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## MASTERTHESIS

Exploring the Aspects of Blogging as a Professional Activity  
and their Influence on Authenticity of the Author and  
Credibility of the Blog

ausgearbeitet von  
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Credibility of the Blog

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submitted to  
Department of Computer Sciences  
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## **Abstract**

Blogging has established itself as an important and influential part of the modern online media. At the dawn of the blogosphere people were publishing their diaries and life journals. Nowadays, some bloggers operate blogs that are hardly any different from online newspapers and magazines. On the one hand professional blogging is broadly accepted in the society, but on the other hand it is poorly understood. The purpose of this explorative study is to broaden the understanding of blogging as a professional activity. In particular, this study explores the aspects of professional blogging and the interplay between credibility, authenticity and monetisation in blogs.

To understand blogging as a professional activity an extensive literature research is conducted. First, main concepts of blogging as a social activity are discussed. Then, the changes that come together with the transformation of a social activity into a professional activity of blogging are discussed. To look at the activity of blogging from an unusual perspective, a comprehensive qualitative survey is conducted with blog readers. The survey examines not only readers' perception of blogging as a professional activity, but also motivations for reading blogs and attitude to monetising practices and labelling of monetised content in blogs. Information received from the survey is used to draw some conclusions about the state of the art of blogging as a professional activity, and challenges and opportunities blogging industry faces nowadays.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Problem and Motivation

Blogging as a research area became relevant with the rapid growth of the blogosphere in the beginning of the 2000s. Millions of people launched their own blogs to publish facts of their personal life in online diaries. Nowadays, the blogosphere is steadily growing and, according to the world's largest blogging platform Wordpress<sup>1</sup>, about eighty million blog posts are being created monthly through their services.

As the emergence and growth of blogs was mainly happening in the end of the 90's beginning of 00's there was a lot of research at that time dedicated to the motivation for blogging, the relations between the author and his audience, motivation behind exposing one's identity, etc. Analysing research papers about the topic of blogging from the last twenty years one can discover that many aspects of an indeed broad area were investigated and reported about: blogging as a social activity [NSG04; BST08], corporate blogging [Ion+12], micro-blogging [Gao+12], etc. Intention of this research, however, is to investigate the topic related to professional blogging. Professional blogging emerged with the very beginning of the blogosphere, but seemed to have received less attention in the research community. Among millions of bloggers, some were able to stand out from the mass and appeal to the audience more than others. Koltsova et al. in [KKA14] call those bloggers *celebrities*, as they form bigger communities and attract more readers. The authors believe this area to be the most studied and give as one of the examples an article of Trammell et al [TK05] who studies "impression management tactics and self-presentation on popular A-list blogs". However, according to my observations, this area of the blogosphere stayed rather unexplored. Even though there were some research publications concerning top bloggers, blogging activity of celebrities is constantly changing together with the modern media and communication trends. Professional blogging community is not only getting bigger, but changing its form and pattern. Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics and trends leading the "industry" of professional blogging.

On the one hand professional blogging is broadly accepted in the society, but on the other hand it is poorly understood. A lot of people have a wrong idea of the exact meaning of the term "professional blog", and many either do not read blogs or do not realise reading them. David Meerman Scott writes about this phenomenon in [Sco14] and discusses the prejudice people have towards blogs and mainstream media. I am a frequent blog reader, besides, I write my own travel blog. Therefore, my interest in this topic is motivated among other factors by my private activities

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<sup>1</sup><https://wordpress.com/activity/posting/> last accessed on the 29th of October 2017

and desire to broaden my knowledge in this area.

David Meerman Scott argues that the border between the online mass media and the blogosphere has become vague [Sco14]. We are used to trust *BBC* or *The Times*. These media nowadays have a wide online presence. Does the same apply to blogs? If not, can blogs become a trusted source of information? Trust people put into media sources depends on certain factors. We trust *BBC* and *The Times* because of their reputation. In fact, we trust information provided by their writers and journalists. In the world where the differences between various online media become vague it is important to understand the aspects which influence the trust of media consumers. Therefore, it is intended to explore such social aspects as authenticity and credibility of blogs that contribute to the reputation of blogs and the trust of readers. Moreover, it is important to maintain an up-to-date perspective on professional blogging as an influential part of the modern digital media industry. Thus, it is intended to determine the aspects of blogging as a professional activity that influence authenticity and credibility of the blog in both positive and negative way.

### 1.2. Goals and Research Questions

The main goal of this thesis is to explore the aspects of professional blogging and their influence on authenticity and credibility of blogs. Problems and motivations discussed above inspired a few research questions that become the foundation for this research and should be answered throughout this thesis. Blogging has established itself as an important and influential part of the modern online media. At the dawn of the blogosphere people were publishing their diaries and life journals. Nowadays some bloggers operate blogs that are hardly any different from online newspapers and magazines. **RQ1: What does the activity of blogging mean nowadays, how has it developed and what role does it play in the modern media?**

The blogosphere becomes more commercialised [Fir12]. Being able to transform a blog into a source of income defines blogging as a professional activity. **RQ2: What are the the aspects of blogging as a professional activity and how they influence the relationship between bloggers and their readers?**

An audience is the main asset of professional bloggers. Understanding the audience gives a perspective into the potential of blogging as a professional activity. The last and the biggest research question is devoted to the audience's perception of professional blogging. **RQ3: How do readers perceive the aspects of professional blogging?**



### 1.3. Organisation of the Research

The first part of this work is done through scholarly research and reviewing literature. Relevant publications containing theoretical concepts and research data about blogging is studied and discussed. This provides an overview on the state of art of the blogosphere and, in particular, professional blogging. Moreover, literature analysis can be of use to grasp an idea about the historical development of professional blogging in order to understand its role in modern media. To obtain a better understanding of the aspects of professional blogging, it is important to win some theoretical knowledge on development of this kind of mass media.

Section 2 is devoted to exploring the foundations of blogging. Definitions and important terms are given to define the scope for this research. The biggest part of this section is dedicated to answering the research question RQ1. Blogs are discussed in terms of mass media. The relation between blogging and journalism and corresponding problems are contemplated. Also, the questions of the nature of blogs are explored. Blogging implies interaction between bloggers and their audiences. Therefore, motivations of both bloggers and readers are discussed in terms of blogging as a social activity.

The aspects of professional blogging, as they are presented in current literature and research papers, are discussed in section 3. The biggest part of this section is dedicated to answering the research question RQ2. First, the concept of professional blogging is defined. It is discussed how professional blogging is different from the social activity of blogging. Then, the importance of social aspects, such as authenticity and credibility, are discussed in terms of commercialisation of blogs. Finally, the process of the audience commoditising and the role of the audience in professional blogging is explored.

Section 4 is devoted to answering the last and the most important research question RQ3. For the purposes of exploring readers perception of professional blogging a qualitative survey is designed. Blog readers both who read blogs frequently, and just from time to time, are relevant for this research. The questions of the survey are focused on discovering readers' attitudes to blogging as a professional activity, monetising practices in blogs, labelling of sponsored content and some other minor aspects of professional blogging. In particular, readers perception of the aspects that influence authenticity and credibility of blogs is of importance for this study. Qualitative data received from the survey is analysed through coding and categorising. Finally, the theoretical concepts discussed in the sections 2 and 3 are reviewed with regard to topics and concepts that emerge from the analysis of empirical data obtained from the qualitative survey.

## 2. Blogging as a Phenomenon in Mass Media

In this section the key concepts of blogs as a part of mass media will be discussed. First, the definitions of such terms as blog, blogging, blogger and blogosphere will be provided. These definitions will serve to set the scope for this research and avoid vague interpretations of the terms. Then, the topics of online journalism and online media in their relation to blogging will be addressed. At last, the aspects of professional blogging will be specified and discussed in relation to the online media.

### 2.1. Blog, Blogger, Blogosphere: Definitions and Background

#### 2.1.1. Blog

Every author who has published a research paper or a book about blogging attempted to provide his or her own definition of the term *blog*. Depending on the aspects that the author considered to be primary, the understanding of the term was different, but the foundation was essentially the same. Most of the authors agree that blogs are websites that consist of a number of articles sorted in a reverse-chronological sequence. The following definition of the blog concerning its structure is given by Nardi et al. [NSG04]:

Weblogs, or *blogs*, are frequently updated webpages with a series of archived posts, typically in reverse-chronological order.

David Meerman Scott [Sco14] adds a few aspects and defines a blog as a specific type of website, which is created and maintained by one person. The goal of the blog creators is to communicate the topic of their special interest, their expertise or concern into the world. Scott adds that even if most of the blogs are written by an individual, there are also such blogs that are maintained by a group of people and corporate blogs. This author also specifies three fundamental functional blog features:

- the articles are sorted in the reverse chronological order,
- posts are categorised with tags (keywords),
- commenting on the posts is possible.

Reverse chronological order allows the reader to see the latest post on top of the blog. The timeline becomes more important than the category. Categorising is still possible and is widely used, but it is secondary to the timeline. Tagging as a mechanism of categorisation allows authors to structure their posts according to certain characteristics and topics. This feature enables readers an alternative way of navigation around the blog. The other fundamental feature of blogs is the possibility

for readers to give feedback or share their interest, opinion, concern, etc. through comments.

Mary Garden [Gar12] conducted a comprehensive literature research on the definition of blogs. She discovered that the scholars researching the blogosphere were likely to see a blog either as a medium<sup>2</sup> or as a genre<sup>3</sup>. Referring to Rettberg [Ret08], Mary Garden [Gar12] seems to support the idea that blogs can be seen as both, a medium and a genre. Rettberg [Ret08] discussed that blogs were easy to define through their elements and form of the content, like comedy or sonnet. However, she argued that the diversity of blogs spoke against viewing blogs as one genre. There were rather multiple genres and sub-genres represented in blogs [Ret08]. Moreover, many online newspapers have adopted elements of blogs. Rettberg [Ret08] explained how and why the difference between medium and genre became vague in the Internet.

Jodi Dean [Dea10] speculates about different interpretations of the term *blog* concerning its nature. According to Dean's observation, some researchers have seen blogs "as personal diaries or easily updatable journals", others as "new forms of citizen journalism", yet others went further and urged to consider blogs as a part of mass media [Dea10]. Arguing if blogs should refer either to diaries, or journalism, or mass media makes little sense, because all of these aspects reflect the nature of blogs. The most reasonable approach to understanding and defining blogs is considering both the context and the perspective.

For the scope of this thesis the following definition of the term blog was formulated. **Blog is an online medium that allows individuals or groups of authors to advocate their own cause through publishing news and articles in the form of blog entries sorted by the publication date (newest at the top), categorised by topics and/or tags, and encourages discussion and feedback through comments.** Blogs are seen here as a channel for communication with an audience, where authors have their own agenda. The personal agenda of an author is the key element of a blog. The structural aspect of a blog is essential to differentiate blogs from, for instance, information websites, where the focus lies on the structure, and not on the timeline. The timeline of blog entries is primary to their categorisation. This definition provides the necessary foundation for understanding blogs, nevertheless, the comprehension of the whole concept is inconsequential without understanding who stands behind the blog.

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<sup>2</sup>*Medium* is a channel or system of communication, information, or entertainment (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/medium> last accessed on the 16th of October 2017)

<sup>3</sup>*Genre* is a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterised by a particular style, form, or content (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/genre> last accessed on the 16th of October 2017)

### 2.1.2. Blogger

Bloggers are usually simply considered to be authors of blog content. However, their role is not only limited to content creation. In fact, many popular bloggers have a team of editors that helps them to maintain their blog. **A blogger is the person who stands behind a blog; he or she maintains the blog, chooses the topic, defines the concept, and creates the content for his or her blog.** The most common practice is that a blogger introduces him- or herself. However, bloggers can choose to stay anonymous under a pseudonym, or create an imaginary protagonist for their blog.

An analog to the blogger in a newspaper is the editorial board (or the chief editor). The editorial board decides the editorial policy of the medium. The editorial board is also responsible for credibility of the medium. Same responsibility takes the blogger towards his blog and the audience. The blogger uses the blog to advocate his own agenda, share opinion and send the message to the audience.

The number of authors in a blog can vary, but should not be too high, because then the border between a blog and an online magazine becomes too vague. It is hard to define requirements for the number of authors for a medium to be called blog. In fact, the key point of a blog is not the size of its team, but the personal agenda of its author(s). Regardless of the number of authors, there should be a core, an aspect holding the author(s) and their audience together. This aspect is the authenticity of the author(s). As Nardi et al. [BST08] note, without authenticity blogs will lose their readership, as the audience expects authenticity from bloggers. **A blogger is the person who authenticates the agenda of a blog.**

### 2.1.3. Blogosphere

Blogosphere is another term that will be often used throughout this thesis. According to Oxford Online Dictionaries, blogosphere is described as "blogs considered collectively with their writers and readers as a distinct online network"<sup>4</sup>. According to Stephanie Hendrick [Hen12], early research about blogging viewed the blogosphere as a large network of links. Although, later, researchers began to identify different clusters that formed within the blogosphere, e.g. German and Russian clusters. It is common to call these clusters blogospheres as well.

The blogosphere as a whole is very heterogeneous. The clusters of the blogosphere, especially related to countries and cultures, have their own peculiar properties and tend to develop differently. For example, the core of the Russian blogosphere is

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<sup>4</sup><https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/blogosphere> last accessed on the 25th of August 2017

concentrated around the LifeJournal blogging platform [KKA14]. The most popular bloggers of *Runet*<sup>5</sup> do not tend to create their own domain names and remain inside the LiveJournal community. Whereas in the USA popular bloggers tend to register unique domain names and develop their own name and build their own brand [Nue16]. There are many inequalities between the regional clusters of the blogosphere, that are shaped greatly by the political and cultural situation in the regions. Nevertheless, certain tendencies, for instance, the ever growing role of the blogosphere in the modern media, are notable disregarding the borders.

## 2.2. Blog as a Part of Mass Media

### 2.2.1. Blogging and Journalism

With the emergence of blogs, every person became the possibility to tell his or her story to the masses. Previously only traditional mass media were authorised to create news. Since the beginning of the blogosphere a conflict between journalism and blogging has developed. Bloggers did not have proper education, but were able to create articles and publish them, like journalists do. Of course, bloggers did not have the access to official mass media, but soon enough some blogs became as big as online newspapers. A project of Markus Bechedahl *Netzpolitik.org*<sup>6</sup>, which was founded in 2003 as a platform for digital civil liberties, is an example of such development from the German blogosphere. As published on the Netzpolitik's about page, the project is to be considered a journalistic product, however, not of neutral nature. The authors have their political position towards digital civil liberties and advocate this position in their blog posts. Therefore, their opinion is not objective, like traditional journalist ethics require a narration to be. The articles at *Netzpolitik.org* contain opinions and judgements offering a biased (not neutral) journalistic product. This development in online media has been widely discussed since blogs claimed their place in the mass media.

The conflict points between traditional journalism and blogging are well represented in [Wal05] (Table 1):

Table 1 reflects the typical concerns of professional journalists. Bloggers do not have knowledge of the journalistic principles and ethics of covering a story. Therefore, the quality of information in blogs from a traditional journalist point of view will always be judged negatively. This happens when people "try to assign blogs to a certain category depending on their view of the world", David Meerman Scott

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<sup>5</sup>Russian-language Internet

<sup>6</sup><https://netzpolitik.org> last accessed on the 26th of September 2017

Table 1: Traditional journalism versus blogging. [Wal05]

	<b>Traditional journalism</b>	<b>Blog journalism</b>
Narrative style	Detached Neutral 'Both' sides	Personal Opinionated One-sided
Approach to audience	Audience as passive recipient	Audience as co-creator
Story form	Structured format (e.g. inverted pyramid) Answers basic questions (who, what, etc.) Closed text Sources and datelines for credibility	Fragments  Incomplete  Open text Hyperlinks for credibility

[Sco14] argues against such prejudices. Indeed, from a journalist point of view the blogger are amateur journalists. Blogging is, however, a phenomenon of its own. Scott [Sco14] says that bloggers have never claimed to be journalists, and should not be seen as journalists by society. Moreover, not everything what bloggers write is credible and should be trusted. He compares bloggers as a source of information with neighbours or friends who usually recommend a book to read. The task of the reader is then to choose friends carefully, and think twice before following the advice of the neighbours. Unfortunately, we are not always able to choose our neighbours.

### 2.2.2. Blog as a Medium

Communication is an optional, but argued to be the key feature of blogs [Gar12]. Authors communicates their interests, expertise, concerns, opinion, etc. to their audience(s). Readers have the possibility to communicate their interests, expertise, concerns, opinion to authors through comments. The reciprocal communication makes blogging so different from traditional media, which is most of the time done through a one way broadcast. However, the traditional media had to establish their presence in the online world and they had to adapt to the quickly evolving web technologies. Many big online newspapers introduced the comment function following the inquiry of their audience and the example of blogs. The Guardian, for instance, published a blog article in 2006 dedicated to the introduction of *Comment is free* feature, where the author admits the changes blogging has brought to the mass media<sup>7</sup>:

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<sup>7</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/mar/14/welcometocommentisfree> last accessed on the 26th of August 2017

The best example of the impact a group blog can have comes from across the Atlantic where the Huffington Post has outstripped its liberal old media competitors in the 10 months since it launched. As Arianna Huffington, its founder and editor in chief writes, old media will thrive if they embrace the energy, passion and immediacy of the blogging revolution. Thanks, Arianna; you're right, the water's just fine.

Scott [Sco14] also refers to the example of *Huffington Post* and compares this group blog to the newspaper *The New Yorker* and the website *BBC News*. He lists the following questions [Sco14]:

- What is a blog?
- What is an online newspaper like *Huffington Post*?
- How is it called that a print newspaper like the *New York Times* or a TV-company like *BBC* publish the news also online?
- How is it called when the reader is able to comment on the online articles?
- How to understand the fact that a journalist maintains a blog for *BBC*?

If one tries to answer all those question, he will realise that the difference between the mass media and the blogosphere became vague today. How different is a blog to an online newspaper or magazine? An online newspaper/magazine has a wider range of information and therefore larger audience. There are usually many articles written by many authors and a big editor team working on the content, therefore the update frequency is much higher than on a blog. It is reasonable to consider a blog as a medium. Moreover, it makes sense to refer to blogging as a kind of journalism. Discussing the issue of defining the blog, Mary Garden [Gar12] comes to the conclusion that a blog can be a medium and a genre depending on the perspective. In this thesis a blog is seen rather as a channel of communication, and therefore, a medium. Moreover, as a blog is usually designed to reach broad audiences, it is only fair to consider blogs a legitimate form of mass media.

### 2.2.3. Setting the Scope: Blog Categories

Categorisation of blogs is an issue that has never been addresses systematically. Different authors offer various ways of blogs categorisation. Rettberg [Ret13] examines three types of blogs: personal blogs, filter blogs, and topic-driven blogs. The author provides an example for each suggested blog category: [dooce.com](http://dooce.com), [kottke.org](http://kottke.org), and [dailykos.com](http://dailykos.com). Rieh et al. [Rie+14] identify four types of blogs (or rather bloggers): Community Builder, Expertise Provider, Topic Synthesiser, Information Filterer. While Rettberg [Ret13] chooses three categories based on the blogging style, Rieh

et al. [Rie+14] focus on the way bloggers perceive their blog value towards the audience.

Indeed, there are many aspects that can serve as a basis for blog categorisation: topic, multimedia, technology. For the scope of this thesis the important aspects are type of activity and authorship. Concerning type of activity this thesis aims attention at the differentiation between hobby blogs and professional blogs. Mentioning hobby blogs serves rather as the way of defining professional blogging. In fact, professional blogs are of the main interest for the given study, because they determine the way the blogosphere develops nowadays.

Concerning the authorship and for the scope of this thesis blogs can be categorised as personal or private blogs, group-driven blogs, and corporate blogs. Private or personal here implies a different meaning from Rettberg's [Ret13] interpretation of diary-style blogs. In the scope of the given research the term *personal blog* is meant as a blog maintained and inspired by a single author, for example, [frauleinselbstgemacht.de](http://frauleinselbstgemacht.de). Group-driven blogs are maintained by a group of bloggers united by one goal, agenda, topic, etc., for example, [www.travelettes.net](http://www.travelettes.net). The last type of authorship are corporate blogs, for example, [blog.couchsurfing.com](http://blog.couchsurfing.com). Corporate blogs are maintained by employees of a company in the interests of that company.

Regarding the scope of this thesis, personal and group-driven blogs will be mainly discussed. Corporate blogs will be excluded from the focus of this research. Even though personal and group-driven blogs will be also considered from the social side of activity, all the implications and conclusions will be drawn regarding professional blogging.

### 2.3. Blogging as Social Activity

Looking back into the history of appearance and development of blogs helps to understand the initial concept of blogging as an activity. According to Nardi et al. [NSG04] blogging as an activity emerged back in 1997. The authors report about the early years of blog research. It was discovered that most of the blogs were of an online diary type [NSG04]. Due to the fact that blogs were initially designed for keeping a kind of life journal, the prejudice about blogs being simple diaries can be still encountered nowadays, especially among those people, who do not read blogs. However, motivations for blogging and, therefore, genres of blogs are diverse, and not limited to keeping an online diary.



### 2.3.1. Why Bloggers Blog?

The study of Nardi et al. [NSG04] helps to understand the initial concept of blogging and motivations of bloggers in the early age of the blogosphere. Their research is focused on blogs written by individuals or small groups, with limited audiences. In 2003 Nardi et al. conducted an interview research among 23 active bloggers where these bloggers reported about their reasons and motivations to start blogging and, then, go on with the activity of blogging. The authors have identified five categories of bloggers' motivations. They do not provide a list of the particular motivational items, however, based on the description of these categories and examples the authors provide in their paper, more concrete reasons to start and continue blogging can be identified. They will be listed further based on the findings of Nardi et al. [NSG04]:

- *Update others on activities and whereabouts:*
  - capture life events for personal reasons,
  - show life events to the public,
  - document life through text or/and photography,
  - communicate with others,
  - facilitate remote social relationships.
- *Express opinions to influence others:*
  - educate the readers on a certain topic the blogger is passionate about,
  - share content the blogger found interesting with the audience,
  - give advice and trigger action.
- *Seek others' opinions and feedback:*
  - seek response from the audience,
  - stimulate feedback by posting.
- *“Think by writing”:*
  - have someone to stimulate the writing and, accordingly, thinking,
  - get feedback and discuss with the audience.
- *Release emotional tension:*
  - freely express themselves,
  - draw attention,
  - release of problems or issues bothering on emotional level.

It is apparent that the above motivations are rather personal and authentic. People present their own lives to public and try to solve their personal problems openly speaking about them and seeking feedback from the audience. It was discovered that some of the bloggers were eagerly looking for the response of their readers, others were rather unwilling of immediate feedback [NSG04]. The authors note that limited interaction possibilities in blogs, that allowed their authors among other things to

control the feedback, enabled more reflective communication and deeper engagement with the audience rather than other more interactive social media channels [NSG04].

Blogging in its initial stage was encouraging people to capture their lives, communicate their stories to the audience, and receive feedback. There was hardly any other goal than sharing authentic experiences for the pleasure of communicating with the audience and being inspired to create more content. How many of the bloggers at that moment realised how important in the end the audience could become? Nardi et al. [NSG04] asked: "Would You Let 900 Million People Read Your Diary?" Another reasonable question to ask is: Why would 900 million people read someones diary?

### 2.3.2. Why Readers Read Blogs?

Barbara Kaye conducted an extensive research about people's motivations to reading blogs. In 2007 she performed an exploratory study and identified 62 motivational items, which she later used for a quantitative research to determine the primary reasons for using blogs. The most common reasons for reading blogs were [Kay10]:

- "for links to information sources"
- "for information I can't get from traditional media"
- "because blogs are interesting"
- "to access information at any time"
- "blogs are independent of traditional media"

Through factor analysis she identified that individual motivation items could be grouped into broader categories [Kay10]:

1. Convenient Information Seeking
2. Anti-traditional Media Sentiment
3. Expression/Affiliation
4. Guidance/Opinion Seeking
5. Blog Ambiance
6. Personal Fulfillment
7. Political Debate
8. Variety of Opinion
9. Specific Inquiry

It is interesting to look closer at two strongest motivation blocks that emerged from Kaye's research [Kay10]. Bearing in mind the aspects discussed in section 2.2.1 about the relation of blogging and journalism, conceptual similarity can be discovered between some of the nine motivational categories. Therefore, it can be argued that such broad categorisation is redundant and can be reduced down to only three main categories.

In fact, Kaye [Kay10] notes that future research can benefit from the reduction of motivational items and categories. She identified that motivational items that fall into *Convenient Information Seeking* and *Anti-traditional Media Sentiment* categories could be appropriate to fully describe readers' motivations for reading blogs. With this thought in mind, a few motivational categories will be closer discussed in the next paragraphs. Eventually, this discussion shall provide a foundation for some questions of the intended qualitative survey.

### **Convenient Information Seeking**

Comparing readers' motivations with those of bloggers one might wonder what has come first, supply or demand. Blogging technology made it simple for bloggers to filter information according to their interests and expertise, and distribute it to their readers. The readers in response realised the convenience of such situation and therefore could rely on blogs as an advantageous source of information instead of or as an addition to traditional media. Looking into motivational items in this category, such advantages as quick and easy access, depth, specific interest, most up-to-date, new information, etc. can be identified.

Motivational items of this category indicate that blogs appear to be more specific about the topics, which correspond with the last category of *Specific Enquiry*. *Specific Enquiry* consists of three motivational items: to research for work or school, to use as ammunition in arguments with others, to find out about the war on Iraq and its aftermath [Kay10]. Kaye [Kay10] explains the emergence of this category by the fact that blogs tend to be focused on an issue, topic or ideology. In other words, blogs provide profound depth of the of the information, and therefore correspond with motivational items from the category *Convenient Information Seeking*.

### **Anti-Traditional Media Sentiment**

In section 2.2.1 the relation of blogging and journalism was discussed. What is seen by media professionals as a drawback of blogging, actually attracts readers to blogs. Motivational items discovered by Kaye [Kay10] such as disclosure of media mistakes and bias or decreased trust in traditional media indicate that blogs attract readers by providing a more credible alternative to traditional information sources.

Other motivational blocks emerged through Kaye's [Kay10] research, in fact, reveal similar aspects to those mentioned above. *Guidance/Opinion Seeking* as a motivation for reading blogs indicates readers' demand for opinionated information. Opinions are something that traditional media cannot supply in the newsfeed. Professional journalism implies a mere reporting of facts. Opinionating of information that happens in blogs is usually criticised by professional journalists. The readers, however,

are looking for such opinionated information, because especially *Variety of Opinion* helps them to obtain an overview of opinions and form their own attitude to the topic.

Another difference of blogs to traditional media is the possibility of free political discussion. Even though most of traditional newspapers and magazines expanded online and introduced the possibility of commenting, for some critical topics comments are usually closed. The Guardian, for instance, made the following statement concerning their commenting policy [Mac12]:

"There are also some other instances in which comments will be off, or premoderated. These are rare occurrences, and usually involve topics of a sensitive nature. A thread might be premoderated if the article is a very personal account and we want to avoid abusive and hurtful comments."

Bella Mackie [Mac12] outlines the following reasons for closing the discussions under the articles:

- Legal liabilities
- Topics of a sensitive nature
- Avoid abusive and hurtful comments
- The subject is likely to create a hostile or negative discussion
- Night time
- The conversation has gone past the point of civility and will not recover

Big online newspapers and magazines can afford and should provide moderation. Blogs are not as affected by legal consequences as traditional media. And often bloggers are not able to moderate discussions. On the one hand it might lead to emergence of negative and hostile discussions, on the other hand it attracts readers to join discussions. The freedom of discussion in blogs opposes the situation in traditional online media. Therefore, *Political Debate* motivational block corresponds with *Anti-Traditional Media Sentiment* motivational block.

### **Blog Ambiance**

In her earlier research Kaye [Kaye07] *Expression/Affiliation* and *Personal Fulfillment* that motivate the readers go for blogs are directly related to the *Blog Ambiance*. When the reader perceives a blog as enjoyable to navigate and read, humorous and interesting, it means that he is attracted by the certain atmosphere of the blog. This aspect makes the difference between the blogs the readers visit regularly and only once.

Under the motivation category *Personal Fulfillment* Kaye appoints such motivational items as "so I don't have to pay for a newspaper or magazine", "to relieve

boredom", "because I'm addicted to them", "because they help me relax". Kaye discusses that good writing, humor and overall atmosphere of the blog draws the readers. In particular, good reading can help in relieving boredom, and humor helps to relax. So blog ambience basically facilitates *Personal Fulfillment*.

The ambience of the blog also fosters *Expression/Affiliation* of the readers. If the readers feel involved, they identify themselves as a part of community around the blog. They join discussions to express their opinions and communicate both with other readers and the author. A task of any blogger that wants opened discussions in his or her blog is to create ambience that fosters *Expression/Affiliation* of the readers. The presence of the blogger not only through the articles, but in the discussions is important.

Kaye [Kay07] admits a few limitations of her study, one of which is the kind of sample. She discloses that the survey respondents were recruited from blogs with large audiences that were devoted to social and political issues. Indeed, the topic of those blogs could have influenced the distribution of motivational items. However, for the goal of the given thesis the fact that the respondents were found among the readers of popular blogs can be of advantage.

Existence of a large audience inclines a blog to become commercial. In the end, the size of the audience made it possible for hobby bloggers to transform their hobby into profession. As it is intended to investigate readers' perception of professional blogging, motivational items identified in Kaye's study that focused of professional blogs will be used as an inspiration for the questions of the intended survey. It was mentioned already that an audience plays a certain and an important role in professional blogs. The next section will clarify the concept of blogging as a professional activity and explain the role of the audience in professional blogs.

## 3. Exploring the Aspects of Professional Blogging

In this section we will address the social and technical aspects of professional blogging. At first, we will talk about the differences and similarities of blogging as a general concept and blogging as a professional activity. Then, we will discuss the concepts introduced by several authors concerning relation between the audience and the author and the process of audience commodification.

### 3.1. Defining the Concept of Professional Blogging

Exploring blogging as a phenomenon helps to understand certain social aspects of blogging in general. However, this thesis focuses on a particular type of blogging – professional blogging. Therefore, it is important to identify the aspects that define blogging as a professional activity. In fact, it is hard to draw the line where the activity of blogging becomes professional. Tom von Nuenen [Nue16] simply defines professional blogs as "commercialised blogs that (potentially) offer a source of income to their writers". The word "potentially" in brackets means that even if the blogger does not have an income from the blog yet, but has an intention to earn money with the blog, the activity of blogging becomes professional. In professional blogging, in addition to motivations discussed by Nardi et al. [NSG04] (section 2.3.1) monetary motivation emerges.

Professional bloggers implement certain practices to earn money from their blogging activities. Blog becomes a source of income for a blogger, therefore, blogging becomes his or hers profession. According to Cambridge Online Dictionary<sup>8</sup>, the word professional is used to describe someone who does a job that people usually do as a hobby: in this case "professional dancer" would have the same implication as "professional blogger".

ConvertKit[Con17], a marketing service provider for professional bloggers, has recently published a report characterising professional bloggers in detail. It is important to admit, however, that the results of the study by ConvertKit should be used and interpreted with caution, as this research was not made by an independent analyst, but originated from the company itself. Nevertheless, being a marketing provider for professional bloggers, ConvertKit could, in fact, have an exclusive access to the target audience, and respectively a possibility to collect reliable information from its own customers – professional bloggers. Still, the presumption of pursuit of own benefit by publishing such a report cannot be completely excluded. The report

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<sup>8</sup><http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/professional> last accessed on the 16th of October 2017

of ConvertKit[Con17] showed that the most popular reason for starting a blog among their respondents was *becoming self-employed*. Among other reasons, the prevailing motivation in one way or another was always related to earning money: building an audience, earning more money, building a company, quitting a job, getting out of debt, creating jobs for other people.

Michael Firnkes [Fir12] notes that the blogosphere has become more commercial in the last years. Even many private diary style blogs used the opportunity to turn on advertisement banners and promote their blogs[Fir12]. Firnkes [Fir12] explains this development as follows: If a blogger devotes a lot of time to his/her blog and creates valuable content that is distributed freely, then it is only fair that the blogger uses possibilities of content monetisation.

## 3.2. Operating Professional Blog

With the emergence of many possibilities to monetise their blogs bloggers had to change their activity in some way. Creating content was enough to build the audience, but earning money with a blog implied many other activities, such as working with SEO (search engine optimisation), or implementing monetising measures. Blog monetising always involves certain marketing measures. In addition to being content creators and chief editors bloggers had to become marketers. Michael Firnkes [Fir12] outlines several possibilities of blog monetising and marketing. Firnkes's [Fir12] work will be taken as a background for exploring the monetising possibilities and finding examples of implementation in different blogs. As the blogosphere evolves quickly, certain changes have happened since the publication of Firnkes's [Fir12] work. Therefore, it is necessary to refer to recent publications as well. Table 2 provides an overview of possible blog monetising measures is represented based on [Fir12], [Cam15], and [JG17].

### 3.2.1. PPC (Pay-per-Click)

PPC is a direct monetising measure, which everybody is used to see on any webpage in the Internet. Google AdSense is the market leader in this area. However, several other companies provide similar service. Firnkes sees Amazon as a possible and to some extent a more serious alternative to AdSense. An example of deploying PPC banner advertising can be found on *theplanetD*<sup>9</sup> blog (figure 1). The main advantage of blog monetising through pay-per-click is simplicity and immediate effect. The

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<sup>9</sup><http://theplanetd.com/11-fun-and-not-so-obvious-things-to-do-in-havana-cuba/>  
last accessed on the 1st of September 2017

Table 2: Overview of blog monetising measures: Advantages and disadvantages

Monetising measure	Advantages	Disadvantages
PPC (pay-per-click)	simplicity and immediate effect	effective only for blogs with big audiences; can be blocked by ad blockers; can negatively affect design of a blog
Affiliate marketing	possibility to introduce the most relevant for their audience material higher remuneration comparing to PPC banners; flexibility in presentation and structuring of affiliate links	needs more time and effort for setting up; constant maintaining and repairing of broken links is necessary
Self-branding	independence in choice of advertisements; possibility to better fit promoted products to blog ambience; feasibility of implementing influencer marketing	blogger needs certain marketing skills; might take a lot of time to create effective content
Native advertisement	if deployed properly, awakes interest instead of rejection	takes a lot of effort to create

main disadvantage is that the effect becomes palpable only if the blog has a few thousand visitors daily.

### 3.2.2. Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing is another direct monetising measure. Many companies use this type of marketing in cooperation with bloggers. One of the market leader here is Amazon. In case of affiliation, bloggers do not include include a *tracking link* instead of a banner on the page: a text link or a link to a certain product or service which is being sold through an affiliate partner. If a reader clicked on the link, the blogger would not receive remuneration like it would happen through pay-per-click banner advertisement. Bloggers receive a percent of product sales. Only if a reader bought a product after clicking a tracking link, the blogger receives remuneration. Usually, the system saves a cookie<sup>10</sup> file with the tracking code in the reader's browser. If the

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<sup>10</sup>Information retrieved from <http://docs.affiliatewp.com/article/52-common-questions-on-affiliate-tracking> last accessed on the 21st of October



### 3. Exploring the Aspects of Professional Blogging

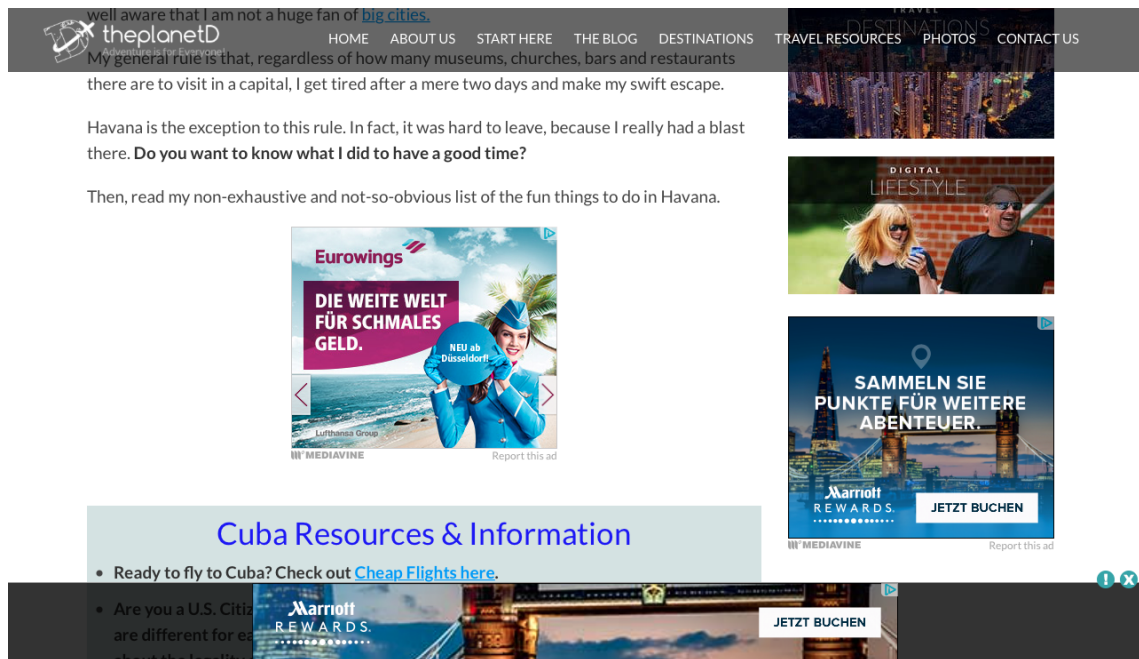


Figure 1: Pay-per-click banner advertisement on [theplanetD](#)

reader comes back to the shop later to buy this product, bloggers still receive their commission.

## Sonstige Technik

- [Mac Book Pro 13,3" 2,9Ghz 256GB 16GB](#)
- [AmazonBasics Laptophülle](#)
- [Kindle Paperwhite](#)
- [Sony Kopfhörer MDR-1000X](#) – zum Abschalten und Arbeiten
- [InEar Kopfhörer](#) – beim Sport praktisch, guter Sound
- [Ipod Nano](#)
- [1 TB Festplatte](#) – für Backups, Filme, etc.
- [2 TB Festplatte](#) – für Backups, Filme, etc.
- [2 x 480 MB SSD-Festplatten](#) – für Foto- und Videomaterial

Figure 2: Affiliate marketing links on [22places](#)

### Particular Aspects of Affiliate Marketing

Michael Firnkes [Fir12] affirms that even though probability of a purchase is lower than probability of a click, affiliate marketing is more lucrative for bloggers than

pay-per-click advertisement. The main reason for this, according to Firnkes [Fir12], is much higher remuneration. The author outlines the most common areas, where affiliate programs work best [Fir12]:

- Finances/insurance
- Telecommunications
- Technology, IT, web hosting
- Power supply industry
- Travel
- Publishing/subscriptions

With affiliate marketing bloggers can create content that is targeted on their particular audience. Common practice among travel bloggers, for instance, is creating packing lists and filling them with affiliate links to online shops, where readers can directly buy these recommended products. A perfect affiliate marketing implementation example is the packing list for South-East Asia from the authors of 22places<sup>11</sup>. Jenny & Sebastian do not link to some random products or services, they use these products themselves. The fact that all these products are relevant for their readers is amplified by the effect of personal experience and recommendation. Such practice increases authenticity of the advertised content.

The biggest advantages of affiliate marketing for the blogger are the possibility to introduce the most relevant for their audience material and relative flexibility in presentation and structuring of affiliate links [Fir12]. Michael Firnkes [Fir12] points out that the quality of the content that contains affiliate links has positive impact on efficiency of affiliate programs. This means that the blogger has to spend more time and effort for implementation of affiliate programs, than, for instance, for embedding a PPC banner. According to Firnkes [Fir12], the necessity of frequent updates is the biggest disadvantage of affiliate marketing. The blogger has to regularly control and maintain affiliate links, as they often become a subject to modification, replacement or elimination. [Fir12]

#### 3.2.3. Self-Marketing

Michael Firnkes [Fir12] explains the practice of self-marketing (in German "Eigenvermarktung") as making the blog an attractive platform for direct advertisers and sponsors. Instead of embedding a third-party banners or links, the blogger can sell the space for advertisement directly to the companies that correspond with the topic of the blog and the target audience. Firnkes notes [Fir12] that very few bloggers

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<sup>11</sup><https://www.22places.de/packliste-suedostasien/> last accessed on the 1st of September 2017

employ the practice of self-marketing. The situation has changed, however, since the publication of his book. Now it is a common practice for bloggers to create a "Work with Me" or "Media Kit" page, where they offer their media services and explain their blogging practices to potential marketing partners.

Firnkes [Fir12] lists possible advertising measures that can be implemented through self-marketing:

- Advertising banner
- Text links
- Sponsored articles
- Product reviews
- Combination of different measures

If bloggers embed AdSense advertisement, they are not able to fully control its content. The banner will automatically show ads depending on the key words used on the page or in the blog article. Selling advertising space directly to partners makes it possible for bloggers to choose content of an advertising banner, which might positively influence the appearance of the page and therefore experience of the readers. The same applies to the text links.

Firnkes [Fir12] defines sponsored articles as advertorial content that includes information about a partner-company, product or service and links to it. Advertorial content can be created either by partner-companies or by bloggers themselves. Firnkes [Fir12] points out the importance of indicating the fact of sponsorship in the article. It must be clear for every reader that for posting such an article a blogger received a monetary compensation [Fir12]. Indicating sponsored content does not only facilitates the feeling of trust and openness towards the reader, but is a legal obligation due to the media policies in many countries [Fir12].

According to Firnkes [Fir12], product reviews as type of partnership with bloggers is common among big brands. The blogger usually receives a product to test and write an honest review about it. The best effect can be achieved if the product/service corresponds with the topic of the blog [Fir12]. In fact, there is a growing number of bloggers who work with companies directly and implement different measures of self-marketing discussed above. A few years have passed since the publication of Firnkes's [Fir12] work. Self-marketing has become one of the most popular monetising activity on blogs and has transformed into *influencer marketing*.

#### **3.2.4. Influencer Marketing**

Influencer marketing is a rather new phenomenon in social media. Johansen and Guldvik [JG17] are one of the first scholars who made an extensive research about

this topic. They describe influencer marketing as "marketing on social media that focuses on using influencers to drive a brand's message to the larger market" [JG17]. An influencer is not a celebrity in classical understanding, but a person who is known in smaller circles and who has strong social ties with his or her followers. Johansen and Guldvik [JG17] explain that influencers are kind of opinion leaders, who work together with brands and companies, and are being payed for promotion of their products. According to the authors, influencers engage into influencer marketing on various social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter. However, blogs have the most impact in this kind of marketing [JG17].

In the meantime, many companies started working with brands and influencers. According to Johansen and Guldvik [JG17], such companies connect brands with suitable for their product or service influencers. Usually, influencers register in a database, and companies looking for social media placement can search through such databases for an influencer that fits the product or service character and goals[JG17]. With the emergence of blogs it became possible for everyone to publish content in mass media. In a similar way, the emergence of influencer marketing raised the possibility to become an advertiser, promoter and marketer for every blogger.

According to a recent study of marketing agency Tapinfluence, the biggest benefit of influencer marketing is that it is perceived as more authentic and trustworthy and, therefore, creates a higher return on investments[JG17]. As Johansen and Guldvik [JG17] note, influencers are very often specialise in a certain niche, which positively contributes to the engagement around a product or service. Influencers are usually interested in the product and, thus, are able to better project their enthusiasm to the audience.

Bloggers are virtually perfect influencers. As it was pointed out in section 2.3.2, readers are looking for opinions in blogs. A travel blogger, for example, might be using a backpack, a tent, a bicycle, a phone, or a computer during his/her travels. In their blog posts bloggers are able to share authentic recommendations, because they have really used the product; their experience is authentic and, therefore, trustworthy. Johansen and Guldvik [JG17] affirm, that the way most advertisements are done online nowadays, leads to the development of ad blockers. People try to escape advertisement. Johansen and Guldvik [JG17] express an opinion that effectiveness of influencer marketing in blogs might depend on design of the sponsored content. In fact, there is another phenomenon in content monetisation which is based on certain design principles that actually attract readers to advertising content. This is called native advertisement.

### 3.2.5. Native Advertisement

If a blogger wanted to switch to native advertisement, in addition to the role of content creator, chief editor and marketing professional he would have to become a designer as well. Campbell and Marks [Cam15] define native advertisement as follows:

At a general level, native advertising is a term used to describe a spectrum of new online advertising forms that share a focus on minimizing disruption to a consumer's online experience by appearing in-stream.

A perfect example of native advertisement implementation is shown by Russian online magazine [Meduza.io](#). Figure 3 demonstrates a part of the main page of the magazine with two sponsored articles built into the news flow. Both articles have a tag *partner material* above the title of the article. As Campbell and Marks [Cam15] argue, the key to the success of native advertisement is unawareness of the readers that it exists on the page.

Indeed, a quick look at [Meduza.io](#) main page does not bewilder by advertising banners. The design is clear and simple: none of the article teasers drives more attention to itself than the other. Campbell and Marks [Cam15] emphasise that "non-disruptive ads are concordant and consistent with a user's experience and in some cases are actually desired". The authors mention two ways of making content non-disruptive: optimising placement to increase relevance for viewers and crafting native advertisements that blend in with the surrounding content. [Meduza.io](#) does not only use the proper placement on the main page to avoid disruption, but also designs the content of a sponsored article to be interesting for readers. Therefore, instead of disrupting the blog-reading experience, sponsorship fuels a genuine interest towards the content. For example, in one of the sponsored articles<sup>12</sup> [Meduza.io](#) writes about reasons to choose a train ride instead of flying. The material is entertaining in the first place: funny pictures are accompanied by high-quality witty texts. The fact that this post was sponsored by a bank and advertisement was occasionally incorporated in the text does not disrupt readers in the way banners do, even though the sponsorship was made recognisable through highlighting. The quality of the content and the topic of this sponsored post are interesting for readers. The key of the success of native advertisement is not only in making it dissolve through design, but adapting it to the style and concept of the whole medium.

[Meduza.io](#) is a relatively big online media source. According to the magazine

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<sup>12</sup><https://meduza.io/slides/10-prichin-pochemu-poezd-luchshe-samoleta> last accessed on the 25th of October 2017)

### 3. Exploring the Aspects of Professional Blogging

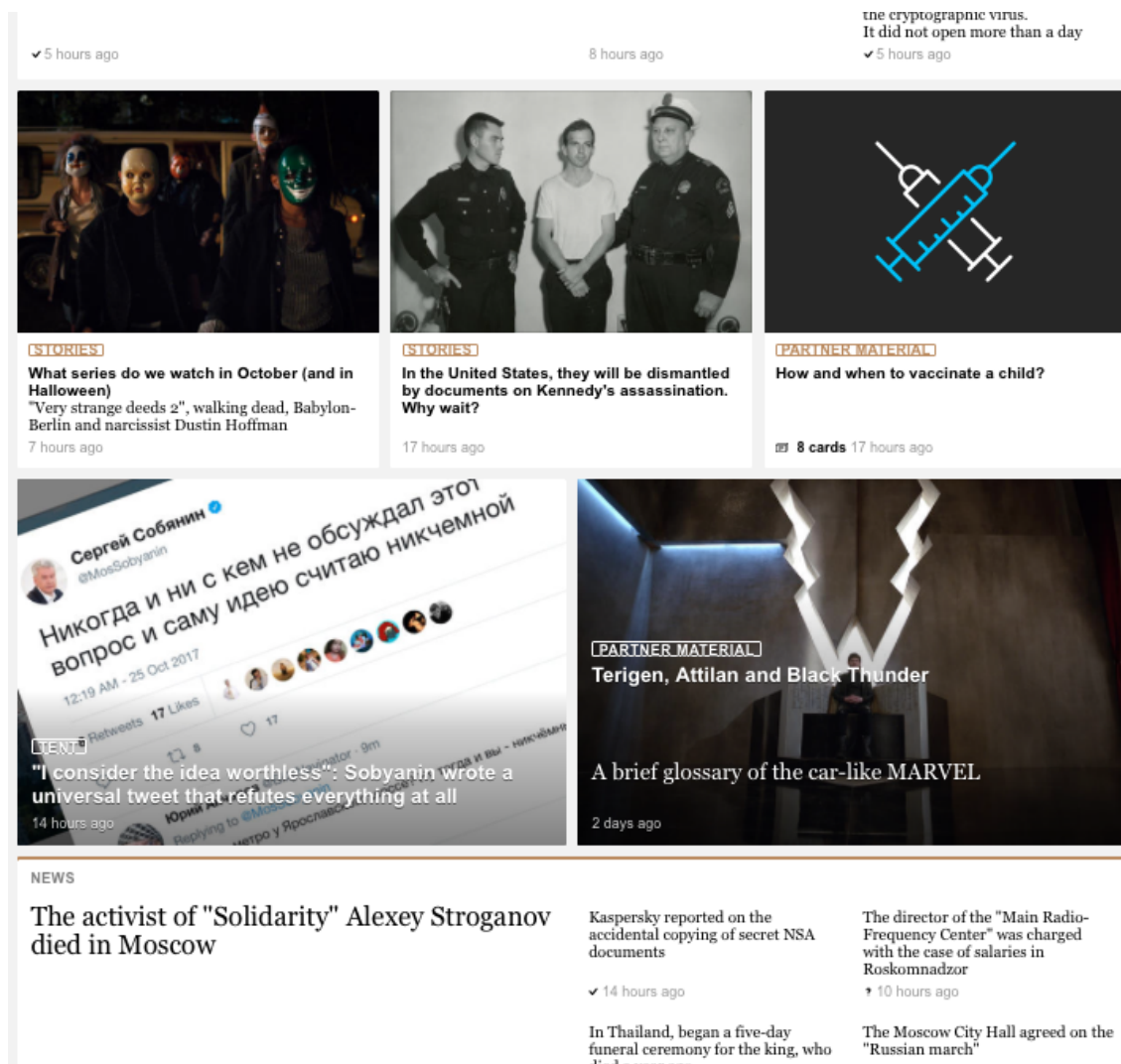


Figure 3: Native advertisement on the main page of an online magazine [Meduza.io](https://meduza.io)

itself<sup>13</sup>, its monthly audience is estimated by 5 million visitors. Of course, it is easy for such a resource to target big brands and invest in creation of native ads of high quality. However, amateur bloggers with much smaller audiences have potential for implementing native advertisement in their blogs. The author of [lovin.livejournal.com](https://lovin.livejournal.com), *lovin*, for instance, follows the principles of native advertisement for his sponsored articles. He uses his creativity to make sponsored posts no less interesting for his readers than any other content on his blog. He adapts the character of sponsored post to the concept of the blog and his own authenticity. However, unlike [Meduza.io](https://meduza.io) *lovin* does not pay so much attention to disclosure of sponsored content. The only way of indication for sponsored content he uses is a tag <pr>. Such attitude to disclosure sometimes leads to negative reaction from his readers. In fact, the issue of

<sup>13</sup><https://meduza.io/pages/ad> last accessed on the 25th of October 2017)

disclosure of sponsored content became more compelling in blogs with the spread of both influencer marketing and native advertisement.

Wojdyski and Evans [Woj15] explore native advertisement phenomenon and the role of disclosure of sponsored content. They express a concern that with the emergence of native advertisement people often have troubles recognising paid articles. On the one hand it is a problem of proper labelling of sponsored content, on the other hand the whole concept of native advertisement is deceiving. The authors raise such questions as whether or not readers can tell if content is advertising, and what affect has recognition of advertisement on the perception and processing of the content. As a conclusion to their quantitative study Wojdyski and Evans [Woj15] state that the growth of native advertisement popularity and interest from the side of sponsors is likely to be caused by the low recognition of advertisement as such among readers and, therefore, inability to apply the avoidance and defence strategies they have established for other types online advertisement, for instance, advertising banners; and not by the compelling nature of native ads towards readers. Campbell and Marks [Cam15] also raise the topic of disclosure. However, they state that native advertisement has nothing to hide, and, therefore, is always disclosed. According to the authors, the aim of native advertisement is not deception, but waking the interest in sponsored content [Cam15].

Disclosure of sponsored content and in particular native advertisement is certainly a topic that deserves attention and is widely discussed among scholars. Insufficient disclosure or concealment of the sponsorship fact often negatively affects both experience of the user, and reputation of the medium. Such effect can have dramatic consequences with regard to blogs, as Andrea Hunter [Hun15] points out. Authenticity plays a crucial role in blogging, which implies that a blogger's job is to provide an honest and genuine experience for readers. No matter which type of monetisation a blogger chooses, there is always a conflict between social and monetary aspects of blogging. The situation around such conflict will be discussed in the next section.

### **3.3. Social Aspects of Professional Blogging**

#### **3.3.1. Defining Credibility and Authenticity**

Authenticity and credibility are the main concepts of this thesis. Therefore, it is important to establish proper understanding of these terms for the scope of this research.

According to Fogg et al. [Fog+01] credibility can be defined as believability. Credible blogs are believable blogs; credible information is trustworthy information.

Credibility is the fact that someone or something can be believed or trusted<sup>14</sup>. As summarised by Fogg et al [Fog+01], most researches define the term of credibility through two major dimensions:

- *Trustworthiness*, which is defined by the terms well-intentioned, truthful, unbiased, etc.
- *Expertise*, which is defined by such terms as knowledgeable, experienced, competent, etc.

Through the development of the blogosphere, the border between the blogs and mass media became vague. We are not able anymore to clearly separate blogs from the traditional mass media. Whatever arguments the media professionals bring to discredit blogs from being an important and credible source of information, it is not enough to oversee the impact of blogs on mass media. If there is no such big difference between a newspaper and a blog, how can we still tell one from another? Authenticity seems to be the only aspect that still differentiates blogs from other online media.

*Authenticity* is the quality of being authentic. If a blogger is authentic then he is true to one's own personality, spirit, or character and is being really what he or she seems to be. Authentic content is not false, worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact<sup>15</sup>.

Exploring the aspects of mommy blogging<sup>16</sup>, Emily Peterson [Pet17] discovered that authenticity was and is a major factor affecting the relation between mommy bloggers and their audience. Based on the findings obtained from the qualitative interviews with 18 mommy bloggers, the author defined authenticity in blogging as "willingly posting imperfect content or experience and doing so self-consciously in an effort to be true to one's lived experiences" [Pet17]. Andrea Hunter explains authenticity as follows: "This sense that bloggers are being authentic is built on the revelation of intimate details over time, details that one would normally only share with close friends or relatives"[Hun15].

Credibility and authenticity in blogs are connected and cannot exist separately. A blogger who is not authentic cannot win trust of his or her readers. And since trust is a foundation of credibility, a blog that is not trustworthy cannot be credible.

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<sup>14</sup><http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/credibility> last accessed 05.09.2017

<sup>15</sup><https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authenticity> last accessed 05.09.2017

<sup>16</sup>Mommy blogging is usually called the kind of blogging done by non-working women (housewives) who started with blogging because they had extra time for that and wanted to share their personal life and experience, or hobbies with people. [Hun15]



### 3.3.2. The Role of the Audience in Establishing Credibility of the Blog

Baumer et al. [BST08] argue that blogging is not an activity of a single person, but a cooperation with blog readers. It is clear that there is growing number of blog writers, but the number of blog readers is increasing as well. As Nardi et al. [NSG04] have indicated, bloggers write their blogs to be read by other people, not just for themselves. Therefore, it is interesting to look at the reader's perspective of blogging, as studied by Baumer et al. [BST08]. They state that for the better understanding of the activity of blogging it is important to study readers and their interactions with the bloggers [BST08].

While Nardi et al. [NSG04] focus on blog writing practices, Baumer et al. [BST08] explore blog reading practices. After conducting a series of semi-structured interviews they were able to discover that there are certain obligations and expectations both of the bloggers to the audience and of the audience to the bloggers. These are presented in table 3. One of the biggest findings of Baumer et al. [BST08] was the fact that readers feel that there are certain expectations of them (they feel somehow obliged to comment and participate in the discussions on the blog). However, there are still more expectations readers put on bloggers, and therefore, obligations bloggers have to fulfil. Fulfilling or failing to fulfil these obligations defines audience's perception of a blogger and his or her blog. For example, from professional bloggers the audience expects authentic and credible stories (information). Rettberg [Ret13] speaks of blogs as a technology for distributed communities. Indeed, communities can be formed around blogs. Rettberg tells that "connections between blogs can be understood as digitally mediated social networks" [Ret13]. It might be true for single blogs as well, as there are connections between the author and the readers. Interviewees of Baumer et al. [BST08] reported the feeling of connectedness and being part of the blog. Indeed, if they participate through comments, they often receive feedback and response from bloggers. Research participants confessed to be happily surprised when they received a response from a blogger [BST08].

Audience is the main asset for a professional blogger. A recent study of Rieh et al. [Rie+14] turned the attention of the researchers to the interaction between bloggers and readers. Their study "addresses how bloggers' perception of their audience influences their idea of the value their blogs provide to their readers"[Rie+14]. Through analysis of interviews with twenty two bloggers Rieh et al. [Rie+14] identify certain categories of bloggers: *Community Builders*, *Expertise Providers*, *Topic Synthesisers*, and *Information Filterers*. They conclude that each of the blogger types has its own perception of the audience and, therefore, the way of establishing and enhancing credibility of their blog. In following, a short characteristic for each

Table 3: Summary of expectations and obligations of the bloggers and the audience. Based on the findings of Baumer et al. [BST08]

Audience	Blogger
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readers feel that there are certain expectations of them (obligation to comment and participate)</li> <li>• Readers don't expect, but are happy to get response from bloggers</li> <li>• Readers expect frequent updates and authentic content</li> <li>• Depends on readers' motivations for reading and perception of blogger</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bloggers expect readers to participate in the activity by commenting</li> <li>• Bloggers feel obligated to response on the activity of their readers</li> <li>• Bloggers feel obligated to post frequently</li> <li>• Depends on bloggers' motivations for the activity of blogging</li> </ul>

group is provided according to the findings and descriptions of Rieh et al. [Rie+14].

- *Community Builders*' motivation for writing is said to be inspired mainly by their audience. By blogging, they tend to provide a space for interactions and interested in broadening their audience. Engagement with the audience was said to be a key factor for community builders. The authors attributed three out of twenty two participants to the group of community builders. [Rie+14]
- *Expertise Providers* tend to provide educational value to their readers. Their audience was well-defined by the area of their expertise. Sharing their knowledge is said to be a key factor for expertise providers. The authors attributed eight out of twenty two participants to the group of community builders. [Rie+14]
- While *Community Builders* provide a place for discussions, *Topic Synthesizers* create discussions by providing topics for them. [Rie+14]
- *Information Filterers* collect information from different sources and post something they found interesting or relevant. Interesting is that the "interesting and relevant" concerns only themselves, as they do not think if the information is interesting and relevant to their audience. In fact, Rieh et al. [Rie+14] argue that *Information Filterers* tend to be the least aware of their audience. [Rie+14]

Rieh et al. [Rie+14] describe a set of practices which bloggers (both professional and hobbyists) implemented to achieve credibility. The authors do not set the focus on whether a blogger was professional, a hobbyist, or intended to monetise his or her blog in the future. These factors might influence the relation between the blogger and his/her audience. Rieh et al. [Rie+14] report that six out of twenty

two participants were professional bloggers. Bloggers’ practices for establishing and enhancing credibility are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Practices for credible blogs. The summary of findings of Rieh et al. [Rie+14].

<p><b> Blogging practices for establishing credibility:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inviting fellow bloggers to give feedback</li> <li>• Keeping narrow focus on content</li> <li>• Presenting multiple viewpoints</li> <li>• Linking to sources with short summaries</li> <li>• Being transparent</li> <li>• Matching design with content</li> <li>• Posting consistently</li> </ul>
<p><b> Interaction with audience for enhancing credibility:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showing and explaining work processes</li> <li>• Responding to commenters</li> <li>• Monitoring readers’ comments, moderating comments for quality control purposes</li> <li>• Having dialogue with commenters, interacting with readers occasionally</li> <li>• Correcting errors based on feedback from readers</li> <li>• Receiving feedback and comments from readers</li> </ul>

Rieh et al. [Rie+14] admit a few limitations of their research including the size of the sample and recruiting strategy. Therefore, if the travel blogging community was taken into consideration, such strict categorisation could not be applicable.

Tom van Nuenen [Nue16] analyses ”About” pages of popular travel blogs. He describes a few blogs and provides some quotations from bloggers, where they share their backgrounds, motives and goals for blogging. Who are those bloggers? Are those bloggers community builders, expertise providers, topic synthesisers, or information filterers? Rieh et al. [Rie+14] report that bloggers they interviewed usually started as information filterers and then developed into one of the other three categories. Who are travel bloggers Tom van Nuenen is writing about?

They do seek a broader audience while they try to spread their message about travel and freedom and inspire their readers to do the same. They engage with their fellow travel bloggers, forming groups in social networks to exchange experiences, they respond to their audience through comments. Even though they fall into the category of community builders, offering an open space for audience participation is not the only and not the main value of their blogs.

Travel bloggers are experienced travellers. Tom van Nuenen [Nue16] provides some examples of blogs and the areas of their expertise. The *PlanetD* authors are experts

in adventure sports; Solo Traveler Blog is an expert in self-organised independent travel; Wandering Earl knows best how to stay on the road longer while jobbing on the way. Tom van Nuenen argues that travel bloggers aim to popularise the way of life out of office. "Travel bloggers consistently point toward inner self-realisation, chasing one's own personal dream." - says the author [Nue16]. That means that they provide not only expertise in travelling, but also act as life coaches.

All of the above discussed arguments prove that a blogger does not have to stay in one of the categories suggested by Rieh et al. [Rie+14]. Travel bloggers are community builders and expertise providers at the same time. A blog can have perceived value in offering an open space for audience participation and serving educational purposes in specific areas, like travel blogs do. There are examples of blogs fitting at the same time in every category, such as Russian top travel blog of Ilya Varlamov. The blog varlamov.ru started as a travel blog and developed into a real mass medium, which has still kept a classic blog. The main outcome of Rieh et al. research are the practices of establishing and enhancing credibility. There are certain guidelines which every blogger, no matter if professional or hobbyist, should follow to make his/her blog credible.

#### **3.3.3. Commercialisation and Credibility of the Blog**

A blog can be authentic and intimate, but as soon as it is being monetised a conflict arises and it becomes a challenge to sustain credibility of the blog. Tom van Nuenen notes [Nue16]:

The entanglement of commercial interests in personal stories creates tension: it could potentially cause harm to the credibility of bloggers in the eyes of their readers.

Here arises the conflict: commercial vs credible. To sustain credibility to their readers professional travel bloggers do implement the practices discovered by Rieh et al. [Rie+14]. Tom van Nuenen gives a few examples of bloggers being transparent about their commercial activities (advertising principles in particular). The blogger of Leave Your Daily Hell leaves a note for potential sponsors: "I don't write positive reviews in exchange for money." The authors of Y Travel Blog declare: "Please know that all reviews will be honest ... Our readers come first, and it is always our intention to provide them with the best information and honest advice." [Nue16] If those statements are truly followed by the bloggers is another question. But if they do not fulfil their claims the audience is sure to notice if the authors are untrue. Being true to the readers is one side of credibility. Establishing "reliable self-brands" for existing and potential partners is another.

According to Tom van Nuenen [Nue16] commoditising one's self-development converts into self-branding. Travel bloggers create a brand out of their identity and their way of self-development and self-realisation. There are certain self-branding strategies bloggers employ, but not all of them contribute to establishing "reliable self-brands". [Nue16]

There are certain practices that not only contribute to enhancing credibility towards the readers, but also towards potential sponsors. The following practices, Tom van Nuenen [Nue16] writes about, facilitate both: credibility among the readers and potential commercial partners. The travel bloggers show openly their intentions to work with sponsors on such pages as "Work with me", "Advertise in this blog", which may be perceived by their readers as credible intention. However, these pages are mainly targeting potential partners and serve to assure them of credibility of self-brand. On "Work with me" pages they usually put information about co-working offers, previous experience in the field, reviews of existing partners and fellow bloggers. [Nue16]

There are a few niches in the market of travel blogging. As it was mentioned before, bloggers have different areas of expertise: *The Planet D* authors specialise in adventure sports, *Solo Traveler Blog* writes about self-organised independent travel, *Wandering Earl* has been travelling since sixteen years and shares his tips for staying long on the road and jobbing all around the world. Bloggers usually take a certain niche of the market. As expertise providers in the niche they do exactly what Rieh et al. [Rie+14] found to be beneficial to credibility, namely, keep narrow focus on the content. Professional travel bloggers are active in the community, they exchange comments with their fellow bloggers, write guests posts for each other [Nue16]. If one credible blogger supports another it obviously facilitates credibility of the last. Facebook group *We Travel, We Blog* is an example of travel blogging community for successful travel blogging professionals and starting travel bloggers seeking for advice. This is a place for experience exchange, guest post offers, discussions about the blogging industry. As Tom van Nuenen [Nue16] notes, travel bloggers are related to each other through such communities.

On one side the travel blogger commoditise their authentic life stories, but it is hardly something they can sell. Like every professional blogger they employ advertisement, sponsored posts, sponsored reviews, etc. They receive payments from advertisers for the amount of views and clicks. Andrea Hunter [Hun15] suggests that the actual commodity of the blog is the audience.

### 3.3.4. Commercialisation and Authenticity of the Author

Andrea Hunter [Hun15] investigates the role of the audiences in mommy blogging. She proposes a term of audience commodity and discusses the issues of authenticity and credibility in professional mommy blogging. Mommy blogging is usually called a kind of blogging done by non-working women (housewives) who started with blogging because they had extra time for that and wanted to share their personal life and experience, or hobbies with people. Mommy blogging is characterised as very authentic and intimate. However, with the opportunities blogging offers (as soon as the audience of the blog grows) such blogs tend to get monetised and lose credibility. [Hun15]

While Tom van Nuenen [Nue16] just noticed the issue with the interplay between authenticity and self-branding and analysed more the side of the author in this issue and less the audience perception, Andrea Hunter [Hun15] goes deeper into analysing how the process of blog monetising influences the reaction of the audience on such changes. She talks about audience becoming a commodity (product). What exactly is being sold in professional blogs? Tom von Nuenen [Nue16] talks about self-branding and selling the authentic identity of the author to attract wider audiences. However, as soon as the audience exists and is big enough, it in turn can be seen as commodity. Andrea Hunter [Hun15] brings up an example of Facebook which sells users' content and data to the advertisers and compares it to the mommy bloggers who sell clicks and page views to advertisers.

The main topics of mommy blogs are connected to family issues, motherhood, children, etc., but also broader topics can be found in such journals as of daily routine, problems, hobbies, questions of life and happiness. Such blogs attract readers by intimacy, honesty, and authenticity. Andrea Hunter [Hun15] alludes to an example of a successful mommy blogger, Heather Armstrong, who shared very personal details of her life with millions of people. Heather Armstrong shared stories of her depression and broken marriage openly and sincerely. Andrea Hunter [Hun15] states that such popularity of Heather Armstrong is based on the feeling of equality with the readers, she has similar ups and downs, and her readers in a way see their own lives reflected in her stories, "they could imagine being her" [Hun15]. The process of building authenticity of a blog starts first of all with creating authentic stories. Andrea Hunter proposes a theory that with the development of blogging as professional practice authenticity was transformed into performance. By performance she means the activity of presenting a form of entertainment, "acting" as if on the stage. The reason for such a transformation she sees in commercialisation.

Andrea Hunter [Hun15] is citing the book of Jill Walker Rettberg [Ret08] where she

is talking about normality of commercialisation of blogs nowadays. In the time when Nardi et al. [NSG04] published their research most blogs were free of advertisement, and blogging was indeed considered a social activity rather than a business. Andrea Hunter [Hun15] used the sources of GOMI community to investigate the reaction of the audience on commercialisation of a few popular blogs (including the one of Heather Armstrong). On the example of mommy blogging paradigm and small blogging community GOMI Andrea Hunter [Hun15] tries to understand how the relationship between bloggers and their audience develops when authentic content is being used for making profit.

GOMI is an online community which was created to discuss "online personalities" including popular mommy bloggers. The main topic concerning popular bloggers is the critique of the fact that bloggers are selling their blogs and therefore themselves. Andrea Hunter [Hun15] chose some threads from the forum on GOMI which discuss cases of mommy blogs being monetised. She analysed the discussions using grounded theory approach. The following two categories and related topics emerged through the analysis of the threads [Hun15]:

- Critique of commercialization:
  - focusing more on selling products, and less on telling authentic stories;
  - not fully disclosing sponsored content;
  - superfluous usage of clickbait, respectively focusing on making content appealing to a wider audience
- Community:
  - the sense of community in mommy blogs;
  - censoring comments
  - creating 'communities of interest'
  - changes in the community within the GOMI forums

Andrea Hunter gives a few examples of GOMI discussions criticising the way the bloggers "abuse" sponsored content. The blogger from "Love TAZA" published a post called "A Morning Workout With Samson!", which aimed to advertise a brand of socks. It was not explicitly said that the post was sponsored, and by the end of the post some readers felt betrayed. The trust of readers was betrayed by concealing the nature of the post and presenting it as an authentic story. [Hun15]

Heather Armstrong was criticised for writing less authentic stories and not anymore disclosing her private life. It was discussed that her blog's main purpose became money making. Andrea Hunter [Hun15] says that even though her readers understood that the blog became a business, they still expected the author to preserve authenticity and credibility of her blog.

Clickbait is a recently emerged practice of producing the headers which attract attention and trigger curiosity. It is mostly used by yellow press and untrustworthy news media just to generate more visits to a certain page. Often a clickbait headline contains such a phrase as "You Won't Believe What Happens Next". In travel blogging a common practice of making an article attractive for a click is to write articles about "10 Things to Do in ..." or "Top 10 Places to Visit in...". People do click on such articles, they like the lists and ratings. However, as it became such a wide spread practice, and there are thousands of such lists being produced daily, following this trend nowadays might have a negative influence on the author's credibility.

Making content appealing to a wider audience and concealing the "dirty" facts is one practice that is being suspected by the members of GOMI about their favourite bloggers. Instead of telling authentic stories bloggers aim now to create an appealing persona, "leaving details out in order to craft a persona that will appeal to an audience that advertisers are targeting" [Hun15]. This is what Tom van Nuenen called self-branding. While Tom van Nuenen describes self-branding as a common and rather successful practice for travel bloggers, GOMI members strongly criticise it in relation to mommy blogging. They criticise the lack of strong opinions, lack of authenticity in the stories. The process of self-branding for travel bloggers might be slightly different from one of mommy bloggers, but the tendency seems to be very similar. While at the dawn of the blogosphere bloggers were writing authentic content mostly because of the social motivations, nowadays bloggers construct authenticity which can be sold to the masses.

Andrea Hunter tells that success of mommy bloggers lies in the sense of community around their blogs. The critiques on GOMI were expressed towards the false sense of community created by popular mommy bloggers and censorship of the readers' opinions. The negative reactions to the posts were sometimes not being welcomed, and were simply deleted. Andrea Hunter tells it to be often connected to monetising of the blogs. She gives an example from Love Taza blog. A sponsored post about vacation in Hawaii received negative reactions from activists defending wild animals. They were concerned about some photos with dolphins kept in captivity. As this post was sponsored the blogger couldn't accept negative opinions about the brand, and, therefore, deleted a few inappropriate comments. The situation that many mommy bloggers censor opinion in the comments on their blogs is interpreted by Andrea Hunter [Hun15] as a sign of inauthenticity. She argues that this process is not allowing true communities to form. [Hun15]



### **3.3.5. Implications**

Recent research concerning blogs and bloggers has demonstrated that authenticity and credibility are influenced by ever increasing commercialisation of blogs. Bloggers interact differently with their readers. The readers often respond with negative reaction to monetisation activities of their favourite bloggers. Most of the qualitative studies about blogosphere are focused on bloggers. Unlike, this thesis is determined to appeal for opinion of blog readers and explore their perception of professional blogging through a qualitative survey.

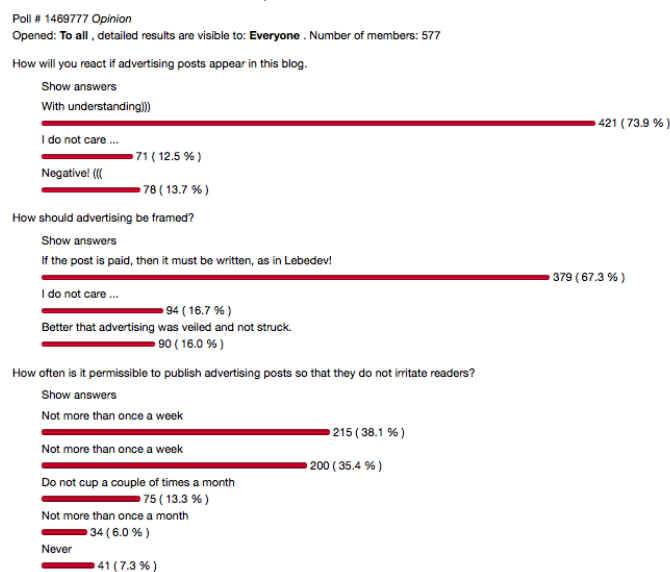
## 4. Empirical Study

### 4.1. Motivation and Inspiration

Professional bloggers adopt certain marketing and design strategies that are thoroughly described in related literature (as discussed in section 3). However, there is no research about perception of these strategies neither from the bloggers' nor from the readers' point of view. Some practical evidence can be found using case studies and monitoring discussions in blogging communities. Bloggers often write about their monetising activities and reflect on those that they consider to be better or worse. Readers discuss bloggers' activities in comments or on related forums. However, since there is no qualitative data about perception of credibility and authenticity, it is intended to conduct a survey with blog readers.

As soon as top bloggers discovered opportunities offered by advertisement in blogs, they started implementing different monetising measures in their blogs. Many bloggers followed the trend, but did not consult with the audience. When Ilia Varlamov, the author of [varlamov.ru](http://varlamov.ru), had to make a strategic decision about monetising his blog, he asked his readers for their opinion in one of his blog posts. He explained that earnings from advertising would help to make his blog better, make more interesting travels possible, and make his reports more colourful. In other words, the earnings from advertisements would help to increase quality of the content.

Figure 4: A poll in [varlamov.ru](http://varlamov.ru)<sup>17</sup> (translated from Russian by Google Translate)



Varlamov created a poll shown in figure 4. 570 readers participated in the poll. 75% of his readers chose to accept advertisement in his blog and understood the need and advantage of it. 67% wanted advertising content to be disclosed explicitly in the beginning of the post. 37% would accept advertising materials a couple of times a weeks, 35% - at most once a week. These results helped Varlamov to implement his own practice of advertising on his blog according to the opinion of the audience and avoiding the conflict between commercialisation and credibility.

The idea of inviting the audience for participation in strategic decisions of the project development, where the very same audience happens to be the fundamental element, seems very simple and authentic. Since then, varlamov.ru transformed his blog into a mass medium with more than four million visitors monthly, while still remaining an authentic author of a credible personal blog. When the intention of the given empirical study emerged, the poll of Varlamov became an inspirational element for the survey design.

## 4.2. Designing Qualitative Survey

### 4.2.1. Methodology Choice

Braun & Clarke [BC13] affirm that qualitative surveys are appropriate for lite-projects, such as student academic research. They say that qualitative surveys can especially be used for research about experiences, understandings, perceptions, and practice of the participants [BC13]. This empirical study should contribute to understanding of the aspects of professional blogging. In particular, this study investigates experiences of being a blog reader nowadays, readers' understanding of blogging as a professional activity, and their perception of the aspects of professional blogging. Therefore, a qualitative survey is especially suitable as a research method for the intended study.

According to Braun & Clarke [BC13], qualitative surveys consist of a series of open-ended questions about a topic, and participants type or hand-write their responses to each question. The easiest way to conduct a qualitative survey is using online survey tools [BC13]. There are certain pros that Braun & Clarke [BC13] mention to be relevant for small student research. For the current study the following aspects were considered to be particularly of advantage:

- Quick and easy distribution
- Highest level of anonymity
- Good for geographically dispersed participants
- Potentially very quick data collection
- No need for data entry or collation

- Potential to start data coding in the programme

Braun & Clarke [BC13] mention that survey data is usually thinner than, for example, interview data, and the depth of responses depends greatly on the participants motivation. Therefore, it was decided to offer three Amazon vouchers to three randomly chosen participants as a reward for participation in the survey and a way to increase motivation of the respondents.

### 4.2.2. Limitations and Risks

Any findings or conclusions made on the basis of the given research do not in any way claim to be statistically significant. The survey was used to produce the data only for descriptive analysis of the given topic. The results cannot be generalised to the basic population of blog readers.

As it was mentioned above, data of a qualitative survey is usually thinner than data from other qualitative research methods [BC13]. The given survey, in fact, delivered diverse depth level of responses. It was obviously due to the lack of motivation from some of the participants. Some open-ended questions received too few responses and could not be used to make any conclusions. However, in general high response rate could be achieved and there was enough of relevant data to work with.

Besides, Braun & Clarke [BC13] note that the major limitation of qualitative surveys is the lack of flexibility. Misunderstandings of some questions cannot be avoided. Some of such cases were eliminated through the piloting of the survey. Nevertheless, there were some cases of misunderstanding, like P03 answering on the question "Do you personally consider blogging to be a profession? Why?" answered "Nope. Because I am a boring person with nothing to blog about." He or she obviously thought this question addressing his profession. However, the intention was to ask if participants considered blogging to be a profession in general, like if they considered taxi driver to be a profession in general, not exactly their profession. Unfortunately, it was the not the only case of misunderstanding. All the misunderstood answers to this question had to be excluded from the descriptive analysis.

Even though there was only few obvious cases of question misunderstanding, it cannot be assured that all the multiple choice questions were understood as they were meant to be understood. Although, a few discussions took place about proper wording for some questions and some corrections were made, this major limitation of all surveys in general has to be taken into account. Moreover, in case of this survey there are many participants whose mother tongue is not English. Despite the efforts taken during the piloting phase, there was no way to guarantee the elimination of question misunderstandings.

While conducting this survey the risk of excluding marginalised groups must be considered. However, the challenge is primarily based on the methods of recruiting participants. As the recruitment has mainly happened through Facebook and snowballing, certain groups (e.g. students) might dominate in the sample. This fact must be taken into consideration while interpreting the data.

### **4.2.3. Designing and Piloting the Survey**

It was decided that the questionnaire consisted both of closed and open-ended questions. This way it was possible both to set a certain frame for the topic and give the participants possibility to share their thoughts and opinions. The survey was published on Google Forms platform, because it had a free service with essential functionality for the intended research.

Especially due to the major limitation of the survey discussed in the previous section, piloting of the survey was necessary. The first version of the questionnaire included a field for feedback about understanding of questions, and suggestions for improvement. To make sure the language of the survey was correct and easy to understand, the questionnaire was given for a review to an English linguistics graduate. After initial corrections, six more people joined the piloting round and gave their feedback. After a few further adjustments and corrections the final survey was standing and consisted of eight sections. Each section was intended to explore a certain aspect of the readers' perception of blogging in general or professional blogging. In table 5 it is clarified which aspects each section covered.

Table 5: Survey design focus and justification

Begin of Table	
Issue	Focus and justification
What kind of blog readers do the respondents represent?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Filtering non-readers out</li> <li>• Knowing the profile of the participant</li> <li>• Frequency of reading: frequent readers are more accustomed with the blogging trends, and therefore might have different opinions from occasional readers</li> <li>• Owning a blog: the perception of other blogs might be different if the person has his/her own blog</li> <li>• What blogs do they read: if the readers name exact websites it will be possible to see what kind of webpages the participants actually perceive as blogs.</li> </ul>
Motivations for reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reading motivations can give insights on the reasons the participants choose to read blogs</li> <li>• It is important to see if there was a change in reading motivations comparing to the earliest research</li> <li>• There is a list of predefined motivations and an open-ended question for the participants to add their own thoughts</li> <li>• In the list of predefined motivations there are some featuring the aspects of credibility and authenticity</li> </ul>
What aspects are important for readers to continue reading a blog?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of credibility and authenticity to continue reading the blog</li> <li>• The importance of some other aspects that might indirectly influence authenticity and credibility of the blog</li> </ul>

4. Empirical Study

Continuation of Table 5	
Issue	Focus and justification
Readers' perception of blogging as a professional activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The acceptance of blogging as a profession</li> <li>• The reasons and justification of the attitude</li> </ul>
Readers' attitude to monetising practices in blogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of monetising practices</li> <li>• The influence of monetising practices and advertisement on authenticity and credibility of the blog</li> <li>• The influence of monetising practices and advertisement on some other aspects that might indirectly influence authenticity and credibility of the blog</li> </ul>
Experiment: what would readers choose, advertisement or subscription?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The willingness of the readers to pay for authentic and credible blog content</li> <li>• The reasons and justification of the attitude</li> </ul>
Experiment: sponsorship and trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The attitude of the readers' to sponsored blog content</li> <li>• The reasons and justification of the attitude</li> </ul>
Readers' attitude to tagging (labelling) of monetised content in blog posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The influence of tagging (labelling) of monetised content on authenticity and credibility of the blog</li> <li>• The influence of tagging (labelling) of monetised content on some other aspects that might indirectly influence authenticity and credibility of the blog</li> </ul>
Readers' demographic profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing the profile of the participants</li> </ul>
End of Table 5	

### **4.3. Sample and Data**

#### **4.3.1. Recruiting Participants**

The recruitment of the participants was accomplished mainly through social media, particularly, Facebook groups. In approximately equal parts the participants were part of:

- Facebook survey exchange groups
- Facebook travel blogger groups
- Fellow students from TH Köln

Out of 45 responses 10 were received from people who do not read blogs, and, therefore, were eliminated from the analysis. The survey received 35 relevant responses from blog readers with different depth of answers. Obviously, the more time respondents needed to fill out the survey, the more detailed information was received.

#### **4.3.2. Sample Profile**

Participants needed between fifteen and forty minutes for filling out the survey. The amount of information received from different participants was uneven, because longer answering time lead to more informative answers.

Most of the participants were rather non-frequent blog readers, who either read blogs just from time to time or only accidentally came across blog articles. A few participants who have been reading blogs frequently also had their own blogs and posted there regularly. It can be explained by the recruiting method, as some participants came from the Facebook group of active travel bloggers. Most of the participants were students between 18 and 30 with rather low income. There were more female than male participating in this survey. Instead of asking about nationality it was decided to ask the country of residence, because the place of living, not the birth place, is more important if we talk about the access to or the quality and the sort of information sources. Due to the implicated recruiting method and the residency of the researcher herself, most of the participants live in Germany. Otherwise, there is a great variety of countries represent in the sample. The detailed profiles, including demographic data of each respondent, are shown in table 6.



## 4. Empirical Study

Table 6: Demographic profile of survey participants

P—	Blog reading	Own blog	Age	Country	Gender	Occupation	Education	Income
P01	From time to time	Not yet	25	Mexico	Female	Employed full-time	Bachelor	less than €15000
P02	I think so	Not yet	25	Germany	Male	Student	Bachelor	less than €15000
P03	I think so	Not yet	22	Singapore	Prefer not to answer	Student	Diploma	€15000 - €24999
P04	From time to time	Used to have	26	Netherlands	Female	Student	Bachelor	less than €15000
P05	From time to time	No	24	USA	Female	Student	N/A	more than €45000
P06	From time to time	No	24	Italy	Female	Student	Bachelor	less than €15000
P07	From time to time	No	22	UK	Female	Student	Bachelor	Prefer not to answer
P08	I think so	No	40	USA	Female	Employed full-time	Bachelor	Prefer not to answer
P09	I think so	No	25	Germany	Male	Student + part-time job	Bachelor	less than €15000
P10	I think so	No	27	UAE	Female	Student	Bachelor	Prefer not to answer
P11	I think so	No	48	Germany	Female	Student	Master	Prefer not to answer
P12	Rather frequently	No	29	Germany	Female	Employed full-time	Master	€15000 - €24999
P13	Rather frequently	No	19	Germany	Male	Student + part-time job	High School	less than €15000
P14	Rather frequently	No	23	Germany	Female	Student + part-time job	Bachelor	€15000 - €24999
P15	Rather frequently	No	26	Germany	Male	Student + part-time job	Bachelor	less than €15000
P16	Rather frequently	No	26	Germany	Male	Student + part-time job	Bachelor	less than €15000
P17	Rather frequently	No	30	Germany	Male	Student	N/A	less than €15000
P18	From time to time	Yes, post very rarely	39	Germany	Male	Employed part-time	Master	€15000 - €24999
P19	Rather frequently	Yes, post regularly	52	USA/ Slovenia/ France	Male	Employed full-time	University undergraduate	€25000 - €45000
P20	Rather frequently	Yes, post regularly	26	Spain	Female	Self-employed	College	less than €15000
P21	From time to time	Yes, post from time to time	21	New Zealand	Female	Student	University undergraduate	less than €15000
P22	Rather frequently	Yes, post regularly	29	USA	Female	Self-employed	Bachelor	€15000 - €24999
P23	Rather frequently	Yes, post regularly	34	Australia	Male	Self-employed	College	Prefer not to answer
P24	Rather frequently	Yes, post regularly	20	India	Male	Student	N/A	N/A
P25	Rather frequently	Yes, post regularly	55	Australia	Female	Unemployed, not currently looking for work	Bachelor	less than €15000
P26	Rather frequently	No	43	Germany	Female	Employed full-time	N/A	Prefer not to answer
P27	I think so	Yes, post from time to time	42	Germany	Female	Employed full-time	Phd	€25000 - €45000
P28	Rather frequently	No	42	Finland	Male	Employed full-time	College	€15000 - €24999
P29	I think so	No	28	Germany	Female	Student + part-time job	Bachelor	€15000 - €24999
P30	From time to time	Not yet	25	Germany	Female	Employed part-time	Bachelor	less than €15000
P31	From time to time	No	25	Germany	Female	Student	Bachelor	less than €15000
P32	I think so	No	24	Germany	Female	Student	Master	less than €15000
P33	Rather frequently	Yes, post very rarely	29	Germany	Male	Employed full-time	Master	€15000 - €24999
P34	I think so	No	25	Germany	Female	Student + part-time job	Bachelor	less than €15000
P35	From time to time	No	25	Germany	Female	Student	Bachelor	€15000 - €24999

## 4.4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.4.1. Blog Readers' Profile

In the survey section about blog reading practices and motivations the focus was not on professional blogs in particular. The idea was to see how people perceive blogs in general and compare the results to the early research of the blogosphere. In this section it is intended to look at the readers' profile in terms of their reading practices. This section of the survey was designed to discover:

- How many of the readers have their own blog?
- How many of the readers read blogs frequently?
- What topics do they read about?
- What kind of blogs do people read?

From all the participants only few said to have their own blog. P04 answered that he used to have a blog. Participants were also offered the answers that indicated the frequency of them posting in their blog (if they had one). Only P19 and P20 reported to post regularly in their blog (every day or every week). In their answer to an open-ended question about their attitude to professional blogging they indicated to be professional bloggers themselves. Figure 6 shows the proportion of participants in terms of owning a blog.

Frequent blog readers should be more aware what kind of blogs they read, if a blog is monetised or not. Besides, they should be able to reflect better on their reading behaviour, because, from my point of view, frequent reading makes one more conscious in their reading practices. Figure 5 shows the proportion of participants in terms of reading frequency.

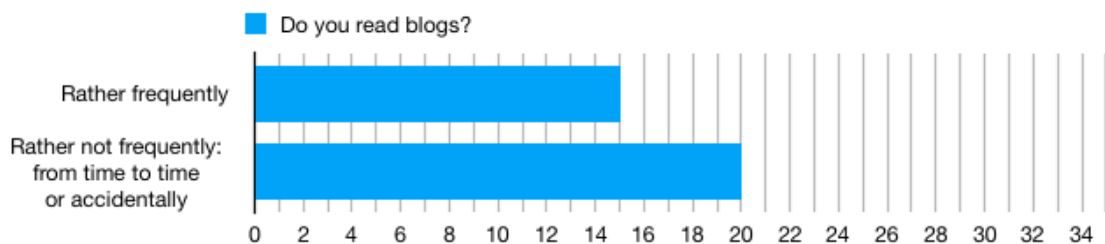


Figure 5: Blog reading practices: frequency of reading

It seems that the readers do not differentiate much between blogs and social media platforms. Indeed, there are bloggers who only have Instagram and Facebook and post their photos and usually shorter stories there, like Instagram influencer @travelfred, mentioned by P01. Social media platforms offer their users a quick way

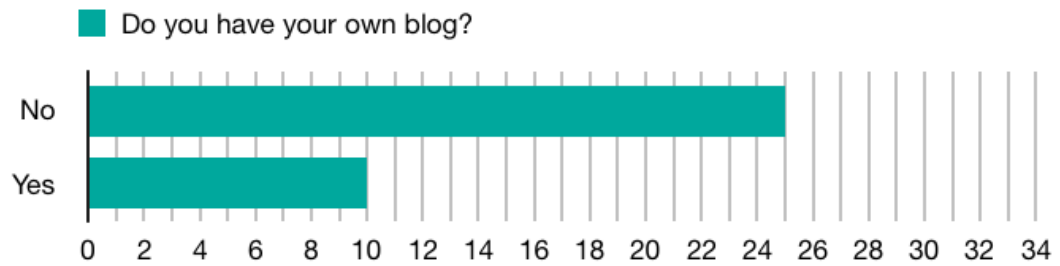


Figure 6: Blogging practices: having own blog

to update their followers about their activities. Nardi et al. [NSG04] discussed that one of the bloggers' motivations for blogging was "update others on activities and whereabouts". With the functionality of social media, like Instagram and Facebook, one does not need a blog for such activities anymore.

It turned out that half of the participants could not name concrete blogs they followed, and were rather coming across blogs to read randomly. From the 17 participants who named particular blogs they have been following most of the blog names occurred only once. There were 79 unique blogs or magazines listed. An interesting fact is that even though the participants were asked to name blogs they read, many of them have listed rather big online magazines, that remind blogs only by their structure, but not by their nature. In section 2.1.2 the importance of blogger presence and agenda was discussed. In case of an online magazine, the core connecting the medium and the audience is the topic. In case of a blog, an aspect holding the authors and the audience together is authenticity of the author(s). During the analysis and coding process the decision of assigning a medium to be a blog or a magazine was made according to the existence of an authentic core. Moreover, "About" pages of each listed medium have been analysed. In most of the cases, the media that were categorised as online magazines have been positioning themselves as, for instance, "an ambitious multimedia effort"<sup>18</sup> or "home for technology news and reviews"<sup>19</sup>, but have not mention the word "blog" anywhere.

Indeed, the border between the traditional media and blogs became vague, which corresponds with the concepts discussed in section 2.2.1. The transformation of many blogs into a new kind of mass media was discussed by Melissa Wall [Wal05]. The fact that some blog readers tend to see no difference between an online magazine and a blog confirms that blogs play a significant role in the modern mass media. And the role of blogs is comparable with the role of online magazines and newspapers

<sup>18</sup><https://www.theverge.com/about-the-verge> last accessed on the 15th of October 2017

<sup>19</sup><https://www.engadget.com/about/> last accessed on the 15th of October 2017

nowadays. We cannot consider blogs only as a social activity, like Nardi et al. [NSG04] saw it, and like it was, indeed, about fifteen years ago.

Figure 7 demonstrates the distribution of the amount of monetised blogs, blogs that are not monetised, and other kinds of online media listed by the respondents. In the whole list of 79 blogs prevailed monetised blogs. In fact, online magazines, blog aggregators, and corporate blogs are all monetised online media. Therefore, in the whole list of media sources mentioned by the respondents monetised media share reaches 89%. This fact tells that blog readers are used to commercialised content and read a lot of online media, including blogs, that are monetised.

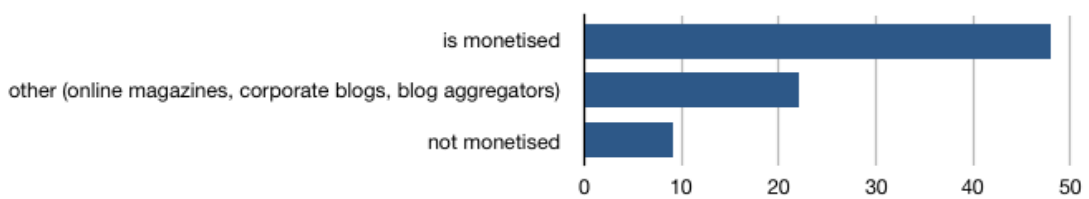


Figure 7: Blog categories according to the presence of monetisation practices

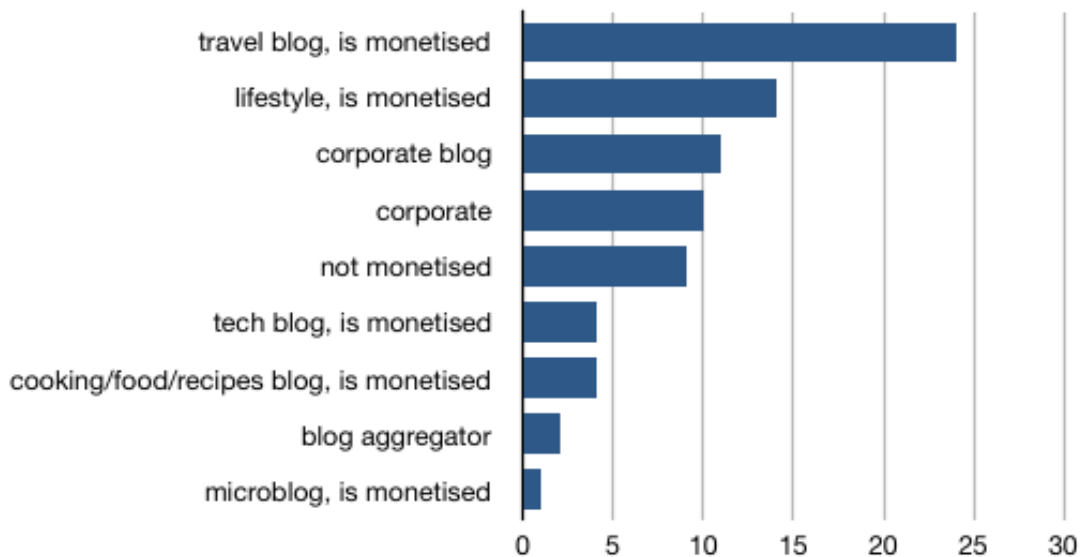


Figure 8: Blog categories identified from the blogs listed by the respondents

Figure 8 demonstrates an overview over all of the identified categories from the list of 79 media sources. Monetised blogs were also categorised by the topic. Only four topics could be identified among monetised blogs: travel, lifestyle, technology, and food. This might be a sign that these topics are the most popular among professional bloggers. However, the scarceness of identified topics could be influenced by the recruiting method, one of the limitations of this research that was discussed in section 4.2.2.

#### 4.4.2. Motivations for Reading

The question about motivations for reading was designed on the basis of the study of Kaye [Kaye10]. Through her empirical study she identified more than sixty different motivations for reading blogs and grouped them into seven categories. The most popular motivations from her list were chosen as answer options for the respondents of the given survey. The participants were also offered the possibility to add their own answers. Surprisingly, none of the participants added his/her own option. Of course, there were only 35 participants taking the survey. Nevertheless, it seems that the list of motivations offered in this question covered the range of the respondents' motivations for reading blogs. The figure 9 shows the proportions of the answers in terms of motivations for reading blogs.



Figure 9: Motivations for reading blogs

As it can be seen from the figure 9, among our participants the most common reasons for reading blogs are:

1. Useful information (e.g., tutorials/life hacks)
2. Authentic stories/experiences/opinions
3. Specific information of interest
4. Entertainment

Nardi et al. [NSG04] still talk about blogging as a social activity, and blogs as journals, or diaries. Among their participants were many who used blogs as "a record of events in their lives for themselves and others". However, readers rarely look to read diaries nowadays, they want to learn something new or have some entertainment. Entertainment as the main reason for reading blogs was also mentioned by Baumer et al. [BST08]. Besides, the participants told to read blogs for life hacks and tutorials, authentic stories and experiences, and specific information of interest.

Indeed, if we take a look at travel blogs, they have become less of travel diaries, but more of a source of information like *Lonely Planet*. The readers do not want the updates of the whereabouts, but a life hack how to book a cheaper hotel, or tips on visiting best spots in Barcelona in one day. Besides, bloggers usually create those tutorials and life hacks based on their own experiences.

22 of 35 respondents have indicated authentic stories/experiences/opinions as one of the motivations for reading blogs. As it was discussed in section 2, readers prefer blogs to traditional media for the opinionated and, therefore, authentic information. The fact, that so many respondents indicated this motivation, confirms the importance of blog authenticity for the readers. Authenticity, therefore, can be considered one of the most appealing aspects of blogs.

The least popular motivations for reading blogs happened to be:

- To get updates from friends who have blogs (3 respondents)
- To participate in discussions (3 respondents)
- Because of the feeling of community (2 respondents)

These motivations reflect the nature of blogs as a social activity. Nardi et al. [NSG04] and Baumer et al. [BST08] write about blogging as a social activity connecting bloggers and their readers through responsibilities they feel to each other and, therefore, forming communities around blogs. Besides, one of the initial motivations for bloggers to blog was updating the others on activities and whereabouts [NSG04]. According to the answers of the respondents, the demand has changed from the social nature to more pragmatic kind of activity.

#### 4.4.3. Important Aspects to Continue Reading a Blog

In the theoretical part of this thesis certain aspects of blogging were discussed. Authenticity and credibility of the blog are two crucial aspects of any blog. High frequency of new posts, content quality, and sophisticated design often differentiate professional blogs [Fir12]. In blogging as a social activity communication with the author is important for the readers [NSG04]. The focus of this survey section was to investigate readers' perception of the importance of these aspects. There was no specification of the nature of a blog (professional, hobby, etc.) The respondents were asked to specify the importance of the following aspects to continue reading a blog:

- Authenticity of the author
- Credibility of the blog
- Quality of the content
- Frequency of new posts
- Design of the blog
- No advertising on the page
- Presence of the author in social media
- Communication with the author

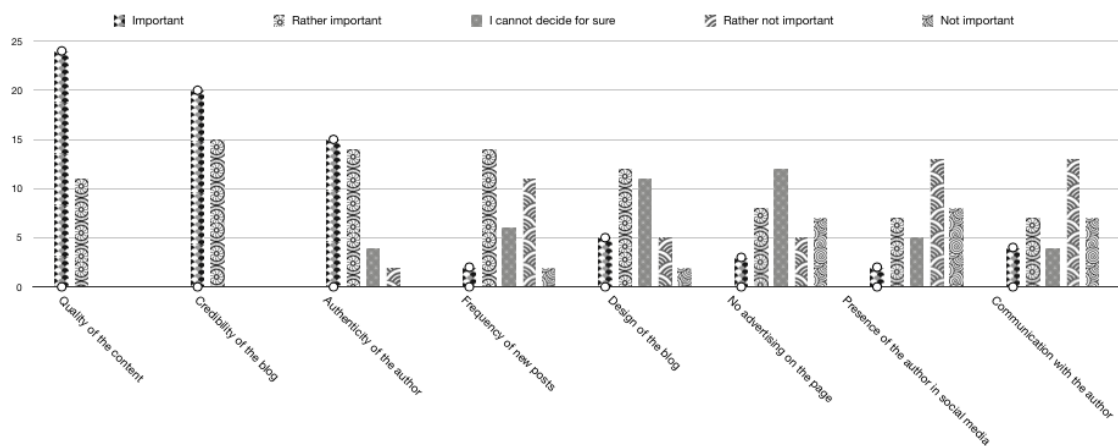


Figure 10: Overview of the responses: What aspects are important for you to continue reading a blog?

This question was important to understand how the readers perceive the importance of authenticity and credibility in any kind of blog without specifying if the blog is monetised, or if it is a corporate or personal blog. A detailed overview of the responses is shown in figure 10. It is, however, interesting to look at the answers from another perspective, which is shown in figures 11 and 12. Figure 11 shows the aspects that the participants perceive as important or rather important. Such perspective shows clearly the three important blog aspects that stand out of all the

rest in the list: credibility of the blog, quality of the content, authenticity of the author. It is interesting that even such important, it would seem, aspect as design is perceived as such only by half of the respondents.

P18 shares a very strict opinion concerning authenticity and credibility of blogs: "Blogs that are neither authentic nor credible should be banned from the internet". All the participants agree that credibility of the blog and quality of the content are important factors for them to continue reading a blog. Authenticity of the author is considered to be important or rather important by 29 out of 35 survey participants. Even though it is not possible to assess the statistical significance or dependences of these results due to qualitative nature of the survey, it can be assumed that authenticity and credibility are very important aspects of blogging that influence the readership and the audience perception of blogs.

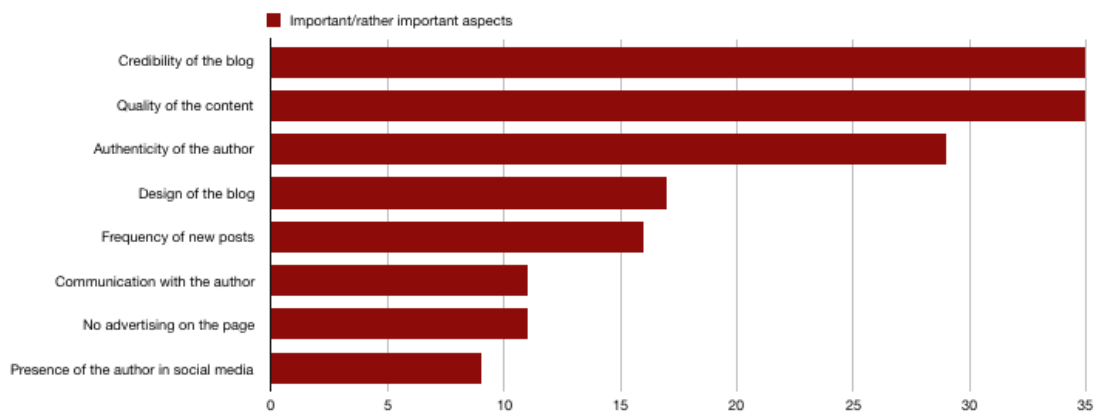


Figure 11: Important or rather important aspects to continue reading a blog

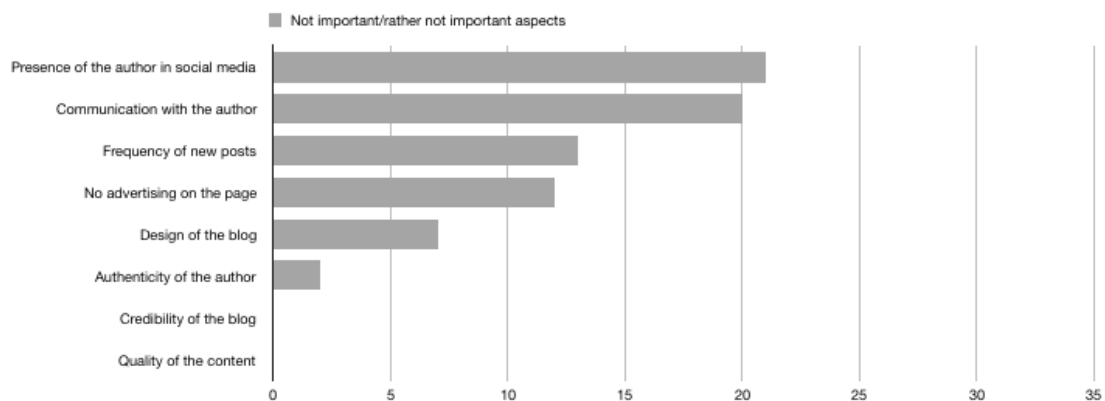


Figure 12: Not important or rather not important aspects to continue reading a blog



Quality of the content is perceived to the same extent as credibility as an important aspect to continue reading a blog. According to the definition of credibility discussed in section 3.3.1, this term is usually defined through two dimensions: trustworthiness and expertise. Quality content implicates competence and, therefore, can be trusted. Discussing the concept of credibility Fogg et al. [Fog+01] define credibility as perceived quality. The answers of the respondents once again confirm this statement.

Figure 12 shows the aspects that the participants perceive as not important or rather not important. Even though the impact of social media grows steadily most of the respondents perceived presence of the author in social media and communication with the author as rather not important or not important. Unfortunately, the argumentation provided by the respondents concerning their answers to this question was rather scarce. Therefore, it is hard to draw any certain conclusions. Concerning such aspects as *no advertising on the page* or *design of the blog*, many respondents could not exactly identify their perception and stayed indecisive.

#### 4.4.4. Readers' Perception of Professional Blogging

According to the definition of professional blogging provided in section 3.1, it implies monetising activities. One of the survey questions was if the blog readers were aware that blogs were often being monetised, and if they read monetised blogs at all. Besides, the participants were asked to share their thought about blogging as a profession and how they distinguish professional from regular blogs. Figure 13 shows the proportion of the answers on the question: "Do you personally consider blogging to be a profession?" Such statements as

- P05: "Yes, if it is a passion that collects revenue."
- P17: "Yes, it is the new-age journalism, reaching a global audience through unfiltered content."
- P22: "Yes - I am a professional blogger myself!"

were coded as "I consider blogging to be a profession". Whereas such statements as

- P08: "Not sure"
- P25: "I know a few who are professional"
- P11: "No"

where it is either not clear what attitude the participant has, or he/she does not consider blogging to be a profession were coded as "Other".

There was only one explicit "No" answer on this question. Other uncertain answers contained either no or little reasoning. Only few participants explicitly mentioned that blogging can be both a hobby and a job. And most were doubtless that blogging is a profession:

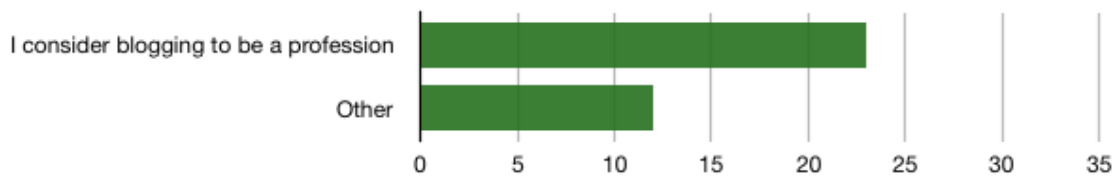


Figure 13: Overview of the responses: Do you personally consider blogging to be a profession?

P15: Bloggers should be taken serious for the work they do.

P13: Of course [blogging is a profession]. You have to spend a lot of time to build a following and to make your blog popular. It's actually harder than many jobs I should say.

P02: Blogging is similar to writing a column in a newspaper, which is also valid job. Why not being a professional blogger?

From the argumentation in favour of blogging being a profession the following topics could be identified:

- Writing a blog is like working for mass media or writing a book
- If you can earn money/make living blogging, it is a job/profession
- It takes time/effort writing quality content/generate ideas
- Blogging is a passion that brings revenue
- Blogging can be both a hobby and a profession

If the answers on the question about participants' attitude to blogging as a profession (or not) were relatively consistent, and could be grouped into a few categories, the question how the readers distinguished between professional and hobby blogs brought a great variety of answers. It is hard to make any conclusions from these answers, except for listing all the different mentioned options (figure 14). However, a few aspects mentioned by the participants stood out: advertising, sponsorship, frequency of the posts, blogging style, design, and quality of the content, that could mean that these aspects the readers notice the most, and these aspects influence at most the readers' perception of blogs.

Four participants (P01, P07, P08, P11) said not to be able to tell if a blog was professional. If we look at table 6, they all do not read blogs very frequently. P07 even clarifies his inability to tell the difference between a professional and a hobby blog by his non frequent reading practice: "I do not read blogs too often so it might be difficult for me to distinguish between the two".



Figure 14: The list of aspects that allow readers to distinguish between a hobby and a professional blog

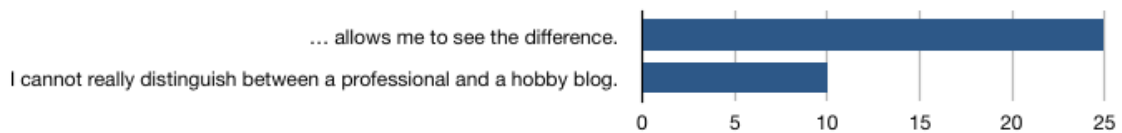


Figure 15: Overview of the responses: If you read a blog, can you distinguish between a professional and a hobby blog?

#### 4.4.5. Readers' Attitude to Monetising in Blogs

P18: I assume that professional bloggers live from advertisement. If there is no monetisation, I doubt a person has blogging as his profession.

Indeed, monetisation of the blog is the usual way for bloggers to transform their hobby into profession. Therefore, to understand how monetisation influences the readers' perception of professional blogs they had to share their opinion about:

1. Their awareness of monetising practices in blogs
2. Their attitude to monetisation in blogs
3. Their attitude to different monetising measures in blogs

**Readers' awareness of monetising practices in blogs** Most of the participants told to be aware that the authors monetise their blogs (figure 16). Four participants told to be either unaware, or not to realise it before taking this survey. As it could be expected, these participants are non frequent blog readers (P04, P05, P08,

P21). From these four readers P08 was the only person who told to not be able to distinguish between a professional and a hobby blog in his/her answer to the question about his/her perception of professional blogging. It could be expected that there was more conformity between these two questions. Indeed, if we refer to the aspects that P04, P05, and P21 mentioned as the way they can distinguish between a hobby and a professional blog, there is no reference to any monetising practices. For them the distinguishing aspects were language, design, popularity of the blog, expertise, and mature opinion.

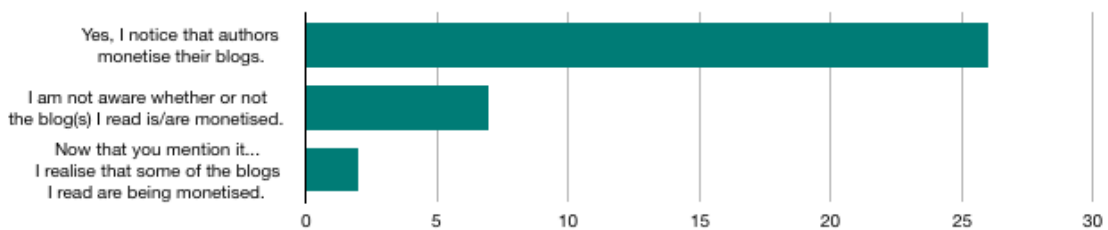


Figure 16: Overview of the responses: Are you aware of monetising practices in blogs?

**Readers' attitude to monetisation in blogs** Understanding towards monetising of blogs expressed fourteen survey participants. Four of them chose the attitude option "negative, but with understanding". Answers proportion diagram demonstrated in figure 17 indicates general acceptance of monetising in blogs, and, surprisingly, even some positive attitude to blog monetisation.

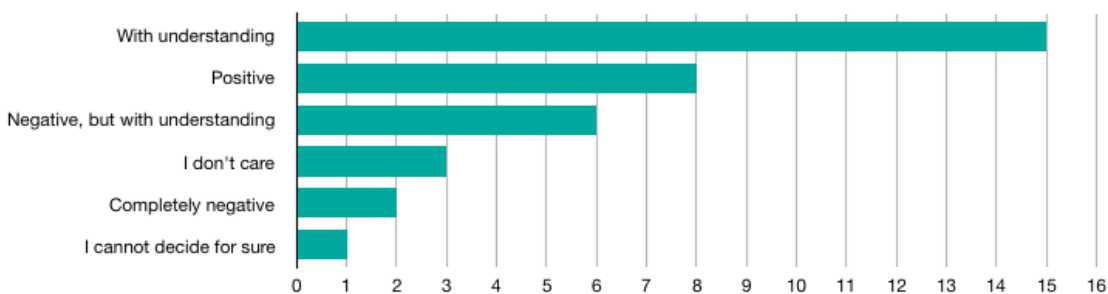


Figure 17: Overview of the responses: What is your attitude in general to monetising of blogs?

When blogging emerged as a social activity as Nardi et al. [NSG04] describe it, the technology was still mostly perceived as a way of bringing a personal diary to public through the web. When popular bloggers realised the power of the audience, a conflict between authenticity/credibility and monetisation arose, as Andrea Hunter

describes it in her work [Hun15]. Nowadays, monetisation of blogs is a usual matter, and the readers accept it the way they accept advertising on TV.

However, the fact that the bloggers struggle to find the balance between authenticity/credibility and monetisation cannot be ignored. There are certain aspects of professional blogs that monetisation influences in one way or another. Therefore, the participants were offered to share their views on how monetisation influences different aspects of blogs. Figure 19 demonstrates the answers to the survey question "How do monetising activities affect different aspects of your perception of the blog?"

There was no general agreement in the answers. Six participants said that monetisation influenced quality of the content positively in their perception, and six participants said it influenced quality of the content negatively. Indeed, receiving remuneration for his/her activities, the blogger is able to make better quality content. However, the very appearance of sponsored posts can be perceived as decrease of content quality throughout the blog. As a matter of fact, it depends. Due to the limitations discussed in section ?? the answers to the following this multiple choice open-ended question were scarce, but a few give some deeper insights on the topic.

P12: It depends whether the authors declare about the blog being a way of making money, declaring whether they are actually advertising something...

P18: The influence on the authenticity depends on the character of the blogger. Money can widen the number of topics, as the blogger might be able to afford things he could not afford before. Communication can be affected in different ways. The blogger might become more active to make more money, wether it is good or bad depends on his authenticity. More money means more money for design, also better quality.

In general, the distribution of answers was rather unexpected, but can be explained by the conclusion drawn a few passages above: the readers are used to blog monetisation. Majority of participants answered that monetisation has no influence on authenticity of the author, topic of the blog, design of the blog or quality of the content. However, majority of participants agreed that monetisation has rather negative influence on credibility of the blog.

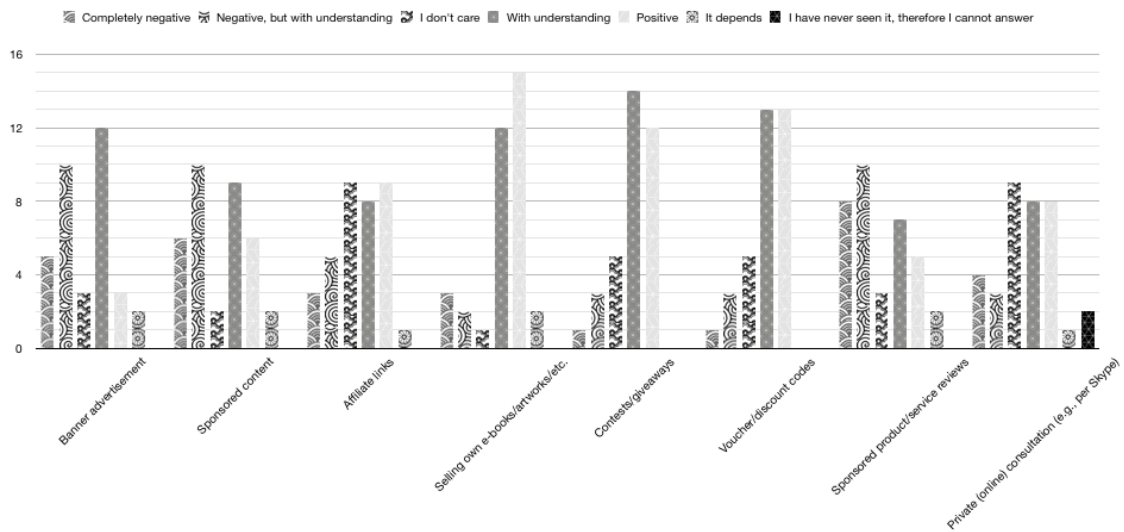


Figure 18: Overview of the responses: What is your attitude to the following monetising measures in blogs?

**Readers' attitude to different monetising measures in blog** All the most significant monetising practices were mentioned by the participants in their answers to the question about the aspects that distinguish professional blogs from hobby blogs (shown on figure 14). In general, the readers seem to be accustomed to various monetising measures. They probably know them not only from blogs, but from other online platforms/newspapers/magazines, etc. In the survey the participants were asked to express their attitude to the following monetising measures in blogs:

- Banner advertisement
- Sponsored content
- Affiliate links
- Selling own e-books/artworks/etc.
- Contests/giveaways
- Voucher/discount codes
- Sponsored product/service reviews
- Private (online) consultation (e.g., per Skype)

The participants were also asked to tell if they have noticed any other monetising measures in blogs that were not listed in the question. P23 indicated that donations could be another way of monetising the blog. Indeed, there are often donation buttons the bloggers use to support their projects/travels/activities. Donations as monetising measure could also receive different feedback, both positive and negative, from the readers. This monetising measure is not popular among bloggers. It would have been interesting to get an insight of the readers' attitude to donations in blogs. Unfortunately, in this study it will not be possible to draw any knowledge about it.

Figure 18 shows the proportion of blog readers' perception of monetising measures. The most negative attitude received banner advertisement, sponsored content, and sponsored products/service reviews. The most positive reaction received selling own e-books/artworks/etc., contests/giveaways and voucher/discount codes. Indeed, Ad-Blocker applications for browsers were not created without demand for it. AdBlockers are even able now to identify and block sponsored articles<sup>20</sup>.

Even though the readers perceive some monetising measures as unfavourable, they indicate certain aspects of blogs that can minimise or even eliminate the general negative influence of monetising. It is important that the author stays authentic and trustworthy:

P21: As long as the blogger is being truthful and legit with what they are advertising I do not mind if they do it.

P16: Any form of sponsored content/reviews is ok for me if the author is not influenced by it. So for me it is important to read not only about the 'good' sides of a product but the negative stuff as well. I just want an honest opinion.

#### 4.4.6. Readers' Attitude to Labelling of Monetised Content

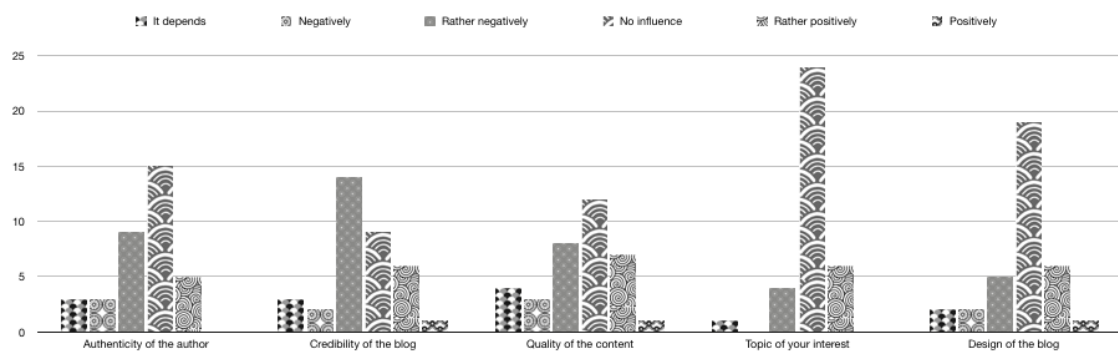


Figure 19: Overview of the responses: How do *monetising activities* affect different aspects of your perception of the blog?

Being honest and trustworthy implies revealing and labelling sponsored content. Comparing the visuals provided in figures 19 and 20 there is an obvious difference in negative vs positive perception concerning the aspect of authenticity, credibility and quality. It was pointed out in section 4.4.5 that it seems that in readers' perception monetising as an activity does not influence major elements of professional blog,

<sup>20</sup><https://mondaynote.com/ad-blocks-doomsday-scenarios-25b1f7af84d2> (last accessed 25.09.2017)

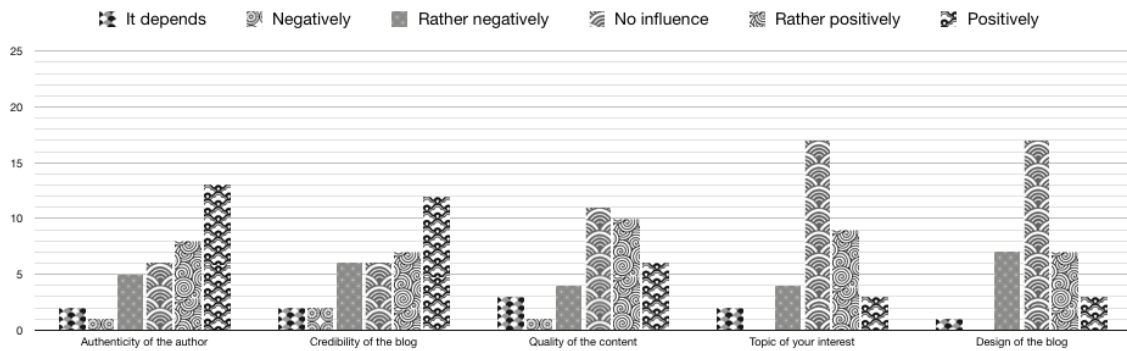


Figure 20: Overview of the responses: Which aspects of your perception could be influenced positively/negatively by *clear labelling* of monetised content?

which is demonstrated in figure 19. However, clear labelling of monetised content has an apparent positive affect on authenticity of the author, credibility of the blog, and quality of content, as can be seen from the blog readers' responses.

#### 4.4.7. Experiment: Sponsorship and Trust

If the readers trust the blogger, it is an indication for credibility of the blog. The survey participants were asked to specify cases when they would trust a sponsored recommendation from a blogger. Most of the participants tend to trust the recommendation, although they do so under certain conditions, such as:

- Product is fitting the blogger
- Blogger really uses the product
- Previous experience/knowing the blogger
- Blogger cares of his/her reputation
- Blogger is trustworthy
- Blogger is honest/unbiased/objective

Eight participants shared arguments against trusting a sponsored recommendation:

- Sponsorship/money biases opinion
- Sponsorship decreases credibility of the product
- Product usage/recommendation only because of sponsorship

Some participants said their actions to depend on the blogger and suggested that further research is always necessary, which is, indeed, a reasonable action concerning any kind of information in web.



#### **4.4.8. Experiment: Advertising or Subscription**

The main idea of this "experiment" was to understand if the readers were ready to pay for qualitative content if there was no advertisement in their favourite blog. It was probably hard for non-frequent readers to objectively answer this question. It is obvious that if one does not consume the information from blogs often enough, the person will not have desire to pay. However, there was no participant in the given sample, who expressed strong will to exchange the indirect way of payment through watching advertisement to direct payment through subscription. A few readers demonstrated strong denial of the opportunity to exchange advertisement for subscription:

P13: I prefer to see 10 000 ads than to pay.

Among the arguments for subscription the participants mentioned the following aspects:

- The particular blog being a daily source of information
- High interest in the topic of the blog
- The expertise of the author in the topic and, respectively, quality of the content

Otherwise, most of the participants declared they did not mind or even preferred advertisement. Blog readers are used to advertisement and seem to not be affected by it so much. Therefore, there remains a huge potential for the research of the ways to balance the elements of the triangle authenticity/monetisation/credibility.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Authenticity and Credibility in Professional Blogs

Extensive literature research has provided profound insights on the role of blogging in modern media and the state of the blogosphere. The blogosphere grows and evolves steadily. In the last years it became more commercial, since many bloggers who have big audiences have chosen to monetise their blogs. During this development some blogs have transformed into online magazines, which sometimes results in confusion during the attempt to differentiate professional blogs from other types of online media.

The qualitative survey helped to collect some insights on kinds of information the readers are looking for in blogs, on readers' awareness and perception of monetising practices in blogs and their influence on major aspects of blogging, such as authenticity of the author and credibility of the blog. The survey data confirms that blogging has transformed from mainly social activity into mainly professional activity, and readers are aware and even demand this change. Blog readers do not look for community or a source of information from their friends, but read blogs for useful information (like life hacks), authentic stories and opinions, and entertainment, which they find mostly in professional monetised blogs.

In the process of commercialisation of blogs authenticity and credibility play crucial role. It seems that monetisation triggers different reactions from the audience, both negative and positive. However, majority of the readers (participants of the given survey) are used to some form of monetisation, and understand its necessity in blogs. On the one hand monetisation gives bloggers many opportunities to develop their blogs and attract a wider audience according to their interests. On the other hand, it discourages part of the existing audience which has a feeling of losing the real authenticity of the stories and getting fake performance instead.

There are certain monetising measures that trigger mostly positive reaction of readers, and there are other that readers perceive negatively. While reading blog content the readers have certain experience with blogs, authors and monetising measures. The challenge is to find the balance between these elements and create such an experience for the reader that can trigger trust and the feeling of reading an authentic story.

The concept of credibility is closely connected with trust. The audience trusts bloggers, and therefore perceives blogs as credible. Commercialisation might step into conflict with credibility towards the audience, as a blogger has to somehow prove his or her honesty. The survey showed that despite general acceptance of monetising

measures in blogs there is demand for transparency and authenticity.

The call for improvement in the ways of monetisation becomes especially clear through such feedback:

P19: "In general terms, the main problem is that most bloggers are marketers first and journalists second. That's painfully apparent with far too many travel/lifestyle bloggers and a major turn off."

Besides, clear labelling of sponsored content seems to have a positive affect on authenticity of authors, credibility of blogs, and quality of content.

### 5.2. Contribution to Research Methods

Qualitative surveys are not often being used for research. The main disadvantage comparing to qualitative interviews, for example, is that they are not flexible. However, in some cases qualitative survey can be a better alternative to other research methods, like it was for the given study.

Design of the survey does not correspond with the classical conception of qualitative research. It consists not only of open-ended questions, but of multiple answer questions with an open-end. Such structure helps to build a certain frame for participants to answer and avoid an information overflow. It also provides participants with an idea about the research topic even if they are not experts in this field, e.g. non frequent blog reader. This study becomes a use case for employing a hybrid qualitative survey to collect data online.

Admittedly, such survey provides rather vague and inconsistent data. It is hard to influence people's motivation to provide elaborated answers. Therefore, the quality of coding and emerged categories is sometimes questionable. In case of choosing such way of collecting of information, a researcher has to think through advantages and disadvantages and set priorities for his or her research.

### 5.3. Outlook for the Future Research

This thesis serves as an inspiration for further research of blogging as a professional activity. Native advertisement is gaining popularity, but has not yet been explored in the scope of blogs. The qualitative survey delivered a lot of conceptual information on a wide range of topics that should be examined in the future: sponsored content and its labelling, acceptance of monetising measures, awareness of sponsored content, sponsorship and trust. Due to its significant length and variety of covered topics, the survey has delivered rather sketchy results. These results can be used to formulate hypotheses for various future studies.

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## **A. Survey**

# Experiences of being a blog reader nowadays

\*Required

## Welcome!

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I appreciate you taking your time to participate in this research. Please, note the following:

- + The research is focused on blog readers. If you don't read blogs, it doesn't make sense for you to participate in the survey. I cannot offer any rewards, SurveyCircle or PollPool code for non blog readers.
- + The survey takes 15-30 minutes to complete.
- + I really appreciate if you take some more time to think on the open ended questions. It gives me much better insights into the whole matter.
- + I want to assure you that all the responses provided will be kept confidential and the information is collected strictly for academic purposes.
- + If you have any questions/suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [inga.kleshchinova@smail.th-koeln.de](mailto:inga.kleshchinova@smail.th-koeln.de)

## Who is the researcher?

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I am Inga Fischer, a masters student in the Department of Computer Science at the Cologne University of Applied Sciences. I am conducting this research for my master thesis in Media Informatics.

### 1. Are you ready to begin the survey? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, let the fun start! *Skip to question 2.*
- No, I would like to get some more information about it. *Skip to "Research background and motivation."*

## Research background and motivation

### What is the research about?

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The topic of my master thesis is "Exploring the Aspects of Blogging as a Professional Activity and their Influence on Authenticity and Credibility of the blog". This survey should help to get the insights on the readers' perception of professional blogs and corresponding monetising practices.

### Background for the research

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Although professional blogging is a widely spread and well-known activity that became a source of income for many popular individual bloggers, there is very little research on people's experiences of reading and writing such blogs. I intend my research to begin to fill the gap in existing knowledge by comparing the experiences of professional bloggers and their readers and their perception of aspects that make blogging a professional activity.

Blogging has a fascinating history. From the moment the first blogs were published in the World Wide Web about twenty years have passed. During these years the blogging industry has gone through a colossal growth and a significant transformation. Blogging became a part of the modern media. Blogs

serve now as a source of information and entertainment in one line with the newspapers and magazines for many media consumers.

Blogging had started with an online diary. People were sharing facts of their private lives, their hobbies, their interests and knowledge with the world online. Anyone could read it from anywhere in the world. As well as the author could publish a post from anywhere in the world. Some authors started growing their audience. The readers reached out for the authentic content, sharing the same opinion or having the same problems as the author. The audience became bigger, and even communities of like minded people emerged around many popular blogs. Every popular blogger had soon an opportunity to monetise his/her blog (or better to say audience?).

In the meantime, most blog readers are used to some kind of advertisement in blogs. Such kind of monetising measures as banner advertisement is the simplest, and might be the most annoying one. In fact, there are many more ways to monetise a blog. Different bloggers employ different monetising measures and do it in their own way. However, every blogger struggles with building an authentic brand. Sometimes employing monetising measures in a blog provokes a negative reaction of the readers. In some cases the author is able to build up the trust with his readers, stay authentic, and, moreover, increase credibility of the blog, despite employing monetising activities.

## **What is the purpose of the research?**

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The research is mainly focused on the readers who read/follow independent professional bloggers. The purpose of this research is to investigate how the reader perceives and anticipates blogs in general, professional blogs and particularly monetising activities in blogs nowadays. The insights into motivations and attitudes of the reader can be used to create a list of best practices on finding the balance between monetisation and self-presentation of the author.

## **My motivation**

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I am an active blog reader.

Some authors I read every day, some once a week, others just once in a while. I follow some blogs since more than ten years, and I was able to see the transformation that happened to these blogs. The transformation has not only happened to the blogs, but to the audience. This change is not so obvious, but it must be addressed. The audience of professional bloggers became their commodity. As it was said in the latest research presented by ConvertKit (a marketing provider): "The audience is what allows a blog to become a business rather than a personal journal".

I am the part of the audience. I have certain motivations to reading the blogs, and certain reasons to quit reading. I am curious, what the other readers think. How do they feel in the world where they became a commodity? Do they realise the change?

I am a (not-yet-professional) blogger.

The amount of independent professional bloggers nowadays is fascinating. According to the latest research of ConvertKit (a marketing provider) the main three motivations for starting a blog were:

1 - Become self-employed (my interpretation: earning money with the blog)  
2 - An outlet for creative expression (my interpretation: self-presentation through writing, art, opinions, etc.)

3 - Build an audience (my interpretation: attract readers and keep them reading the blog)

I am interested how the first motivation interplays with the second and how their interplay influences the third. I want to understand, how the readers perceive the interplay between monetisation and creative self-expression in blogs.

**I hope, I could clear your questions and you are ready to begin the survey. Just click "NEXT" to start the fun :)**

**What kind of blog reader are you?**

I read certain blogs every day. There are some blogs that I read once a week or once a month when I receive a newsletter. What about you? How often if at all do you read blogs?

**2. Do you read any blogs? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes, I read blogs (blog articles) rather frequently (every day or every week).
- I read blogs (blog articles) just from time to time (once a month or even less often).
- I think so, I sometimes come across articles from blogs.
- No, I don't read blogs at all. *After the last question in this section, skip to question 31.*
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Please, elaborate the answer to the previous question. What blogs do you read/know? (Name up to ten)**

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**4. How do you usually come across blog articles?**

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**5. Do you have your own blog? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- No, I don't have a blog.
- Yes, I post articles regularly (every day/every week).
- Yes, I post there from time to time.
- Yes, but I post there very rarely.
- I thought about having my own blog, but I didn't create it yet.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Motivations for reading**

**6. Why do you read blogs? \***

*Tick all that apply.*

- It is entertaining
- For useful information (e.g., tutorials/life hacks)
- Because of good writing / interesting author
- It is an alternative to traditional media
- To get a wide variety of opinions
- For authentic stories/experiences/opinions
- For up-to-date information and news
- For specific information of interest
- Because of the feeling of community
- Because the blogs are credible (believable)
- To read discussions
- To participate in discussions
- To get updates from friends who have blogs
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. What are the main topics you are interested to read about in the blogs? Name up to ten blog topics that are of interest to you. \***

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**What aspects are important for you to continue reading a blog?**

Authenticity and credibility are the main concepts of this research. Let's make sure we are on the same page here.

\*Authenticity is the quality of being authentic. If the blogger is authentic then he/she is true to one's own personality, spirit, or character and is being really what he/she seems to be. Authentic content is not false, worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authenticity>).

\*\*Credibility can be defined as believability. Credible blogs are believable blogs; credible information is trustworthy information. Credibility is the fact that someone/something can be believed or trusted (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/credibility>).

**8. What aspects are important for you to continue reading a blog? \***

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Important	Rather important	I cannot decide for sure	Rather not important	Not important
Authenticity* of the author	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Credibility** of the blog	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication with the author	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Design of the blog	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of the content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No advertising on the page	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Presence of the author in social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frequency of new posts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**9. In case you have some more thoughts about your reading motivations or the factors influencing it, please, elaborate the answers or add some information concerning the previous questions.**

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**Your perception of professional blogging\***

\*Professional blogging is another key word for this research. Let's make sure we are on the same page here.

Professional bloggers implement certain practices to earn money from their blogging activities. Blog becomes a source of income for the blogger, therefore blogging becomes his/her profession. According to Cambridge Dictionary, professional is used to describe someone who does a job that people usually do as a hobby (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/professional>): in this case "professional dancer" would have the same implication as "professional blogger".

**10. Do you personally consider blogging to be a profession? Why? \***

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11. If you read a blog, can you distinguish between a professional and a hobby blog? If yes, what allows you to see the difference? \*

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12. Are there any professional bloggers among those you read/follow? What topics do they write about? \*

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### Your attitude to monetising\* practices in blogs

\*Monetising means making money from something (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/monetize>).

Professional blogging is directly related to monetising blog content. Monetising practices in blogs are certain measures that are aimed at making money from the blog. Even some not-yet-professional/hobby bloggers try out different ways of making money from their blog.

13. Are you aware of monetising practices that some bloggers implement in their blogs? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, I notice that authors monetise their blogs.
- I am not aware whether or not the blog(s) I read is/are monetised.
- Now that you mention it... I realise that some of the blogs I read are being monetised.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14. What is your attitude in general to monetising of blogs? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Positive
- With understanding
- I don't care
- Negative, but with understanding
- Completely negative
- I cannot decide for sure
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

15. **How do monetising activities affect different aspects of your perception of the blog? \***  
*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Positively	Rather positively	No influence	Rather negatively	Negatively	It depends
Authenticity of the author	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Topic of your interest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Credibility of the blog	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication with the author	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Design of the blog	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of the content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. **If you have any special thoughts or if you answered "It depends" to any of the questions above, please elaborate your answers.**

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17. **What is your attitude to the following monetising measures in blogs? \***  
*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Positive	With understanding	I don't care	Negative, but with understanding	Completely negative	It depends	I have never seen it, therefore I cannot answer
Banner advertisement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sponsored content*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Affiliate links**	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Selling own e-books/artworks/etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contests/giveaways	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Voucher/discount codes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sponsored product/service reviews***	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Private (online) consultation (e.g., per Skype)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Let's clear some expressions

\*Sponsored content is also called as advertorial (advertisement+editorial). It is a sponsored article that have the look and feel of a normal blog post. Usually the bloggers mark/tag such posts as \*sponsored by AwesomeCompany\* or \*brought to you by AwesomeCompany\* or make a disclaimer



explaining the origin of the content.

**\*\*Affiliate links are usually integrated in blog post and link to a certain product/service which is being sold through the affiliate partner. If the reader bought the product after clicking the link, the blogger receives some percent of the sales.**

**\*\*\*Sponsored product/service reviews: the blogger receives a product/service for free and reports about his/her experience, usually recommending the product/service to his/her readers.**

**18. If you have any special thoughts or if you answered "It depends" to any of the questions above, please elaborate your answers.**

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**19. Have you noticed any other monetising activities in the blogs you read? What are those? How do you feel about them?**

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**20. Imagine the following situation: your favourite blogger recommends a product or service that he/she uses himself/herself and that could be of interest for you. The blogger admits to receive a monetary compensation for this recommendation. Do you trust his/her recommendation? Why? \***

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### **What would you choose, advertisement or subscription?**

**21. If your favorite blogger offered a paid but advertisement-free subscription, would you take the offer? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

22. Please, elaborate your answer to the previous question. Why would/wouldn't you buy such a subscription?

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23. What is the maximum amount of money you would agree to pay monthly for a subscription to your favourite blog?

Mark only one oval.

- I wouldn't pay at all
- €0,50
- €1-€3
- €4-€6
- €7-€10
- More than €10
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Your attitude to tagging (labelling) of monetised content in blog posts

There are different ways to tell the reader about advertisement on the blog. One can see banner advertisement straight away, but what about a sponsored blog post or affiliate links? How shall the author indicate monetised content?

24. Shall the blogger reveal if he/she receives any kind of payment (commission) from a blog post? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes. There always should be a disclaimer.
- It depends.
- I don't care much.
- No designation necessary at all. It should be concealed.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

25. If you opened the main blog page with a list of blog posts, do you want to see directly which of the posts are monetised? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

26. In your opinion, how should monetised content be labelled? Disclaimer, design, colour?  
Please, share your thoughts. \*

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27. Which aspects of your perception could be influenced positively/negatively by clear labelling of monetised content? \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Positively	Rather positively	No influence	Rather negatively	Negatively	It depends
Authenticity of the author	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Topic of your interest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Credibility of the blog	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication with the author	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Design of the blog	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of the content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

28. If you have any special thoughts or if you answered "It depends" to any of the questions above, please elaborate your answers.

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29. Would you click on a sponsored/monetised post if it is distinctively labelled on the main blog page? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

30. **Please, elaborate your answer to the previous question. Why would/wouldn't you click?**

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*Skip to question 32.*

### **So, you don't read blogs...**

You've answered that you don't read blogs. This research, however, is focused on people who read blogs at least from time to time. Therefore, I'll ask you just one question concerning blogs, and a few demographical questions. I appreciate if you take your time to answer them.

31. **Please, elaborate, why don't you read blogs? What information sources do you prefer to use? \***

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*Skip to question 39.*

### **Your demographic profile**

In order for me to learn about the range of people taking part in this research, I would be grateful if you could answer the following questions. All information provided is anonymous.

32. **How old are you?**

Please, write your real age or nothing at all.

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33. **Country of your residence.**

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34. **I am:**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Prefer not to answer
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

35. **Are you currently...?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Student
- Student + part-time job
- Self-employed
- Unemployed and looking for work
- Unemployed but not currently looking for work
- Retired
- Unable to work
- Prefer not to answer
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

36. **What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?**

\_\_\_\_\_

37. **What was your total personal netto income during the past 12 months?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- less than €15000
- €15000 - €24999
- €25000 - €45000
- more than €45000
- Prefer not to answer
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for participating!**

As a little thank you I offer 3x€10 Amazon voucher for three randomly chosen participants.

Survey Code for SurveyCircle: H8Q7-ZSKA-ESN3-RPM5

Or redeem Survey Code with one click: <https://www.surveycircle.com/H8Q7-ZSKA-ESN3-RPM5>

CODE FOR POLLPOOL-BENUTZER ([WWW.POLL-POOL.COM](http://WWW.POLL-POOL.COM)): DAZPL

38. **If you wish to participate in the competition for a €10 Amazon Voucher, please, enter you email (the information is strictly confident).**

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*Stop filling out this form.*

## **Eidesstattliche Erklärung über die selbständige Abfassung der Arbeit**

Ich versichere an Eides Statt, die von mir vorgelegte Arbeit selbständig verfasst zu haben. Alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder sinngemäß aus veröffentlichten oder nicht veröffentlichten Arbeiten anderer entnommen sind, habe ich als entnommen kenntlich gemacht.

Sämtliche Quellen und Hilfsmittel, die ich für die Arbeit benutzt habe, sind angegeben. Die Arbeit hat mit gleichem Inhalt bzw. in wesentlichen Teilen noch keiner anderen Prüfungsbehörde vorgelegen.

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(Ort, Datum, Unterschrift)

