involvement with potentially groundbreaking consequences. Blogging has been portrayed as a powerful tool of grass-roots democracy giving everyone a possibility to make his or her voice heard. In the context of journalism, the notions participatory- or citizen-journalism have emerged. Blogging has often been referred to as giving way for more egalitarian forms of mass communication thereby challenging traditional journalism. In recent times bloggers were reporting about world-shaking events from September 11th to the natural disasters in Asia. Also in the sphere of politics weblogs have been attributed relatively much power and influence. In 2004 blogging was taken to a new level in the American political sphere due to the huge success of the official blog of Howard Dean`s presidential campaign.

Considering the diversity of content of weblogs that can be found today it seems astonishing that the same term is used to cover them all. In fact most of the recent discussion about blogging is focused on the so-called “A-list”. The A-list is a common term used to refer to the most popular weblogs. However the overwhelming majority of blogs are less frequently visited weblogs, written by the average citizen in journal style. From the recently estimated 70 million weblogs worldwide only very few make it on the A-list. It is the private journal blog that represents the essential backbone of the blogosphere because it facilitates the networked nature of communication. This thesis seeks to illuminate the question of why people maintain weblogs. It is thereby focused on less frequently visited weblogs written by average citizens in journal style. The main objective is to find out what motivates people to publish their thoughts on the internet which is referred to as the most public medium in the history of mankind.

1. The Field Of Research

This chapter provides a brief description of the research field. Besides describing the current state of the research field this chapter also defines the research purpose. The last part presents an overview on the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Background Information on the Research Object

Blogging as a mass phenomenon is of relatively recent origin with its onset in the late 1990s. Weblogs have hitherto experienced rather little academic attention. Ojala (2005:3) notes that there is no standard definition of weblogs yet since the technology is in transition. Bausch et al. (2002:7) contributes that coming up with a definition that fits all weblogs is difficult and problematic since weblogs` style and format have evolved over time. Stauffer (2002:6) points out that `the rules are not set in stone` regarding a universally valid blog definition. In the technical literature, one is met with great obscurity concerning the field`s terminology. The current literature is characterized by a lack of undisputed notions, coherence, and precision. In the academia one is currently confronted with a vast diversity of different opinions and concepts concerning weblogs. Thereby clear conceptual and operational guidelines for the investigation of blogging are yet to be developed.

1.2 Research Questions at Issue

The main purpose of this thesis is to answer the question of why people maintain a weblog. Based upon data gained from qualitative online interviews the main objective of this thesis is to identify motivations for blogging. The investigation is exclusively focused on private blogs in journal style with little authority since this category represents the majority of blogs. During the course of writing relevant sub questions emerged concerning, for instance, the bloggers` understanding of privacy or audience which will also be addressed.

1.3 The Structure of the Thesis

The first part of the thesis seeks to define important expressions and concepts of the research object. Besides giving a definition of the notion weblog, it will also illustrate blogging from a historic perspective. Furthermore this part provides a summary of preceding research on the subject based upon a comprehensive literature review. The cognitions gained from the technical literature will be used as a theoretical framework for this thesis. The

second part is the methodology part which describes the underlying methodology and certain specifics of online research. The third part provides analytical perspectives on the subject. Based upon qualitative online interviews and the cognitions provided by the technical literature the analytical part seeks to illuminate the question of why people maintain weblogs.

2. Defining Blogging

This chapter seeks to present expression and background information on the research object. Besides providing a definition of weblog it also explains blog-related expressions that are necessary to understand in order to follow the course of research. The last sections of this chapter contain blog statistics and outline the main areas of application.

2.1 What is a Weblog?

Certain scholars promote the idea that the notion blog or weblog is no longer sufficient to work as an umbrella term for all the subcategories one can find nowadays. (see for instance Bruns and Jacobs, 2006; Halavais, 2006; Doctorow et al., 2002) Bruns and Jacobs (2006) require a more sophisticated discussion of blogging which specifies the genres and contexts of use.

“In the future it is likely that we will come to speak primarily not of blogging per se, but of diary blogging, corporate blogging, community blogging, research blogging, and many other specific sub-genres that are variations on the overall blogging term.” (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006:3)

Halavais (2006) contributes that the bloggers’ behaviour differs so much that it is inadequate to use the same term to cover them all. There is a clear need to distinguish the range of different blogging styles used by different groups and disciplines. The recent occurrence of subgenre-specific notions like jblog, (Robinson, 2006) which is an abbreviation for a journalist blog, or kblog, which is short for knowledge blog, seems to affirm the need for more diverse definitions of weblogs. However despite a certain obscurity concerning the field’s current terminology, a clear definition of the research object is necessary for this thesis. The following paragraph seeks to define the notion blog.

A very early and basic approach to define the word weblog is made by Winer (2002). According to Winer weblogs are “/.../ often updated sites that point to articles elsewhere on the web.” Winer’s perception of blogs is inspired by the very first blogs which were merely a collection of links of the latest webpages that could be found on the internet. A somewhat more sophisticated definition is given by Bausch et al. (2002:7): “*At their core, weblogs are pages consisting of several posts or distinct chunks of information per page, usually arranged in reverse chronology from the most recent post at the top of the page to the oldest post at the bottom.*” Bausch et al. approach the term weblog by describing the format. The reverse chronology of posts is one of the most distinctive features of blogs concerning the format. (Stauffer, 2002) This format has been introduced for the simple reason that one can always read the latest entry first. Bausch et al. (2002) notes further that weblogs are often maintained by one individual. Nevertheless certain weblogs are written by small groups of people or even

large communities of many people. Bruns and Jacobs (2006:2) define blogging “/.../ as the reverse-chronological posting of individually authored entries that include the capacity to provide hypertext links and often allow comment-based responses from readers, /.../” Bruns and Jacobs (2006) perception of weblog contribute to the greater picture since they mention the individual aspect and also the medium’s interactivity. Especially the latter feature is often presented as specific to online communication. For instance Stauffer (2002) notes in regard to interactivity that weblogs invite active participation as opposed mere passive consumption of content. Although refraining from giving a universally valid definition of blogging, Halavais (2006:117-118) specifies the four core practices of blogging: firstly, blogs rely on networked audiences that share the practice of reading particular sites, secondly, blogging encourages conversation, for instance, through the commenting function, thirdly, due to easy-to-use blogsoftware, blogging represents a low-intensity activity which does neither require much time or money, lastly, blogs provide a transparent and unedited view of thinking-in-progress. Winer (2001) also identifies four key characteristics of weblogs. According to Winer blogs are pages that are personal, available on the internet, automatically published through software, and part of a community. Halavais’ (2006) and Winer’s (2001) contributions are noteworthy in that they add the community dimension to blogging. Blogging has often been highlighted as a communal experience (see for instance Stone, 2002; 2004; Blood, 2002) with special emphasis on the network character. A further crucially important aspect mentioned by Halavais (2006) and Winer (2001) is the personal dimension which is central to the view on blogging adopted in this thesis. Accordingly Ojala (2005) points out that the terms journal or diary often are used in order to give a definition of blog which thereby reflects the personal nature of the blogging phenomenon. “In 2004, the Merriam-Webster online dictionary declared blog the #1 Word of the Year. Its definition: ‘A website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer.’” (Ojala, 2005:3) Also Quiggin (2006:482) mentions the personal aspect of blogging: “A blog is simply a personal webpage in a journal format, using software that automatically puts new entries (‘posts’) at the top of the page, and shifts old entries to archives after a specified time, or when the number of posts becomes too large for convenient scrolling.” Additionally Stauffer (2002:6) emphasizes the journal aspect of weblogs: “/.../ a blog is a Web page that serves as a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual. Typically updated daily, blogs often reflect the personality of the author.” Stauffer’s contribution is important in that it stresses the up-to-dateness of blogs as well as the fact that weblogs provide personal and subjective information. As has become abundantly clear, the personal aspect of blogging is of tremendous importance in order to describe the blogging phenomenon. (see also for instance Nardi et al., 2004a; Herring et al., 2005; Thomas, 2006; Neuberger, 2007) However this particular aspect will be subject to detailed discussion in further chapters. As for now this thesis follows Paul Pedley’s (2005:95) definition of weblog:

“The Weblog (blog) is a form of online diary or regularly updated journal which can take a number of forms that tend to have a number of characteristics in common, such as: being set up to display blog postings in reverse-chronological order or with their content arranged by subject; being updated regularly with new material; and providing a personal viewpoint. A major attraction of Weblogs is their relative ease of construction/updating and the lack of the need for any special skills in web design or of HTML coding; “

Pedley’s definition matches the underlying perception of weblog of this thesis since he combines the typical format-related features with the personal journal aspect. Nevertheless Pedley’s definition needs to be slightly adjusted through adding that the posts, although

primarily textual, nowadays often contain photos, video streams, or other multimedia content. (Schiano et al., 2004)

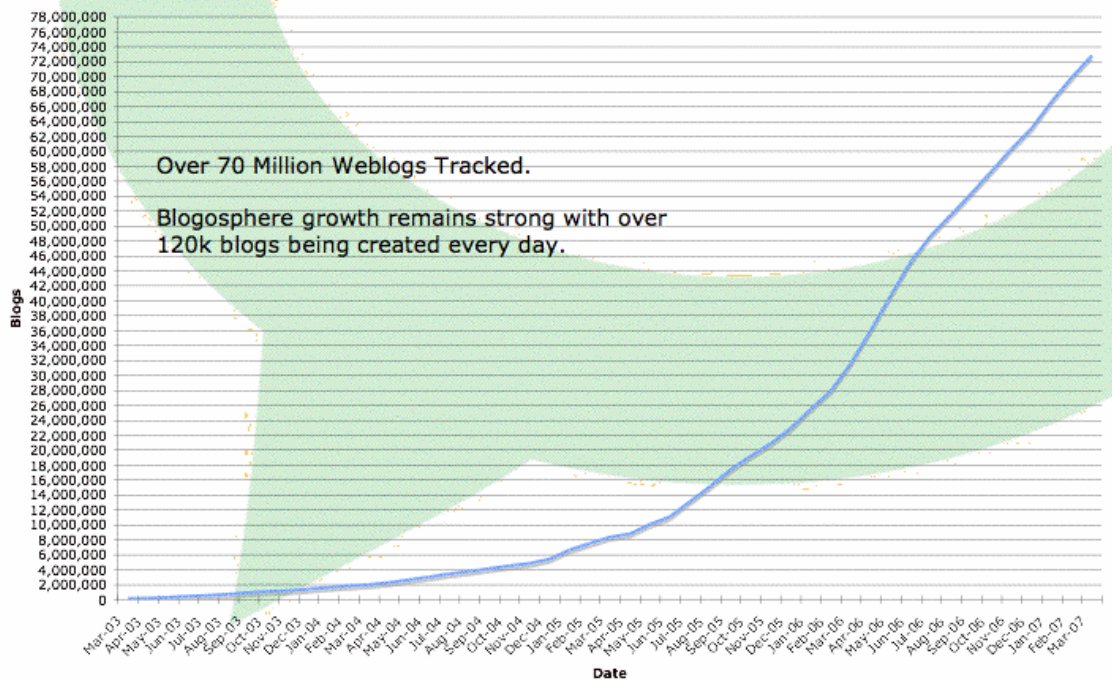
2.2 Blog related Expressions

Besides the notion (web)blog there are a couple of related expressions that one has to define in the investigation of weblogs. The term blog is also frequently used as a verb in order to describe the process of writing a blog. This is often referred to as blogging. The written message is often called post while posting is also used similar to blogging. The author of a blog is commonly referred to as blogger while blogosphere is used in order to describe the total universe of weblogs. (Westner, 2004)

2.3 Blogging Statistics

If one wants to give the global total amount of weblogs one has to rely on rough estimations. According to Neuberger et al. (2007) the reports of Dave Sifry called “The State of the Blogosphere” represent one of the most reliable sources. Since 2004 Dave Sifry evaluates the total number of weblogs based upon the trackings of the blog search engine *Technorati*. *Technorati* is currently the biggest weblog search engine in the world closely followed by the blog search service provided by Google. On Dave Sifry’s page the latest numbers concerning the blogosphere date back to April 2007. In April 2007 Dave Sifry estimates the global amount of blogs to 70 million. 120,000 new weblogs are being created every day which corresponds to 1,4 blogs being created every second of every day. The following table illustrates Sifry’s estimation. (Sifry, 2007)

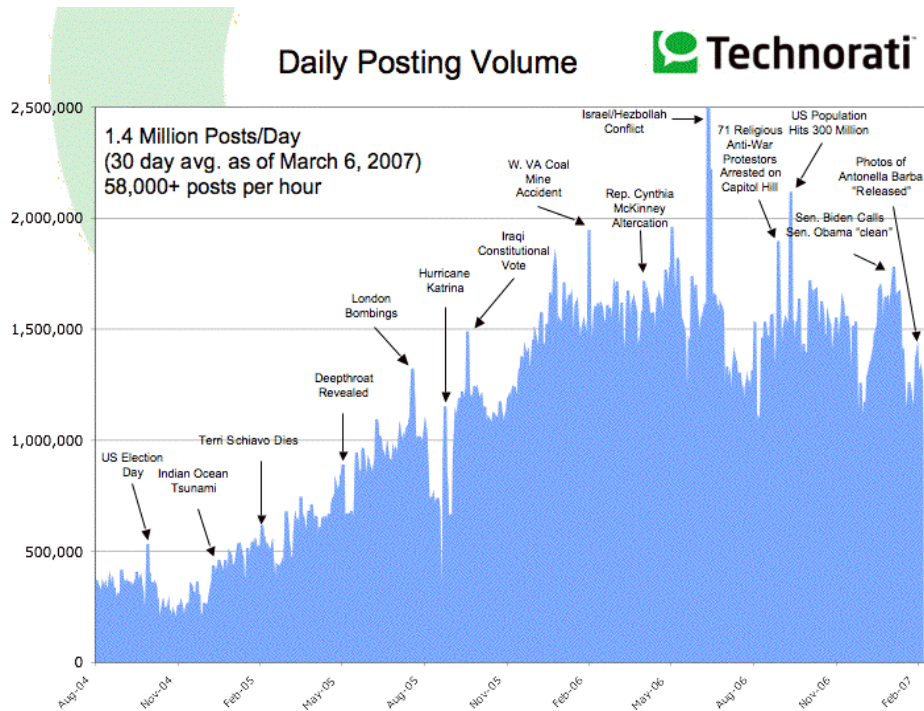
Weblogs Cumulative: March 2003 - March 2007



(Sifry, 2007)

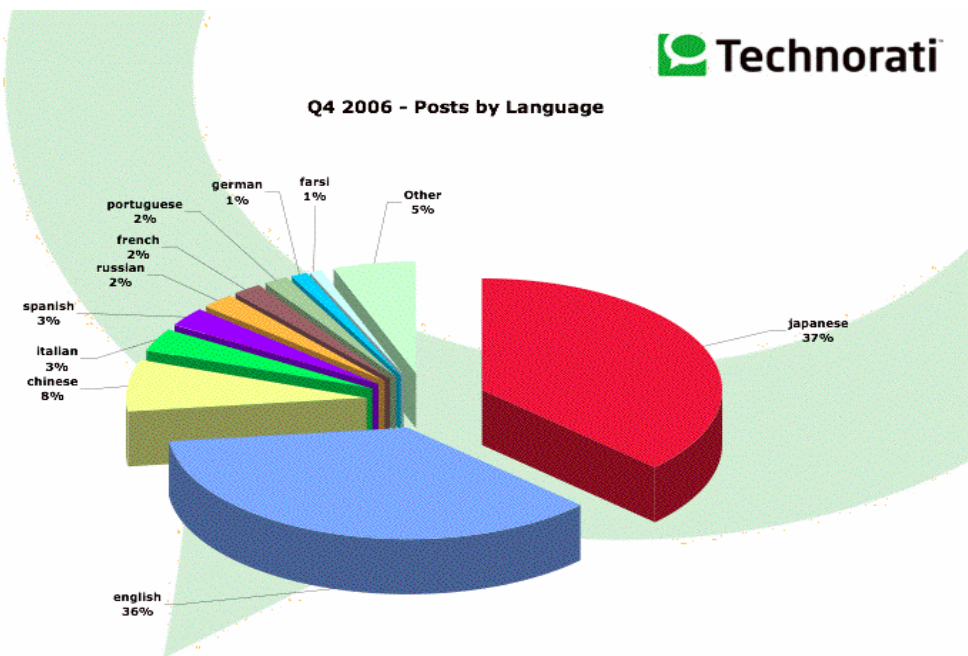
Thereby so-called “sblogs” – spam blogs that are merely maintained, for instance, to manipulate search engine results and that one can find in huge numbers – are excluded from the total number. Since the last report in 2006, Sifry notes a slight decrease in the doubling of the size of the blogosphere. From the second quarter in 2004 to the second quarter in 2006 the total number of weblogs doubled every five to seven months. (Neuberger et al., 2007:97) According to Sifry the decrease in the doubling of the size of the blogosphere is due to the law of the large number. According to Sifry this means that it takes more growth to double, for instance, from 35 million to 70 million blogs than it takes to double from 5 million blogs to 10 million blogs. (Sifry, 2007)

Concerning how many blogs are actively maintained, Sifry (2007) does not provide any numbers for the year 2007. In particular regard to this aspect the latest number dates back to October 2006 where 55 percent of all blogs were actively maintained. Actively maintained means that they were at least updated once during the preceding three months. Also Sifry describes a slowing in growth in the rate of posts that are made daily. In April 2007 the daily rate of postings was at 1,5 million. However Sifry notes that there are spikes in blog posting during extraordinary events and times of significant world crisis as can be seen in the next table. (Sifry, 2007)



(Sifry, 2007)

In terms of language Sifry (2007) notes that Japanese is currently on the top position with 37 percent of all posts being written in Japanese. English is with 36 percent the second most common language followed by Chinese and Italian. The latter is noteworthy since it overtook Spanish and ranks place four in April 2007. (Sifry, 2007)



(Sifry, 2007)

2.4 The main Areas of Application

Outlining the main areas of application of weblogs is a difficult endeavor due to the vast diversity of content and different contexts of use. Today's blogosphere is primarily characterized by diversity. As Doctorow et al. (2002:2) point out:

“Creating a taxonomy of the blogiverse is a fruitless task. There's no good, central directory of blogs that puts each one in its own pigeonhole, because even the most topical blogger will stray from the subject from time to time to celebrate some personal victory or warn his readers off a terrible movie.”

The following paragraph seeks to explain the main areas of weblog application according to the technical literature. One area that has often been mentioned in the blog discussion is journalism. In the context of journalism one often speaks about citizen or participatory journalism. News and filter blogs have long been discussed and the relationship between journalism and blogging is usually portrayed as either complementary (Neuberger et al., 2007) or competitive (Blood, 2002; Klein and Burstein, 2005; Stone, 2004). Blogs have been discussed as a new form of journalism which emphasize personalization and audience participation in content creation. (Wall, 2005; Robinson, 2006) Additionally in the field of politics weblogs have lately experienced much attention. Especially in the USA weblogs are considered having a certain democratizing function in that they give voice to everyone. Since groundbreaking events, such as, the blog supported election campaign of presidential candidate Howard Dean or the popular weblogs on the war in Iraq, weblogs are considered as having political influence. (Klein and Burstein, 2005; Coenen, 2005; Abhold & Heltsche, 2006) In the meantime also in Europe the political influence of weblogs has been recognized. Furthermore weblogs are often to be found in the field of education and knowledge. For instance Halavais (2006) describes blogging as an increasingly important tool in the academia. In her dissertation Ekstrand (2006) describes the common use of weblogs in libraries. Knallgrau (2003) contributes that blogs can be utilized as an easy-to-use publishing platform for the support of teaching. In addition business is an important field of weblog application. Here, blogs are often mentioned in the context of knowledge management. (Foley, 2002; Bausch et al., 2002) Also weblogs increasingly become important in marketing, business communication, and as a platform for online advertising.

Notwithstanding certain inconsistencies with regard to the range of blogging, one is met with great accordance in the technical literature concerning the most popular area of application: the blog as a personal journal. (see for instance Blood, 2002; Bruns & Jacobs, 2006; Stone, 2002; Nardi et al., 2004a; Gumbrecht et al., 2004 ; Herring et al., 2005; Stauffer, 2002; Thomas, 2006) The underlying perception of a blog in journal-style stems from Blood (2002). According to her definition the content of a journal blog reflects the internal state of the blogger's mind and is about his or her personality and activities. The content of a filter blog, on the other hand, is external and about for instance world events or online happenings. Nardi et al. (2004a) focus their study on journal-style blogs written by ordinary people for a small audience. The authors point out that this type of weblog is the most common form in the USA. In their study they describe the three most popular types of blogs: personal journals, filters, and knowledge blogs. However, personal journals account for 70 percent of all blogs and represent the great majority. A further study conducted by Gumbrecht, Shiano, Schwartz, and Nardi (2004) comes to similar conclusions. The authors point out the main areas that weblogs are devoted to: politics and punditry and technical developments. Gumbrecht et al.

(2004:1) put special emphasis on the fact that the vast majority of all weblogs are written by ordinary people for a rather limited audience. Bruns and Jacobs (2006) emphasize the personal aspect of blogging. Stauffer (2002:10) stresses the journaling aspect of blogging and contributes that blogs can be intimate, personal, and that a weblog often is about the author. In accordance with Nardi et al. (2004a), Herring et al. (2004) and Scheidt (n.d.) point out that diary weblogs are the most numerous ones on the internet. As Herring et al. (2004:6) note:

“Although filter blogs in which authors link to and comment on the contents of other web sites are assumed by researchers, journalists and members of the blogging community to be the prototypical blog type, the blogs in our sample are overwhelmingly of the personal journal type (70.4%), in which authors report on their lives and inner thoughts and feelings /---/ This variation notwithstanding, on the whole, the blogs in this sample share a common purpose: to express the author’s subjective, often intimate perspective on matters of interest to him or her. In the case of most blogs, the matters of interest concern the authors and their daily lives.”

This high percentage of the journal-style blog is all the more notable because specific popular journal blog providers such as *LiveJournal.com* or *Diaryland.com* were excluded from the sample in the study of Herring et al. (2004). The above illustrated findings are of crucial importance to this thesis since they support and justify the focus on personal journal-style weblogs.

3. A Historic Overview

The exact moment when blogging began is debatable since the format was not consciously invented. (Bausch et al., 2002) Rather, blogging underwent several phases of evolution until it finally reached today’s popularity. One thing that is clearly determined, however, is the invention of the program “WorldWideWeb” by Tim Berners-Lee in the summer of 1991. In the technical literature one will find currents who consider Berners-Lee the inventor of the weblog. (see for instance Stone 2002; Stone 2004; Bausch et al., 2002; Winer, 2002) Initially Tim Berners-Lee worked on a method to allow people to work together through combining their knowledge in a ‘web’. He realized his idea through the application of hypertext documents which he started to link to each other. Tim continued to work on the design of the web and also coordinated feedback from the users. These practices of linking, coordinating feedback, and writing are often considered essential to blogging which then has existed since the beginning of the internet. Several scholars describe Berners-Lee as the founding father of the weblog because they view the concept of blogging as rooted in the intensions of the web itself. (Stone, 2002: 4) These currents see the first weblog in the very first web page.

“He called his project “WorldWideWeb”. It is vital that we take note of the fact that Berners-Lee envisioned a system that was equal parts readable and writable – the latter part of his genius was essentially forgotten until blogging came along.” (Stone, 2004:12)

3.1 The Early Weblogs

During the early 1990s one could only find very few sites of the type that are today identified as weblogs. These original weblogs or webpages were merely maintained by the real internet enthusiasts since it required substantial HTML-coding skills. According to Rebecca Blood (2002) blogging as we know it today did not start before 1999. (see also Stone 2002, 2004; Bausch et al., 2002) Biz Stone (2004) mentions two blog pioneers: Dave Winer and Justin Hall. Both are also mentioned by Bausch et al. (2002). These two early blogs were mostly a collection of links. Bausch et al. point out that Justin Hall was among the first to introduce the journal character. Already in 1994 one could find short stories about his life and travels on his page. Dave Winer, CEO of UserLand Software, started his site “Scripting News” in 1997. On his frequently updated site Winer kept track of interesting Web sites and devoted the site to short entries and links. In the same year Jorn Barger started a site on which he collected links. Later he started writing a diary to complement the links and eventually coined the term weblog. (Bausch et al., 2002) In regard to who created the notion weblog one is met with contradictory information in the technical literature. While Bausch et al. (2002) refers to Jorn Barger, Blood (2002), Doctorow et al. (2002), and Stone (2002) mention Peter Merholz. According to the latter three authors Peter Merholz introduced the term “wee-blog” which was eventually shortened to “blog”. Subsequently the author of a blog was referred to as “blogger” (Blood, 2002; Doctorow et al., 2002). In 1999 online editor Jesse James Garrett published a list with all known weblogs on a site called CamWorld. As other people writing weblogs began to send him their URLs, Garrett established an extensive list of weblogs. In the beginning of 1999 one could find 23 known weblogs on this list. The existence of a central bloglist facilitated the emergence of a community. The community consisted of people who would read all the entries on CamWorld which was possible due to the manageable amount of weblogs. (Blood, 2002; Stone, 2002)

3.2 Weblogs and the Filtering Function

As mentioned in the preceding paragraph the early weblogs were link driven sites. Typically each site contained a mix of commentary, links, and personal thoughts and essays. The editors provided links to current news articles as well as to little known areas of the internet. In general the links were always connected to personal commentary. As the number of weblogs grew, authors with expertise in a certain field would increasingly evaluate the accuracy of linked articles. Often they would add information or present a different point of view from the one promoted by the linked article. These comments were often characterized by a certain irreverence or even by a sarcastic tone. In a way these weblogs fulfilled a certain consulting function in that they often guided the reader through the overwhelming amount of information on the web. As Blood (2002:8) contributes:

“These weblogs provide a valuable filtering function for their readers. The Web has been, in effect, pre-surfed for them. Out of the myriad webpages slung through cyberspace, weblog editors pick out the most mind-boggling, the most stupid, the most compelling.”

Also Bausch et al. (2002) mentions the filter function of the early weblogs and acknowledges that the creation of a site for the exclusive purpose of directing visitors to other sites was a new and ground breaking concept. In accordance with Bausch et al. (2002) and Blood (2002), Stone (2002) stresses the filtering function of the early weblogs and describes them as “media-filters”. Furthermore Stone (2002: 7) refers to the early bloggers as guides to the internet who often had a specific area of expertise.

3.3 Easy-to-Use Tools and the Breakthrough of Blogging

Towards the very end of the 1990s the phenomenon blogging as we know it today started. Due to the development of blog software tools that made it possible to maintain a weblog without having HTML skills, weblogs became available to the broad masses. “*In 1999, blogging really happened.*” (Stone, 2004: 38) Concerning the starting point of mass blogging the technical literature is characterized by great consensus. As Bausch et al. (2002: 10) puts it: “*A big bang of sorts in 1999, when tools were publicly released to automate and enable anyone to easily create a weblog.*” (see also Blood, 2002; Stauffer, 2002; Stone, 2002) As mentioned previously, before 1999 blogging required HTML skills which represented a significant technical barrier to many users. This was about to change in July of 1999 when *Pitas*, the first blogging tool, was released. *Pitas* were the first to offer people to sign up for an account and create a weblog which is at no charge hosted at the company’s website. The weblogs offered by *Pitas* feature several automated parts such as automatic creation of links and automatic archiving where older posts automatically get moved to an archive. A *Pitas* weblog also provides a very simple posting page where the user has the possibility to add a title, the URL, and descriptions for each post. In August 1999 *Pyra Labs* released the first version of *Blogger* which offered similar features as the *Pitas* tool. However, contrary to *Pitas*, *Blogger* initially only worked with already existing webpages. *Blogger* facilitated the programming, maintaining, and archiving of weblog information by providing a service on a central server which was accessible from anywhere.

“With the tools available through *Pitas* and *Blogger*, an explosion in the number of people maintaining weblogs took place. The number of weblog authors grew from several dozen to hundreds and then thousands within months of these tools’ release.” (Bausch et al., 2002: 11)

Besides *Pitas* and *Blogger* one can find similar early tools of blogging such as *Manila* which was launched by *UserLand Software*, *LiveJournal*, *Velocinews*, and *Groksoup*. All these new blogging tools had in common that they provided automatic weblog posting and offered free of charge hosting. In the year 2000 the second generation of blogging tools such as *Greymatter* was released. On contrary to its predecessors, *Greymatter* featured a good number of new functions and was also installed on an own server. The latter feature was very effective in order to avoid traffic issues. (Bausch et al., 2002; Stone, 2002, 2004, Blood, 2002)

3.4 From the Filtering to the Journal Function

With the increasingly widespread access to weblogs the very nature of blogging began to change. While the early blogs provided significant filter function the new wave of weblogs

increasingly incorporated the journal aspect. Blood (2002) noticed a shift of focus from initially on the “Web-at-large” to a “short-form journal” which she ascribes to the broad availability of easy-to-use blog tools:

“It is this free-form interface combined with absolute ease of use which has, in my opinion, done more to impel the shift from the filter-style weblog to journal-style blog than any other factor. And there has been a shift. Searching for a filter-style weblog by clicking through the thousands of weblogs listed at weblogs.com, the Eatonweb Portal, or Blogger Directory can be a Sisyphean task.” (Blood, 2002: 11)

These new blogs were often updated several times a day and represented a record of the blogger’s personal thoughts. Often bloggers would write about experiences of their everyday lives and would start to link and communicate with other journal blogs. Also Stone (2002) describes a change in the basic characteristics of weblogs due the occurrence free of charge blog tools. Stone describes a growing number of diarists who strengthened the community. According to Blood (2002) especially newcomers in the blogging scene were increasingly attracted to the journal-style blog.

3.5 The two Historic Strands of Blogging

In his dissertation Westner (2004) describes two strands in regard to the historic evolution of blogging. The one strand is represented by Rebecca Blood (2000) and illustrates the history of blogs in the context of the development of web publishing tools. The second strand is represented by Winer (2002) whose article pursues a content based definition of blogs.

As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, Blood (2002) describes the onset of the blog phenomenon as tightly related to the development of blog tools such as *Blogger.com* and *Pitas.com*. The development of easy-to-use tools initiated two main aspects. On the one hand, the total number of blogs increased tremendously due to the blog services which made online publishing easy. On the other hand, Blood describes that blogs in journal style started to outweigh link driven blogs. In the opinion of Blood, the success of blogs is due to the development of publishing tools since it extended the user group.

Winer (2002) on the other hand introduces a content based perception of the history of blogs. According to Winer Tim Berners-Lee first web site was also the first blog. On his site Berners-Lee collected links to other pages and posted them chronologically. In 1993 the NCSA (National Center for Supercomputing Applications) adopted Berners-Lee’s concept and launched a “What’s new” page where they collected new sites available on the internet. After 1993 Netscape started a “What’s new” page and more and more people slowly but steady started their blogs based on the same concept. On contrary to Blood (2000), Winer’s (2002) perception is influenced by the content and structure of blogs. (Westner, 2004)

4. Limited Interactivity of Interactive Online Media

Interactivity is often considered the key feature of the new online media. Moreover interactivity is often described as a central feature of blogging since it facilitates the communal side of blogging. Also the commenting function allows for immediate feedback and critique and represents one of blogging's characteristic interactive features. (see for instance Stone, 2002; Blood, 2002; Hodgkinson, 2006; Thomson, 2006) Initially the term interactivity was introduced by WWW inventor Tim Berners-Lee in his book *Weaving the Web*. (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006) Since interactivity plays an important role in this thesis it appears necessary to define the notion interactivity. In her study Chung (2007:45) distinguishes between two forms of interactivity: human interactivity and medium interactivity respectively user-to-user or user-to-medium interactivity. Human interactivity is closer to real interpersonal face-to-face communication and is performed by two or more users through channels such as message boards or email links. Medium interactivity, on the other side is interactive communication between the user and technology, for instance, through using hyperlinks. Concerning blogging both forms of interactivity are of crucial importance. Human interactivity can be seen in facets of blogging such as the commenting function or the email contact feature. Furthermore preceding research on blogging contributed that blog communication often gets extended through other channels such as instant messaging or mobile phones. Medium interactivity, on the other hand is often referred to as being significant through the practice of linking blogs to each other.

In the context of communication research the use of interactive features on the internet is presented as potentially paradigm shifting. The internet is often described as challenging mass media's traditional one-sided flow of communication through interactive features that allow for bi- or even multi-directional communication. (Chung, 2007) However while enthusiasts often envision the rise of a new egalitarian and dialogic mass communication, technology is always embedded in sociocultural ideologies. The later most likely has the potential to inhibit real interactivity.

4.1 Blogs and Interactivity

Blogs are among other things interactive because they offer the possibility for the reader to leave a comment. Therefore Nardi et al. (2004a) put special emphasis on the investigation of interactivity in their study. However the authors found out that the participating bloggers - although in general very aware of their audience - desired interactivity only to a very limited extend. Most bloggers tried to keep a certain distance to their audience and appreciated interactivity as long it was controlled and in small amounts. *"They seemed to be holding their readers at arm's length."* (Nardi et al., 2004a: 228) Also Gumbrecht et al. (2004: 46) came to a similar result: *"Blogs can be characterized as having limited interactivity."* Additionally the quantitative content analysis conducted by Herring et al. (2005) suggests that the extent to which weblogs are interactive often is exaggerated.

4.2 The Blogger's Relationship to the Audience

Nardi et al. (2004a) describe the blogger's relationship to their audience as asymmetrical in that bloggers wanted to have readers but they did not necessarily feel the desire to interact with them greatly. One participant, for instance, acknowledged the civility of weblogs and the fact that one does not have to communicate directly with someone else. According to this informant, the civility would seem to stem from the fact that weblogs are a less interactive medium compared to, for example, instant message systems where rage and cursing were more common. Many bloggers appreciated that the audience has only limited comment facilities on most weblogs. It was also appreciated by many that one had to be less responsive than in emails, face to face communication, or on the phone. Accordingly Gumbrecht et al. (2004: 46) contribute: "*Bloggers value that they can post and share their thoughts without the intensive feedback associated with other forms of communication.*" Nardi et al. (2004a) continue with pointing out that comments from the audience are very subservient to the post on many weblogs. This is due to the fact that they are typically not immediately visible but must be opened up. In illuminating to the audience's responsiveness the authors refer to the quantitative study on blog comments by Herring et al. (2005) which showed that the average number of comments on individual blogs was zero. This information gets confirmed by Gumbrecht et al. (2004) who refer to the same study in their investigation. In the study of Nardi et al. (2004a) most informants stated that they would most commonly receive feedback regarding their weblog through other channels, for instance, through face to face communication or chatting. Feedback through other channels than the weblog was often experienced as less intense and emotional. This was mainly due to the fact that it was received delayed which diminished the immediacy of interaction. In explaining this phenomenon Nardi et al. follow Clark and Brennan who contributed that emotion gets tempered through a lack of relevance to the current situation. Moreover some bloggers even made use of the limited interactivity through saying things that they otherwise would not dare to say. In many cases bloggers hid behind their weblogs in order to avoid direct face to face communication. Nardi et al. (2004a: 228) speak of '*self-attributed cowardice*' which was perceivable in the case of some participants. Many bloggers preferred to write about certain topics they felt uncomfortable about instead of talking to their personal environment. Others pointed out that they liked the fact that one does not have to deal with interruptions in the flow of communication. Writing a post was often referred to as a monologue or a measure to express oneself freely without disturbance.

"For our bloggers, the blog was almost a kind of preserve, a refuge from the intense interaction of other forms of communication. /---/ In our sample, bloggers wanted to express themselves without the "threat" of immediate feedback. When feedback came, it was often in other media, after time had passed./---/ Bloggers engaged their audience but found ways to control interaction so that it was infrequent and less emotional, more reflective, than in other interactive media or face to face communication." (Nardi et al., 2004a: 228)

4.3 Limited Interactivity in other Online Media

The study of Neuberger et al. (2007) attempts to illuminate the relationship between blogs and journalism and also seeks to summarize the core findings of international blog research which has been conducted till this day. Neuberger et al. reveal similar cognitions concerning audience and interactivity. In regard to audience and interactivity the authors

contribute that contrary to popular opinion bloggers often do not write for a wider audience. *“It has further become clear that only a few blogger seek to reach a mass audience.”*¹ (Neuberger et al., 2007:110) With reference to a blog study which was conducted by the authors in German speaking countries, Neuberger et al. point out that only one third of their informants sought to reach all internet users. A similar study which was conducted in the USA came to the conclusion that more than 50 percent of all bloggers wrote their blog for no one other than themselves. While one third of the informants wrote their blog for others to read, half of the American informants stated that their blog was merely read by their own circle of acquaintances. Additionally the interest to participate in discussions in the blogosphere about relevant topics was about 25 percent. Neuberger et al. also contribute that a considerable number of blogger were uninterested in their audience. For instance, only 30 percent of the bloggers evaluated their logfiles on a regular basis in order to keep track of their audience. (Neuberger et al., 2007)

Another study conducted by Chung (2007) on online news sites also indicates that interactivity is only desired to a limited extend in new forms of online communication. In the opinion of Chung interactive features are often missing when it comes to online news sites although interactivity has often been praised as introducing an egalitarian environment for mass communication. Chung seeks to provide explanations why interpersonal interactive features - which could enable audience participation - often are left out by many online journalists. According to Chung one of the most difficult problems for many journalists is the loss of their traditional gate keeping function. For instance, nowadays one will find numerous blogs on the internet that comment news sites or publish their own news. Other blogs work as filters in that they provide an overview, for example, on the most important news. Certainly journalism currently has all the possibilities to allow more citizens to participate in information seeking through interactive collaborative projects on the internet. Thus changing the current ‘top-down’ journalistic model in a ‘bottom-up’ process of information distribution. *“By participating in chat forums and blogs or by creating user-generated content, members of the news audience can play a more active role in consuming news.”* (Chung, 2007:44) However Chung reveals that most media organization do not make extensive use of the internet’s interactive features. For example only very few sites provide direct email links from the story to the author. In general human interactivity features are far outnumbered by medium interactivity features such as the download of audio or video files. Many sites were very cautious to use human interactivity features and many news producers defined online interactivity as medium interactivity. Chung concludes with pointing out that there is resistance in adopting interactive features that allow for interpersonal communication in the online news business. Although most of the producers agreed that interactivity was an important aspect of online news, the underlying perception of interactivity varied greatly. In the opinion of Chung journalism undergoes an uncomfortable transition since the features of the internet challenge the traditional paradigms of centralized news production. (Chung, 2007)

The cognition revealed by Neuberger et al. (2007) and Chung (2007) in combination with Nardi et al. (2004a), Gumbrecht et al. (2004) and Herring et al. (2005) indicate that interaction in the blogosphere might be overestimated, at least in regard to human interactivity. With reference to political online campaigns in the USA, McQuail also points out that the internet’s interactivity is often not made use of extensively. *“ /.../ campaign*

¹ Original in German: „Deutlich wurde ferner, dass nur wenige Blogger danach streben, ein Massenpublikum zu erreichen.“

managers did not really want interaction which is risky, problematic and burdensome.” (McQuail, 2005:152) Interactivity certainly is a feature of blogging that appears to be worth examining closer.

5. Traditional Media Use Theory

As mentioned above, the internet has added a new dimension to mass communication. Online interactive features have contested the traditional paradigm within communication research since interactivity allows for multi-directional communication. Therefore it appears questionable if traditional media use theory can be utilized in the investigation of blogging since interactivity plays an important role in the blogosphere. The following paragraph seeks to give a brief overview on traditional media use theory.

5.1 A Brief Overview on Media Use Theory

According to McQuail (2005:420) one has to distinguish between three schools of thought concerning media use research: firstly, the structural tradition which is primarily based upon the media system and the social system, secondly, the behavioral or functionalist tradition which takes into account individual needs, motives and circumstances, and thirdly, the socio-cultural approach which emphasizes the context in which the audience is located and the way the media is valued and given meaning.

The very early investigations in the field of media science, which started in the 1940s, were focused on the effects that the media had on the individual. Scholars were particularly interested in evaluating the impact of the media on the electorate and poll. At that time scholars viewed the mass media as very strong and described a passive and easy impressionable audience. The media was perceived as being in a superior position and having great influence on the consumer. For instance the stimulus-response model or the cannonball theory represent two early approaches in the communication science that attributed much power to the mass media.

According to the structuralist approach media use is mainly influenced by constant elements of social structure and media structure. The notion “social structure” describes certain social facts such as education, income, or gender which are determining general social behavior. Media structure on the other side refers to a constant array of channels, choices, and content which are available in a particular place and time. Thereby the media system maintains a stable self-regulating balance between supply and demand driven by the audience. The media system mirrors the facts of society and responds to the demands of the audience. Subsequently media consumption becomes a matter of social structure and media structure. (McQuail, 2005:423)

In the 1970s the uses and gratifications approach was developed by Katz. Initially the uses and gratifications approach was very inspired by functionalism (Jansson, 2002). It followed functionalism in that functionalist considered the media as serving society’s needs. Additionally uses and gratifications research also embraced certain features of the behaviorist tradition such as the focus on an individual’s motives. The most ground breaking aspect of the uses and gratifications approach was a shift of perspectives towards the audience. It was

assumed that media use correlates with perceived satisfactions, needs, wishes or motives of the consumer. The uses and gratifications approach is based upon the assumption that the audience is strong and actively uses the media in order to fulfill certain needs. As McQuail (2005:403) puts it “/.../ *media use was now central, and the audience was viewed as a more or less active and motivated set of media users/ consumers, who were ‘in charge’ of their media experience rather than passive ‘victims’.*” Media effects were considered consequences of profit considerations of the audience. According to the uses and gratifications approach media consumption happens in order to satisfy particular needs. The notion “needs” encompasses, for instance, emotional relief, enhancement of knowledge, or diversion. Thereby, uses and gratifications rather represents a whole research tradition than one single approach. Today uses and gratifications research is a broad tradition which is characterized by diversity. Reimer (1994:33) describes uses and gratifications as an approach that expands in all possible directions. The early uses and gratifications research focused on the creation of habits in regard to media consumption. It has become apparent that media consumption is tightly related to routines and follows rather stable patterns. Jansson (2002) points out that societal-, medial-, and individual-factors contribute concerning the creation of media routines. An individual’s skills, interests, and motivation play an important role regarding media routines. In the meantime it has become obvious that media habits are well established and that significant alterations require a long period of time. (see for instance Bergström, 2005)

In the 1980s the British cultural studies entered the scientific field of media use. On contrary to uses and gratifications research, the culture theoretical perspective focused on an individual’s interpretation of media messages and the context of media use. Here the human being and the way human beings interpret their environment was in the focal point. As McQuail (2005:404) states in regard to the culture theoretical perspective: “*It emphasizes media use as a reflection of a particular social-cultural context and as a process of giving meaning to cultural products and experiences in everyday life.*” This approach is about an individual perspective where the consumer is seen as conferring meaning to the media.

To date scientific studies have revealed a vast diversity of motivations for media use. It has become apparent that these motivations can be very versatile and based upon individual conditions such as the situation of living, social position, media skills, or interest. The individual motivations include aspects like surveillance, entertainment, or simply to while away the time. Thereby an individual’s motivation for media use is often linked to particular social factors, for instance, gender, age, or education. Additionally media use can also be motivated in order to make one’s name. In certain cases individuals consume media because they want to leave a certain impression on others. Other individuals feel a common obligation to be informed. Media use can also confer status in the eye of a beholder. For instance, the consumption of certain types of media can be related to a certain desirable image. As has become clear the motivations for the use of media includes a wide range of aspects. (Bergström, 2005)

5.2 Blogging and Media Use Theory

In the beginning of this chapter the question was raised whether traditional media use theory is an appropriate school of thought in the investigation of blogging. The above mentioned approaches all have in common that they focus on the consumption of media. When it comes to blogging, however, one is confronted with mass communication where each single individual plays a far more active role. In the case of blogging the masses create the

communication which represents a fundamentally different perspective than the traditional theory of media use. Through the simple one-to-many publication on the internet the audience is shifted from the “receiving” position to the “sending” position.

Also McQuail (2005:446-447) describes fundamental changes due to the onset of online media such as blogs.

“New technologies are bringing into question the clear distinction between sender and receiver which is crucial to the original idea of media audience, as well as introducing new forms of use of media. /.../ Interactive and consultative uses of media take away the spectatorship that was so characteristic of the original mass audience.”

Blood (2002) points out that blogging represents a public and participatory endeavor. Therefore Blood demands a new definition of the notion media which is capable of capturing these public and participatory elements of blogging. Also Blood considers it necessary to distinguish between audience and public.

“In Douglas Rushkoff’s *Media Virus*, Greg Ruggiero of the Immediast Underground is quoted saying, “Media is a corporate possession... You cannot participate in the media.” Bringing that into the foreground is the first step. The second step is to define the difference between public and audience. An audience is passive; a public is participatory. We need a definition of media that is public in its orientation.” (Blood, 2002:9)

Weblogs have also often been referred to as a democratizing medium which gives everybody a voice. (see for instance Blood, 2000; Klein & Burstein, 2005; Bruns & Jacobs, 2006; McQuail, 2005) As Klein and Burstein (2005:9) put it: “*Blogging represents one important wave of innovation that is contributing to restoring the lost voice of the ordinary citizen in our culture.*” According to the authors notions like citizen journalist, citizen expert, and informed amateurs increasingly gain importance due to the blogging phenomenon. For instance in the context of journalism, one often speaks of citizen, grassroots, or participatory journalism in order to emphasize the active involvement of civilians in publishing to a wide audience. Nowadays blogs are considered an extension to the traditional news media and an alternative source to get first hand information. (Bruns, 2006) Also blogging has been described as a measure to escape the oppressive ‘top-down’ politics which can be found in many modern societies and which is created through a collaboration of politics and a few leading mass media channels. (McQuail, 2005) In the opinion of certain scholars blogging represents “/.../ *re-engaging in the lost art of public conversation.*” (Klein & Burstein, 2005:9)

In accordance with the above mentioned scholars, Bruns and Jacobs (2006) point out that blogging offers possibilities to the wide public to become publishers, commentators, and discussants. In order to capture this phenomenon Bruns and Jacobs introduce the term *produser* which is a hybrid of producer and user. On the one hand, bloggers are potential users in the sense of information recipients. On the other hand, bloggers are producers of content. Thereby the blogosphere represents an environment for the distributed, collaborative *produsage* of information and knowledge. (Bruns and Jacobs, 2006:6)

These preceding paragraphs clearly suggest a profound change in the nature of mass communication. The audience which was traditionally considered the consumer nowadays has all possibilities to become the producer of information. Blogs are certainly at the forefront of

this development in that the audience creates the media message. This shift of mode of action of mass communication makes it not sustainable to range this thesis in the tradition of media use theory. However, a universally valid research tradition for new media practices such as blogging is yet to be developed. As stated in the beginning, the field of blogging is rather unexplored and characterized by a lack of theories and concepts. Accordingly McQuail (2005:452) notes: “ *This book is about mass communication, and we stop at the frontier where new and related phenomena begin, especially those based on the use of the computer and other new media.* ” Certainly, studying relatively new phenomena such as blogging requires a certain degree of pioneering spirit. The cognitions and contributions of the preceding chapters will be utilized as a theoretic frame of reference for this thesis. The analysis of the empirical data will be made against the backdrop of the above illustrated findings concerning motivations for blogging.

6. Literature Review on Motivations for Blogging

Motivations for blogging is still sparsely covered in the technical literature. However, two articles by Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) seek to tackle the question what motivates people to maintain a weblog. Additionally one can find passages in other publications (see for instance Blood, 2002; Doctorow, 2002; Stauffer, 2002; Bausch et al., 2002; Thomas, 2006; Hodkinson, 2006) that are devoted to this particular matter. Nevertheless, these passages merely scratch the surface of the issue and do not represent a comprehensive investigation. The following chapters seek to summarize the hitherto gathered cognitions on motivations for blogging.

6.1 Blogging in Journal-Style

Nardi et al. (2004a) seek to illuminate the topic from the blogger’s perspective. Their ethnographic study is focused on less frequently visited journal-style weblogs, that are written by individuals or small groups. With their ethnographic study Nadir et al. tried to elaborate what motivates people to publish their most personal thoughts on the internet. The formulation of their below quoted research question really captures the phenomenon of blogging and represents to a great extend the underlying spirit of this thesis:

“Why would so many people post their diaries – perhaps the most intimate form of personal musing – on the most public communication medium in human history, the internet. Diaries have long been written and stored in secret; the classic diary is a volume whose privacy is secured by lock and key.” (Nardi et al., 2004a: 222)

In terms of methodology Nardi et al. (2004a) draw on ethnographic interviews and content analysis of posts. In investigating motivations for writing weblogs, the study also takes into account the social interactivity and the relations that the bloggers maintained with their audience. In regard to the audience, Nardi et al. distinguish between the known audience which stems from the blogger’s personal surroundings and the wider and public ‘blogosphere’ of unknown readers. In terms of blogging software, the informants used a wide range of systems, such as Xanga, Blogger, Movable Type, or Blurry. Only few bloggers wrote their weblogs in HTML. In terms of privacy Nardi et al. point out that blogging software usually allows three steps of privacy. If an author prefers the most private version

one can protect the weblogs with a personal password. Blogs that are listed by the user's service provider and which are easily found by search engines provide the least level of privacy. The third moderate level of privacy is provided by unlisted blogs. Unlisted blogs are not listed by the service provider which means that one has to know the URL in order to access the blog.

Nevertheless unlisted weblogs can become public through linkage to other blogs.

6.2 Blogging for an Audience

During the course of their study Nardi et al. (2004a) recognized the need to put special emphasis on blogs as social activity. Their study revealed a dual relationship between the weblog and the audience in that blogs create the audience but the audience also creates the weblog (Nardi et al, 2004a: 224). The authors came to the conclusion that weblogs have to be considered a social activity and a form of social communication: “/.../ *blogger and audience are intimately related through the writing and reading of blogs.*” (ibid.) The social aspect of blogging gets additionally confirmed by the fact that a lot of bloggers initially started blogging in response to a social request. Twenty percent of the informants had started their weblogs because their friends had asked them to start writing.

According to Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) the audience is of crucial importance. Moreover the audience is a further important factor that contributes to the social nature of blogging. A good number of informants emphasized the importance of the experience to discover that one's posts are being read by others. Often the audience plays a crucially important role. As can be seen, for instance, in cases where informants reported that they got tired of blogging but were reluctant to quit and continued writing in order to not disappoint their audience. In other cases bloggers changed the content in response to the audience's feedback or carefully calibrated the content. A lot of bloggers sought to avoid controversy and tried to keep their blogs “clean”. In Accordance with Nardi et al, Gumbrecht et al. (2004: 43) contributes: “*Many bloggers have personal codes of ethics dictating what goes into their blogs such as never criticized friends or express political opinions that are openly inflammatory*” Also, in both studies, many bloggers were cautious to not hurt anybody's feelings and adjusted their posts accordingly. One informant of Gumbrecht et al.'s (2004) sample reported that he had closed down his weblog after having hurt the feelings of a good friend. Bloggers consider their audience and the audience's feedback in the process of writing their weblog: “*Readers create blogs as much as writers.*” (Nardi et al, 2004a: 225) Thereby it is important to emphasize that bloggers do not generally seek to avoid controversy but blogging is about expressing yourself in the light of the audience. (Gumbrecht et al., 2004: 43)

According to Nardi et al. (2004a) the bloggers' extreme awareness of their audience is a central feature of the blogging experience. The social nature of blogging can be seen in the fact that blogging often results in other forms of communication. In their study it was rather common that online-discussions got extended and pursued through other types of media such as instant messaging or private email. In the opinion of the authors the social side of blogging is the most important feature that differs a weblog from a traditional diary: “*Blogs, then, are unlike private diaries, being completely social in nature.*” (Nardi et al., 2004a: 225) Subsequently, based upon this cognition, Nardi et al. suggest that weblogs should not be considered online diaries or journals.

6.3 Blogging Motivated by Diverse Social Motives

In the investigation of motivations for blogging Nardi et al. (2004a) continue with activity theory. Activity theory entails the analysis of objects since they are considered the central driving force for human conduct. In activity theory an object embodies a motive which is directed to satisfy a need or desire. Nardi et al. outline two spheres of investigation: on the one hand, they examined objects that connected the informants to their known social environment. On the other hand, they considered objects that connected the informants to a larger public audience. Thereby the authors were guided by the following assumption: *“Blogs are a manifestation of diverse social motives, in which the inscriptions in the blog communicate specific social purposes to others.”* (Nardi et al., 2004a: 225) Concerning the first sphere Nardi et al. (ibid.) mention five objects that motivated their informants' blogging. Firstly, bloggers were motivated to update others on activities and whereabouts. Secondly, some informants maintained their weblogs in order to express opinions to influence others. Thirdly, seeking others opinions and feedback was given as motivation. Fourthly, blogging was described as 'thinking by writing'. Lastly, some individuals wrote their weblogs as a measure of releasing emotional tension. However, it is important to point out that these factors are not mutually exclusive nor are weblogs restricted to these factors. Rather these factors were distinctive in this particular sample. The study conducted by Gumbrecht et al. (2004) shows similarities with the one conducted by Nardi et al. (2004a). In accordance with Nardi et al., Gumbrecht et al. (2004: 43) mention five major motivations to become involved with blogging: documenting one's life, providing commentary and opinions, expressing deeply felt emotions, articulating ideas through writing, and forming and maintaining community forums. In regard to the first four aspects one will find great similarities between the two studies. However, the last aspect, forming and maintaining community forums is not mentioned in Nardi et al.'s (2004a) study. Conversely, Gumbrecht et al. (2004) do not describe blogging as a measure to release emotional tension. Also, the study by Gumbrecht et al. does not differentiate between two spheres of audience with different scope. However, since the distinction between two audiences appears to be meaningful, I find it productive to draw on Nadir et al.'s (2004a) contributions and structure the following paragraphs accordingly.

6.4 Blogging in the Personal Sphere

In regard to the first point of motivation Nardi et al.'s study (2004a) shows that weblogs were often used as a personal record of events for the authors as well as for others. The medium weblog even allows to maintain social relations with remote people. As can be seen in the fact that blogs frequently got used as travelogues in order to inform the audience about the blogger's 'whereabouts'. Many informants posted pictures from trips and travelling. In this respect blogging is an effective way to keep in touch with others and represents a measure *“/.../ to insert the blogger into a social space of friends and family-“* (Nardi et al., 2004a:226). In accordance with Nardi et al., Gumbrecht et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of blogging as a measure to record personal events as well as to keep in touch with the personal social environment. On contrary to Nardi et al. (2004a), Gumbrecht et al. (2004) introduce the term 'documenting one's life' in order to refer to one of the main motivations for blogging. Their study mentions, for instance, a husband who documented the course of disease of his wife on his weblog. In another case a student from Iceland wrote her blog for her family and friends back home. *“Keeping family and friends abreast of life events is a key use of blogging.”* (Gumbrecht et al., 2004: 43) In regard to this communicative feature

of blogging, Gumbrecht et al. tackle the question of why bloggers preferred blogging over other forms of online media, such as, personal email or traditional web pages. Concerning communication via email, some informants point out that blogging involved less overhead, for instance, addressing, “rants”, and speculation. Other informants acknowledged the fact that when it comes to blogging one did not have to be responsive unless one wished to. Blogs were furthermore described as being not intrusive and one could read them voluntarily as opposed to personal emails. With reference to traditional web pages, many informants considered them more static, formal, and less authentic than weblogs. Traditional web pages were usually not linked to the idea of getting ‘fresh news’ from friends or colleagues on a regular basis.

The study of Nardi et al. (2004a) revealed that many bloggers used their weblog in order to express opinion. Some informants, for instance, wrote political opinion pieces while others commented on the latest science related online publications. While the content varied greatly the bloggers had in common that they used their blog to clearly express opinions and advice and particular actions they wished their audience to take. Also Gumbrecht et al. (2004) point out that many bloggers in their sample used their blog in order to express opinions. However, in Gumbrecht et al.’s study the informants were cautious to emphasize the importance of their messages. Besides being referred to as a new form of democratic self-expression, blogging is also often commonly characterized as publishing chat with little importance to anyone besides the blogger. Many bloggers were aware of this rather negative characterization and were keen to emphasize that they only wrote about topics that were relevant. In terms of seeking others opinion and feedback many bloggers admitted that the audience’s opinion was important to them. This becomes very obvious in cases of weblogs with artistic content. For instance, the authors refer to one case where the informant wrote poems and published them on his weblog. The audience then played an important role in judging the poems through their feedback which impacted on the process of writing the poems. (Nardi et al., 2004a)

In regard to the fourth motivation ‘thinking by writing’ Nardi et al. (2004a) point out that a good number of informants used their weblogs to work through the process of writing. Some of the informants had a professional background in which writing was important. In these cases the informants often equaled thinking and writing. The presence of the audience then forced them to think and write and introduced the “/.../ *social into the individual’s thought process.*” (Nardi et al., 2004a: 227) In cases where blogging is linked to releasing emotional tension Nardi et al. could not claim with certainty that weblogs really afforded this particular aspect. Rather, their informants sometimes referred to blogging in a way that indicated emotional relieve. For instance, some blogger pointed out that they used their blogs to work out issues they felt passionate about. Others described the writing motivated by an urge ‘to get it out there’. Nevertheless even in situations where bloggers posted in order to release emotional tension they were well aware of the presence of an audience. One could say that bloggers release emotional tension together with the audience.

Gumbrecht et al. (2004) describe the use of weblogs as catharsis since many informants considered blogging an outlet for thoughts and feelings. In accordance with Nardi et al. (2004a), Gumbrecht et al. (2004) contribute that the posts were overtly emotional in certain cases. Some informants described blogging as working out personal emotions. In other cases the weblog was started because of ‘undercurrents of subtle but deeply felt emotions’. (Gumbrecht et al., 2004:44) For instance, one informant had started his blog as a response to the onset of the war in Iraq since he felt that attending anti-war demonstrations was not sufficient. Another blog, called ‘Shout’ written by an attorney, criticized the misapplication

of capital punishment. Similar to Nardi et al. (2004a), Gumbrecht et al. (2004) came to the result that many bloggers used their blogs to write about issues they felt passionate or obsessive about. Often weblogs were utilized as a 'relief valve' or as a "...*place to get closure out of writing.*" (Gumbrecht et al., 2004: 44)

Besides using the weblog to work through personal issues, Gumbrecht et al. (2004) also came to the conclusion that many bloggers considered blogging as 'thinking by writing'. Some informants considered their blog as muse and an opportunity to test their ideas through writing them down for their readers. In accordance with Nardi et al. (2004a) these informants often had a professional background where writing was important such as scholars or journalists. For these informants who "think by writing" weblogs fulfilled two main functions: they practiced their writing skills in tune with an audience and they used the weblog as a archive for potentially reusable content. (Gumbrecht et al., 2004)

As mentioned before, on contrast to Nardi et al. (2004a), Gumbrecht et al. (2004) put special emphasis on weblogs as a community forum. "*Some of our informants expressed their views to one another in community settings.*" (Gumbrecht et al., 2004: 45) For instance, some weblogs in the sample were devoted to a community of poets, others were devoted to a educational community while others supported a "collective" of people who discussed politics. (ibid.) Additionally the authors mention workplace blogs that support certain workgroups. In the sample was one teacher who had established an online learning community through weblogs. The students agreed that blogging created a sense of community which was hard to establish otherwise. In the case of the poetry community the authors noticed the generation of a certain form of peer pressure which "motivated" the members to post on a regular basis.

6.5 Blogging for the Global Online Community

After having examined the bloggers' personal social network, Nardi et al. (2004a) continue their investigation by focusing on the wider unknown audience. In regard to this particular aspect, the authors were interested in answering the question of why bloggers would publish their posts on the internet and therewith exposing their thoughts to an estimated 900 million people. The latter number represents the estimated global internet connectivity in the year 2004. Concerning this public aspect of blogging, Nardi et al.'s results differed to a great extent. Some bloggers were indifferent about the extensive audience of the WWW and pointed out that the majority of the people would not be interested in their weblogs. Consequently they considered these readers as irrelevant. Other bloggers, on contrary, really desired to reach an audience beyond their personal social network and recurrently checked their sitemeters in order evaluate who was reading the blog. In Nardi et al.'s sample there was no case of unwanted attention from unknown readers.

In general, the participants were rather uninterested in issues of privacy. Only one informant had a password-protected blog featuring photos of his daughter which was exclusively for his family and friends. Although even in public blogs one often has the possibility to set certain posts to private this has been done very seldomly in Nardi et al.'s (2004a) study. Most bloggers were characterized by a willingness to reveal very private information on the internet. Moreover, many blogs revealed the authors real identity and provided contact information. Herring et al.'s (2004) study came to a similar conclusion. Only very few informants had made bad experiences with the publication of private issues. Also, many bloggers expressed the idea that society would develop rules to assure

appropriate behaviour in the future in regard to public matters on the internet. As can be seen some bloggers chose to ignore the wider blogosphere while others yearned to reach a wider audience. *“As with other aspects of blogging, relationships to the larger blogosphere varied depending on the blogger’s object-oriented activity of blogging.”* (Nardi et al., 2004a: 229)

Nardi et al. (2004a) concluded by contributing that blogging can serve many different social purposes. In the opinion of the authors there is no limit to these purposes. However, in their particular sample the motivations assembled around object-oriented activities. The distinction between two spheres of audience with different scopes is a very useful concept in investigating motivations for blogging. One of the most important findings of Nardi et al.’s study is the cognition that weblogs are different from diaries. This is mainly due to their social and public nature. Gumbrecht et al. (2004) also stress the versatility of the medium weblog. According to them blogging is motivated by a variety of motives such as release of emotional tension or support for group collaboration. It is important to emphasize that both studies indicate that interactivity is a rather limited feature of blogging.

6.6 Blogging for Varied Reasons

As pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, the studies conducted by Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) represent the only comprehensive investigations that merely focus on motivations for blogging. Nevertheless one can find single passages in the technical literature that briefly address the subject. Although far from being comprehensive, these passages often are precious in that they represent inspiring hints and suggestions to follow up.

Bausch et al. (2002) refers to gossip in order to explain why people blog. In the opinion of the authors blogging often parallels oral conversation since it is informal, immediate, and undergoes limited editing. With reference to Keith Devlin’s study of the use of spoken language, Bausch et al. contribute that two thirds of all conversations are taken up with gossip. Since most blog content fits Devlin’s definition of gossip in that it often is about social matters, Bausch et al. (2002:34) describe blogging as “gossip broadcast to a wider audience”. Also Stauffer (2002) mentions gossip and contributes that blogging represents gossip brought to a new medium. *“The word gossip in this sense is good – gossip is the connector of people, a shared humanity.”* (Bausch et al., 2002:34) According to Bausch et al. blogging connects individuals in times were people increasingly grow more isolated from each other. In that sense blogging represents a simple human connection which brings people back in contact and helps them to realize that they are not alone.

Improving ones writing skills is a motivation for blogging in the opinion of Bausch et al. (2002). Good writing skills require practice and when it comes to blogging the editor really has to refine his or her analytical abilities. In the blogosphere poorly written posts or badly reasoned opinions without supporting facts potentially leads to criticism by other bloggers. Therefore bloggers usually seek to maintain high levels of quality and improve their writing skills with continued practice. *“Whether a blogger starts out with this as a stated goal or merely realizes it after six months of daily posting, this self-improvement can be very satisfying.”* (Bausch et al., 2002:35)

Maintaining a weblog is also a way of sharing observations and stories with other human beings. Sharing stories with each other is a fundamental need of humanity and is often experienced as emotionally relieving. Many blogs are focused on the author’s area of

expertise. Sharing their expertise and knowledge can be very empowering for the authors and in many cases blogging is a measure to create and enhance an individual's reputation. "People often blog to assert their individuality, to sound their "barbaric yawp" over the World Wide Web." (Bausch et al., 2002: 36) In this way a blog can become the personal "Speaker's Corner" through which people define their personalities and create their "own brand".

In the opinion of Blood (2002) writing a blog can be a fruitful method to increase the awareness of the inner self. For instance a blogger can discover his or her interests through linking stories and can also learn to value more highly his or her own point of view. When it comes to journal-style blogs, the fragments of the everyday life pieced together over months can represent an intimate view of a particular individual. As Blood (2002:13) puts it: "*The blogger, by virtue of simply writing down whatever is on his mind, will be confronted with his own thoughts and opinions. /---/ Being met with friendly voices, he may gain more confidence in his view of the world;*" Blood (2002) illuminates blogging from a psychological perspective and describes it as a journey through the inner self which eventually leads to more self awareness and confidence.

Stauffer (2002) sees blogging as a form of democratization. According to him blogging is attractive since it provides a forum for everyone to publish one's ideas with reasonably low barriers to entry. Also blogging enables people to play "editor". Stauffer's perception of the notion "playing editor" represents to a great degree what is elsewhere in the literature referred to as the filter function of weblogs.

"An entire class of weblog is out there expressly for the purpose of enabling bloggers to surf the Web, find things that interest—or irritate or nauseate or agitate or tickle—them, create a link, surround it with commentary, and then publish it for the masses." (Stauffer, 2002: 10)

As a further aspect that makes blogging attractive Stauffer (2002) mentions the weblog's ability to encourage community. In the opinion of the author this is an outstanding feature of blogging and the level of achieved community is far beyond the scope of traditional media such as newspapers or magazines. Although a weblog is a great tool to create community it is also intimate, personal, and about the author. In regard to this particular aspect Stauffer mentions a therapeutic function of blogging since it represents an opportunity to express oneself in an effort to find comfort and acceptance.

Paul Hodkinson's (2006) study on blogging among Goths in the UK indicates that weblogs play an important role in subcultures. In the UK goth scene, a subculture which is characterized by a particular "dark" style of music and fashion, weblogs play a tremendous role in reinforcing cohesion and shared identity among the group members. The author noticed that from the year 2000 the goth scene increasingly moved their online communication to personal journal-style blogs. Weblogs enhanced subcultural participation through facilitating the development of friendships between Goths and also represented a very effective measure for the transfer of subcultural information. Additionally Hodkinson noticed that blogs often were used in order to maintain regular contact with people the informants already had a face-to-face relationship with. Weblogs facilitated interaction among a relatively stable set of existing friends rather than among an all inclusive online community of anonymous strangers. In some cases weblogs were used to develop a new relationship with someone who had briefly been encountered face-to-face. Furthermore, in many cases relationships that were maintained through the weblog extended to other forms of

interpersonal communication such as email, instant messaging, or mobile phone. Hodkinson's bottom line is that blogging reinforced and facilitated the participant's attachment to their subculture.

Angela Thomas (2006) contributes that blogging can play an important role in the construction of identity. Especially in the fan fiction community there are many editors that blog as fictional characters. Famous television shows such as *'Buffy the Vampire Slayer'*, *'Charmed'*, or *'Providence'* have associated weblogs where authors are writing their blog in the role as the characters of the shows in journal-style. Additionally Thomas found weblogs that were devoted to certain historical figures. For instance the blog "Bloggus Caesari" is written to illustrate the life of Julius Caesar in journal-style. Fan fiction blogging is mostly an adolescent practice and contributes to the exploring and constructing of the self-identity through getting inside a character's head. Thus authoring a version of themselves since the fictional narrative works as a distancing mechanism which allows adolescents to explore feelings and experiences that are either problematic or unexplored in real life.

" /.../ adolescent writers of fictional blogs in this study used the central character of their blogs to explore aspects of their own identities: their adolescent excitement and angst, difficult everyday experiences, the very real pains of growing up, and possible versions of their future selves." (Thomas, 2006: 205)

Thereby it is common practice for the author to insert certain aspects of the real self into the character. This procedure is commonly referred to as "fusing identities", "hybrid identities", or creating a "Mary Sue" character. Maintaining a weblog in the fictional role allows for introspective reflection on ways in which the fictional character handles issues and insecurities similar to those the authors are confronted with in their real lives. For example many informants clearly described on the blog how the character had to deal with adolescent issues and peer pressure. In these cases the fusion of identities becomes clear in that the anxieties and frustrations the character is confronted with actually refers to the real self. (Thomas, 2006)

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the findings of previously conducted research on motivations for blogging. It has examined the principal literatures that will provide the primary theoretical reference points for the investigation of motivations for blogging. Two studies conducted by Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) are in the main focus. Nardi et al (2004a) describe blogging as a social activity and a form of social communication which is based upon a strong sense of community. They put special emphasis on the audience because they came to the conclusion that blogging is about expressing yourself in the light of the audience. Their study reveals that many bloggers are highly aware of their audience and consider the audience in regard to various aspects. Nonetheless many bloggers have an asymmetrical relationship with their audience in that direct feedback is only desired to a limited extent. According to the authors the social side of blogging distinguishes weblogs from traditional paper diaries. In their investigation Nardi et al. differentiate between two spheres of audience with different scope. One sphere of blogging refers to the relationship of the blogger to his or her known social environment. The second sphere encompasses a wider public audience. Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) outline five major motivations to maintain a weblog: blogging to document one's life and update others, blogging in order to express

opinion, some bloggers were seeking other peoples` opinion and feedback, `thinking by writing` was a further motivation to blog, and lastly blogging was used as a measure of releasing emotional tension. In regard to the wider global sphere of audience the results of the studies varied greatly. However most bloggers were characterized by a willingness to reveal private information on the internet. The last part of chapter seeks to give further motivations for blogging that one can find in the technical literature. For instance Bausch et al. (2004) considers blogging a form of gossip whereas Stauffer (2002) emphasizes the weblog`s ability to encourage community.

7. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology of this thesis. It describes the underlying research approach and the research method. Besides illustrating qualitative online interviews and associated specifics of online research, this chapter also describes the selection of the sample. However, Sveningsson et al. (2003) notes that clear conceptual and operational guidelines for online research are yet to be developed.

7.1 Research Approach: Justifying a Qualitative Perspective

This thesis employs a qualitative research approach based upon online interviews. Additionally the research question will be addressed by an extensive literature research combined with the gained empirical data. In general qualitative research is characterized by flexibility and openness. (Winter, 2000) In justifying the qualitative research approach this thesis follows the contributions of Westner (2004), Ekstrand (2006), and Wallstén (2005). In his investigation of functional requirements for weblogs Westner (2004) describes the qualitative approach as the most suitable one for research on blogging. In accordance with Ekstrand (2006) and Wallsten (2005) Westner (2004) motivates his preference of the qualitative approach through emphasizing the recent and unexplored nature of online communication. In the opinion of Westner (2004:22) qualitative research designs are applicable in cases where the variables and theory base are unknown. He continues his line of argumentation with the aid of Creswell (1994) and outlines the characteristic features of typical qualitative research problems accordingly:

“[...] (a) the concept is “immature” due to a conspicuous lack of theory and previous research; [...] (c) a need exists to explore and describe the phenomena and to develop theory; or (d) the nature of the phenomenon may not be suited to quantitative measures.” (Creswell, 1994 as cited in Westner, 2004:22)

The above mentioned characteristics certainly match the nature of the blogging phenomenon because blogging represents a rather unexplored field. A qualitative approach entails that the human being is the focal point and facilitates the investigation of the meaning that the individual confer to media. Qualitative research is focused on how individuals construct meaning through experience. The research object of this thesis requires deep insights into human cognition and is therefore suitable for a qualitative approach.

According to Winter (2000) qualitative research brings about a good deal of advantages. Firstly, it allows for a flexible application of the method which means that the method adjusts

according to the research object and not vice versa. The openness and flexibility of the qualitative procedure facilitates the discovery and exploration of new hitherto unknown aspects. It is highly likely that one obtains deep insights concerning the subjective view of the interviewee which is desired in the investigation of motivations for blogging. In qualitative research the emphasis is determined by the interviewee which subsequently results in information that is relevant to the interviewee.

Qualitative research is often explorative. (Winter, 2000) This facet of qualitative research is perceivable in this study since it is about discovering and exploring new things in a new field of research. According to Ekstrand (2006) an explorative approach entails that the new categories, themes, and aspects derive from the gathered data during the course of research.

7.2 Research Method

Concerning the process of data collection both primary research and secondary research were used in order illuminate the research object. The former type of research is embodied by eight qualitative online interviews while the latter type is represented by the technical literature. This mix of different data collection procedures is very inspired by Westner's (2004) contributions:

“The mix of different data collection procedures /.../ has the advantage that results of the interviews can be analysed in context of the literature research's findings. That helps to minimize potential biases or influences of misleading information that might result from the limited number of interviews.” (Westner, 2004:23)

According to Sveningsson et al. (2003) interviews are an effective measure to gain information about an individual's view of the world. Interviews are capable to capture the interviewee's thoughts, feelings, knowledge, ideas, opinions, memories, and experiences. Since interviews facilitate an inside perspective they certainly represent an appropriate method for this research object.

7.2.1 Some Broad Perspectives on the Interview

Nowadays interviews get conducted in all types of environments such as face-to-face, via telephone, or even through the internet. Sveningsson et al. (2003:82-86) categorize interviews based upon the following attributes: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. A structured interview is characterized by a pre-defined set of questions that do not vary among different interviewees. Here the informant is confronted with either open or closed answering options. In the case of the latter category the informant has to choose among given answer options. In the case of the former the interviewee usually has to formulate his or her own answer which adds an individual dimension. Semi-structured interviews on contrary are based upon an “interviewguide”. The interviewguide is a roughly outlined frame of reference concerning the topic. On contrary to the structured interview, the questions are not pre-defined and the conversation evolves relatively freely within the frame determined by the interviewguide. The unstructured interview technique tries to follow the natural flow of communication. Thereby it is desired that different topics come up naturally. Everything that is communicated is considered important since it allows to draw conclusion regarding the

context. However unstructured interviews often need to be conducted more than once in order to produce usable results. In general one has to take into account that an interview represents an asymmetrical conversation since the interviewer usually influences the conversation in regard to various dimensions. This has to be acknowledged by the researcher and he or she should act accordingly during the course of research. (Sveningsson et al., 2003)

7.2.2 The Design of the Utilized Interview Questionnaire

The interviews were structured and contained 32 questions that were asked of all candidates.² Although the written nature of online interviews somewhat determines the structured nature, it still made it easier to evaluate and compare the results in the analysis. The participants were instructed to write their answers directly in the word document and send it back to the author via email. Sveningsson et al. (2003) note that the response rate is higher when the questions are directly asked in the email without an attachment. However the relatively high number of questions made it necessary to attach a separate document. In the accompanying email the interviewees were asked to answer the questions as detailed as possible. Besides a few demographic questions the questionnaire merely contained open questions. Thereby the questions were asked in such a way as to motivate the respondent to think and reflect as well as to bring the respondent's opinions and feelings to light. Nonetheless conducting qualitative research on the internet requires that one has to grapple with a number of online-specific features as can be seen from the next paragraphs.

7.3 Specifics of qualitative Online Interviews

In outlining specifics of qualitative online interviews I have extensively drawn on the work of Sveningsson et al. (2003). Conducting qualitative research based upon online interviews differs from research conducted offline in regard to various aspects. First and foremost one has to take into account that the range of participants is clearly limited in that one can only reach people who have access to the internet. However, this issue is somewhat irrelevant to this thesis since the object of study – blogging – is inseparably tied to the internet. Participation in the blogosphere requires access to the internet which entails that people without access to the internet are irrelevant to this study. The absence of the process of transcription is another important specific that Sveningsson et al. note in regard to online interviews. Contrary to offline interviews which are often based upon recorded face-to-face conversations the researcher receives the answers already in written form. Generally Sveningsson et al. describe three key factors which are essential to online communication and which have an influence on the interview situation: a shortened distance between time and space, disembodiment, and linguistic aspect. In regard to the first factor the internet has the potential to overcome time and space since online communication is not limited to physical presence in a specific geographic place. Utilizing the internet widens the range of participants since one is enabled to reach people that live in remote places or people that are otherwise difficult to reach. According to online communication can be difficult because it is disembodied which means that one cannot refer to all sense organs like in an offline conversation. In an online interview situation the absence of body language can make it

² The utilized interview questionnaire is attached as Appendix A

difficult to interpret the interviewee's message. In general online communication involves high risks for misunderstandings because one can not refer, for instance, to facial expressions or the tone of the voice which are important in understanding a message. Linguistic aspects represent the third group of specifics that Sveningsson et al. describe as distinctive of online interviews. One major problem of online interviews is the fact that it is very difficult to give direct feedback. One of the main consequences is that one often does not know the general conditions of the online conversation. (Sveningsson et al., 2003)

7.4 The Selection of the Sample

The sample of this thesis consists of eight participants that were deliberately selected through the blog search engine *Technorati*. *Technorati* is a global search engine that is currently competing with *Google Blog Search* for the market leading position. As of december 2006 *Google Blog Search* reportedly outpaced *Technorati*. (Kennedy, 2006) Despite the fact that *Google* overtook *Technorati's* market shares the latter proved to be a better tool for the purpose of this thesis. This is mainly due to the fact that *Technorati* offers more elaborate search functions which were crucially important in selecting the participants. While *Google's Blog Search* is a tool that primarily tracks weblogs based upon the content or the author *Technorati's* version also allows to search blogs by genre. *Technorati's* search engine made it possible to specifically single out journal-style and diary blogs which would have been impossible with *Google Blog Search*.

7.4.1 The Focus on German Speaking Countries

The interviews were held in German while participants were recruited from the German-speaking countries namely Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The focus on German-speaking countries is motivated by two main reasons. Firstly the interviews were conducted in German since the author has German as his first language. Sveningsson et al. (2003 :93-94) note that conducting an interview in another language than the mother tongue brings about high risks for misunderstandings. The choice of language can be a dilemma sometimes and is highly dependent on how well the researcher as well as the interviewee speak and understand the concerned language in all its nuances. If the research had been conducted in Swedish the performance of the interviews would have involved two extensive translations. Initially during the creation of the interview questions from German to Swedish and later in the evaluation of the data from Swedish to English. Certainly this would have inevitably falsified the data and inadequately risen the risk for misapprehensions. Nevertheless the study still demanded the translation of the data from German to English. However this involves a lesser risk of being misled due to the fact that the author's English skills are more developed than his Swedish skills. Secondly according to *Technorati* (Sifry, 2007) German is rated among the ten most common languages of the blogosphere while Swedish is absent.

The blogs of the participants were tracked by *Technorati's* advanced search function. The advanced search function allows the tracking of weblogs in four different categories: keyword search, URL search, tag search, and directory search. The participating weblogs were determined through making use of the directory search function since this particular

application delivers genre-specific search results. Search was performed using the German word “Tagebuch”. The German expression Tagebuch translates into journal or diary in English. It proved that the search term Tagebuch provided the encompassing selection of journal-style blogs. With particular regard to privacy only weblogs with the least degree of privacy were in the sample. Password protected or unlisted blogs were not considered.

7.4.2 Low Authority Weblogs

Next the search results were sorted according to their authority. *Technorati*'s advanced search features an authority function which means that one has the option to rank the tracked weblogs according to their popularity. The popularity is determined on the basis of the total amount of blogs that link to the concerned blog over the past six months. Sifry (2007) describes four groups of weblogs: the low authority group with 3 to 9 blogs linking over the past six months, the middle authority group with 10 to 99 linking over the past six months, the high authority group with 100 to 499 blogs linking over the past six months, and the very high authority group with 500 or more blogs linking over the past six months. For the sample only bloggers from the first two categories were chosen since the first two groups represent the great majority of all weblogs. This study is focused on less frequently visited weblogs that are written by “ordinary people” in journal-style as opposed to the A-list. The latter category is unrepresentative for blogging as a mass phenomenon. Motivations for blogging in the A-list category presumably differs from less frequently visited blogs which represent the overwhelming majority. Furthermore *Technorati* allows to determine the “freshness” of a weblog since the latest update is always displayed in the search results. Since only weblogs that are actively maintained were of interest to this study one further selection criterion became that the blog was updated at least once in the preceding two weeks.

7.4.3 Blogosphere Demographics

The sample consisted of eight German-speaking people ranging in age from 20-43. Despite the limited sample size the group was diverse with one interviewee from Austria and one from Switzerland. In regard to gender the sample consisted of four males and four females. By today demographic information on the blogosphere is only sporadically available and often contradictory. This goes hand in hand with the general unsophisticated state of the research field. However male and female informants were equally considered in order to receive a somewhat balanced perspective. Also in regard to further demographic information such as age, occupational groups, or educational background one cannot find valid data in the technical literature. Therefore no selection criteria was defined based upon occupation, age, or educational background. Nevertheless all participants had a middle class or upper middle class background. The occupations were very diverse and ranged from journalist and designer to student. It is important to note that all participants were educated to the university level respectively in pursuit of an academic degree.

Despite the fact that blogosphere demographics are not available one is met with great accordance in the emphasis of the personal side of weblogs. A good number of researchers (see for instance, Neuberger et al, 2007; Doctorow et al., 2002; Herring et al. 2004; Stauffer, 2002) present the personal aspect as the most characteristic and associating feature that is shared by all weblogs. Weblogs are usually portrayed as universally sharing the personal aspect, the subjectivity and biased information, and the fact that they are all about the author

and his or her life on a very basic and essential dimension. At least for the current state of affairs this cognition makes an investigation of blogging based on criteria such as occupation less productive than an investigation which is focused on the personal side of blogging. Also the most professional blog will occasionally depict the author's private everyday life. (Doctorow et al., 2002) At least by today's state of knowledge concerning blogging and demographic information a study based on occupational groups could hardly be significant. On the other hand a study that is focused on the journal aspect has the potential to cover an aspect of blogging that is a universally shared feature of the blogosphere.

7.5 Methodological Discussion

In order to give a wide perspective on motivations for blogging this thesis is based upon eight qualitative online interviews. The research was conducted based on a questionnaire that was sent to the interviewees via email. An accompanying email was formulated in which the project was briefly introduced. Also the participants were ensured that neither their personal information nor the URL of their blogs would be revealed in the thesis. The participant's names in the analytical part are fictitious. The questionnaire consisted of a word document which was attached to an email that was sent to the selected participants. After the first draft of the questionnaire was finished it was sent out for a test run. Some of the questions were revised since it turned out that they did not deliver the desired answers. For instance some questions were not formulated openly enough which resulted in mere yes or no answers. One underlying problem was how to motivate the participants to answer particular and in detail. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 32 questions which required a certain time effort on the side of the participant. A total number of 12 filled in questionnaires were sent back. However only 8 were used for this thesis. This is due to the fact that some informants answered too briefly. Others skipped certain questions or lost interest half way through the questions. In other cases misunderstandings occurred. For instance in regard to the question of "how often do you update your weblog". The intention was to find out how often the blogger posted on his or her weblog. However a number of informants thought that the question referred to their blog software and answered accordingly. This thesis follows a dual approach of data gathering where the interviews were among other things conducted against the backdrop of Nardi et al.'s (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al.'s (2004) findings. The findings were analyzed in the context of the literature research's findings. It is important to take into account that the findings of this thesis are neither mutually exclusive nor does the small size of the sample allow to make strong claims about the blogging phenomenon in general. Also one has to keep in mind that qualitative research leads to subjective information which is highly dependent on the context. This thesis does not lay claim to being an objective reflection of the data nor providing generalizable results. Rather selectivity is an important aspect in that the outcome represents what the author considers important to highlight.

8. Analytical Perspectives on Motivations for Blogging

The following chapter is the most substantive one and will provide analytical perspectives on blogging. It especially aims to illuminate what motivates people to maintain a weblog. This chapter seeks to tackle questions like: What motivates people to blog? What are

their perspectives on the blogosphere? To what degree does a weblog embody a source of identification? In exploring the blogosphere this chapter draws on both; empirical data and cognitions provided by the technical literature.

The general idea of capturing your life in the form of a journal is a traditionally established phenomenon. As Stauffer (2002:9) puts it:

“So, weblogs – and particular web-based journals – haven’t exactly burst onto the scene, and they don’t necessarily represent a fundamental buzzword-compliant shift in a paradigm, in space-time or, for that matter, in any sort of –igm or –ism.”

According to Stauffer (2002) the idea of personal journaling – even for public consumption – is incredibly old if one considers historic figures such as Moses, Columbus, Mark Twain, or Anne Frank. In the opinion of Stauffer blogs do not really represent a brand new medium although it may feel very innovative. Rather weblogs represent an old medium that has changed. Nardi et al. (2004b) take the same line and put special emphasis on the historic character of journaling.

“Blogging has historical precedents in paper journals, diaries and chronicles. Such documents provide a chronological account with a strong personal point of view and clear sense of audience. In the Middle Ages, to take but one historical example, the renegade activities of the illiterate Basque adventurer Lope de Aguirre were chronicled by several of his men as Aguirre pillaged his way through parts of the New World. These accounts were colored by the need to stay on the good side of the treacherous Aguirre as well as by the writers’ notions of what would appeal to their audiences. One enticed his readers: “[Here] you will find cruelty, passion, and incidents arousing great pity...” /.../ As we will see, today’s bloggers write with just as much attention to the audience as did the ancient chroniclers.” (Nardi et al., 2004b)

As has become clear journaling has long been a feature of human conduct. Apparently human beings have long felt the urge to share their personal lives with their surroundings. However never before in the history of mankind has technology facilitated amateur mass publication on such a tremendous scale. In general one can currently find two major perceptions concerning blogging: at its best blogging represents a global mass movement of democratic self-expression thereby introducing an egalitarian environment for mass communication. At its worst blogging represents a collaborative form of navel gazing with little use to anyone but the self-important author.

8.1 The Informant’s Relationship to their Audience

Nardi et al. (2004a) put special emphasis on the audience in their study. According to the authors blogging represents a highly social activity where blogger and audience are interconnected through writing and reading of blogs. They discovered a dual coherence between the weblog and the audience where one part is creating the other and vice versa. It is also due to the audience that weblogs do not equate with paper diaries, at least not with the traditional understanding of diary which refers to a journal that is kept private. Scheidt (n.d.:4) contributes that a weblog and a traditional paper diary differ in regard to two distinct aspects: firstly, a weblog is not merely kept for the personal consumption of the author. Secondly, the

perception that diary keeping is a private and secret practice appears inappropriate when the diary is posted online. Nardi et al.'s (2004a) study showed that the audience was important since many bloggers were highly aware of the audience. Nardi et al. described the bloggers' extreme awareness of the audience as a key feature of the blogging experience. Take into account the following statements of the informants in regard to their relationship to the audience. The first statement is made by Martin who is a 20 years old student.

“To what extent do you write for an audience? Are you aware of the audience when you write? For instance do you sometimes withhold certain issues because you know that you might offend one of your readers?”

Yes, of course I write for an audience. Accordingly I write anonymously in order to protect myself. And yes, every once in a while I deliberately do not write about certain things because of it [the audience].” (Martin)

This first statement clearly shows Martins high awareness of his audience. He explicitly states that he writes for an audience. However he considers it necessary to write anonymously in order to protect himself from potential sanctions or negative reactions of the audience. It seems as if he has deep respect for the audience or at least he considers the audience as having a certain amount of authority. The next statement was made by Nadin who is 31 years old and currently working as a psychologist.

“I write exclusively for an audience. I have a vague idea of my audience and I know what they like to read. In particular I refrain from writing about anything really private and anything that could hurt someone else. In cases where I write about other people I ask for their permission. Everything that concerns my job is taboo.” (Nadin)

Nadin makes it even clearer that she writes for an audience. She even includes the audience in her process of writing and tries to meet the audiences' expectations. The importance of the audience becomes very clear when she notes that she sometimes withholds certain topics in order to not hurt the audience. This was quite a common statement that could be found in almost all interviews. In fact eight out of the eight informants explained that they sometimes refrained from writing certain things because of the audience. In all cases this was done in order to avoid any conflict with the audience. This particular aspect of holding back information because of the audience is described in the study by Nardi et al. (2004a) and seems to get confirmed in this study. Also Nadin's statement indicates something that Nardi et al. describe as a personal code of ethics. According to Nardi et al. many bloggers have clearly formulated rules that dictate what does not go into their weblogs. Nadin even asks for permission as soon as she writes about other people. Take into account this statement by Johanna who is 43 years old. She is currently working as a teacher.

“I always hope that the people that I write personal things about on my blog either never visit my blog or don't recognize themselves. I never make up a story. But I do make up names and personal depictions. I restrain myself to not mention events that happen at my job or in my circle of friends.” (Johanna)

It was very common that the informants had strict limitations when it came to their professional career. But also in regard to their friends or family, most bloggers imposed strict rules upon themselves. Johanna's comment represents a very common answer because many bloggers would write cryptically when it comes to events concerning friends and family. Nevertheless it is important to emphasize that not all bloggers completely sought to avoid any

form of controversy. On contrary, some informants expressed a preference for provocative topics. However it became clear that blogging is not about to avoid controversy in general but about expressing oneself in the light of the audience. (Gumbrecht et al., 2004) In alignment with Nardi et al. (2004a) the data seems to underpin the idea that blogging is a social activity where readers create blogs as much as the writers.

Nardi et al. (2004a) elaborate their argumentation by contributing that the social nature of blogging gets in addition perceivable through the fact that many bloggers initially started their weblog in response to a social request. The following statement is Nadin's response to the question of how she got into blogging from the outset.

“Some friends of mine traveled to Australia and started a blog which I frequently followed.” (Nadin)

In this sample two informants stated that they were introduced to blogging by friends. The reasons for the rest of the sample to get involved with blogging varied greatly and ranged from turning one's attention to blogs because of aimlessly surfing on the internet to having read a book about blogging. It remains to be seen if the mere fact that one got introduced to the blogosphere by a friend is a real proper argument for the social nature of blogging. Nonetheless the bottom line of this paragraph is the cognition that blogging is something that happens in the interplay between the audience and the blogger. In the blogosphere the audience and the blogger are inseparably interconnected and both perspectives need to be considered in order to get a holistic understanding of blogging as a mass phenomenon.

8.2 The Range of Blogging

In their study of the blogosphere Nardi et al. (2004a) structure their findings based upon two distinct spheres of audience. The authors distinguish between the blogger's relationship to his or her known social environment and the relationship to a large public audience. This chapter seeks to analyze the informants' statements in regard to this two-sided distinction in order to illuminate the informants' apprehension of the range of their weblogs.

8.2.1 Blogging in the Personal Sphere

The results were very diverse regarding the question of whether the weblogs were maintained for the blogger's known social environment or for a wider virtual public of the internet. None of the eight informants stated that he or she did not know any of his or her readers. All informants accordingly noted that they somewhat knew their audience. Nonetheless the range of the bloggers' definition of their audience varied in this sample. While some informants merely wrote for their known social environment others considered a wide public audience in addition. However it is crucially important to emphasize that none of the informants wrote for a global virtual public exclusively. Take into consideration the following statement by Johanna:

“Do you write for a global public?”

I wouldn't think so, rather I write for a regional public. I'm always a little confused when I see that the global public ends up on my page. It's usually people that have

searched the internet for things like a recipe or, very popularly, for anything about sex. They enter my little private blog and it feels like as if they were searching my bedroom.

When you write do you distinguish between readers that you personally know and a wide global public of all internet users?

Yes I do. When I write, I primarily don't think about the global public. I write as if I would write a letter./---/ I need the feeling that I tell someone a personal story about myself." (Johanna)

As can be seen, Johanna is almost a little afraid of the global public. She is confused and feels as if someone violates her privacy in cases where the global audience accidentally ends up on her weblog. Johanna sees her blog as a private form of communication and compares it with letter writing which represents another form of private communication. The fact that she is so sensitive regarding the global audience is somewhat surprising since she also refers to herself as an aspiring book author who uses the weblog as an important platform to get feedback for her texts. Nevertheless she apparently does not like the idea that her texts are exposed to a global audience. This seems to be a little strange considering the fact that she is an aspiring book author who could substantially profit from the global publicity. In any case she seems to have certain selection criteria regarding her audience and refers to them as the regional public. Additionally she pointed out that she personally knew a good number of her readers. Obviously Johanna defines her audience within a very manageable and personal range. Martin comes to a similar conclusion:

"Do you know the people who read your blog?"

I know most of my regular readers./---/I'm connected to the regular readers through a social network. We read each others blogs and are interested in each others lives." (Martin)

Also Martin puts special emphasis on the personal range of his weblog. Martin is contained in a social network of people who read each other's blogs. Moreover he points out that the members of the social network are interested in each others lives. Additionally Nadin's statement gives reason to assume that bloggers often write for a close social environment:

"Do you write for a global public?"

I don't differentiate that much between the readers. If ever I only care about the opinions of personal friends and relatives regarding what I write on my weblog." (Nadin)

Nadin's contribution indicates that she blinds out the existence of the global public. In accordance with Johanna and Martin, Nadin also envisions a small personal circle of readers when she blogs. The information from Tim indicates that he does not write for a global audience. Tim is 39 years old and works as a webdesigner. In accordance with the previously mentioned participants Tim notes that he knows his regular readers:

“In the case of [name of one of his weblogs] the comments are more numerous and I know my regular readers. At least you know a couple of characteristics of that person which of course represents not much more than a little facet of the real person.” (Tim)

Although Tim also states that he knows his regular readers he differs between an online and an offline identity. In contrast to Johanna, Martin, and Nadin, Tim points out that he only knows a little facet of his readers` personality. However asked later in the questionnaire which type of information he withholds, he stated that he never wrote about anything that he would not dare to tell the person face-to-face. This statement indicates that Tim views his weblog as an instrument of communication within a personal sphere of readers. He contributed further that he does not rack his brain regarding what could be interesting for his readers since he does not write to satisfy the readers` interests. Also this statement indicates that Tim is rather uninterested in reaching a global audience. However his reference to face-to-face communication suggests that he sees parallels between blogging and personal forms of communication.

Three informants stated that they would consider the personal and the global audience equally. Although they knew parts of their audience they were also trying to reach the global audience. As can be seen in the next statement by Stephan who is a 35 year old journalist and specialized on web content:

“Do you know the people who read your blog?”

Yes, I know some of them. But usually I try to keep my posts very general. I think about the people who get to my weblog through search engines. I want to provide a certain service for them. Because of that I try to avoid “insider jokes”. (Stephan)

Stephan`s statement is very representative for the three informants that considered both spheres of the audience. Stephan appreciates the potential presence of a global audience and considers the global audience during his process of writing. Another informant pointed out that she was very aware of the global audience. In explaining her perspective she noted that WWW meant “world wide web” and that one had to reckon with the public audience if one maintains a weblog. But also in this case her blog was read by her friends and relatives. Also in the third case the informant wrote consciously for her personal audience as well as for the global audience. It is important to mention that all the bloggers who wrote for both spheres had very distinct limits concerning their privacy.

In the sample was only one exceptional case namely Jens where the informant claimed that he would merely write for a global audience. Jen`s statement is very different and outstanding compared to the other members of the sample. Jens is 23 years old and worked as a paramedic before he started to study ethnology:

“When you write do you distinguish between readers that you personally know and a wide global public of all internet users?”

I write primarily for the global public; for an anonymous mass.

Do you know the people who read your blog?

I like it very much when anonymous people read my weblog and I don`t like it when people from my personal social sphere read it. For instance my girlfriend knows the

URL of my weblog but I trust her that she does not read it. Concerning my relatives no one knows that I publish that much on the internet.” (Jens)

However even Jens stated that he knew some of his readers. On contrary to all the other participants Jens did not like it when people from his personal social surroundings read his blog. He was also one of the informants who put special emphasize on the fact that he strongly wrote for an audience and not for himself. In his job as a paramedic he was confronted with many traumatic events such as the daily experience of death and suicide. Jens is driven to show the world his everyday reality through his weblog. Also Jens had very distinct limits concerning his privacy. Nonetheless his motivation for blogging will be subject to detailed discussion in a later chapter. It remains to analyze the informants` relationship to the global sphere of blogging which will be done in the next chapter.

8.2.2 Blogging in the Global Sphere

As mentioned before Nardi et al. (2004a) distinguish between a personal and a global sphere of blogging concerning the blogger`s relationship to the audience. In analyzing the bloggers` relationship to the global sphere, Nardi et al. investigated issues of privacy and came to the conclusion that most of their informants were characterized by a willingness to reveal private information on the internet. The following chapter seeks to illuminate the issue of the bloggers` privacy and the global audience.

The preceding chapter has shown that concerning the range of audience some of the participants had chosen to ignore the presence of the wider blogosphere while others considered it in their process of writing. As mentioned before no one in the sample maintained a password protected weblog. Also most public blogs often offer possibilities to set certain posts to private which has not been done either in this sample. The first chapter about the bloggers` relationship to their audience pointed out that many informants had established a certain ethic code about what and what not to write about on their blogs. One aspect that the majority of the eight informants were commonly concerned about was their professional life. As can be seen in the following statement by Sabine who is a 33 year old script consultant in the movie industry :

“Do you have a certain policy about concerning things that you generally never write about?”

Yes I do. If job related people knew who wrote the blog and I would write personal things on my blog it could harm my career. Job related details are a taboo.” (Sabine)

Sabine does not write about anything that is job related because she fears that it could endanger her career. The same stand is also taken by Tim who points out that he would never write about anything that could get him into any conflict with a customer, a friend, or the judiciary. Also Stephan notes that he writes about anything but the company. Additionally Nadin contributes that she never wrote about her job.

Concerning personal matters in general the results of this study varied to a greater extent than described by Nardi et al. (2004a). Four out of the eight participants wrote under a pseudonym and expressed certain concerns regarding to publish really private matters. This became obvious even in cases where the informant explicitly noted not to have such concerns

as in the case of Johanna who sometimes writes about things that others may find offensive. Johanna's statement is somewhat conflicting:

“To what extent do you write about personal matters?”

I write exclusively about personal matters.

Do you have any inhibitions to write about personal matters?

No, and that is not because of naivety or exaggerated self-projection. I just don't have any inhibitions. I write about things that many are interested in such as how a woman feels, how she experiences sexuality, how she loves, and what she finds funny or irritating. And still most of the people have inhibitions to address these issues. If I was totally anonymous I would probably write even more uninhibited.

Do you have a certain policy about concerning things that you generally never write about?

I don't have such a policy.” (Johanna)

Johanna sometimes writes about her sexuality and other topics that might be commonly regarded sensitive issues to address. Although Johanna claims that she does not have any inhibitions concerning the content of her weblog the last sentence of her second statement indicates that she has some inhibitions after all. The fact that she expresses concern that her identity might be revealed strongly indicates that she has certain boundaries concerning her privacy. This fact becomes even clearer in a later statement of her:

“Do you write under a pseudonym?”

Yes, so that my parents don't find my blog or my publications./---/ It is an absolute authentic part of me. But my parents and my boss don't need to know that part of me.” (Johanna)

The last part of her statement speaks for itself and does not really need any interpretation. Johanna clearly has specific boundaries concerning her privacy on the internet. Besides Johanna also Martin expressed concerns about his privacy:

“To what extent do you write about personal matters?”

I do write about personal; matters but I censor in cases where it concerns people from my personal environment. I do have inhibitions in that I think about what I want totally unknown people to know about me.” (Martin)

Besides the job most informants were most sensitive about stories regarding their friends and families. Often they would encode their stories so that friends, family members, or other acquaintances would not recognize themselves if they were mentioned on the blog. As can be seen in the case of Jens:

“Do you have any inhibitions to write about personal matters?”

Yes, I do have inhibitions and boundaries. I am very conscious about what I write on my weblog. In cases where it concerns friends and acquaintances I encode the names and events so that nobody can draw comparisons to real people.” (Jens)

It was common practice in this sample to encode information about people of the social environment of the blogger. However not everyone had these inhibitions to write about socially close people. As Stephan puts it:

“I write about anything that I would tell the neighbor in the hallway. I write about excursions, the latest purchases, and sometimes a little anecdote about my daughter. I never write about business” (Stephan)

As has become clear all bloggers in this sample were very cautious and selective concerning what to write about on their weblogs. None of the eight informants had no restriction regarding what to write about. Most commonly the bloggers were concerned about their professional integrity and about offending people of their personal surroundings. In contrast to the study conducted by Nardi et al. (2004a) in this sample there was one case of unwanted attention from the global audience. Johanna pointed out that she sometimes felt like as if strangers would search her bedroom in cases where the global public read her weblog. However the motivation for this statement appears to be unclear. Also contrary to the study by Nardi et al. one informant, namely Jens, noted that he had made bad experiences with publishing personal information on the internet. He points out that there were times when it was very easy to reveal his real identity through the *Google* search engine. As a consequence he chose to write under a pseudonym. Four out of the eight participants of the sample would write anonymously which indicates a high awareness of a certain danger to blog things that are too personal. Even in the four cases where the bloggers did not write under a pseudonym they restricted themselves concerning the content. Although the preceding chapter indicates that only a minority would write for the global audience this chapter shows that the majority is highly aware of the presence of the global audience.

8.3 The Participant`s Relationship to Interactivity

As outlined in chapter five, many scholars view interactivity as an important feature of blogging, which emphasizes the communal aspect of blogging and facilitates the existence of the global blogosphere. For instance the commenting function is often described as an interactive key feature of blogging since it allows immediate feedback and critique thereby encouraging conversation between reader and blogger. In chapter four we have also seen how Chung (2007) distinguishes between medium interactivity and human interactivity. The former represents user-to-medium interactivity while the latter represents user-to-user interactivity. Human interactivity can be seen in features of blogging such as the commenting function. Whereas medium interactivity can be seen in features such as the common practice of interlinking blogs through the blogroll. However the studies conducted by Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) came to the conclusion that human interactivity was only desired to a very limited extent. Most of the informants in their studies tried to keep a certain distance to their audience and appreciated interactivity as long as it was in small amounts and controlled.

This fact led Nardi et al. (2004a) to the conclusion that bloggers have an asymmetrical relationship to their audience. On the one hand, they really wished for an audience. This aspect has been confirmed in the first part of this chapter. On the other hand, they were holding the audience at arms length. This second assumption of Nardi et al. (2004a) remains to be validate with this sample. In general the investigation of interactivity is of crucial importance in that high levels of human- and medium-interactivity could suggest that membership in the blogosphere is rewarded, for instance, through communal pleasures. According to popular opinion and a considerable part of the technical literature blogging is often thought of as facilitating a feeling of community. Also in regard to the community aspect the blogosphere could represent a powerful source of group identification. This chapter seeks to find out to what extend the bloggers really desired human interactivity and medium interactivity.

8.3.1 The Importance of Human Interactivity

Since blogging is an asynchronized medium it is productive to focus on the commenting function in the attempt to evaluate the importance of human interactivity. The commenting function represents something which is as close as it gets to face-to-face communication since it allows direct feedback and encourages interaction. Subsequently one approaches this particular matter best by an examination of the participants' statements regarding the commenting function and feedback:

“Do you offer your readers the possibility to comment on your blog?”

In some cases I do not think it is appropriate and I shut down the commenting function.

How important is it for you to receive feedback from your readers?

Limitedly important. Feedback is only important in cases where I can assess the person and where I figure that it's meant honestly. A simple “well written” in the commentaries does not interest me.

Have you ever gotten hurt or were upset about a comment?

Yes. But usually I try to surpress the reflex to answer and try to make myself to see it as merely a different opinion. Obviously this gets more problematic in cases where the comment is offensive to a third person or otherwise legally relevant.” (Tim)

Tim's statement indicates that he is rather skeptical towards the commenting function. Moreover he shuts down the commenting function in cases where he does not want to get any comments. He notes that he does not care at all about feedback from people he cannot assess and points out that a comment needs to be sound and convincing in order to be taken seriously. Also Tim clearly seeks to avoid having a communication directly with the commentator. He suppresses his reflex to answer and tries to discount the comment as a different opinion. Tim's attitude towards feedback was rather common in this sample. In general all eight participants had the commenting feature activated on their weblog. In some cases such as in Tim's case the participants would sometimes temporarily shut down the commenting function. Take into account Johanna's point of view regarding feedback:

“How important is it for you to receive feedback from your readers?”

Feedback is only important when it comes from certain readers. /---/ Although I usually never react to it. I don't want to have any dialogue or discussion in the comments. Most of the time I'm disappointed because the comments are either shallow or I find the person unsympathetic.

Have you ever gotten hurt or were upset about a comment?

Yes, almost always. I have erased many comments because they were offending. I get most upset about pieces of advice and suggestive comments. Unfortunately way too many idiots comment on my blog; people that want to draw attention.” (Johanna)

Like Tim, Johanna also has a rather negative perception of feedback. Also Johanna deliberately sought to avoid dialogue and conversation in the commenting section. Furthermore she often dislikes people that comment on her blog. It is interesting that she points out that people comment in order to seek attention. This particular aspect can also be found in the contributions of Jens:

“Do you like it when your readers leave comments on your blog?”

Sometimes it is very exhausting. Often people leave comments regarding their own private experiences. I observe this with disgust since they apparently use my blog to publish their private stories instead of publishing them on their own weblogs.” (Jens)

Also Jens clearly expresses his dislike for feedback through comments. He is annoyed by the fact that other bloggers mention their own private experiences in their comments. This fact somewhat parallels Johanna's statement when she describes the commentators as attention seekers. Jens is the only member of the sample who had only recently activated the commenting function on his weblog. Before the readers could not leave any comments:

“Until recently I have avoided the virtual public because I did not allow commenting. I wanted that my posts would speak for themselves. Additionally with my old weblog I often experienced the comments as inappropriate or bothering. Now since the commenting function is activated, I'm excited to see if an interesting exchange starts with my readers. But I'm still very sceptical.” (Jens)

In general five out of the eight informants had a negative attitude towards feedback through the commenting function. While the majority pointed out that they experienced comments as something rather negative one stated that satisfaction with the own texts was more important than feedback from others. Another participant contributed that although she liked comments when they are smart a very few comments every now and then were sufficient. Among the remaining three participants one stated that she really appreciated comments since the commenting would distinguish her blog from secret diary writing. The remaining two others expressed a general sympathy for comments.

It is important to emphasize that the majority of the informants confirmed the contributions of Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) concerning a preference for very limited interactivity. At least human interactivity was not desired to a high degree by the majority. As mentioned in chapter five also other studies in the field of online media have

suggested a preference for very little human interactivity. In accordance with the above mentioned studies the informants of this study wished their blogs to be a form of communication without the threat of direct feedback. Also Nardi et al.'s (2004a) perception of an asymmetrical relationship between bloggers and the audience seems to be mirrored by the findings of this study. In the beginning of this chapter we have seen that the bloggers really wished for an audience. The presence of the audience was considered an important dimension of the blogging experience. However in most cases direct interaction with the audience through the commenting function was experienced as disturbing and inappropriate. This is what Nardi et al. (2004a) describe as holding the audience at arms length. Human interactivity was not considered being of essential importance to blogging by the majority of this sample. It remains to be seen what the informants' attitude is towards medium interactivity. The evaluation of medium interactivity is the subject of the next paragraph.

8.3.2 The Importance of Medium Interactivity

Medium interactivity is interactivity between the individual and the medium. Considering the fact that blogging is commonly referred to as a practice that is based upon a global digital network, medium interactivity is highly relevant in the context of blogging. In regard to this world-wide digital network the blogroll is often mentioned. Leelefever –a blogger who writes under a pseudonym- defines the blogroll in the following way: “A *blogroll* is a listing of websites that often appear as links on weblogs. This list of links is used to relate the site owner's interest in or affiliation with other webbloggers.” (Leelefever, 2003) The blogroll is often referred to as an important tool that facilitates the global community of bloggers. Blogrolls are used to express connection between weblogs. According to Leelefever (ibid.) a blogger expresses through his blogroll the following statement: “*Here are other weblogs that I like- you should check them out too.*” On a higher level and overlapping level the blogroll means: “*Here is my community of webbloggers- I fit into this group.*” (ibid.) In analyzing the importance of medium interactivity this chapter illuminates among other things the importance of the blogroll in this sample. Take into consideration the statement of Tim:

“How important is the blogroll?”

It is not important.

Do you link your blog often to other blogs?

Sometimes when it appears useful, for instance, in order to give a reference or to point out towards something extraordinary. Besides that I'm not a great fan of the “me-too-post”. (Tim)

Tim's statement is somewhat representative for the majority of the sample. Most of the informants did not euphorically embrace the linking feature of blogging. A good number of the informants had a rather skeptical attitude towards the blogroll. As can be seen in Jens's statement:

“Blogging is an individual experience. I consider the linking to each other as rather unproductive. It's all about “If you like me I like you”. (Jens)

Most of the informants did not update their blogroll on a regular basis. For instance Sabine stated that the blogroll was not important too her and that she would use a feedreader instead for the blogs that she read on a regular basis. She also pointed out that she would link her blog to others very rarely. Stephan contributed that he had not update his blogroll in quite a while and that it contained links to other weblogs that used to be important to him in the past. Accordingly Martin noted that he would only rarely link his blog to others. However he stated that the blogroll was somewhat important in that it showed whom one identified with. In general none of the eight participants extended their weblog communication to communication on online forums. However Stephan and Martin had done so in the past. Concerning the question of why they did not get involved in discussions on online forums any more they both answered that it was too time consuming. Also only two informants reported about email communication that stemmed from their weblogs. Three informants noted that they considered their weblogs an exclusive instrument of information as opposed to an instrument of discussion. Two of the informants did never comment other weblogs. For instance Johanna contributed that she did not really dare to comment other blogs. Four informants would occasionally comment other blogs while two informants stated that they would only comment blogs where they had a personal relationship with the blogger.

Also concerning medium interactivity the findings of this chapter somehow confirm Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) although both studies did not distinguish between human interactivity and medium interactivity. The study conducted by Gumbrecht et al. (2004) revealed that interactivity was rather an exaggerated feature of the blogosphere. In Gumbrecht et al.'s study the average number of comments was zero. Although some of the informants would comment other blogs the practice of commenting did not emerge as a central feature of this sample either. In this sample the practice of commenting other blogs and making or making use of other forms of medium interactivity was not distinct enough in order to represents a characteristic feature of the blogging phenomenon. The next chapter will analyze to what extent blogging really represents a communal activity.

8.3.3 Blogging as a Community Oriented Activity

As pointed out in earlier chapters many scholars describe the blogosphere as a kind of mass movement of democratic self-expression. Take into consideration this statement of Stone (2004:2009) which really mirrors this contemporary apprehension of blogging:

“Critics call blogging a form of navel gazing. Bloggers are boring and narcissistic, they say. Reading blogs is like being forced to look at your friends’ scrapbooks – a bunch of meaningless, personal junk. This is often true but these critics are missing the bigger picture. When they drive home from work, they think they’re just sitting in a car. That is sad, empty existence. Instead they could tap into the connection they are sharing with other commuters as part of a slithering, twitching aggregate traffic worm – now, that’s a commute. When people begin to realize that they have a voice on the web, that they are small but integral pieces loosely joined into intelligence greater than any other one mind, than they will know that blogging is far more than navel gazing.”

The preceding two chapters have suggested that both human interactivity and medium interactivity were not very distinct in this sample. Thereby the former form of interactivity

was clearly less distinct than the latter form of interactivity. This chapter will evaluate to what extent blogging represents a community oriented activity. The findings of the preceding two chapters will thereby contribute to the analysis of the informants` attitude towards the communal pleasures of blogging.

The majority of the sample did not describe blogging as a community oriented practice in the sense of Stone (2004). Stone`s underlying perception of community is very inspired by the idea of a huge global virtual public. However the informants described blogging as a community oriented practice concerning other bloggers which they had a personal relationship with; such as friends and relatives. As can be seen in the following statement by Sabine:

“How important are other Bloggers to you?”

Those who are friends in real life are important. But as human beings and not as bloggers.” (Sabine)

Besides Sabine four other participants stated that they had a feeling of community only in regard to bloggers they had a social relationship to. For instance Nadin contributed that she would only view those bloggers as a community that she personally found sympathetically. Tim noted that he considered himself an individual blogger although he would read other blogs. He considered only those bloggers important that he was good friends with. Tim expressed his dislike for the global community among other things because certain people would try to create a very artificial blog community feeling. Jens furthermore pointed out that other bloggers were only important to him in cases where they had something interesting to say or in cases where they shared personal interests. Also Martin`s statement is interesting in regard to the question of how important other bloggers were to him:

“I consider myself a loose part of a network consisting of bloggers that I`m friends with. (Martin)

One participant in the sample considered himself as part of a wider community. However he was keen to emphasize that he had maintained certain levels of individual control. One could say that his apprehension of community was one where the individual does not dissolve in the global blogging crowd.

“Do you consider blogging an individual or a communal experience?”

I do consider it a communal experience. However I can freely decide the extent of my community involvement. /.../ most commonly I read weblogs of bloggers that I personally know.” (Stephan)

Stephan still emphasizes certain individual aspects of blogging despite the fact that he views blogging a community oriented practice. For Stephan it is important that he has the freedom to decide when he wants to become more and when he wants to become less involved with the blogging community. Even Stephan noted that he would most likely read weblogs of people he was friends with. The fact that the majority of the sample considered blogging a communal experience only in the context of people they had a social relationship with shows parallels with the general relationship between bloggers and the audience as described in the beginning of the chapter. Only two informants stated that they considered

blogging a communal experience. However also in these cases the ensemble of the analysis of their contributions did not create the impression that the individual aspects would take backstage to the communal aspects of blogging.

This chapter seems to suggest that blogging may be less of a community oriented practice than it is commonly referred to. At least if ones understanding of community refers to an overarching global community of bloggers. As we have seen in the preceding chapter Jens, for instance, describes blogging as an individual endeavor and views the practice of interlinking weblogs as unproductive. Additionally we have seen that commenting other blogs is certainly not the most common activity among the informants. It turned out that medium interactivity was not too much appreciated among the informants. Also human interactivity was only desired to limited extents. This chapter has revealed that the majority of the sample did not view blogging as a large scale global group experience. If one wants to speak of blogging as a community oriented practice this chapter provides evidence that one may think of blogging as a communal pleasure that the blogger experiences in his or her “community”.

8.4 Blogging as a Social Practice

As outlined in the second chapter Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) describe five majour fields of social motivations for blogging: documenting ones life, providing commentary and opinion, expressing deeply felt emotions, articulating ideas through writing, and seeking others` opinions and feedback. Gumbrecht et al. (2004) point out that many bloggers also seek to form and maintain community forums. However this particular aspect will be dropped from further consideration since none of the informants was engaged with community forums or weblogs that were written by more than one author.

8.4.1 The Documenting and Communicative Character of Blogging

In accordance with Gumbrecht et al. (2004) Nardi et al. (2004a) contribute that many weblogs were utilized as a personal record of events for the bloggers as well as for others. Therefore Gumbrecht et al. (2004) introduce the term documenting one`s life in order to describe one of the key features of blogging. Take into account the following statement by Jens:

“Describe your blog, what are you writing about?”

While I was working as an emergency medical technician I wrote primarily about my daily rescues. Now during my ethnology studies I write about for instance ethnologic topics or about sports that I play. The focal point of my weblog changes according to my life situation.” (Jens)

Jens clearly uses his weblog as a measure to document his life. He posts about events that he experienced in his everyday life. Stephan comes to similar conclusions:

“[on my blog] I report about things that surround me such as traffic, people, advertisement on the streets, media, internet sites, software, other blogs and podcasts, and sometimes the family.” (Stephan)

Both informants clearly use their weblogs to capture their lives. Also in both statements a focus on the everyday life is perceivable. The above mentioned use of the weblogs is somewhat similar to the function of the traditional paper diary. Take into account the next statement by Stephan:

“I can refer to my weblog if someone wants to look up my personal development during over last three years. Although the blog only partly depicts my personality.” (Stephan)

These statements represent what Blood (2002) describes as the ability of weblogs to piece the fragments of the everyday life together. According to Blood the documented fragments represent an intimate view of the particular individual. Although we have seen that a weblog differs from a traditional diary primarily because it is published on the internet the focus on the everyday life was very typical for this sample. Concerning traditional diaries it is noteworthy that six out of eight informants noted that they had maintained a traditional paper diary before. Only two of the informants had never written a diary offline. Preceding research on paper diaries has unveiled further parallels to blogging. For instance Bloom (1996 as cited in Scheidt, n.d.) suggests that diary authors have many implied audiences in mind while they construct their written work. This following extract from an interview with Jens seems to underpin Bloom’s perception.

“Have you ever maintained a traditional diary in your life?”

Yes as a child /.../ not too detailed though. I guess I was lacking the audience for which I like to write for so much today. What is in for me when I write privately only for myself? If you write for other people you put more effort in it, you structure your thoughts more carefully, and you have to face different opinions. That is way more interesting than to merely write for yourself without getting any feedback.” (Jens)

No matter whether there may be a connection between blogging and maintaining a traditional paper diary, all eight interviewees referred to their blogs as a way to document their lives. Additionally to the above mentioned statements one informant stressed the fact that he was writing about daily events, thoughts and opinions while another informant described his weblogs as a journal with everyday life notes. In the preceding chapter it was argued that blogging happens in interplay between the blogger and the audience. The fact that documenting one’s life was an essential feature of all the participants’ weblogs and that blogging happens in interplay with the audience seems to underpin the communicative features of blogging that have been mentioned by Gumbrecht et al. (2004) and Nardi et al. (2004a). According to the two latter studies, blogging represents among other things a social activity since it inserts the blogger into a social space of his or her friends and family. Blogging fulfills the function to update others on the blogger’s life.

In particular regard to the communicative feature of blogging Gumbrecht et al. (2004) tried to elaborate why people chose to communicate via a weblog instead of other online media such as email or a traditional homepage. Their study revealed that some informants appreciated the fact that blogging was less informal and involved less overhead while others appreciated that one does not have to be responsive unless one wished to. Blogs were also described as non intrusive in that one could read them voluntarily as opposed to personal emails. Concerning traditional web pages many informants considered them more static, formal, and less linked to the idea of getting fresh personal news. In regard to these above mentioned aspects however this study differs from Gumbrecht et al.’s (2004) findings. Although the answers were diverse regarding the comparison between email and blog, one

trend among the interviewees was to emphasize the wide range of blogging. A good number of informants highlighted the fact that blogging is one-to-many communication and that one could reach a wider range of people through the weblog. One informant considered blogging a very effective measure to archive conversation in a clear manner. A couple of other informants emphasized the public nature of blogging as the main feature that differed blogging from personal email. However, emailing was neither described as intrusive, nor as less formal or as more pressuring to read. Concerning traditional homepages, the majority of informants noted that weblogs were easier to use and required fewer IT-skills than a traditional homepage. As a matter of fact only one informant in the sample maintained a traditional homepage additionally to the blog. Nonetheless he described his homepage as somewhat neglected compared to his weblog.

These paragraphs illuminated some aspects of the social nature of blogging. Documenting one's life is a key feature of blogging while many bloggers use their blogs in order to communicate with others. Certainly blogging shows similarities to the traditional paper diary. Blogging is a measure to keep family and friends abreast of life events Gumbrecht et al. (2004). Compared to other online media it is most importantly the range of weblogs that makes blogging attractive to the members of this sample.

8.4.2 Blogging in Order to Express Opinion and Advice

The studies conducted by Nardi et al. (2004a) revealed that blogging was often seen as a way to express opinion and advice. While the content varied greatly – ranging from political opinion pieces to commenting on the latest science related online publications – the weblogs were used to clearly express opinion and advice. The study conducted by Gumbrecht et al. (2004) also came to the conclusion that blogs were often used in order to express opinion. However the participants in Gumbrecht et al.'s study were cautious to not be suggestive, as if they would take themselves too seriously. Since they were aware that blogging is also sometimes thought of a narcissistic form of self expression with little importance to anyone besides the blogger they emphasized the importance and relevance of their message.

Expressing opinion and advice certainly is a topic that is also perceivable among the informants for this study, as can be seen in the following statement from Franziska. She is 29 years old and a political economist:

“A weblog represents a simple measure to present your opinion to others which then can be commented on.” (Franziska)

However, contrary to Nardi et al.'s (2004a) study, political opinions were not mentioned at all among all eight informants. Concerning politics or other social topics none of the informants expressed any interest in communicating political or social messages despite the fact that the majority described themselves as politically interested. As Franziska puts it:

“Does it [the blog] play any role in a wider societal context? Are you interested in politics? Does your blog have any political function?”

No, I don't think so. I'm interested in politics but I keep that away from my blog.” (Franziska)

Franziska's answer is very typical for this sample. None of the eight informants sought to have political or otherwise social influence through his or her blog. Although two informants stated that they would write about political events every now and then they were aware that their influence was very slim, as can be seen in the answer of Tim concerning the same question as illustrated above.

"I do consider blogs on the whole as being socially relevant. But only on the whole, single blogs don't matter. Yes I'm interested in politics. And when I write on my blog about the presidential election in France it is somehow or other politically relevant on a micro-level. But this political function is not relevant. Blogs on the whole might be another story." (Tim)

As can be seen none of the informants were interested in exercising any political or societal power. However the certain cautiousness among bloggers to not take themselves too seriously as described by Gumbrecht et al. (2004) is perceivable in that also these informants were keen to not exaggerate their influence. This became in addition clear considering the informants point of view of journalism. As Martin puts it:

"Do you see similarities between traditional journalism and blogging?"

Honestly, I find it quite overstated to describe blogging as the journalism of the 21 century ... " (Martin)

None of the eight informants expressed the idea to have any form of journalistic function let alone to challenge journalism. One informant stated that she could never be so committed to blogging that her blog could actually fulfill a journalistic function. Sabine emphasized that weblogs lack objectivity and were too biased to be journalistic:

"Do you consider your blog an information- or a discussion-tool?"

More as a notepad. I capture events and I'm glad if others are interested in them. But this is hardly information in the valuable journalistic sense. For instance when I publish a photo on my blog it is hardly there to inform other people or to start a discussion. Primarily it is there because I want to show it. It's there for others to look at." (Sabine)

In the same manner like Sabine the majority of all informants could not see connections between blogging and journalism. In general the informants referred to their influence on society in a very modest and almost humble way. Although the majority thought of their blog as a measure to express some form of opinion it was always without any "revolutionary intentions". Rather the informants gave their opinions in form of expert advice.

In some cases informants would have a certain area of expertise and would try to give advice to other people. For instance Franziska was very interested in music and emphasized the fact that she would give relevant music tips to her readers. Sabine stated that she would write a lot about her job experiences in the film industry. Asked about what she thought made her weblog interesting to others she responded that one could get interesting information about her job in the film industry. Accordingly Stephan, a web content specialist, pointed out that he thought his sound recommendations and advice concerning IT-related topics were one of the main reasons why other people would read his blog. Also the contribution of Jens indicates that some bloggers use their weblogs in order to give advice to others:

“What do you think makes your blog interesting for others?”

The description of situations like suicide for instance one is hardly ever confronted with elsewhere. A lot of areas that I got to know during my job such as death are suppressed by society.

Why do you blog?

To pass on knowledge and experience. I worked as a paramedic for the last three years and I faced situations that every man seldom has to face and if he or she has to face them they are often experienced as life threatening. I want to pass on what people experience in emergency situations; what they say and what they do.” (Jens)

Jens used his blog a lot to write about things that he experienced at his job. Informing others about suppressed topics such as death and suicide represents a form of advice giving. Moreover Jens explicitly states that he seeks to pass on knowledge and experience to others. The following statement is taken from the interview with Stephan and is his response to the question of why he blogged:

“Because I want to pass on my ideas and experiences. I want to share them with others.”
(Stephan)

In general, four out of the eight informants stated that they used their weblogs in order to give advice to others. Certainly writing about oppressed societal topics or making recommendations concerning the IT-market represents a form of expressing opinion. The case of Stephan represents what Stauffer (2002) notes as “playing editor”. According to Stauffer the lure of blogging partly consisted of the fact that it provides a forum for people to publish with reasonably low barriers of entry. Stephan uses his blog in order to demonstrate his competence in the IT area. This is very similar to the filter function where blogs are maintained in order to enable other bloggers to surf the internet. Stephan “plays editor” in the IT area and utilizes his blog in order to demonstrate his competence.

The utilization of weblogs in order to express political opinions and particular actions that the bloggers wished their audience to take as described by Nardi et al. (2004a) was not perceivable in this study. None of these informants overtly viewed their weblogs as an important form of democratic self-expression. In cases where expression of opinion was mentioned the bloggers were keen to suggest that they viewed their impact on society as very limited and in most cases nonexistent. Also the issue described by Gumbrecht et al. (2004) that the bloggers emphasized the importance of their messages because of their awareness of a potential unimportance of blogging could not be found in this thesis. Although the bloggers were aware of the fact that their impact on society may be little they did not feel the urge to emphasize the relevance of their messages. Whereas the informants in Gumbrecht et al.’s (2004) study dealt with the negative characterization of blogging by emphasizing that they would only write about relevant topics the informants of this study suggested that the bloggers’s influence on society is very limited in general.

8.4.3 Blogging as `Thinking by Writing`

Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) mention accordingly that blogging was often used as 'thinking by writing'. The studies by Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) revealed that many bloggers saw a strong coherence between thinking and writing. Blogging was portrayed as something that facilitated thinking. In regard to this particular aspect blogging represents a highly reflexive practice. Take into account the following statement by Tim:

“Which function does your blog fulfill for you?”

It facilitates a form of inner-conversation. Not least because of it helps me to structure my thoughts.” (Tim)

Tim describes blogging as a form of inner conversation that helps him to structure his thoughts. This view on the weblog was shared by other participants in that many participants viewed their blog as a support of thinking and reasoning. Jens described his blog as a measure to archive impressions, Sabine referred to her blog as a personal notepad, and Stephan contributed that his blog represented a collection of personal knowledge. All informants described their weblogs in a way which indicates that blogging is a highly reflexive practice that involves reasoning and thinking. As Stephan puts it in regard to the question of what function his blog fulfills for him:

“Since I blog I somehow live more consciously. I save events in my head in order to write them down later. /---/My stored memories are captured in data. That is an awesome feeling and at the same time a little scary too.” (Stephan)

According to Blood (2002) maintaining a weblog can be a fruitful method to increase the awareness of the inner self. This particular aspect of blogging becomes obvious in the interview sections given above. The informants describe their weblogs as an inside oriented practice that facilitates insights in their psyche. Furthermore blogging was often described as playing a crucially important role in the life of the bloggers. In the case of Stephan his blog enables him to experience his life more consciously. Take into account the opinion of Johanna concerning the same question:

“It [her blog] has the function to reflect over everyday life experiences differently, that is to say everyday life experiences are always potential blogposts. It facilitates to capture certain moods and pictures in thought for a potential post. Blogging trains my perceptions.”

Obviously her blog plays a central role in her life. Moreover the blog has an impact on the way she experiences her everyday life. Johanna experiences her everyday life as potential blogposts. As has become abundantly clear blogging is tightly connected to the thinking process. Accordingly to the studies by Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) also in this study blogging was often experienced as 'thinking by writing'.

8.4.4 Blogging as Catharsis

Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) mention that blogging plays a role when it comes to catharsis. Many informants in their studies stated that they used blogging in

order to work out issues they felt passionate about. In illuminating the coherence between blogging and catharsis this thesis draws on Van Wagner's (2007) definition of catharsis:

"A catharsis is an emotional release. According to psychodynamic theory, this emotional release is linked to a need to release unconscious conflicts. For example, experiencing stress over a work-related situation may cause feelings of frustration and tension. Rather than vent these feelings inappropriately, the individual may instead release these feelings in another way, such as through physical activity or another stress relieving activity." (Van Wagner, 2007)

Also this study indicates that blogging is related to emotional relief. As mentioned earlier Gumbrecht et al. (2004) considered blogging as catharsis since it represents an outlet for the informant's thoughts and feelings. Nardi et al. (2004a) mentions an 'urge to get it out there' as a motivation for blogging. Take into consideration the following statement of Martin:

"Which function does your blog fulfill for you?"

It is a way of relieve. Always when I want to say something I can let it out there./---/ In times when I'm doing very well I write a lot of positive posts. When I'm in a bad mood my posts are accordingly." (Martin)

Clearly Martin's blogging is motivated by what Nardi et al. (2004a) refer to as an 'urge to get it out there'. In general the data suggest the existence of a connection between the emotional state of mind and blogging. Three out of the eight participants noted that they would blog more in times of emotional sorrow. This becomes most obvious in the following statement:

"Are there certain phase in which you blog more than in others. For instance in times when you are emotionally troubled, in times when you have problems and a lot of stress? Or do you write more often in phases when you feel very well?"

I can only write when I'm angry, sad, or in a state of hopelessness. Only these feelings facilitate my writing-flow. Typing in the keyboard gives me physical and psychological relief. If I'm in a state of happiness which I'm as often in as in sorrow and depression it is impossible for me to write. Then I'm outside in the nature or with other people. Because with this elation I don't feel the urge to lock my self away and to be on my own./---/Accordingly most of the posts on [name of the weblog] are written in a negative mood." (Jens)

As can be seen in this case blogging was used for the purpose of catharsis in a very obvious manner. Jens clearly uses his blog as a form of self-therapy. He uses his weblog as a 'relief valve'. In his interview it became recurrently obvious that his job was very emotionally burdening and that he somewhat sought to cope through blogging. As described in the two first chapters Jens statements were often outstanding and different from the others. Jens was motivated to write his blog through the fact that he wanted to share his – sometimes traumatic- everyday life experiences with the rest of the blogosphere:

"To what extend do you write for an audience?"

I do very much write for an audience. Especially during my time as a paramedic when I experienced many interesting situations like death, suicide, and the contact with psychologically disturbed people it was very important to me that my readers could follow this reality – they should get to know what happened in Germany.” (Jens)

As we have seen in the chapter about the range of blogging Jens noted that he did not want his family or friends to read his weblog. This indicates that he experienced the content of his blog as very burdensome and did not want to share the content with someone who was close to him. He certainly did not use his blog in order to keep friends and family abreast of his life. If one takes into consideration the above given definition of catharsis, Jen’s situation seems to fit every single aspect of it. It is likely that his blogging was motivated by unconscious needs to release conflicts. As a matter of fact he explicitly stated that he would only write for others but not for himself. However it is sustainable to suggest that Jens actually wrote more for himself than he was aware of. His job situation certainly provided enough potential for frustration and tension. Apparently blogging had become a stress relieving activity for Jens. The case of Jens represents what Nardi et al. (2004a) describe as to get closure out of writing. Jens used his weblog as catharsis in order to vent his feeling.

However the other five participants did not refer to their blogs in ways that indicate catharsis. In regard to the above mentioned question the majority of participants answered that the volume of the posts mostly was a matter of time. They often stated that it depended on their job how much time they could find to blog.

8.4.5 Blogging to Seek Opinion and Feedback

Gumbrecht et al. (2004) and Nardi et al. (2004a) contributed further that some bloggers considered blogging as an important measure to seek the opinion and feedback of others. These informants often had a professional background where writing was important such as journalists or scholars. Bausch et al. (2002) came to the conclusion that blogging is sometimes used in order to improve ones writing skills. Also in this sample one could find hints that underpin the contributions of Nardi et al. (2004a), Gumbrecht et al. (2004), and Bausch et al. (2002). For instance Stephan who is a web content specialist and also a professional journalist referred to his blog as a “writing-channel”, a possibility for creative expression and display of professional competence. Johanna is an author besides her job as a teacher. She is currently working on her first book. According to her blogging had helped her a lot in gaining the necessary confidence to try to write a book. Johanna describes blogging as a training of her writing skills and also as the first step of publishing her texts to an audience:

“Why did you chose to have a weblog?”

I wanted to find out how it felt to publish my texts. First I read a couple of weblogs and then I decided that I could do at least as good if not better than the other bloggers. I chosed a weblog because I wanted to try to write on a regular basis. Blogging to me represents the brave step to not letting my texts disappear in the drawer but to publish them. It seemed as if a weblog was an independent platform to do that./---/ One of my goals was to read my texts to others on such events as public readings or `poetry slams`

on small stages. My weblog was the first step towards the public. In the meantime I have successfully read my texts in public events. My next goal is to write a book.” (Johanna)

For Johanna starting her own weblog facilitated the starting of her professional writing career. Blogging was her first step towards the audience and encouraged her to take further steps towards writing for an audience. She clearly used her weblog in order to seek opinion and feedback from her readers, although we have seen in the first part of the analysis that she had certain selection criteria concerning her audience. In accordance with Nardi et al. (2004a), Gumbrecht et al. (2004), and Bausch et al. (2002) also this study found evidence that bloggers with a professional background where writing is essential, use their blogs in order to work on their writing skills and to seek opinion and feedback. Both members of the sample who had a writing related professional background used their weblogs in the above outlined manner.

8.4.6 Blogging to make New Friends

One social motivation for blogging that has been revealed in this thesis and which is neither mentioned by Nardi et al. (2004a) or Gumbrecht et al. (2004) is blogging in order to make new friends. All eight participants accordingly noted that they had made new social contacts through blogging. As Jens puts it:

“Have you met new people through blogging?”

Yes I have made a lot of interesting contacts. I have at least met 15 people personally although we live quite far away from each other. Through blogging you meet people that have the same interests.” (Jens)

The analysis brought to light that blogging was viewed as an opportunity to meet new people among all members of the sample. However the extent to which the bloggers socialized with their new acquaintances varied. In this sample only Jens and Stephan had actually encountered their new social contacts personally in real life. Stephan was the only one in the sample who participated in trans-regional blogger events: in blogger meetings and other weblog related events he had made new social contacts that had become valuable for him. The other members of the sample would stay in touch with their new social contacts through email and had never encountered each other in real life. Nonetheless these new social contacts were often highly valued. Take into account Sabine`s point of view concerning the question of if she had met new people through blogging:

“Yes, several and very nice ones as well. Interestingly enough only few of them live in the same town as I do.” (Sabine)

Considering the fact that the internet is a medium with global range Sabine`s wonderment about the fact that most of her new acquaintances did not come from her city is somewhat hard to comprehend. However it suggests that Sabine does not make that much difference between blogging and real life social interaction. Concerning the latter form it would probably be highly likely that Sabine would mostly socialize with individuals from her town. The cases of Jens and Stephan showed that blogging sometimes gets extended to real life social interaction. This fact makes it also sustainable to suggest that in certain cases bloggers apparently do not differ much between real life interaction and blogging. In these cases blogging represents a form of personal communication with others. Also Johanna appreciated her relationship with her new online friends although they would only interact

with each other through email. Nevertheless she pointed out that she really enjoyed the email contact with the other bloggers. While six out of the eight informants had never met offline it became obvious that blogging was commonly appreciated as a measure to meet and to interact with new people on different levels of intensity.

The results of this chapter confirm the findings that have been made earlier in regard to the communal experience of blogging. Earlier it has been pointed out that the bloggers especially valued other weblogs that were maintained by bloggers they had a social relationship with. An overall global community spirit was not perceptible. This fact gets repeated in this chapter because the bloggers were very selective concerning with whom to interact with. Similar to offline life, the bloggers in this sample had a circle of acquaintances and friends that they interacted with. It is important to emphasize that the bloggers favored communication with other bloggers in cases where they had a social relationship with each other. As can be seen in the informants' statements these relationships were created for instance on the basis of shared interests. A random communication with totally unknown bloggers for the sake of an overall community spirit did not occur in this sample. The fact that random human interactivity was generally rather unwanted as shown earlier underpins this impression. Instead the online interaction was carried through in ways that were very similar to the way human beings socialize offline.

Also Hodkinson (2006) came to similar conclusions with his study in that one of his findings was that weblogs facilitated interaction among a relatively stable set of existing friends rather than among an all inclusive online community of strangers. Accordingly he also came to the conclusion that relationships that were maintained through the weblog often extended to other forms of interpersonal communication such as email or instant messaging as we have seen above this was also the case in this sample. The emphasis on personal relationships between the bloggers becomes even more significant if one takes into account that several of the informants had many bloggers in their personal "offline friend-sphere". One could say that many bloggers are embedded in a social network of friends from the outset. This is another factor that highlights blogging as a social activity. The bottom line of this chapter is that personal interaction through weblogs goes off in many cases very similar to personal interaction in "reality". In spite of the fact that new friendships are commonly made through blogging the interaction between the bloggers is selective and reminding of interaction in real-life.

8.5 Blogging as a Source of Identity

This study also brought facts to light that suggest that blogging represents a source of identity. In the preceding chapter we have seen that blogging often is about sharing the blogger's expertise and knowledge. According to Bausch et al. (2002) the experience of sharing expertise can be very empowering. As mentioned before Stephan, for instance, uses his blog among other things for the display of competence. In the opinion of Bausch et al. blogging is often a measure to create and enhance an individual's reputation. People often blog to assert their individuality. In these cases the weblog can become a personal "speaker's corner" through which people define and create their identities.

According to certain scientists one of the main characteristic features of live in contemporary societies is the fact the identities have to be actively constructed. For instance Giddens (2003) contributions facilitate a deeper reflection on modernity and identity. According to Giddens we live in circumstances of a progressed or “radicalized” modernity which he refers to as late modernity. Thereby modernity changes the very nature of social life and even impacts on the most personal facets of human experience. For instance globalizing influences are increasingly linked with personal dispositions. Under the influence of modern institutions new mechanisms of self-identity have occurred. On contrary to pre-modern times self-identity needs to be actively constructed. Self-identity is no longer something that is imposed upon oneself by society’s institutions. As Giddens (2003:3) puts it: *“In the setting of what I call high or late modernity – our present day world – the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made. Yet this task has to be accomplished amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities.”* As we have seen in chapter four Thomas (2006) takes the same line as Giddens (2003) and points out that blogging can play an important role in the creation of identity. According to Thomas (2006) many bloggers blog as fictional characters. Consider the statement of Jens:

“Have you ever gotten hurt or upset by a comment on your blog?”

Sometimes but usually not. Since I play another character on my weblog I never feel personally offended.” (Jens)

As can be seen Jens distinguishes between his real self and another character that he plays on his weblog. Although Jens is not a member of the fan fiction community as described by Thomas (2006) he blogs as a fictional character. As a matter of fact Jens was not the only participant in the sample who blogged as a fictional character. As Nadin puts it:

“To what extent to you define your personality through your weblog?”

I don’t do that. My blog personality is a construction and has very little in common with my real character.” (Nadin)

It remains to be seen if Nadin defines her personality through her weblog or not but it is has become obvious that both Nadin and Jens both differentiate between their real personality and their blog personality. This becomes even more obvious in the case of Johanna:

“Do you write under a pseudonym?”

Yes/.../As [name of her pseudonym] I write these funny and sexy stories and sometimes I read them on poetry slams or even write a column in a magazine. But it is an absolute authentic part of me. A very intimate in fact./---/I want to be famous as [name of her pseudonym] for these texts/.../It is a different but authentic part of me that needs a name.” (Johanna)

Obviously Johanna blogs as a fictional character. Moreover she constructs a new identity through her weblog which is still related to her real character. Also Jens deliberately constructs another identity on his weblog:

“To what extent do you write about personal matters on your weblog?”

Concerning myself I only write things that subserve my blog character. The lesser you describe yourself the more the reader is forced to create his own image of your personality. And the more the reader pictures the blog character in a positive manner.

“To what extent to you define your personality through your weblog?”

Not in particular. On my blog I am an artificial figure. I only write about things that contribute to this figure.

Do you present through your blog certain facets of your character more than in real life?

Yes the facet of the ingenious globetrotter who meets a lot of interesting people.”
(Jens)

As can be seen Jens actively constructs another identity. He presents himself in certain preferred manners to his readers. It is thereby important to note that Jens and Nadin both seem to be unaware of the importance of their artificial blog characters. Accordingly both point out that they do not identify their personality through their weblog. Their statements however suggest the opposite. Their blog character seems to represent a rather important aspect of their identity. Nowadays one distinguishes between an online identity and the real life identity because the internet has become such an important global medium. Besides being a communication and information platform the internet also provides great possibilities to present oneself to others in a preferred manner. Since the internet provides anonymity to a certain degree one has the possibility to merely present fragments of the self to others. The internet offers a great measure for people to redefine themselves in a certain preferred manner. As Grohol (2007) puts it a pseudonym or an online identity allows people to hide their real identities while one can build a desired reputation with the username.

Also Tim points out that his weblog character is different from his real life character. Tim describes his blog character as more open and communicative than his real life character. Thomas (2006) notes that bloggers commonly insert certain aspects of the real self into their character. According to Thomas (2006) this is commonly referred to as “fusing identities”, “hybrid identities” or creating a “Mary Sue” character. Tim, Nadin, Johanna, and Jens clearly create a Mary Sue character on their blogs. Thereby their blogs represent an important source of identification. These four participants actively create an online identity on their blogs. Through their online identities they are enabled to say more things than they would say in real life without having to face the consequences. Consequently part of the lure of blogging is certainly the possibility to play another person and to construct another identity. In regard to this aspect the blogging phenomenon seems to underpin Giddens` (2003) theory about modernity and flexible self-identities.

8.6 Conclusion

This final chapter has analyzed the participants` motivations for blogging. Some of the findings were congruent with the studies conducted by Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) while other findings varied to different extents. Following Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) I have suggested in the first chapter that blogging is about expressing oneself in the light of the audience since all informants were highly aware of their audiences. I have concluded that blogging happens in the interplay between blogger and audience. In the

next chapter, I have adopted Nardi et al.'s (2004a) two-sided distinction of the range of blogging. While the results were diverse regarding the question of how the bloggers defined the range of their audience none of the eight informants wrote for a global public exclusively. The majority in the sample expressed a certain preference for readers that they had a personal relationship with. In regard to this particular aspect one could find parallels between the way the bloggers perceived their weblog and personal forms of communication. The cognition that many bloggers write for an audience that they know conforms the findings revealed by Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004). Next I have analyzed the participants' relationship to the global sphere based upon an investigation of issues of privacy. Concerning personal matters in general the results of this study varied to a greater extent than described by Nardi et al. (2004a). On contrast to the study by Nardi et al. (2004a) the sample of this study was characterized by a certain cautiousness and selectiveness concerning what to write about on their weblogs. Thereby the job and family and friends were the two areas the informants were most concerned about. Nardi et al. (2004a) on the other hand had described their informants as rather easy in their minds about publishing private issues. In regard to the participants' relationship to interactivity I have argued that human interactivity and medium interactivity were only desired to a limited extent. This study consequently confirms Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) in their idea of the asymmetrical relationship between blogger and audience. Also the members of this sample wished for an audience while at the same time they sought to keep their audience at arms length. Concerning blogging as a community oriented activity I have contributed that many bloggers did not see blogging as a community oriented practice in the sense of an overarching global community. Instead I have suggested that blogging is a communal pleasure that the blogger experiences in his or her "community". Following the main five areas of motivations for blogging outlined by Nardi et al. (2004a) and Gumbrecht et al. (2004) I have analyzed blogging as a social practice. All of the informants used their weblogs in order to document their lives. Concerning blogging as a measure to express opinion none of the informants were interested in exercising any political or societal power. Also the certain cautiousness among bloggers to not take themselves too seriously as described by Gumbrecht et al. (2004) was perceivable in that also these informants were keen to not exaggerate their influence. In general the informants referred to their influence on society in a very modest way and would usually give their opinion in form of expert advice. Furthermore I have argued that blogging represents a highly reflexive practice and a form of inner conversation that often supported the blogger's thinking and reasoning. Also I have noted that blogging is linked to emotional relieve in certain cases. For instance the case of Jens clearly represented blogging as catharsis since he got closure out of blogging. In accordance with Nardi et al. (2004a), Gumbrecht et al. (2004), and Bausch et al. (2002) this study found evidence that bloggers with a professional background where writing is important, used their blogs in order to work on their writing skills and to seek opinion and feedback. Additionally the analysis brought to light that blogging was viewed as an opportunity to meet new people among all members of the sample. In regard to this aspect I have pointed out that neither Gumbrecht et al. (2004) or Nardi et al. (2004a) mentioned it in their studies. However the extent to which the bloggers socialized with their new acquaintances varied. In general the online interaction was carried through in ways that were often very similar to the way human beings socialize offline. Finally I have argued that blogging provides a source of identity. Some of the informants wrote as a fictional character on their blog. Besides providing measures to construct new identities I have suggested that blogging becomes attractive because one can hide behind the online identity.

Final Discussion

In the beginning of chapter eight the two most common perceptions on blogging that can be found in contemporary public discourse were outlined. It was argued that blogging at its best represented a democratic mass movement of citizen involvement while at its worst blogging represented a form narcissistic navel gazing. This study suggests that neither is the case for this sample. The informants were motivated to blog by other factors.

Although many bloggers interacted with each other the data did not suggest the existence of a global group identity. Blogging was often described as an individual experience where self-identity was not sacrificed for an overarching group identity. All the bloggers in the sample maintained certain levels of individuality. One of the advantages of the blogosphere may indeed be that although membership provides a blogger identity, one does not have to sacrifice a great deal of individuality. Being a blogger one can experience communal pleasures without being “dissolved in the crowd”. Most of the time community feelings were only described as relevant in cases where the blogger was interacting with his or her “community”. In addition none of the informants strived to have any influence on society. It proved that the informants had very low expectations concerning the impact of their weblogs on society. It came to light that they neither intended to challenge journalism nor did any of the statements allow to suggest the existence of any political ambitions. The common assumption that blogging represents a mass movement of democratic self-expression which is aimed to establish a revolutionary and more egalitarian form of mass communication could not be confirmed in this study. On contrary to popular opinion I assume that blogs represent much more a personal instrument of communication than a new communal and alternative form of mass communication. A recent study conducted by Neuberger et al. (2007) seems to underpin this assumption since the authors found great similarities between blogging and traditional forms of mass communication. In accordance with the traditional mass communication Neuberger et al. describe the existence of hierarchical attention structures in the blogosphere. Very few popular blogs receive the majority of audience attention while the majority of all blogs hardly ever get noticed. Additionally concerning the egalitarian public the authors revealed that one can find power structures in the blogosphere that are very similar to the traditional relationships between mass media and the audience. The relationship between A-list bloggers and blogs with low authority are very one-sided in that A-list bloggers tend to link their blogs to each other more commonly than to blogs with low authority. However low-authority bloggers often link their blogs to high-authority blogs without getting a link back. The consequence is that influential blogs reinforce each other's influence while low-authority blogs remain unnoticed. The relationship between low- and high-authority weblogs is very similar to the relationship between the audience and medium in traditional mass communication. Additionally the authors contribute that many bloggers on the A-list have a journalistic background or are otherwise employed in the media business. This cognition certainly justifies further why A-list bloggers were of subordinate importance to this thesis. In general no evidence could be found to reinforce the assumption that blogging represents an upcoming movement of communal citizen involvement.

Neither could there be found evidence that would justify to describe blogging as a narcissistic and self-important form of amateur publishing with little importance to anyone but the author. None of the informants was merely motivated to blog in order to make his or her name on the internet. Nobody in the sample seemed to overestimate his or her weblog's importance. Although this study has revealed that the bloggers were motivated by their audience and that blogging is about expressing oneself in the light of the audience many participants did not seek to reach a mass audience. The later cognition makes it somewhat

difficult to see the bloggers as a group of self-important “busybodies”. This impression gets underpinned by the fact that the informants were very cautious concerning the content and selective in regard to their audience. In fact the majority did not perceive their weblog as a platform to promote their personal opinions that “the world had been waiting for”. In all cases blogging was motivated by more complex reasons. In cases where bloggers expressed opinion they would usually do it in the form of expert advice. As can be seen also the second common assumption concerning blogging does not seem to be sustainable in the light of the analyzed data.

Up to now I have argued that blogging neither represents a narcissistic attempt of self-realization nor the often discussed upcoming movement of communal citizen involvement. In pursuing the question of what motivates people to maintain their weblogs I suggest that bloggers – at least the ones in this sample - were motivated by somewhat more mundane, simple and less spectacular reasons. As has become abundantly clear blogging represents a highly social and reflexive practice. We have seen in chapter six that Bausch et al. (2002) associates blogging with the mundane practice of gossiping. In the opinion of the authors blogging parallels the way one uses spoken language since it is informal, immediate, and undergoes limited editing. Furthermore two thirds of all conversations are taken up with gossip and also most blog content fits the definition of gossip. The authors conclude that blogging represents a simple human connection which brings people back in contact. As a matter of fact the analysis has often suggested the existence of parallels between blogging and offline forms of social interaction. For instance, I have argued that the majority of the sample expressed a preference for readers that they had a social relationship with. I have suggested that new contacts were made on the basis of shared interests while the communication with other bloggers was very selective. In terms of privacy I have noted that most of the bloggers were concerned with issues of privacy. The relationship to the audience was asymmetrical in that interactivity was only desired to limited degrees. All these cognitions lead me to take the same line as Bausch et al. and to assume that blogging often is motivated by mundane social needs. This becomes further obvious if one takes into account the diverse social motivations for blogging that were revealed in the analysis. They ranged from documenting one's life and emotional relieve to meeting new friends. Also the analysis brought to light that blogging played a role in the process of creating identity. Today identity is something that is actively constructed and constantly negotiated against the backdrop of a confusing variety of choices. However on the individual level the creation of identity represents a very mundane and basic social need that everyone has to grapple with.

While the perception that blogging has the potential to impact on traditional mass communication might be true in a number of cases – particularly when it comes to the A-list - the majority of the bloggers in this study utilized their weblogs for less spectacular reasons, such as, in order to communicate with their circle of friends and acquaintances. While the blogosphere is often highlighted as a global community, I suggest that blogging often represents a communal pleasure that the blogger experiences within his or her “community”. He or she is thereby motivated by huge diversity of social motivations. However, it is important to emphasize that the findings of this study are not mutually exclusive nor are motivations to maintain a weblog restricted to these factors. Rather these factors were distinctive in this particular sample. According to McQuail (2005) the emergence of new media has always been met with euphoric expectations, intense interest, and a general overestimation of their significance. Concerning blogging there is reason to believe that we are still in this very first phase.

Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire

Bitte Geben Sie hier die URL ihres Blogs an:

1. Wie alt sind sie?
2. Welches Geschlecht haben Sie?
3. Welchen Beruf üben Sie aus und welche Ausbildung haben Sie?
4. Wie ist Ihr Familienstand?
5. Wie lange bloggen Sie schon?
6. Würden Sie sich als Computer-interessiert beschreiben?
7. Wie sind Sie ursprünglich mit dem Bloggen in Kontakt gekommen?
8. Haben Sie viele Blogger in Ihrem sozialen Umfeld?
9. Wie häufig updaten Sie Ihren Blog ungefähr?
10. Beschreiben Sie Ihren Blog, über was schreiben Sie?
11. Haben Sie zusätzlich eine traditionelle Homepage?
Warum haben Sie sich für einen Weblog entschieden?
12. Haben Sie schon einmal ein traditionelles Tagebuch geführt?
Wenn ja, wann, warum und wie ausführlich?
13. Wissen Sie wer Ihren Blog liest? Ist es Ihnen wichtig dass jemand Ihren Blog liest?
14. Inwieweit schreiben Sie für ein Publikum? Sind Sie sich des Publikums bewusst wenn Sie schreiben? Halten Sie manchmal gewisse Dinge zurück, weil Sie wissen, dass es einen Ihrer Leser verletzen könnte? Welche Dinge halten Sie zurück?
15. Kennen Sie die Leute, die Ihren Blog lesen? Schreiben Sie für eine globale Öffentlichkeit?
16. Unterscheiden Sie beim Schreiben Lesern, die Sie persönlich kennen und einer globalen Öffentlichkeit?
17. Was denken Sie macht Ihren Blog interessant für andere?
18. Haben Sie neue Leute kennengelernt durch das Bloggen?
19. Wie wichtig ist es für Sie Feedback von Ihren Lesern zu erhalten? Erwarten Sie Feedback und in welcher Form erhalten Sie meistens Feedback?
20. Bieten Sie Ihren Lesern die Möglichkeit Kommentare zu hinterlassen? Mögen Sie es wenn Leser Kommentare auf Ihrem Blog hinterlassen? Haben Sie sich schon einmal über Kommentare geärgert oder verletzt gefühlt?

21. Welche Funktion erfüllt der Blog für Sie persönlich?
22. Erfüllt er eine Funktion in einem erweiterten gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhang? Sind Sie politisch interessiert? Hat ihr Blog eine politische Funktion? Sehen Sie Bloggen zwischen Bloggen und dem traditionellen Journalismus?
23. Warum Bloggen Sie?
24. Gibt es bestimmte Phasen, in denen Sie häufiger bloggen als in anderen, z.B. Phasen, in denen Sie emotional belastet sind, Probleme, Schwierigkeiten oder Stress haben? Oder schreiben Sie häufiger in Phasen, in denen es Ihnen besonders gut geht?
25. Wie wichtig sind Ihnen andere Blogger? Sehen Sie sich als Teil einer "Community" oder eines globalen Netzwerkes? Ist Bloggen ein individuelles oder ein gemeinschaftliches Erlebnis? Lesen Sie andere Blogs?
26. Wie wichtig ist das Blogroll? Verlinken Sie Ihren Blog häufig zu anderen Blogs? In welchen Fällen verlinken Sie Ihren Blog?
27. Betrachten Sie Ihren Blog als ein Informations- oder Diskussionsinstrument? Kommunizieren Sie mit anderen Bloggern über Ihren Blog, bzw. Kommentieren Sie andere Weblogs? Beteiligen Sie sich an Diskussionen in online Foren?
28. Was unterscheidet diese Form der Kommunikation von anderen Formen der online Kommunikation, z.B. instant messaging oder persönliche email? Sehen Sie Vorteile in der Kommunikation via Weblog?
29. Inwieweit schreiben Sie über persönliche Dinge? Haben Sie Hemmungen über persönliche Dinge zu schreiben? Haben Sie gewisse Grundsätze, über was Sie generell nicht schreiben? über welche Dinge schreiben Sie nicht? Wenn ja, warum?
30. Inwieweit definieren Sie Ihre Persönlichkeit über Ihren Blog? Leben Sie über Ihren Blog bestimmte Facetten Ihrer Persönlichkeit stärker aus als Sie es offline tun? Präsentieren Sie sich bewusst in einer bestimmten Art und Weise für Ihre Leser?
31. Geben Sie Ihren Beruf an auf Ihrem Blog? Schreiben Sie als Privatperson oder als Berufsperson? Bloggen Sie nur in der Freizeit oder auch während der Arbeitszeit?
32. Spielen Sie online eine andere Rolle als offline?

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