

Blogging practices in the German-speaking blogosphere

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Bloggng practices in the german-speaking blogosphere

Findings from the “Wie ich blogge?!“-survey

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Abstract

This working paper presents findings from a large-scale survey (N=5,246) of the german-speaking blogosphere, focusing on the sociodemographic characteristics and motivations of active bloggers as well as on routines for presenting oneself, dealing with social relationships, and using the blogosphere as a source of information. In general, the majority of bloggers records episodes and events of their private lives, while keeping contact with other readers and authors through comments and (to a lesser extent) a blogroll. However, there are some significant differences among blogging practices: Routines of identity management differ significantly among bloggers of different age, while routines of relationship management and information management depend rather on the blog’s age, pointing to the influence of experience with the new online format.

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1 Introduction¹

The growing number of blogs has led to a differentiation of uses for this format of online-based communication. Formally, blogs are regularly updated websites where individual postings are displayed in reverse chronological order and addressable through an individual URL (the “permalink”). Usually, readers can comment on any single posting – a blog thus combines features of static HTML homepages and the asynchronous computer-mediated communication of discussion boards or newsgroups (Herring et al., 2005). Based on this formal definition we can identify various uses, for example the blog as personal online journal, as an instrument of political commentary, as a channel for expert communication in academics or within companies, etc.

As has been argued elsewhere (Schmidt, 2007) in more detail, this variety of uses should be accounted for and explained by analysing “blogging practices”. These consist of individual episodes in which a blogger uses specific software to engage in identity management, relationship management and information management within the frame of three structural dimensions of rules, relations and code. In other words: Individual and situated use of blogs is framed by (1) shared routines and expectations about the “correct” use of blog for fulfilling sought gratifications, (2) pre-existing social and hypertextual relations forming networks of which the blogger and the blog are a part, and (3) specific software functionalities which assist or allow certain actions while restricting others. These elements of blogging practices are “structural” in the sense that they lie analytically beyond the individual blogger, but it is in fact his or her actions that reproduce or change them, thus contributing to a recursive interdependence of individual and structural aspects of blogging practices.

Most of the growing empirical research on blogs is focussing either on individual characteristics, motivations, routines, and expectations or on structural properties of the blogosphere, most prominently on the link networks between blogs or the emerging publics (see Schmidt, 2007 for a literature overview). These studies contribute to an analysis of blogging practices by giving insights about prevalent routines and about the size and composition of the emerging blog-based networks. However, while recent data suggests that English is not the dominant language within the blogosphere anymore (Sifry, 2007), research is usually focussed on English-speaking blogs. Notable exceptions are the country- or culture-specific analyses for the Persian (Esmaili et al., 2006), the Spanish (Merelo et al., 2005) and the Polish blogosphere (Trammell et al., 2006) as well as the comparative analysis of the language networks on the popular international blogging platform LiveJournal (Herring et al., 2007), but not similar studies exist for the german-speaking blogosphere. This working paper reports findings from a large-scale online survey conducted in October 2005, which aimed to empirically assess the sociodemographics and blogging practices within the german-speaking blogosphere. After some introductory remarks on the survey design, selected results will be presented and discussed, focussing on the distinction between identity management, relationship management, and information management.

¹ The work presented here was partially financed by grants from the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst (DAAD) and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). Martin Wilbers contributed to the data analysis and interpretation. Susan C. Herring and three anonymous reviewers of the “Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication” made some valuable comments on earlier versions of this paper.

A final introductory note: The diffusion of blogs within Germany, Austria, and Switzerland has lagged behind other european countries such as France, Poland or the UK and the United States, leading to a smaller share of the general online population using blogs either as authors or as readers. According to a representative survey (van Eimeren & Frees, 2006), seven percent of all German onliners have used blogs, with 35 percent of this group being active contributors, while the remaining two thirds are readers only. Given that the share of Internet users among the German population over 14 years has been about 60 percent in 2006, the number of active bloggers in Germany would be about 1 million people. Since “active contribution” might include posting a comment as well as running a blog, and since an unknown number of blogs might be discontinued after weeks, months or years, one cannot directly conclude from the number of blog users how many blogs are actually still active. However, a recent effort to crawl the german-speaking blogosphere² gives a number of about 100.000 publicly accessible blogs in German that have been updated between May and July 2007.

2 Survey design

The survey „Wie ich blogge?!“³ was conducted by the author between October 3rd and 31st, 2005 and was directed not only at active bloggers, but at ex-bloggers and readers-only as well. The online questionnaire included 18 pages and about 50 questions (including some open questions for extended input; a list of all questions is provided in the appendix), which were displayed dynamically depending on previous answers to filtering questions. The average answering time for the complete survey was about 12 minutes.

Participants were recruited by two means (see Table 1): An e-mail invitation was sent to registered members of two cooperating blog hosting services (blogg.de and twoday.net), and the survey was announced in the author’s blog. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to blog about the survey. To help spread the announcement, a code snippet and a banner were available for download, which users could insert in in their own blogs. This led to a total of 5.246 participants, making the „Wie ich blogge?!“-survey one of the largest surveys on blog use conducted so far.⁴ During the first week, the survey and the corresponding FAQ page on the authors’ blog were the most-linked-to URLs in the german-speaking blogosphere, according to the (now inactive) blog tracking service blogstats.de.

Table 1: Contacts and response rate for the “Wie ich blogge?!“-survey

Mode of invitation	Contacts	Survey started	Survey completed	Response rate
Mail twoday.net	11,916	1,149	980	8.2 %
Mail blogg.de	659	107	96	14.6 %
Self-recruitment	Not applicable	10,309	4,170	Not applicable
Total	Not applicable	11,565	5,246	Not applicable

² See <http://www.blogcensus.de>.

³ „Wie ich blogge?!“ means both „How am I blogging?“ and “That’s how I blog!”.

⁴ The largest blog survey up to now has apparently been the “MIT Blog Survey” conducted in Summer 2005 with about 35,000 participants (Marlow, 2005).

3 Results

Due to the selection process described above, the results are not statistically representative of the german-speaking blogosphere, but nevertheless give valuable insights into blogging practices. Among the countries of origin, Germany dominates by far (81.5%), with Austria (9.6%) and Switzerland (5.5%) trailing behind. Other countries account for 3.4 percent.⁵

The majority of participants are active bloggers (84.0%), but fair shares of readers only (11.7%) and ex-bloggers (4.3%) participated as well. The following results are only for the sub-group of active bloggers (N=4,405).⁶ Of those, about three out of four (73.7%) maintain only one blog, while 15.3 percent run two and 11 percent three or more blogs. Authors with more than one blog were asked to answer the questions thinking about the blog that is “most typical” for their blogging routines.⁷ For some questions, separate results for sub-groups (based on authors’ age and blogs’ age, respectively) were computed, with the results of a chi²- test and the coefficient quotient eta given.

3.1 General findings

The participants of this survey share characteristics with early adopters of Internet technologies (see Table 2 and Table 4): they are rather young and mostly in their twenties (M = 29.3 years, SD = 10.59), usually have a high formal education (college-entrance level or university degree), and a high degree of Internet involvement measured both by time since first Internet use (mostly five years and more) and Internet use per week. However, there is one important exception (see Table 3): the gender share is nearly balanced; among teenage bloggers, women even outnumber men by a 2:1 ratio.

Table 2: Sociodemographics of active bloggers

Sex (N=4,218)	%
Male	54.4
Female	45.6
Age (N=4,186)	
< 20 years	17.7
20 to 29 years	41.8
30 to 39 years	24.3
40 to 49 years	10.7
> 50 years	5.4
Formal education (N=4,193)	
No degree	3.8
„Hauptschule“ (9 years)	4.2
„Mittlere Reife“ (10 years)	19.3
„Abitur“/“Matura“ (12/13 years)	42.8
College degree	29.9

⁵ 40 other countries were named in total. Among them were, for example, the United States, Luxemburg, Poland and Italy.

⁶ A full account of the results is available in Schmidt/Wilbers (2006) [german]. A separate analysis focussing on differences in blogging software use is presented in Schmidt/Wilbers/Paetzolt 2006.

⁷ The decision to ask questions only with regard to the most typical blog might skew some results, when participants with multiple blogs thought of different of their blogs when answering different questions. An alternative option would have been to repeat the blog-related questions for every single blog. However, this would have prolonged the time needed to complete the survey, thus increasing the number of drop-outs.

Table 3: Gender share by age groups

N=3,558	Male (%)	Female (%)
< 20 years	33.9	66.1
20 to 29 years	58.5	41.5
30 to 39 years	62.0	38.0
40 to 49 years	53.1	46.9
> 50 years	58.0	42.0
Total	54.4	45.6

$Chi^2=137.770, df=4, eta=.109^{**}$

Table 4: General Internet use

Time of first Internet use (N=4,218)	%
< 1 year	1.1
1 to 2 years	3.1
2 to 5 years	22.4
5 to 10 years	53.7
> 10 years	19.7
Length of Internet use (N=4,183)	
< 10 hours/week	18.8
11 to 20 hours/week	26.8
21 to 30 hours/week	20.3
31 to 50 hours/week	14.2
> 50 hours/week	19.9

Slightly less than half of the participants started their blogs within six months before the survey, showing that the adoption of this new format has somewhat lagged behind the US. About sixty percent use a blog provider (most commonly myblog.de, twoday.net or blog.de) to host their blog, while about a third (31.9%) have stand-alone-software installed. Among them, Wordpress is the most common (49.9%), followed by Serendipity (10.8%) and Movable Type (5.7%). 7.6 percent of the participants state that they don't know what the technical base for their blog is.

Table 5: Blog age

N=4,391	%
< 6 months	45.2
6 to 12 months	20.6
12 to 24 months	20.5
24 to 36 months	8.3
> 36 months	5.4

When asked about their motivation to maintain a blog, more than two-thirds state “for fun”, while a majority also gives “like to write” and “record ideas and experiences for myself” as reasons for blogging. About one in ten blogger runs his/her blog for professional reasons. When different age groups are compared, some significant differences become visible. Teenage bloggers are more likely than older bloggers to blog because they like to write and to get feelings off their chest. The latter are in turn more likely to blog for professional reasons (as comes to be expected) but also to use their blog as a way to share knowledge on certain topics with others.

Table 6: Motives for maintaining a blog by bloggers' age

N=4,309	eta	< 20 yrs (%)	> 20 yrs (%)	Total (%)
For fun	.046 **	75.9	70.0	70.8
Like to write	.143 **	79.4	59.8	62.7
Record ideas and experiences for myself	.090 **	72.2	59.9	61.7
Share ideas and experiences	.058 **	56.0	47.8	49.0
Get feelings off my chest	.211 **	69.9	40.1	44.5
Share my knowledge on certain topics	.098 **	22.2	35.3	33.4
Stay in touch with friends/acquaintances	n.s.	35.1	32.9	33.2
Make new contacts	.066 **	34.3	26.0	27.2
For professional reasons	.142 **	1.3	14.7	12.7
Other reasons	n.s.	9.3	10.9	10.7

Answer options given; multiple answers possible.

3.2 Identity management: Updates, content and anonymity

Most participants update their blogs frequently, about a third at least once a day. Teenage bloggers report a slightly higher update frequency than older bloggers. Looking at the content of the postings, episodes and stories from private life are published by three out of four bloggers, and about two-thirds add pictures or photos to their blog. A majority also states that they include episodes or stories from their professional life, school or university respectively as well as commented links to other online content. Only a small number includes multi-media files like videoclips and podcasts in their blog. Again, age differences come to light: teenage bloggers are more likely to share poems, lyrics and/or short stories, and – to a lesser degree – to blog about episodes and stories from both personal life and school. Older bloggers are in turn more likely to point at other online content and to comment on political issues.

Table 7: Frequency of blog updates by bloggers' age

N=4,402	< 20 yrs (%)	> 20 yrs (%)	Total (%)
Couple of times/day	11.9	11.3	11.4
About once/day	30.4	20.2	21.7
Couple of times/week	36.0	39.8	39.2
Couple of times/month	19.1	23.1	22.6
Once/month or less	2.5	5.6	5.1

$\chi^2=41.390, df=4, eta=.072^{**}$

Table 8: Blog content by bloggers' age

N=4,108	eta	< 20 yrs (%)	> 20 yrs (%)	Total (%)
Episodes/stories from private life	.086 **	83.3	72.9	74.5
Pictures/photographies	n.s.	63.4	63.6	63.5
Episodes/stories from professional life, school, university	.084 **	68.0	56.5	58.3
Commented links to other online content	.088 **	47.9	60.0	58.2
Comments on current political issues	.093 **	30.6	43.2	40.5
Comments on professional, school or academic topics	n.s.	42.2	40.2	40.5
Poems, lyrics, short stories	.162 **	49.8	28.9	32.1
Other content	.044 **	15.6	20.5	19.7
Video clips	n.s.	4.9	4.6	4.6
Podcasts	.031 *	1.8	3.2	3.0

Answer options given; multiple answers possible.

Less than a third (29.5%) of the participants are blogging anonymously or with a pseudonym. Among those who disclose personal information (like name, age or address), different ways are possible: 40.9 percent of all participants mention these details in postings, and 35.8 percent maintain a separate “about me” page, with teenage bloggers being more likely to use these strategies than older bloggers. To a lesser extent, bloggers also use a personalized URL/blog name or link to another personal homepage, without significant differences between age groups.

Table 9: Disclosing personal information by bloggers’ age

N = 4,220	eta	< 20 yrs (%)	> 20 yrs (%)	Total (%)
Blogging anonymously/with pseudonym	.074**	21.4	30.9	29.5
Disclosing personal information (multiple answers possible)				
Posting information on 'real' identity	.123**	55.3	38.3	40.9
Maintaining an 'about me' page	.087**	45.8	34.1	35.8
Title or URL of blog contains author’s name	n.s.	13.6	16.2	15.8
Link to a separate personal homepage	n.s.	10	11.7	11.5

3.3 Relationship management: Comments and Blogrolls

Comments are an integral part of blogs, and only 3.2 percent of all active bloggers have them disabled. In contrast, three out of four (74.6%) allow any reader to comment on particular postings, while 22.2 percent make a registration mandatory before readers can comment. Not all postings receive comments, though (see Table 10): less than 30 percent of the participants state that most or all of their postings are commented upon, while almost half of all active bloggers get comments on only a few of their postings or even none at all. Participants were then asked to estimate the average number of comments a posting receives (see Table 10); about a quarter states it is only one, and 62 percent state they get only a few comments on average.

Results for both questions differ significantly if we look at blogs of different ages: those blogs younger than six months get comments on fewer postings in general, and get fewer comments on particular postings on average.

Table 10: Share of postings commented upon by blog age

N=3,916	< 6 months (%)	> 6 months (%)	Total (%)
All	3.2	7.4	5.5
Most	18.9	27.6	23.7
About half	20.4	25.6	23.2
Few	48.3	38.0	42.6
None	9.1	1.5	4.9

$Chi^2=209.255, df=4, eta=.206^{**}$

Table 11: Average number of comments per posting by blog age

N=3,783	< 6 months (%)	> 6 months (%)	Total (%)
1	35.3	16.2	24.5
2 to 5	56.9	65.9	62.0
5 to 10	6.2	13.2	10.2
10 to 50	1.4	4.2	3.0
> 50	0.2	0.5	0.4

$Chi^2=222.926, df=4, eta=.231^{**}$

While blogrolls are often mentioned as an integral part of the blog format, only slightly more than half (55.3%) of all active authors maintain such a linklist to other favorite blogs. The number of links in the blogroll differs widely (see Table 12); on average it contains 16 links (SD = 23.15; Median = 10). The majority of blogroll links point to other blogs the author is reading on a regular basis and/or to friends' blogs (see Table 13). A quarter of all bloggers establishes reciprocal links, that is links to blogs which refer to their own site. Other than the blog itself, the blogroll gets updated less frequently (see Table 14). Only about a third of all authors update at least once a month, while the majority adds or removes links less frequently.

As with comments, we can see also significant differences between blogs of different ages with respect to the blogroll. 49.9 percent of all authors blogging for six months or less maintain a blogroll, while 59.7 percent of all participants with blogs older than 6 months do ($\chi^2=41.576$, $df=1$, $\eta^2=.098$). Authors of younger blogs have fewer links in their blogroll but report that they update them more often.

Table 12: Number of blogroll links by blog age

N=2,119	< 6 months (%)	> 6 months (%)	Total (%)
1 to 5 links	45.9	21.3	31.1
6 to 10 links	31.7	23.8	27.0
11 to 15 links	9.7	15.5	13.2
16 to 20 links	6.0	13.8	10.7
> 20 links	6.7	25.6	18.0

$\chi^2=252.185$, $df=4$, $\eta^2=.341^{**}$

Table 13: Kinds of Blogs included in Blogroll

N=2,180	eta	< 6 months (%)	> 6 months (%)	Total (%)
Blogs I read regularly	.123**	79,6	88,6	85,0
Blogs of friends	.070**	56,1	63,1	60,3
Blogs that deal with similar topics	.064**	34,9	41,3	38,7
Blogs that link to my blog	n.s.	25,0	26,1	25,6
Other blogs	n.s.	7,2	6,5	6,8

Answer options given; multiple answers possible.

Table 14: Blogroll update frequency by blog age

N=2,160	< 6 months (%)	> 6 months (%)	Total (%)
Couple of times/week	5.5	3.6	4.4
Couple of times/month	35.9	25.5	29.7
Couple of times/year	37.2	51.2	45.6
Less often	21.4	19.6	20.4

$\chi^2=46.686$, $df=3$, $\eta^2=.076^{**}$

3.4 Information management: Reading Blogs and RSS

Blog authors are not only publishers, but also readers of other blogs. On average, an active blogger reads 21.15 (SD = 39.43, Median = 10) other blogs regularly (see Table 15 for the grouped answers). A convenient way to stay up to date on new content is to subscribe to RSS feeds – two out of five participants use a feed reader to manage their reading routines; about the same number has heard about RSS feeds, but does not use them (see Table 16). Active bloggers with younger blogs are significantly less likely to read many blogs and to use a feed reader.

Table 15: Number of blogs read regularly by blog age

N=3.562	< 6 months (%)	> 6 months (%)	Total (%)
1 to 5 blogs	50.7	23.9	35.3
6 to 10 blogs	23.7	21.7	22.6
11 to 20 blogs	15.7	23.1	20.0
> 20 blogs	9.8	31.3	22.1

*Chi*²=385.008, *df*=3, *eta*=.328**

Table 16: Use of RSS Feed Reader by blog age

N=3.666	< 6 months (%)	> 6 months (%)	Total (%)
Yes	33.4	49.9	42.7
No, but have heard of RSS feeds	43.3	39.1	41.0
No, never heard of RSS feeds	23.3	11.0	16.4

*Chi*²=143.674, *df*=2, *eta*=.197**

Participants were also asked to state their expectations of what constitutes a ,typical blog’ (see Table 17 and Table 18). In general, most bloggers expect blogs to enable comments and to present the author’s personal opinion. A majority also expects an informal writing style, unique content that is not presented in other media formats and photos or pictures. On the other hand, relatively few bloggers expect blogs to have a polished design or to engage in an objective discussion on the topics covered.

Comparing different groups of bloggers, some significant differences come to light. With regard to the age of the blog, authors of younger blogs are especially less likely to expect RSS feeds. Teenage bloggers are also less likely to expect feeds, as well as trackbacks, keyword search, and unique content. On the other hand, they are more likely to expect an informal writing style, a separate ‘about me’ page and a polished design.

Table 17: Expectations of “typical blogs” by blog age

N=3,678	<i>eta</i>	< 6 months (%)	> 6 months (%)	Total (%)
Being able to comment	n.s.	86.2	86.0	86.1
Personal opinion in postings	.038 *	73.9	77.2	75.7
Informal writing style	n.s.	59.9	57.9	58.8
Read texts I don’t read in other media	n.s.	56.1	59.5	58.0
Photos/Pictures	.039 *	53.0	49.1	50.8
Blogroll	n.s.	43.4	42.0	42.6
Author’s contact E-Mail	.040 *	44.4	40.5	42.2
RSS Feeds	.125**	31.7	43.9	38.5
A separate ,about me’ page	.038 *	29.9	33.5	31.9
Daily updates	n.s.	30.7	31.3	31.0
Keyword search	n.s.	31.1	30.0	30.5
Trackbacks	.041 *	24.5	28.1	26.5
Many links to other online content	n.s.	25.8	26.1	26.0
Polished design	.033 *	25.7	22.9	24.1
Objective discussion of topics	n.s.	18.5	19.4	19.0

Answer options given; multiple answers possible.

Table 18: Expectations of “typical blogs” by bloggers’ age

N=3,689	eta	<20 years (%)	> 20 years (%)	Total (%)
Being able to comment	n.s.	88.4	85.6	86.0
Personal opinion in postings	n.s.	78.0	75.3	75.8
Informal writing style	.122 **	72.1	56.1	58.8
Read texts I don’t read in other media	.077 **	49.6	59.7	58.0
Photos/Pictures	.043 *	55.7	49.9	50.9
Blogroll	n.s.	39.9	43.1	42.6
Author’s contact E-Mail	n.s.	45.3	41.6	42.2
RSS Feeds	.189 **	18.2	42.7	38.5
A separate ,about me’ page	.100 **	42.3	29.8	32.0
Daily updates	.089 *	40.0	29.1	31.0
Keyword search	.112 **	19.1	32.8	30.5
Trackbacks	.149 **	12.0	29.5	26.5
Many links to other online content	.062 **	19.9	27.2	25.9
Polished design	.177 *	40.8	20.7	24.1
Objective discussion of topics	n.s.	20.3	18.7	19.0

Answer options given; multiple answers possible.

4 Discussion

Results of the “Wie ich blogge?!”-survey give an indication of various aspects of blogging practices prevalent within the german-speaking blogosphere, especially with respect to the various rule sets which frame individual blogging episodes. In line with other findings (e.g. Herring, Scheidt et al., 2006; Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Trammell et al., 2006), the dominant motives for maintaining a blog are personal expression and, to a somewhat lesser extent, supporting existing social relations. The format seems to be adequate for a wide range of usages framed by different sets of procedural rules. Blog authors use different software platforms and other technical means (like RSS feeds and blogrolls) to manage the publication and reception of content as well as the social relations that are started or maintained through their blogs. Since these technologies are fairly new, it is no surprise that the sociodemographic characteristics of active bloggers are similar to those of ‘early adoptors’ of technological innovations in general. The one notable exception is gender: female bloggers have a high share and are in a clear majority among teenage blog authors. These results support findings of other studies such as Herring, Kouper et al. (2004) for English-language blogs or Trammell et al. (2006) for Polish blogs.

As Herring, Kouper et al. (2004) have argued, blogging practices of women in general, and of teenagers specifically, are banalized in discourses about the new online format, since they are treated as being irrelevant in contrast to the more accepted practices of using blogs as an information filter, as a channel for political commentary, or as a knowledge management tool. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess the discursive formation of public images of blogging, the results presented here emphasize that blogging practices, in particular routines of identity management, depend on bloggers’ age: teenage bloggers seem to use blogs primarily as personal journals, as an online space to reflect on and share ideas and experiences of their personal life. This practice is also the most common among adult bloggers, but here we find reasonable numbers of authors using blogs as sites of knowledge management or for professional communication as well.

An important part of identity management is the decision whether to blog anonymously or to disclose personal information. The share of anonymous or pseudonymous bloggers within the german-speaking blogosphere (about 30 percent) is slightly higher than the (non-representative) numbers given in Viégas

(2005), where 81 percent of the bloggers stated that they identify themselves within the blog.⁸ However, even more important than these differences seems to be the fact that a clear majority of bloggers make themselves identifiable. Apparently, for them the benefits of giving additional context to their postings and comments seem to outweigh the potential risks that come from the persistence of blog entries, ranging from conflicts about certain postings in private or professional life to possible implications for future job searches. It is not clear if the higher likelihood of teenagers to disclose personal information in postings or separate ‘about me’-sites results from an age effect (where younger bloggers would increasingly hold back personal information as they grow older) or points to shifting conceptions of privacy and publicness among the younger generation. In contrast to identity management, routines of relationship management and information management depend rather on blogs’ age than on bloggers’ age. Since the age of a blog can be regarded as an indicator of experience with blogs and the blogosphere in general, these findings underscore the fact that blogging practices change over time. As bloggers incorporate blogs into their communicative routines, they expand their social relations with other bloggers through blogrolls and comments, and they also expand their reading repertoires. Based on the expectations of what constitutes a “typical blog”, comments seem to be more important than blogrolls for relationship management. Although not all postings receive comments⁹, the share of commented postings and the number of comments itself increases with the age of the blog.

We can observe similar dynamics with respect to blogrolls, and with a growing number of blogs to be followed, experienced bloggers are more likely to use RSS to manage the amount of information. In other words, by looking at blogrolls, comments and reading routines we can observe a process of network formation, both in respect to hypertextual links and to social ties. While the three strategies of identity management, relationship management and information management have been separated analytically for the purpose of discussing the survey’s findings, they are in fact interdependent: Relationship management will have an influence on information management, since social networks based on and manifested in hyperlink connections between blogs help directing attention to certain information. In addition, comments and blogrolls serve not only to maintain social relations, but allow ways of presenting one’s identity online as well. For example, whom a blogger links to in his/her blogroll will also highlight certain facets of his/her identity, like friendships or thematic interests. More generally speaking, identity is always constructed by synthesizing personal and social aspects of the self – an idea originally put forward by classical theorists like George Herbert Mead (1934). In blog-based communication, this process of constructing the self is made visible.

⁸ Herring, Scheidt et al. (2005) report a share similar to the “Wie ich blogge?!”-study based on a content analysis: 67.6 percent of 203 blogs include either first or full name of the author, and 54 percent provide other forms of explicit personal information such as age, occupation or geographic location. A longitudinal analysis conducted by Herring, Scheidt et al. (2006) shows that the share of anonymous or pseudonymous blogs decreased to under 20 percent between 2003 and 2004.

⁹ The survey results are in line (although not directly comparable) with findings of Mishne & Glance (2006) who analyzed about 685.000 blog postings published in July 2005. They found that 28 percent of all blogs, but only 15 percent of all postings received comments. On average, there were 6.3 comments per posting (excluding the un-commented postings).

5 Conclusion and further research

The survey “Wie ich blogge?!” has empirically assessed the importance of various aspects of information-, identity- and relationship management in blog-based communication. It can only be a starting point, though, for systematic and longitudinal study of changes and stability in blogging practices and online-based networking in general. The survey data itself allows for more analyses, like investigating gender differences or contrasting the practices of “stand alone” bloggers and bloggers using a hosting platform. To gain a more comprehensive picture of blogging practices, this data, which has been gathered reactively through surveys, must be complemented by other instruments. For example, quantitative network analysis might allow more insights into the emerging networks and topical clusters, while qualitative content analysis of blog postings and comments will help understand the finer points of identity management and the discursive formation of procedural rules. These and other approaches will also increase our understanding of the way blogging practices influence the structuring of attention and information flows as well as the provision of various kinds of social capital.

Compared to other countries, the diffusion of blogs in german-speaking countries has lagged behind (Schlobinski & Siever, 2005), but it is not settled whether general cultural factors or institutional characteristics of the various national media systems (or combinations of both) are accountable for these differences. Comparative research would help close this research gap and also give insights into the relative importance of blogs within the larger landscape of ‘social software’. Internet users increasingly apply a whole repertoire of applications for online-based networking, self-presentation, and information management. Teenagers are especially eager to create content online and to manage their social relations to peers through a whole array of tools for interpersonal communication, among them blogs, Instant Messaging, social networking sites and mobile phones (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). It will be an on-going challenge to communication research to study the dynamic practices which form around the use of these technical innovations.

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Appendix: Translation of survey questions

Wie ich blogge?!

This survey is part of a research project dealing with routines and expectations of people using blogs. It is not aimed exclusively at “bloggers”, those who actively run a blog, but also at people who at least sometimes read blogs or have run a blog in the past. The survey is designed so that only those questions are asked that are relevant for the various groups. The time needed to complete the survey will therefore vary; for active bloggers it should take about ten to fifteen minutes, for ‘readers only’ it will be significantly less.

The survey is organized by Dr. Jan Schmidt of the Research Centre “New Communication Media” (University of Bamberg). The blog providers blog.de, blogg.de, blogigo.de and twoday.net are cooperating with the research project and will be informed about the results. At the end of the survey you can leave an E-Mail address if you want to learn about the results as well.

Some additional information about the survey and the project are published here [<http://www.bamberg-gewinnt.de/wordpress/archives/292>], where you also have the opportunity to leave comments or ask questions about the survey. We are looking forward to your feedback!

Thank you for your help!

1. How many blogs do you run, either on your own or in a group of several authors? (Please answer only in regard to „active blogs“, meaning those blogs you update with a certain regularity.)
 - a. I don't run my own blog
 - b. One blog
 - c. More than one blog [open input]
 - d. I used to run one or more blogs, but quit blogging

[Questions 2 to 32 asked only if participant answered b or c on question 1 – active blogger]

The following questions deal with your routines as a blog author, that is the way you typically use your blog. [If more than one blog: You run a number of blogs that might differ. Please answer the following questions in regard to your typical blogging routines or in regard to the blog that is the most typical for your blogging routines.]

2. Do you run your blog on your own? (“Other authors” refers to other people who publish postings, not comments, with a certain regularity.)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No, there are other authors on my blog
3. How many months ago did you start your blog? [open input]
4. How often do you usually publish postings in your blog?
 - a. Several times a day
 - b. About once a day
 - c. Several times a week
 - d. Several times a month
 - e. About once a month or less
5. Do you engage in “Mobile Blogging” by publishing postings and pictures from your mobile phone? [Partly exclusive answers]
 - a. No, because I'm not interested in it
 - b. No, because it is too difficult
 - c. Yes, some of my postings are published via mobile phone
 - d. Yes, most of my postings are published via mobile phone
 - e. Yes, my whole blog is a “moblog”

6. Do you have a „blogroll“, i.e. a list of other blogs you recommend, on your start page?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

7. Which blog software do you use?
 - a. My blog is hosted by a “blog provider” (e.g. twoday.net, blogg.de, 20six.de, antville.org...).
 - b. My blog is based on „stand alone“-software (e.g. Wordpress, MovableType, Serendipity, ...).
 - c. Don’t know

8. Why do you run a blog? Please select all answers that apply.
 - a. For fun
 - b. For professional reasons
 - c. To share ideas and experiences
 - d. To share my knowledge on certain topics
 - e. To get feelings off my chest
 - f. Because I like to write
 - g. To stay in touch with friends and acquaintances
 - h. To make new acquaintances and contacts
 - i. To record ideas and experiences for myself
 - j. For other reasons, please specify [open input]

9. Is your blog open to all internet users?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No, some postings are open only to selected people
 - c. No, my whole blog is open only to selected people
 - d. Don’t know

10. Can readers comment posting on your blog?
 - a. Yes, but only if they register first
 - b. Yes, and they don’t have to register
 - c. No

11. Does your blog contain information regarding your „real“ identity, e.g. your name or age, a postal address or a phone number? Please select all answers that apply.
 - a. Yes, the title or the URL of my blog contains my name
 - b. Yes, I have a separate text or “about me“-page with personal information on my blog
 - c. Yes, I mention information regarding my „real“ identity in some postings
 - d. I link to a separate personal homepage
 - e. No, I’m bloggging anonymously or with a pseudonym

12. Please explain briefly, why you publish personal information on your blog or why you choose to remain anonymous. [open input]

13. Which kinds of postings do you publish on your blog? Please select all that apply.
 - a. Episodes and stories from my private life
 - b. Episodes and stories from professional life, school or university
 - c. Poems, lyrics, short stories
 - d. Pictures and/or photographies
 - e. Podcasts
 - f. Commented links to other online content
 - g. Comments on current political issues
 - h. Comments on professional, school-related or academic topics
 - i. Video clips
 - j. Other content, please explain [open input]

14. *[Question asked only if participant answered „no“ on question 10]* Please explain briefly, why you don't allow comments on your postings. [open input]
15. Did you ever delete or change a posting you already published on your blog?
- Yes, I have deleted a posting from my blog
 - Yes, I have changed or updated a posting in my blog
 - No, but I would do so if it were necessary
 - No, and I would never do it

[Questions 16 to 18 asked only if participant answered “Yes” on question 10 – comments allowed]

16. About how many of your posting receive comments by readers?
- All
 - Most
 - About half
 - Few
 - None
17. About how many comments do the postings receive that are commented? (The number of comments might differ from posting to posting; in this case please give an average number.)
- One
 - Two to five
 - Five to ten
 - Ten to fifty
 - More than fifty
18. Do you write comments to your own postings?
- Yes, to react to other comments
 - Yes, to update or correct my posting
 - No
19. Which people read your blog? For all the groups below, please indicate if you know, guess or don't know that people from this group read your blog. [Options: (1) Does not apply; (2) Know that people from this group read my blog; (3) Guess that people from this group read my blog; (4) Don't know if people from this group read my blog; (5) Know that NO people from this group read my blog]
- Friends
 - Relatives
 - My fellow students
 - My colleagues
 - My boss; my teachers
 - My students
 - People I don't know personally
20. Can you estimate how many people read your blog regularly?
- Yes, about [open input] people
 - No
21. Do you check server log files or blog statistic services to see how many or which people visit your blog?
- Yes, from time to time
 - Yes, regularly
 - I would like to, but my software does not offer this
 - I would like to, but don't know how to do it
 - No

[Questions 22 to 24 asked only if participant answered “Yes” on question 6 – blogroll on blog]

22. About how many blogs do you link to in your blogroll? [open input]

23. What kinds of blogs to you list in your blogroll? Please check all answers that apply.
- Blogs of friends
 - Blogs that deal with topics similar to mine
 - Blogs I read regularly
 - Blogs that link to my blog
 - Other blogs, please specify [open input]

24. How often do you update your blogroll?
- A couple of times per week
 - A couple of times a month
 - A couple of times a year
 - Less often

[Questions 25 and 26 asked only if participant answered "b" on question 2 – at least one group blog]

25. You are participating in (at least) a groupblog. With regard to that groupblog that is most typical for your blogging routines: How many other people (excluding you) are writing for that groupblog? [open input]

26. What is your relationship to the other authors of that groupblog? Please select all answers that apply.
- Relatives
 - Close friends
 - Acquaintances
 - Colleagues from my organization or company
 - Colleagues from my industry
 - Students of mine
 - People I don't know personally

[Questions 27 to 29 asked only if participant answered "a" on question 7 – Blog hosted by provider]

27. Now we would like to ask some questions about your blogging platform, that is the provider where your blog is hosted. [If more than one blog] Please keep in mind to answer only for the blog that is most typical for your blogging routines.

Where is your blog hosted?

- [List of 40 blogging providers given]
- My blog is hosted by a provider not listed, please specify [open input]

28. How satisfied are you in general with your blogging provider?
- Very satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Partly satisfied – partly unsatisfied
 - Unsatisfied
 - Very unsatisfied

29. And how satisfied are you with specific aspects of your blogging provider?

[Answer options ranging from „very satisfied“ to „very unsatisfied“ as in question 28]

- Ease of use for author / administrator
- Adapting/modifying design and layout
- Adding modules/plugins/interfaces to other software
- Ease of use for readers
- Spam protection
- Adding other authors
- Integrating blog into extended web site
- Uploading pictures or other files

[Questions 30 to 32 asked only if participant answered "b" on question 7 – Blog based on stand-alone software]

30. Now we would like to ask some questions about your blogging software. [If more than one blog] Please keep in mind to answer only for the blog that is most typical for your blogging routines.

Which blogging software do you use?

- a. [List of 28 stand-alone software systems given]
- b. My blogging software is not listed, please specify [open input]

31. How satisfied are you in general with your blogging software?

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Partly satisfied – partly unsatisfied
- d. Unsatisfied
- e. Very unsatisfied

32. And how satisfied are you with specific aspects of your blogging software?

[Answer options ranged from „very satisfied“ to „very unsatisfied“ as in question 31]

- a. Integrating blog into extended web site
- b. Adapting/modifying design and layout
- c. Adding modules/plugins/interfaces to other software
- d. Ease of use for readers
- e. Ease of use for author / administrator
- f. Spam protection
- g. Adding other authors
- h. Uploading pictures or other files

[Questions 33 to 35 asked only if participant answered d question 1 – ex-blogger]

33. For how many months did you run your blog(s)? [open input]

34. Why did you stop blogging? Please select all answers that apply.

- a. It was too expensive
- b. There was no feedback
- c. I lost interest in it
- d. I worried about making my private life public
- e. It was a blog run temporarily for school, college or my job
- f. Blogging took too much time
- g. I had technical difficulties
- h. Other reasons, please specify [open input]

35. Will you start another blog within the next 12 months?

- a. Definitely yes
- b. Probably yes
- c. Probably not
- d. Definitely not

[Questions 36 to 53 asked all participants]

36. We now present a couple of statements with regard to your general behaviour, not only regarding blogging. [Answer options ranged from (1) „agree completely“ to (5) “disagree completely”]

- a. I often take my time to explain my friends things they don't know.
- b. When I'm talking to my friends and acquaintances about new ideas, trends and developments, I usually give them a lot of information.
- c. I often notice that other people tend to follow my lead with regard to new ideas, trends and developments.
- d. I tell my friends and acquaintances more often about new ideas, trends and developments than they tell me.
- e. I read a lot of detailed articles about new ideas, trends and developments.
- f. I have the impression that my friends and acquaintances think I'm a valuable source regarding new ideas, trends and developments.
- g. I often notice that I have less difficulties adapting to new things than other people.
- h. There are certain areas where I'm trying to always stay up-to-date.
- i. I like to try out new things.

37. The next questions deal with your routines as a blog reader. About how many blogs do you read or follow regularly? [open input]

38. Many blogs offer so-called „RSS Feeds“ to keep their readers informed about updates. Do you use a Feed Reader?

- a. Yes
- b. No, but I have heard about RSS Feeds
- c. No, and I have never heard about RSS Feeds

40. What makes up a „typical blog“ for you? Please select all answers that apply.

- a. Being able to comment
- b. Trackbacks
- c. A separate ‚about me‘ page
- d. Polished design
- e. Finding the author's personal opinion in postings
- f. Having the author's contact E-Mail included
- g. Keyword search
- h. Informal writing style
- i. RSS Feeds
- j. Objective discussion of topics
- k. Blogroll
- l. Many links to other online content
- m. Reading texts I don't read in other media
- n. Photos/Pictures
- o. Daily updates

41. Are there other features or aspects that make up a „typical blog“ for you? [open input]

42. We have listed a couple of statements about the future of blogs and blogging – in general as well as for you personally.

[Answer options ranged from (1) „agree completely“ to (5) “disagree completely”]

- a. I will quit blogging in the near future [statement given only to active bloggers]
- b. I plan to blog about other topics in the future [statement given only to active bloggers]
- c. In the future, a person's blog will be important for his/her job applications or career.
- d. In the future, blogs will be more important as a form of journalism.
- e. Companies will increasingly use blogs for a dialogue with their customers.
- f. More people will get in trouble with their colleagues or friends because of their blog.
- g. Blogs will never be as credible as traditional mass media.
- h. With the growing number of blogs, it will become increasingly difficult to find relevant information.
- i. Blogs are a fad that will loose importance in the future.

43. Is there anything else we haven't covered in our survey which you think is important with regard to blogs? [open input]
44. If you want to be informed about the results of this survey, please leave your E-Mail [open input]
45. Scientifically, it is very interesting to keep track of the development of blogs. We are planning a follow-up survey in 2006. Would you be interested in participating in that second survey?
- Yes, please contact me via E-Mail [open input]
 - No, I'm not interested
46. What year were you born in? [open input]
47. What is your sex?
- Male
 - Female
48. Which country do you reside in?
- Germany
 - Austria
 - Switzerland
 - Other country, please specify [open input]
49. When did you start using the internet?
- Less than a year ago
 - One to two years ago
 - Two to five years ago
 - Five to ten years ago
 - More than ten years ago
50. How many hours per week are you usually online? [open input]
51. What is your highest educational degree?
- No degree
 - Volksschule/Hauptschule [9 years]
 - Mittlere Reife [10 years]
 - Abitur/Matura [12/13 years]
 - College degree
52. What is your employment position?
- Prefer not to disclose
 - Student (school/college)
 - Military/alternative service
 - Employed
 - Self-Employed/Freelancer
 - Housewife/-man
 - Pensioner
 - Unemployed
53. What is your monthly net income?
- Prefer not to disclose
 - Up to 1000 Euro
 - 1000 to 1500 Euro
 - 1500 to 2000 Euro
 - 2000 to 2500 Euro
 - 2500 to 3000 Euro
 - More than 3000 Euro