
Disenchantment of the Family Mediatisation of Parenthood in Family Blogs

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Abstract

This study asks how parenthood has changed in the context of mediatisation. To investigate the question, the 100 most frequently viewed German-language family blogs were systematically analysed. Methods of qualitative text analysis were applied. The analysis reveals that family blogs meet the parents' need for exchange and community and, at the same time, fulfil a similar function to parenting self-help books and diaries. Family blogs therefore also include an essential element of identity development. The study shows that family blogs not only create a public, they also lead to a disenchantment and politicisation of family and parenthood. Product tests and reviews that serve as a source of financial income for the bloggers play an important role in these blogs. The economisation of parenthood through advertising points to a shift in the boundary between the economic world outside the home and non-economic family life, contributing to a disenchantment of the family.

Entzauberung der Familie. Mediatisierung von Elternschaft in Familienblogs

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag geht der Frage nach, wie sich Elternschaft im Kontext von Mediatisierung verändert. Dazu wurden die 100 am häufigsten aufgerufenen deutschsprachige Familienblogs systematisch mit qualitativen Methoden der Textanalyse ausgewertet. Eltern teilen in den Blogs ihre Erfahrungen mit der Gestaltung des Alltagslebens in Familien. Die Analyse verdeutlicht, dass Familienblogs dem Bedürfnis von Eltern nach Austausch und Gemeinschaft entsprechen und zugleich eine ähnliche Funktion wie Elternratgeber und Tagebücher haben. Damit beinhalten Familienblogs auch ein wesentliches identitätsstiftendes Element. Der Beitrag arbeitet heraus, dass mit den Familienblogs nicht nur Öffentlichkeit hergestellt wird, sondern auch eine Entzauberung und Politisierung von Familie und Elternschaft einhergeht. Eine wichtige Rolle spielen Produkttests und Rezensionen, die den Bloggenden als finanzielle Einkommensquelle dienen. Die Ökonomisierung von Elternschaft durch Werbung markiert eine Grenzverschiebung zwischen ökonomischer Außenwelt und nichtökonomischer Familienwelt und trägt dadurch zu einer Entzauberung von Familie bei.

Parenthood and the Internet

Mediatisation of Family and Parenthood

Mediatisation is understood as a social meta-process that includes a fundamental change in social relationships, similar to individualization or globalization (Krotz 2013). It describes a long-term change that is «culturally dependent, technological, socially-embedded, but at the same non-synchronous, non-linear, and non-causal» (Krotz 2013, 440). This means that the mediatisation perspective does not focus on technology but on the change in communicative action (ibid.). In this, mediatisation is not understood as a normative concept but as an analytical perspective (Hjarvard 2008).

To date, there has been little research done on mediatisation processes of parenthood and in families. Various more recent studies demonstrate the benefits of social network sites for family practices, for example of Instagram as a medium of grieving (Thimm and Nehls 2017) or Facebook for sharing and preserving family photos (Autenrieth 2014; Holloway and Green 2017). Thimm and Nehls (2017) show that public sharing of personal information contributes considerably to the establishment of a family identity. Besides this, the integration of social network sites also reveals «domestication», that is, the penetration of the private, household sphere with (digital) media, which is compounded by the virtual availability of the media and increasing mobility of the end devices (Hjarvard 2008). It is precisely with the help of the domestication theory perspective that it can be worked out how everyday routines in families change through the use of digital media; thereby digital tools become a constitutive instrument of social interaction (Röser and Peil 2012). This more recent research direction indicates that mediatisation has far-reaching consequences, especially in the family environment. Rather, there are indications that family life is changing in a fundamental way (Livingstone 1998; 2009). This is where the present study picks up. As there has not been done much research on the influence of mediatisation on parenthood and family, this study aims at investigating how parenthood and family are changing in the context of mediatisation processes.

Parents' Use of the Internet and Online Blogs

In recent years, family life has increasingly been influenced by internet-based communication and leisure time. On the one hand, parents use the Internet as a source of information (Pehora et al. 2015), but on the other it also provides a place for discussion with other parents (Ammari and Schoenbeck 2015; Duggan et al. 2015; Fleischmann 2004; Leonard et al. 2004). Studies have reached contradictory conclusions regarding the benefits of involvement on social network sites: While Bartholomew et al. (2012)

found increasing levels of stress in young parents linked to Facebook use, Petko et al. (2015) showed in a meta-study that internet activity actually contributes to parents being able to meet the challenges of parenthood. The writing itself (in the sense of therapeutic writing), but also the exchange with others and the support given to bloggers by people in a similar life situation proves to be particularly helpful (Petko et al. 2015).

Besides informational sites and social network sites, blogs play a central role in parents' Internet usage. Blogs are regularly updated internet sites that are typically written by one author and characterized by their personal and informal style (Lomborg 2009). Individual blogs reach very large audience; for example, Hart indicates 1.5 million page views and 350.000 different visitors per month at her blog 'babykindundmeer.de' (Hart 2018); Mierau indicates 500.000 page views and 135.000 different readers per month at 'geborgen-wachsen.de' (Mierau 2017). As with other Web 2.0 applications, readers and authors can contact each other through the comment function. From a technical perspective, blogs are easy to manage, which is a key condition for the large number of personal blogs. Previous research on blogs pointed out the important role of self-discussion and self-exposure in the blogs, which is seen as an expression of growing narcissism (Brake 2012). Self-exposure also serves to create connections with others and should be viewed as a type of currency that is used for payment on social network sites (Duggan et al. 2015; Petko et al. 2015; Stefanone and Jang 2007).

Blogs that parents write about their lives as mothers and fathers represent a specific subcategory of personal blogs. The vast majority of family blogs are run by mothers, which is why the term «mommy blogs» has become standard in the USA. In public discourse, however, the belittling nature of this term is criticized from a feminist perspective (Chen 2013), as especially the mothers' blogs are seen as an expression of an emancipation from traditional gender roles (Lopez 2009; Webb and Lee 2011). This feminist perspective is based on the observation that many mothers' blogs also show the dark sides of everyday life with children. Motherhood is presented here from a female perspective and based on personal experiences.

There is a wide range of family blogs in terms of their content and target groups. Besides blogs that are aimed at parents in general with a broad spectrum of topics, there are also blogs focussed on sub-groups, e.g. multilingual families (Bello-Rodzen 2016), young families focussed on the topics of pregnancy and birth (Sohr-Preston et al. 2016) or lesbian parents (Hunter 2015). A common theme in previous research on family blogs is that of searching for and finding a community of like-minded people and experiencing a connection and sense of solidarity (Gurak and Antonijevic 2008; Hunter 2015; Lopez 2009; Pettigrew, Archer, and Harrigan 2016; Webb and Lee 2011). Using network analyses, Stansberry (2011) was able to show empirically how closely American «mommy blogs» are interlinked with one another. The requirement

for establishing a close community (e.g. as a multilingual family or as a family with homosexual parents, see above) is the presentation of private or intimate insights; at the same time, this presentation is a constitutive element. In contrast to other personal blogs (e.g. a diet blog or travel blog), parents not only give insights into their daily life as it relates to themselves as individuals, but these are also always related to their children and, in some cases, their partner. In this way, they always present their «relational self» (Blum-Ross and Livingstone 2017), that is, in a relationship with other individuals. They reveal the daily lives, personalities, and behaviour of their children. This means they are presented with an ethical dilemma between protecting their children's privacy and the desire to picture themselves in their relationship to the children (ibid.).

In existing studies – mostly from the USA – the focus is on the bloggers' motives and experiences, which is why they are based on various forms of surveys. An analysis of the family blogs themselves has not yet been carried out. There are no data on the quantitative importance of family blogs. One starting point could be blog directories in which the family bloggers can enter themselves. The largest directory for German-speaking areas includes more than 2.400 German-language family blogs (Brigitte MOM 2019).

Method

The aim of the study was to gain an overview of the characteristics and topics of German-language family blogs. The study is designed as an explorative study and combines qualitative and quantitative methods.

Procedure and Sample

The study presented here should include particularly frequently read family blogs. However, there are particular challenges in identifying the blogs with the highest circulation. Systematic research allows for the identification of a large number of German-language family blogs, but no definitive statements about the population can be made. It is also a very dynamic field in which new blogs are constantly being created and others are abandoned. Blog directories are suitable for sampling only to a limited extent, as the basis of these blog collections is the blogger's own entry into the directory. This self-selection can lead to a bias, for example because the newest blogs are at the top but are not (yet) read by many people.

To avoid these kinds of bias and yet choose popular blogs for the analysis, the following sampling method was used for the study: In the search engine Google, the search terms «Familie» (German for «family») and «Blog» were entered. The search resulted in around 22 million hits (August 2017). The first 100 blogs that were found

using these search criteria (keyword matches plus currentness) were included in the study. In addition, the sample only included those blogs for which a current blog post was made during the three months preceding the sampling. Sampling using a search engine includes certain biases. Google works with the algorithm «PageRank», for example, that shows the most relevant Internet entries first. This algorithm measures relevance according to the number of links to this site on the Internet. Links from websites that are also often linked are given more weight than links from pages that are not frequently linked. The sample drawn for the present study therefore includes the family blogs that are linked often and, as a result, read most often. Small blogs that are not frequently read are therefore not included in this study.

The blogs studied give various hints about the identity of the blogger. It can be said with relative certainty that almost all of the family blogs in the study are run by a woman. On 3 blogs only a man writes, and 8 of the blogs are written jointly by both parents. The evaluation of information about the bloggers' life situations reveals that the majority lead a family life that is formally considered typical for Germany: Almost all of them live together with their partner and children, 8 bloggers state clearly that they are a single-parent household, and one blogger recognizably lives in a same-sex partnership. On average, the bloggers have two children. The professional background or educational level of the bloggers can only be determined for some of the blogs. 30 bloggers state explicitly that they are academics. In all, 15 bloggers are journalists, 9 are or were employed in the area of marketing / communication, and 7 are trained educators or social educators. There are even fewer indications that the bloggers might have a migrant background. 10 bloggers explicitly say they were born somewhere other than Germany, 5 of whom are Austrian. Overall it is clear that, based on sociodemographic characteristics, the bloggers in this study represent an autochthonous German middle class with a relatively high level of education and traditional family constellations.

Analysis

For each of the 100 blogs in the sample, the five most recent blog posts were evaluated; this meant that a total of 500 blog posts were included. The topics of the posts were analysed qualitatively. As a first step, all blog posts included in the study were reviewed. The aim of this initial review was to find similarities between the family blogs. In this way, typical characteristics could be identified. The further analysis focuses on information about the topics and content of the blogs. For the evaluation, the principles of Grounded Theory (Muckel 2011; Corbin and Strauss 2014) guided the action. The texts were first viewed and then coded out of the material. The aim was to achieve the greatest possible emergence so that the material would not be superimposed with categories from outside (similar to Hunter 2015 in her text analysis

of blogs). Therefore, codes were assigned from the material reflecting the main topics of each post (e.g. sleep behaviour, dealing with anger). When doing so, the keywords the bloggers chose in the tags and/or title as well as a meaningful citation from the blog entries were selected. In some cases, the posts were assigned to more than one topic. In a second step, the topics were combined into topic clusters. For each topic cluster, text passages («anchor quotes») were chosen and documented that were considered typical for the topic because they were used in a similar form in several blogs (> 3 blogs). All topics were entered into a table calculation program (Microsoft Office Excel) to enable basic univariate analysis, such as descriptive statistics and frequency distributions.

Results

Characteristics of Family Blogs – An Overview

Family blogs are shown to be a clearly defined website genre that can be characterized especially on four levels:

1. Authors: The bloggers identify themselves as parents.
2. Content: The blogs' content is grouped around the topics of children and family. Two focuses can be identified: experiences in and reflections on everyday life with children and ideas and tips for structuring family life.
3. Form: In terms of photo selection and writing style, the form of presentation suggests immediacy and authenticity.
4. Economic orientation: Advertising is included seamlessly in the blogs both formally and in terms of content. It is a typical element of the blogs. With advertising, the bloggers place importance on transparency.

The majority of the blogs in the study look at various aspects of family life; 41, however, have a particular focus: 10 blogs concentrate on travelling with children, 10 other blogs focus on a certain lifestyle (e.g. mindfulness, minimalism, sustainability, alternative lifestyle). Blogs focussed on health also play a role, that is, those that look at nutrition (4 blogs) and fitness (3 blogs). In total, 3 blogs follow a certain parenting style («attachment parenting»), 3 blogs concentrated on a child's uniqueness or illness, and 2 blogs on the mother's illness. In 7 blogs, the bloggers reflected mainly on their role as wife and mother (problems with reconciling family and career: 3 blogs, single parenting: 3 blogs, feminism: 1 blog).

In general, blogs are not set up to be unidirectional but interactive. The blog posts are written by the authors themselves, but the readers' comments are an important element of the blog. The blog posts in the study varied greatly in this: Especially experienced-based blog topics (e.g. on the topic of weaning or children's sleep habits) or controversial topics (e.g. taking time out as a mother, fathers' involvement) got many comments. Other blog posts hardly resonated (e.g. recipes or posts about birthdays). The bloggers also contributed to interactivity with their strong networks on social network sites: 97 of the blogs in the study were also represented on Facebook, 85 on Instagram, and 78 were also on Twitter. On those sites, attention is drawn not only to the posts, sometimes discussions about the content of a blog post were also held there.

Besides networking on the Internet, many family bloggers also have personal contact with one another and plan get-togethers. The association «Blogfamilia e.V.», for example, has organized a conference for up to 174 family bloggers since 2016 and offers workshops and presentations (Blogfamilia 2019). In addition, several family bloggers meet at regular regional family blogger get-togethers. The networking activities in the real world underscore the bloggers' desire to exchange views and cultivate relationships with each other.

Most of bloggers consciously grapple with their children's anonymity. The vast majority attempt to protect their children's anonymity, for example by not posting photos in which they can be recognized and giving the children pseudonyms. One-quarter of the bloggers (26 blogs) show the children from the front; 22 of these blogs use the children's actual names.

Blog Topics

When evaluating the 500 blog posts, a total of eight commonly used topics could be identified. Figure 1 gives an overview of the topics and their frequency.

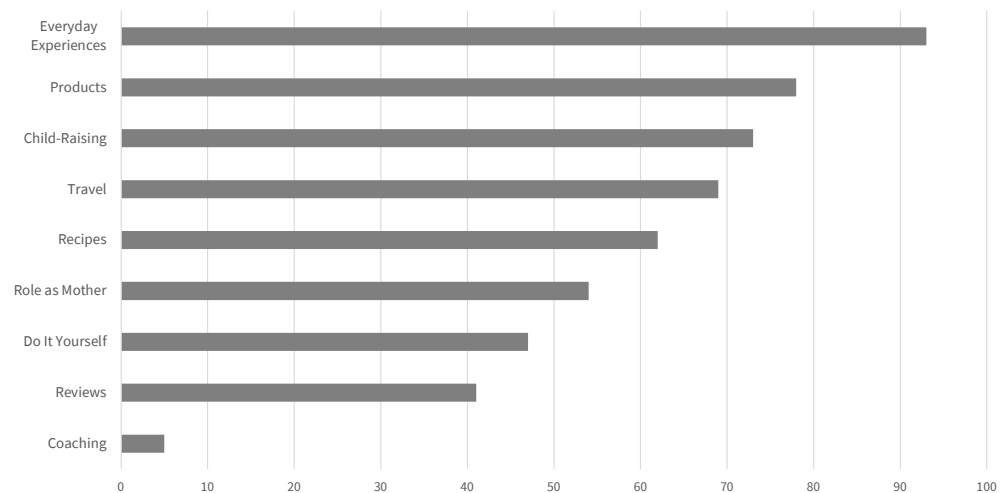


Fig. 1.: Topics of Blog Posts and their Quantitative Distribution (n=500; due to duplicate assignments 517 results).

Everyday Experiences

The largest number of blog posts were concerned with the family's everyday experiences. Both special events and situations that are deemed to be everyday or typical are described. In contrast to other categories in this study, in this category daily occurrences themselves are the focus. Activities for bloggers organised by individual family bloggers (e.g. «Weekend in Pictures» or «12 of 12») in which many family blogs participate often provide an occasion for documenting everyday occurrences.

The blogs show a varied and often chaotic daily life in which text and photos document mealtimes (set breakfast tables, empty coffee cups, homemade cakes, and fast food boxes), outings (walks, theatre, amusement parks), media use (picture books, computer games, television shows), social interactions (meetings with other children/families/relatives), and child-related activities (playing, crafts). The primary idea is the portrayal of an (apparently) unfiltered, authentic, honest look at daily life in which unmade beds, children without their hair done, and mothers without make-up are shown.

Other blogs focus on achievements in daily life and use words and pictures to describe a lifestyle that is presented by the bloggers as successful. Especially prominent events such as birthdays or elaborate outings are used to portray «successful» daily life.

At the same time, in many blog posts it is made clear that «chaotic» and «successful» family life are not mutually exclusive. Numerous blog posts clearly relegate formal perfection (order, cleanliness) to the background and prioritise close relationships with the children.

Products

Product presentations are very important for family blogs. Of the 100 blogs in the study, 78 examined products connected to children and family: Children's books, self-help books for parents, toys, prams, car seats, school bookbags, food, and clothing are all very common. Usually the blogs include personal experiences with the product. Product presentations are typically the result of cooperation with a manufacturer or distributor (see below: Economic Interests).

Raising Children

Most of the blogs also deal with questions related to raising children. Typical topics are the children falling asleep and sleeping through the night, dealing with defiant phases, or how to deal with children and digital media. These topics are discussed in various forms: In satirical glosses (e.g. Christian Hanne, familienbetrieb.info), as reports about experiences in which the pros and cons of the solutions used in their own family are explained (e.g. «Selbstbestimmtes Einschlafen oder nicht – wie das Abends mit unseren Kindern so läuft» [Who determines when to fall asleep – how we do things with our kids in the evening] by Sonja Lehnert, mama-notes.de), or as tips and checklists (e.g. «Tipps für einen sicheren Schulweg» [Tips for getting to school safely], Alexandra Gaida-Steingaß, mama-im-laendle.de). Often the questions related to raising children are also discussed in the form of introducing books or the arguments of individual self-help books. Several bloggers have also written self-help books on raising children and use the blog to draw attention to these books (e.g. Susanne Mierau, geborgen-wachsen.de), or the books arose out of the blogs (e.g. Christina Tropper, einerschreitimmer.com).

Travel

With the topic travel and holidays, the focus is on the questions of how travelling should be managed with children and what activities and accommodations can be expected at the location. By and large, no promotional purposes could be recognized in the travel reports. However, just as with product presentations, travel in connection with a commercial provider is often reported. Whether it is a travel portal («Together with booking.com we once again took a family trip to London», Marisa Hart, babykindundmeer.de), a hotel operation («We were warmly invited by Elldus Resort to get to know the hotel free of charge», Jennifer Pitzke, kinderchaos-familienblog.de), or a recreational facility («I was given two free press tickets for visiting the parks and 2 free tickets to give out as prizes.», Steffi Zehnder, mamaz.de).

Recipes

Recipes for baking or cooking are an important part of many blogs. The goal is primarily to introduce meals suited for children, that they like, or that can be prepared quickly. There are also recommendations for special formats like breakfast boxes or picnics. In addition, there are also many recipes that follow specific nutrition concepts. For example, there is a blog that is directed specifically at «the vegan family» (Carlotta Frings and Sara Pol, casavegan.de).

Role as Mother

Part of the blogs deal intensively with the situation of mothers and women. They have in part very different ideas and perspectives about motherhood, though. There are bloggers who present themselves as completely happy and others who describe their discontent with their general life situation. Especially the disillusionment experienced when transitioning into parenthood is a common theme of blog posts. Some blogs take it a step further and explicitly describe the negative aspects of motherhood, for example exhaustion up to post-partum depression.

Other blogs explicitly refer to a new image of motherhood. This can be expressed with a specific method of raising children or a set attitude on motherhood and raising children, or it can be how the workload is divided in the family (e.g. strict halving of all work between the two parents).

Do It Yourself

Many blog posts are focussed on various forms of «Do It Yourself»: Crafts, building, and sewing. Instructions for various homemade products are given, including both things that children can do for parents (e.g. sewing something) or things they can do together with the children (e.g. doing crafts).

Reviews

On many blogs, reviews of picture books and children's books can be found. In part there are collections of reviews in which several books are introduced together with a common topic, for example «The best children's books for 3-year-olds» (Christina Tropper, einerschreitimmer.com). Other reviews refer to books that the bloggers are given by the publishers. Reviews are also given for the self-help books, either as individual blog posts or blog post series, for example for the self-help author Jesper Juul (Sonja Lehnert, mama-notes.de).

Advertising

Of the 100 blogs in the study, 85 placed visible advertising on their blogs. The by far most common form are the so-called advertorials (n=77), in which the advertising is embedded in a text written by the blogger, usually as a review (books) or product discussion (school bookbags, markers, diapers, etc.). Usually, advertorials are marked as such or a note is included that they are advertising. Several blogs also do prize giveaways (n=36) in which products provided free of charge by the manufacturer are given away as prizes in a lottery. A direct form of advertising is providing individual segments of the blog in which companies' logos are placed (banners), a method used by 22 bloggers. Finally, there is the form of affiliate links: Here, the blog posts include a link to a manufacturer or distributor; if the link is clicked by the reader, the bloggers receive a commission fee (even if there is no purchase). Most bloggers provide targeted information in their blogs for companies that would like to enter into this kind of cooperation. This form of advertising is the key basis for earning money with a blog. Several of the blogs in the study also served to support the bloggers' other professional activities, for example coaching and consulting, selling their own books, operating their own online shops, or working as a photographer. In summary, it can be said that very few of the blogs in the study are only for leisure purposes. They are usually linked to monetary or professional interests.

Discussion

The analysis of the family blogs makes clear that the mediatization of family includes various elements of family life and parenthood. This can be seen in particular in the search for exchange and a sense of community, in the blogs' advice function, in their diary nature, and in the creation and strengthening of identity as a family, as will be described in more detail in the following:

1. The blogs in the study show the bloggers' search for community and exchange. Comments on the blog posts, networking on other social network sites, and participation in the bloggers' contests play a major role. This search for a community of like-minded people is something parents have sought for a long time (and will continue to do so). Previously, these communities were typically found in places close to the home: Children's stores, nursing and play groups, mothers' meetings, PEKiP groups, other activities organized by parents created the framework for personal exchange, especially among mothers. By providing a virtual space for exchange, blogs fulfil a similar function to these face-to-face encounters. A decisive advantage is the fact that the blogs are independent of space and time: Parents can read and write when they have time and are not bound to a specific time and date for a meeting. Especially for parents who have many commitments

(children, jobs, household chores, social contacts, etc.), this temporal flexibility is attractive. The spatial flexibility also offers many advantages in the early phases of parenthood, for example when the parents do not have any friends in a similar stage of life. This becomes even more important the more specialized the parents' needs are. The interests focussed on in the blogs suggest that especially family bloggers with a specific focus (e.g. for a certain chronic illness or a set nutritional concept) can find like-minded people online. This finding is in accordance with Hjarvard's analysis that mediatisation contributes both to a homogenization as well as a differentiation (Hjarvard 2008): The mediatisation of the exchange with like-minded people in a parenting blog makes it possible for parents to orient themselves on widespread family practices (homogenization), but also to find like-minded people in their own niche (differentiation).

2. Blogs are part of the tradition of parenting self-help books, as they include a large portion of advice and recommendations for other parents. In previous decades, pedagogical knowledge for parents was primarily conveyed through books (Oelkers 1995). Various magazines gave and give ideas for structuring daily life (but also tips on child-raising) (Kingma 1996). In contrast to the blogs, book and magazine authors typically pass on expert advice that is based less on personal experience and more on an objective, theoretical treatment of the subject. Bloggers, on the other hand, reveal themselves as being affected or having experience and pass on their personal impressions and strategies. They are thereby part of the tradition of personal perspectives and personally passing on individual knowledge about child-raising (Gillis 1997). The process of mediatisation adds a dimension of personal experience (which can now rarely be found in the self-help books) to the self-help books that lack this perspective because they are typically based on theories and aim for generalisability. In part this is done with (critical) reflections on precisely these self-help books. Sometimes, however, blogging leads to the bloggers publishing their own self-help books for parents. The postulate that mediatisation is neither linear nor causal (Krotz 2013) is revealed here in a near ideal-typical way: On the one hand, the family blogs mark a process of turning away from foremost theoretical expert knowledge in the (printed) advice literature for parents, because they put personal experiences at the place of abstract theories. On the other hand family blogs often take on the habitus of precisely these advice literature or even transform into printed advice literature itself. Against this backdrop, family blogs are neither a new version of advice literature, nor should they be understood as anti-advice literature.

3. Family blogs carry on the tradition of personal diaries (Walker Rettberg 2014): Writing the blog step-by-step in small, chronological texts; the private, in part confessional nature of the texts; and the overall unfinished (because it points to the future) form all remind one of classic diaries. This becomes particularly clear in the many reports in the blogs on a progressing pregnancy or a child's development. In part, the blogs remind one of letters written by parents to distant relatives or friends. Diaries and letters are intended for a very small group of readers, however, or are only written for ourselves; the contents are therefore intimate. In contrast, a blog is accessible to anyone anywhere. The question arises of how the dramatic expansion of the intended readers also changes the content. The blogs give various answers to this: Some are very general and reveal little about the bloggers' feelings or conflicts, fulfilling especially the formal characteristics of a diary (regular, chronological entries) and not the content characteristics (opening up about something personal). Others give deeper insights into the bloggers' emotional life so that the nature of a diary is also taken on in the content. The immediacy of the insights given by blogs should not be overestimated, however, as the descriptions of daily life are subject to numerous technical and social filters (ibid.). This means that the person represented in the digital space is not necessarily identical with the real-life person; Jung's terms «persona» as the personality shown to the outside world describes this difference accurately (Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimmons 2002). So, the creation of another variant of the self is by no means a new phenomenon. In the context of mediatisation, however, the creation and care of the persona is brought to perfection. To what extent the virtual identity of bloggers in turn influences the way of life in the analogue world should be the subject of future research.

4. The family blogs included in the study are also an expression of the respective family identity. Many blogs focus on daily life, and others include depictions of daily life even if it is not their primary focus, thereby expressing the individual characteristics and priorities of the families describing themselves. In the texts on the role of the mother or dividing the workload in the family, many of which are highly opinionated, the bloggers reveal their perspectives. The question must be asked, though, whether this is actually an expression of a need or behaviour on the part of the parents that already existed before blogs were created. On the contrary, it is to be assumed that parents' desire to explain themselves and their families' practices has only arisen in recent decades. With increasing freedom in such important factors such as when to start a family, the number of children, how the children are cared for, combining family with a career, division of the workload between the parents, where the family lives, etc., the need to justify these decisions also seems to have grown. The family blog appears to be an ideal

place for these explanations while also strengthening the family's identity, which is presented as being individual. The social meta-processes of individualization and mediatisation are inextricably linked here.

In many regards, family blogs are an example of the mediatisation of parents' typical needs and behaviours (e.g. exchange, advice, looking for approval). At the same time, they also show that it is not only old, traditional social practices that are finding a new channel with the help of the Internet, but that the process of mediatisation also gives rise to possibilities for expressing new needs. The analysis of family blogs points to fundamental changes in being a parent:

- **Public:** The dividing line is shifting from where it had been drawn between private and public life in middle-class society since the 19th century. Family life, which until recently was kept strictly behind closed doors, is now being revealed to the public through blogs. Mediatisation apparently leads not only to a domestication of the media (here: the Internet), but also to a publicisation of private life, which is also a significant part of the family identity.
- **Disenchantment:** Publicizing private life is done radically in some cases, showing even 'the down and dirty of daily life'. In many family blogs, family life is presented with a focus on the problems, which become the object of (self-)critical reflection. As with all enlightenment processes, this also includes disenchantment.
- **Politicisation:** Exposing and discussing the problematic aspects of family life gives the blogs an element of enlightenment. By avoiding a romanticised or kitschy portrayal of family life and illuminating the negative aspects instead, a differentiated and thus enlightened picture of family can emerge. At the same time, it enables people in similar situations and with similar experiences to connect, not only offering them consolation but also solidarity so that problems are perceived less as individual challenges and more as patterns that are shared with others. This also leads to a strengthening in identity as a parent.
- **Commercialization:** Consumption of child-related products and family-oriented services is a key aspect of family blogs that is not generally contradictory to the political aspects of family blogging. The same applies to the profit made from the bloggers' advertising activities. Instead, this has given rise to a parent movement that has naturally made use of the principles of internet capitalism. However, this has led to an economisation of parenthood through advertising, marking a shift in the boundary between the economic world outside the home and non-economic family life and thereby contributing to a disenchantment of families.

The study presented here employs mediatisation as a theoretical background which is rooted in cultural and communication theory (Krotz 2009). Nevertheless, the findings of the study can be linked up to common discourses on family research: The increasing role of individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), the changing understandings of motherhood (Faircloth 2013; Green 2015) and parent-child-relationships which crystallise in parenting styles (Craig, Powell, and Smyth 2014). The perspective of mediatisation allows for a new perspective on the field and accentuates alteration in families and family relations, amplified by new media.

Although this was the first study to examine the content of family blogs in the context of mediatisation, it is also important to acknowledge some limitations of this initial step in understanding the intentions and impact of family blogging. The number of blogs included in the study was limited to 100, which puts an emphasis on highly frequented blogs. Moreover, the study is restricted to German language blogs. Both might lead to a distortion of results. Another limitation can be seen in the research method which is exclusively focused on content analysis, while insights into the individual motives for blogging can also be provided by enquiry either by interviews or by surveys. An additional limitation can be seen in the fact that family blogs are only one facet of the mediatisation of the family. Thus, future research should consider triangulation of different methods and data. Furthermore, a broadening of the data foundation could provide more comprehensive results. With regard to possible cultural differences or commonalities an internationally comparative approach might seem productive, too. Following on from the findings of this study, detailed research on particular aspects can be reasonable. Especially, further explorations of the ideas of education and upbringing expressed in the blogs and the commercial purposes related to family blogging seem to be important issues to be examined.

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