

Experts' meeting »Media and Women's Rights«

Good practices for equality in the mass media: Observatories, Codes and Self-Regulation

Blogging and Gender Learning from non-mass media

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Talking about ...

- Gender **gaps**, gender **biases** and other gender-related aspects of blogging.
- Awareness biases in **media coverage** on net culture.

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Blog

- Short for **web log**
- **Frequently updated** website
- Articles in **chronological order**
- Technical means supporting **easy publishing and discussing**



Due to its openness and lack of scarcity, the internet acts as a natural experiment to see more clearly what happens when the most important rules of communications aren't codified but emerge from common practise.

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What are the regulations if there are no regulations?

- **Everyone can blog**, blogging isn't regulated, there's no scarcity on the web
- The Internet is **no post-gender Utopia**: Societal structures of the real world are reproduced in the virtual world.



In theory, the internet is a realm of total freedom: There is enough room for everybody to publish. Everyone can publish, everyone can create his or her image.

In the early nineties a cartoon published by *The New Yorker* showed two dogs in front of a screen, captioned »On the internet, nobody knows that you're a dog«. Virtuality was associated with anonymity and the potential of total control of ones persona. Virtualization seemed to be a possibility to reach a real deconstruction of gender roles.

Yet, in practise, a woman online is still a woman, a man online is still a man, a dog online is still a dog.

Informal regulations exist: societal structures aren't abandonend when the public becomes virtual, they are reproduced and in a certain sense become even stronger.

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Gender gaps in German blogs

- **66 %** of German blogs are **written by women**.
- **30 %** of the **top bloggers** are women.



(Additionally, there's an age gap: Most blogs are in fact written by female teenagers.)

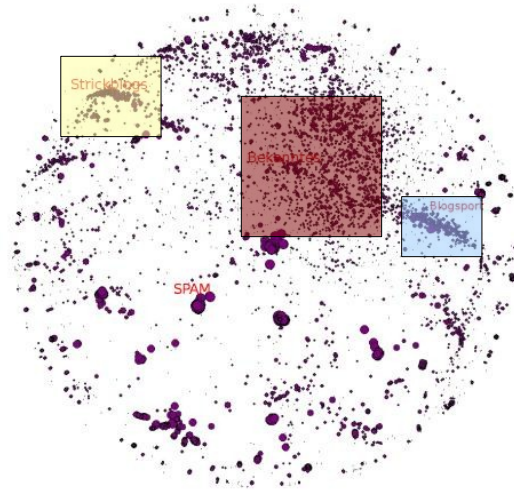
Determining the top bloggers is a technical process: You can e.g. count links, regular readers or page impressions. Different measures are used, the figures stay similar.

Hesse, Franka (2008): Die Geschlechterdimension von Weblogs: Inhaltsanalytische Streifzüge durch die Blogosphäre. In: kommunikation@gesellschaft, Jg. 9, Beitrag 1. Online-Publikation: http://www.soz.uni-frankfurt.de/K.G/B1_2008_Hesse.pdf

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- **Yellow:** knitting blogs
- **Brown:** top blogs
- **Blue:** blogspot blogs



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The German blogosphere. Proximity means connectedness (via links).

The yellow cluster is a community dealing with crafts.

The brown cluster in the middle consists of »important« blogs, blogs which are frequently quoted and linked.

The blue cluster is one of the many subspheres, here Blogs hosted by the blogspot.de provider, where mostly leftwing blogs are hosted.

Only the top blogs have a notable media impact. When blogging is referred in mainstream media, most likely those blogs are quoted.

Image: John Kelly/netzpolitik.org, license: CC by-nc, source:

<http://www.netzpolitik.org/2008/netzpolitik-podcast-die-deutsche-blogosphaere-kartografieren/>

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Gender gaps in German blogs

- **Male bloggers:** 60 % write on politics
37 % write on their lives
- **Female bloggers:** 36 % write on politics
76 % write on their lives

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Common interpretation

- **Male bloggers:** 60 % important topics
37 % boring topics
- **Female bloggers:** 36 % important topics
76 % boring topics



Most blogs written by women seem to cover topics without enough relevance to be considered important or newsworthy.

(Another factor is networking which acts as an reinforcing factor: »top bloggers« meet at net-culture and hacker conventions and conferences, while similar events do not exist for non-technical, non-political blogging scene.)

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Feminist interpretation

- **Male bloggers:** 60 % secondary politics
37 % primary politics
- **Female bloggers:** 36 % secondary politics
76 % primary politics



Primary politics means »doing what needs to be done in society«, whereas

Secondary politics means »talking about doing what needs to be done in society«.

In common discourse, only secondary politics are considered »real« politics, yet seemingly private and unpolitical topics deal with political issues: raising children, organizing day-care, choosing an education, coping with sexist experiences, coping with bureaucracy, discussing lifestyles.

In mainstream media this potential of blogging isn't used, leading to a marginalization process.

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Interpretations

Androcentrism in media, education and politics

- **Male connotation** of seemingly *relevant* topics
- Androcentric **self-reinforcing processes**
- Definition and gender-connotation of **private and public**



»Relevant« topics are male connotated topics.

Additionally, net-related discourse is limited to *crime* and *technology*. The internet as tool for managing and maintaining communities and relations isn't stressed as much in media and politics. In education, media literacy seems to be widely reduced to informing about dangers, not about taking chances.

The technical devices used to rank blogs are programmed by males, so a male perspective is the foundation of the code; additionally, the idea of numerical impact is a male-connotated concept.

The privat sphere is associated with women, the public sphere with men, so it's uncommon for men to engage in »public privateness«.

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How politics can help in advancing equality

- Don't act as if the internet was bad
- Don't talk only about technical aspects
- Do talk about chances of the internet for e.g. women, elderly and disabled people
- Do talk about androcentrism



It's important to talk about androcentrism, especially in school and education. Gender role clichés and stereotypical role models are one side of the problem. Even more important is to address the fallacy of the male norm and the female aberration. Male and female norms are two paradigms of equal value, none is derived from the other.

Besides implementing suitable curricula, the role of politics is primarily not to misinform about the internet and an awareness for appropriate agenda setting:

We discuss the internet politically as if it was *1.* a threat and *2.* only about technical questions.

If the internet is associated politically only with child pornography and fraud, you'll miss its capability as a tool for community building, communication, making the lives of elderly and disabled people easy.

If net politics consists solely of technical questions like net neutrality, copyright issues and broadband connectivity, all the social aspects will be forgotten.

If net politics consists solely of crime and technology, political media coverage will be reduced to those topics.