

Bloggers as Trendsetters  
A survey in Germany, Austria and Switzerland

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Euroblog 2006 - 18.3.2006 - Stuttgart - Jan Schmidt

# Agenda

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Analytical  
framework

Survey  
Findings

Conclusion

1. Blogging Practices and Trendsetting
  
2. Findings from the „Wie ich blogge?!“ survey
  - General findings
  - Trendsetting
  
3. Conclusion and agenda for further research

# Weblogs 101: General Characteristics

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- Weblogs are a new format of online-based communication, combining elements of (personal) homepages and discussion boards
  - Weblogs are websites where content (text, pictures, soundfiles) is posted on a regular basis, displayed in reverse chronological order
  - Single postings are identified by unique URL („micro-content“) and usually can be commented upon by readers
- Diffusion has led to differentiation of blogging practices, e.g. private online journals; personal knowledge management; corporate weblogs; alternative journalism; literary experiments; ...
- Common emphasis on
  - Personalized and authentic authorship
  - Interactivity and dialogue
  - Building decentralized hypertextual and social networks

# Weblogs 101: Blogging Networks

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- Analytically, a blogging episode might encompass three modalities of action:
  - Selecting content: **Information management**
  - Publishing content: **Identity management**
  - Linking content: **Relationship management**
- Through comments, blogrolls [list of favorite blogs] and references to other online sources, weblogs form dense network of hypertextual links and social relations: the „blogosphere“
  - *Channeling attention / providing (partial) publics*
  - *Providing social capital (information sharing, socio-emotional support, sense of group identity)*

# Weblogs 101: The Blogosphere

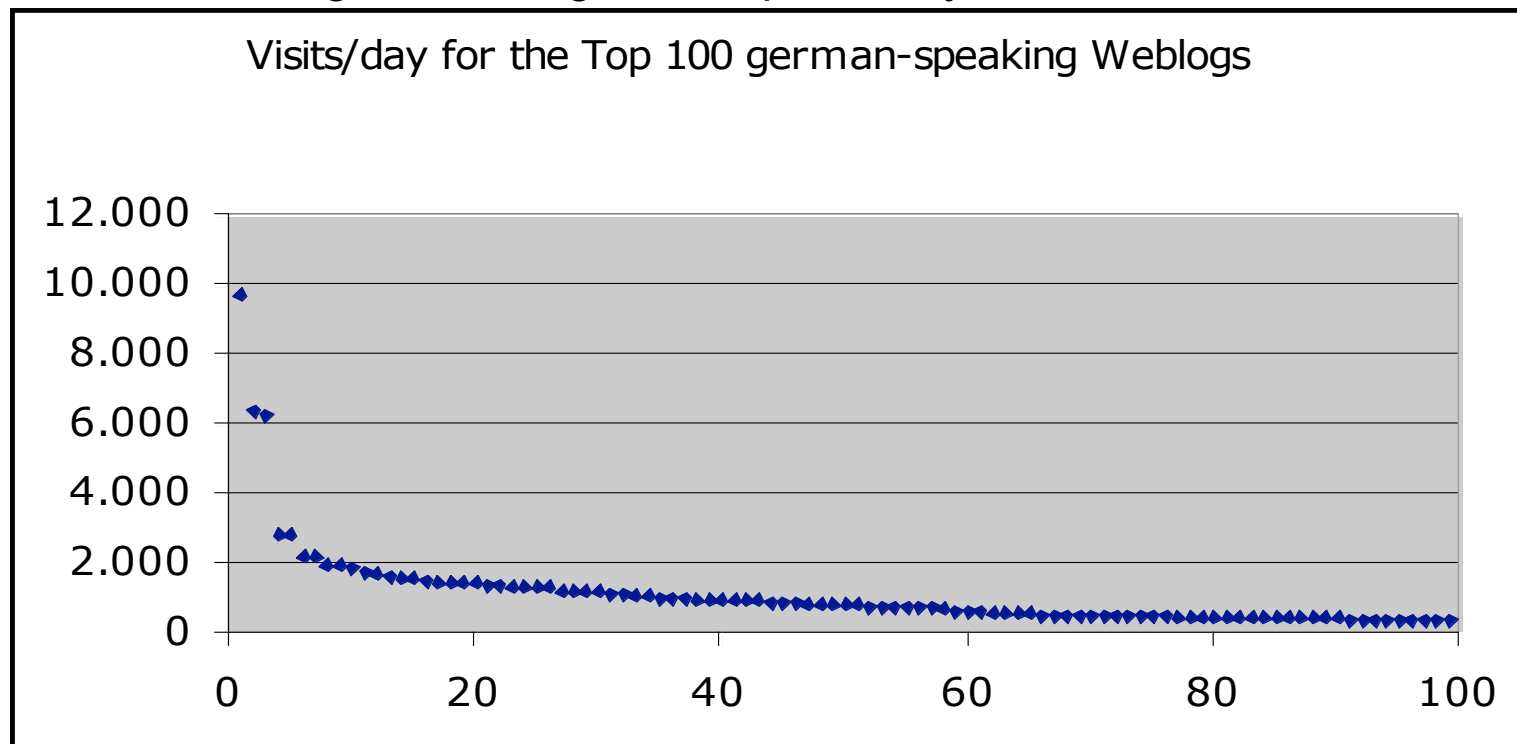
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- „Myth of equality“: weblog offer de-hierarchical communication
- But: Power Law structures emerge: a small number of Weblogs gaining high attention (as measured by incoming links or visits), while a large number gets comparatively low attention



Source: *counter.blogspot.de*, 03/08/2006

Note: *Bildblog* (~52.500 visits) has been omitted

# Trendsetting in Weblogs

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- More central Weblogs have a greater chance of spreading information and influencing opinions
  - Epidemic spread of information (Adar et al. 2004)
  - „Focal Points“ are watched by journalists (Drezner/Farell 2004)
- Difference between opinion leaders and trendsetters
  - Opinion leaders are those individuals who influence formation of opinions within their social networks
  - Trendsetters are those individuals who direct members of their social networks to innovations (cf. Batinic/Haupt/Wieselhuber 2005)
  - Opinion leadership is usually domain-specific while trendsetting is hypothesized to be a general psychological trait

# Blogbased Trendsetting – preliminary model

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Trendsetting ability is dependent on both individual characteristics of Weblog author and network position of Weblog

## Individual Characteristics

(Sociodemographics, sought gratifications, general trendsetting)



## Blogging Practices

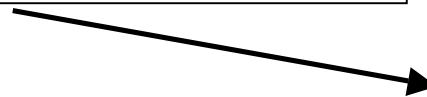
Information -, Identity -, Relationship Management



Network Position



Weblog Trendsetting  
Ability



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# „Wie ich blogge?!“ (WIB 2005)

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- German-speaking Blogosphere is estimated to have about 250.000 Weblogs; with about 50.000 being updated at least once a month
- Up to now, only few empirical information on bloggers and their practices were available
- Online-based survey „Wie ich blogge?!“ (October 2005), one of the largest surveys on Weblogs conducted so far
- Recruitment of participants (N=5.246) through
  - E-Mail invitation to registered users of two Weblog hosting services (N=1.076)
  - Self-recruiting sample, aided by survey banner and code snippet (N=4.170)
- Results are not statistically representative for the german-speaking blogosphere, but give valuable insights in blogging practices



blog.de



# WIB 2005: Participants

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- Majority of participants are active bloggers (84%), but readers-only (12%) and ex-blogger (4%) participated as well
- Countries of origin:
  - Germany 82%
  - Austria 10%
  - Switzerland 5%
  - Other countries 3%
- Results are given for sub-group of active bloggers only

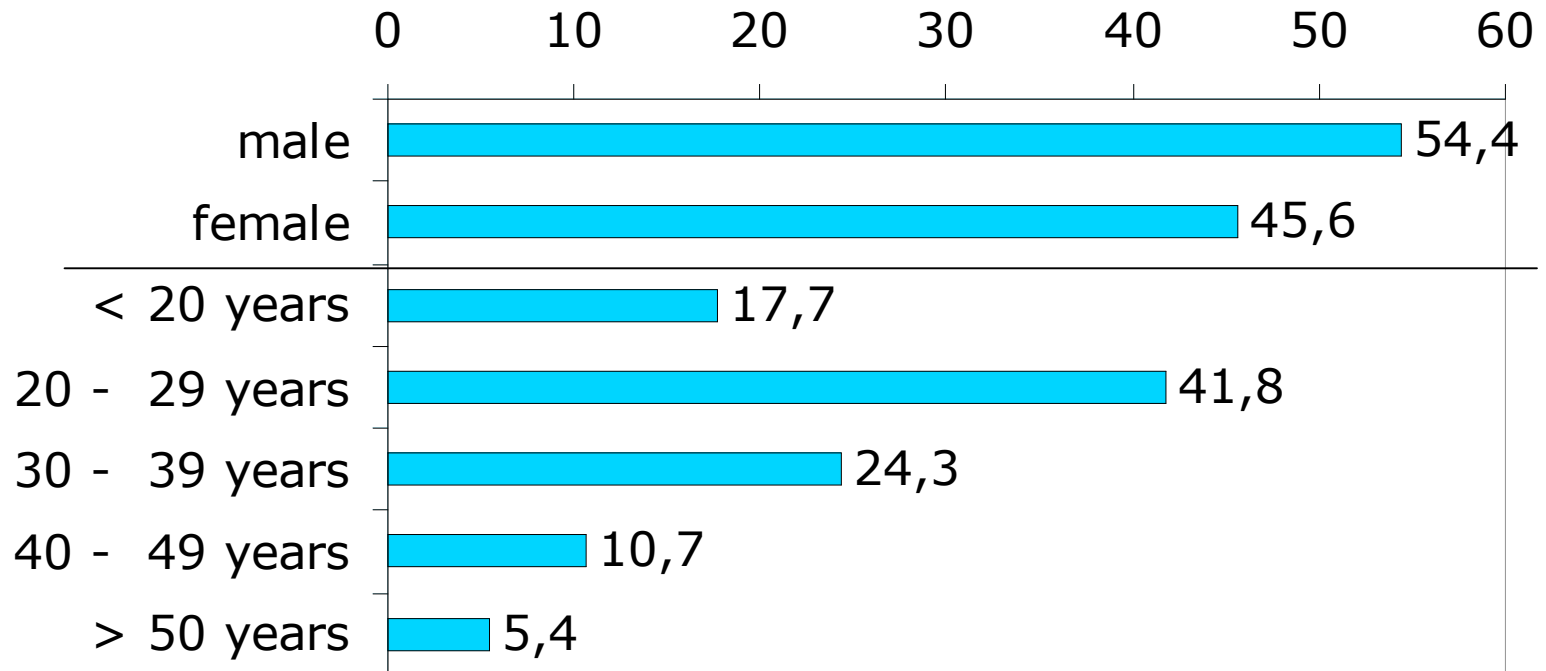
# WIB 2005: Sociodemographics

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- Active bloggers share characteristics with early adoptors of Internet technologies
  - Rather young, high formal education, high Internet involvement
  - Exception: gender share nearly balanced, Among teenage bloggers women outnumber men 2:1

Diagram 1: Active Bloggers' sociodemographics (n=3578/3558; in %)



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# WIB 2005: Motives

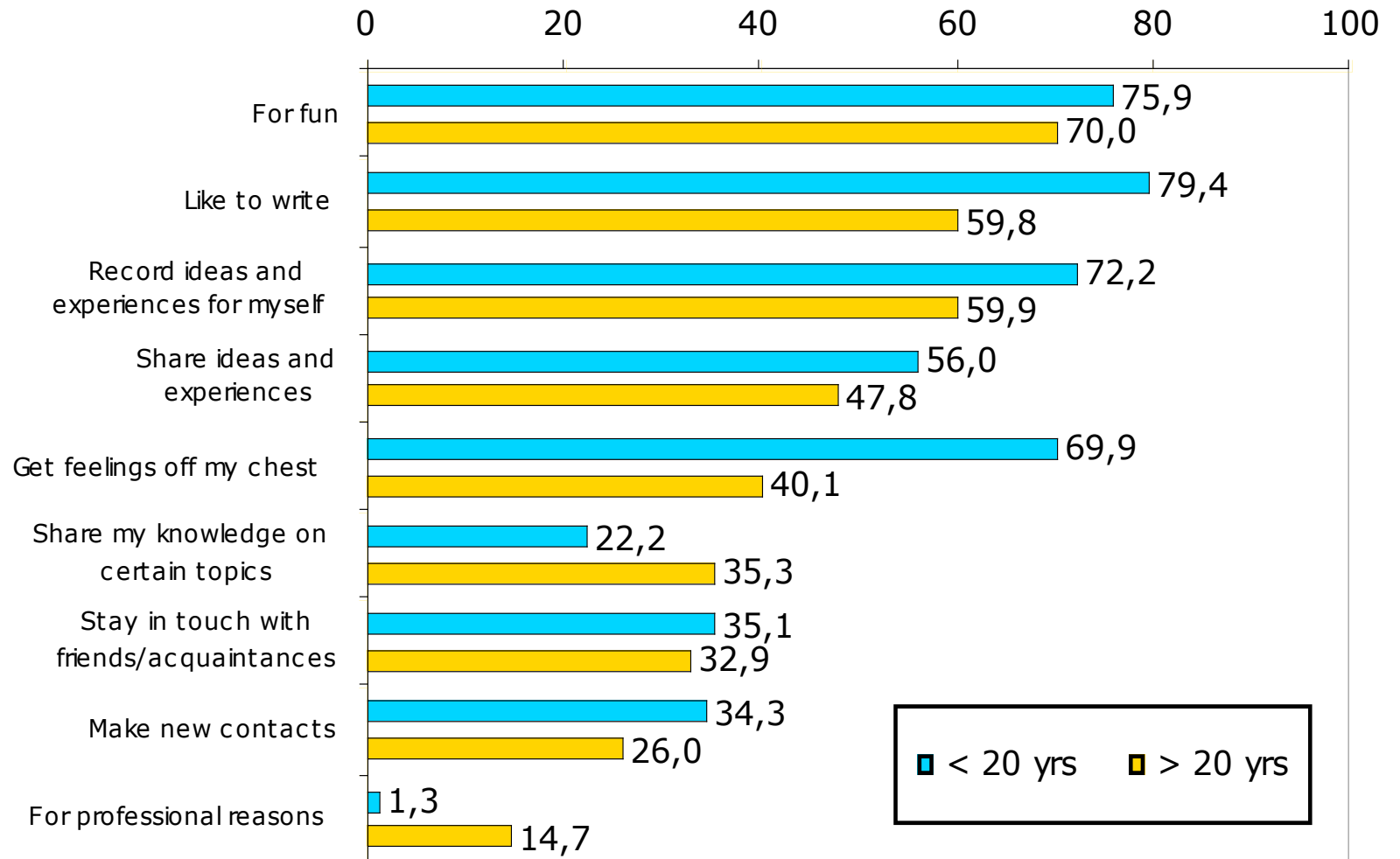
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Diagram 3: Motives for blogging by age (n=4309)



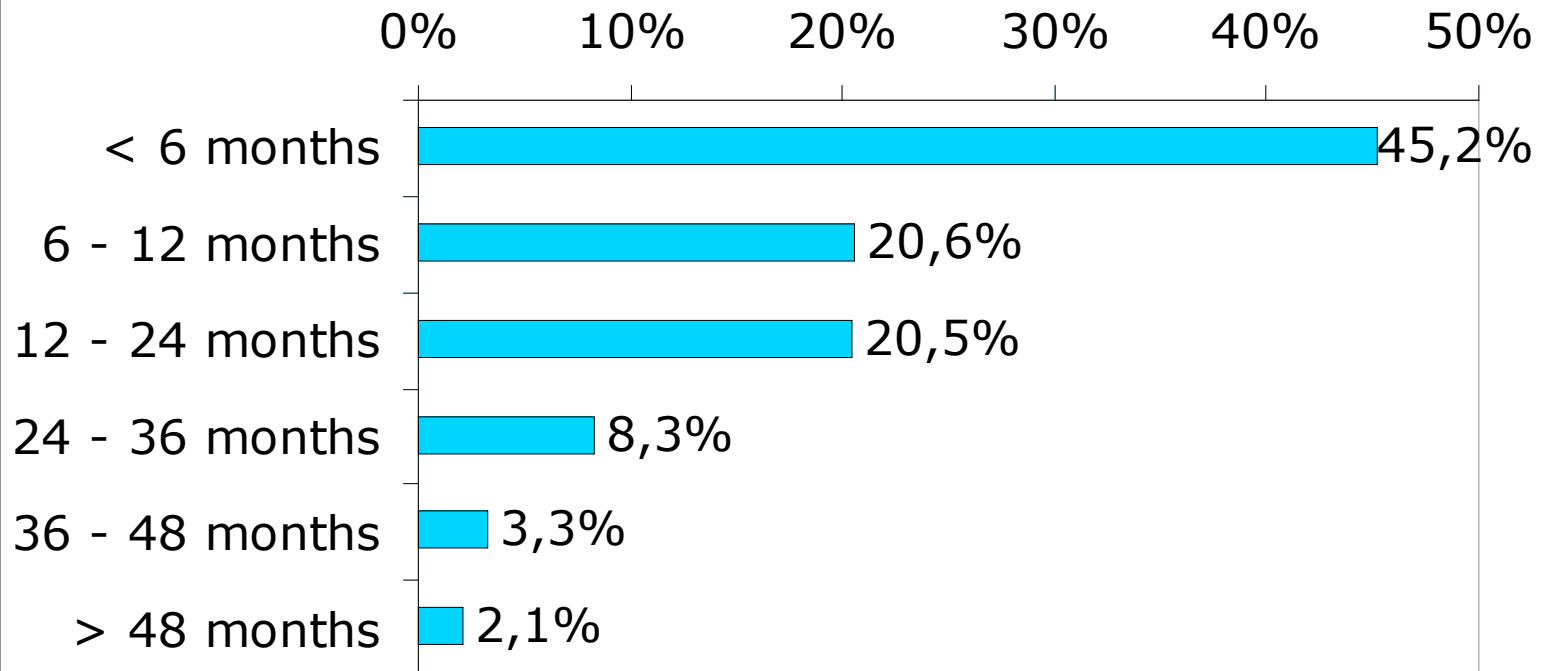
# WIB 2005: Weblog age

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- Majority of weblogs was started in 2005  
    ➔ young media format

Diagram 4: Weblog age (n=4391)



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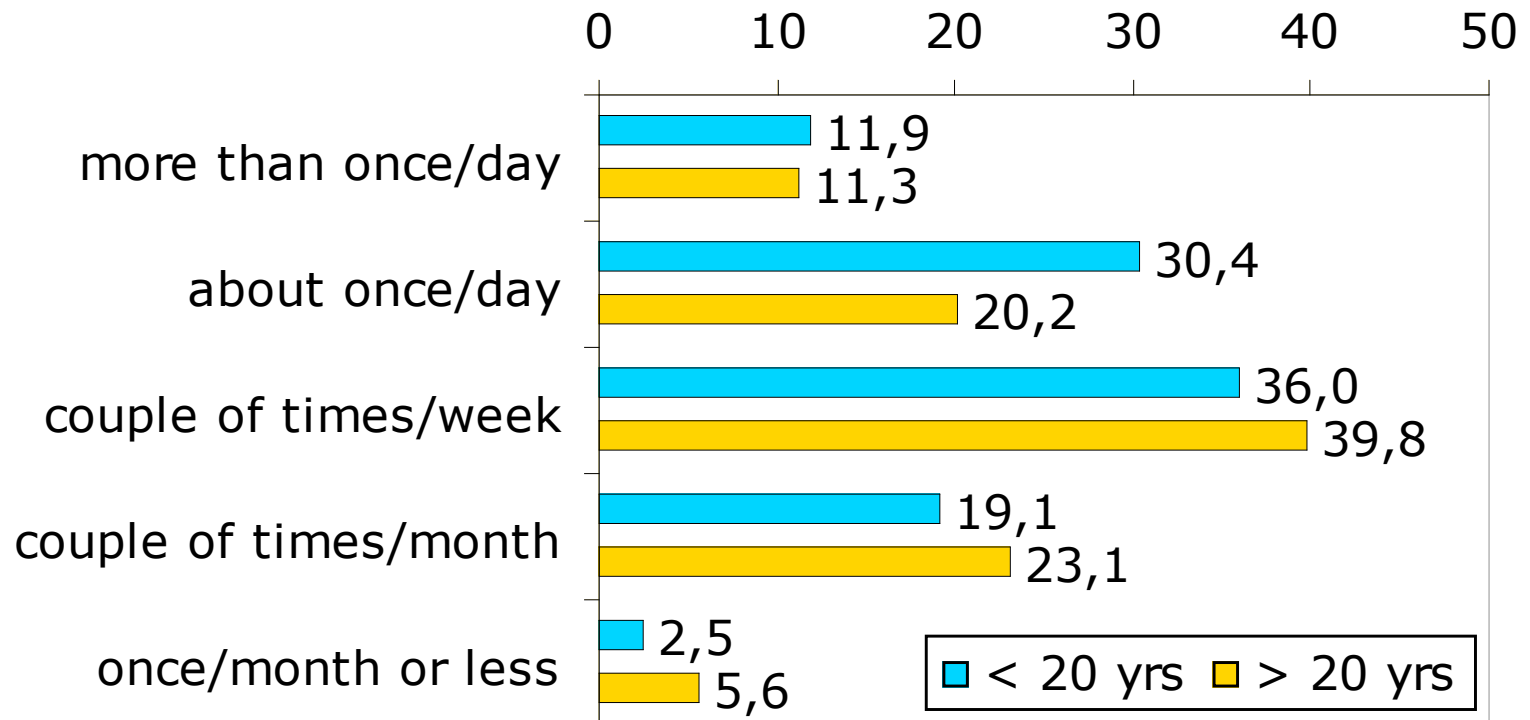
# Identity management: Updating

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- Most weblogs get updated frequently, about a third at least once a day

Diagram 5: Frequency of postings by age (n=4402)



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# Identity management: Content

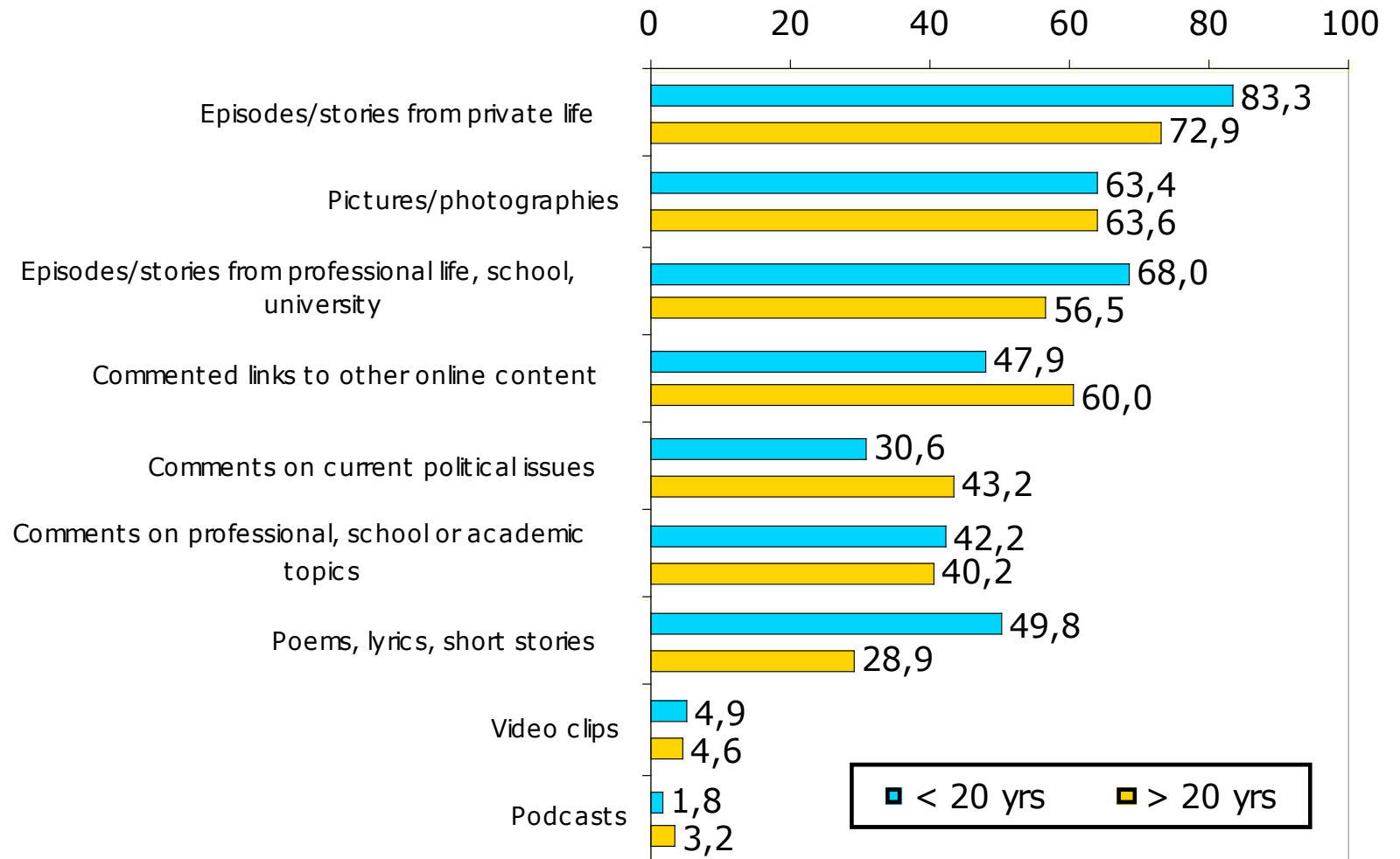
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Diagram 6: Published content by age (n=4108)



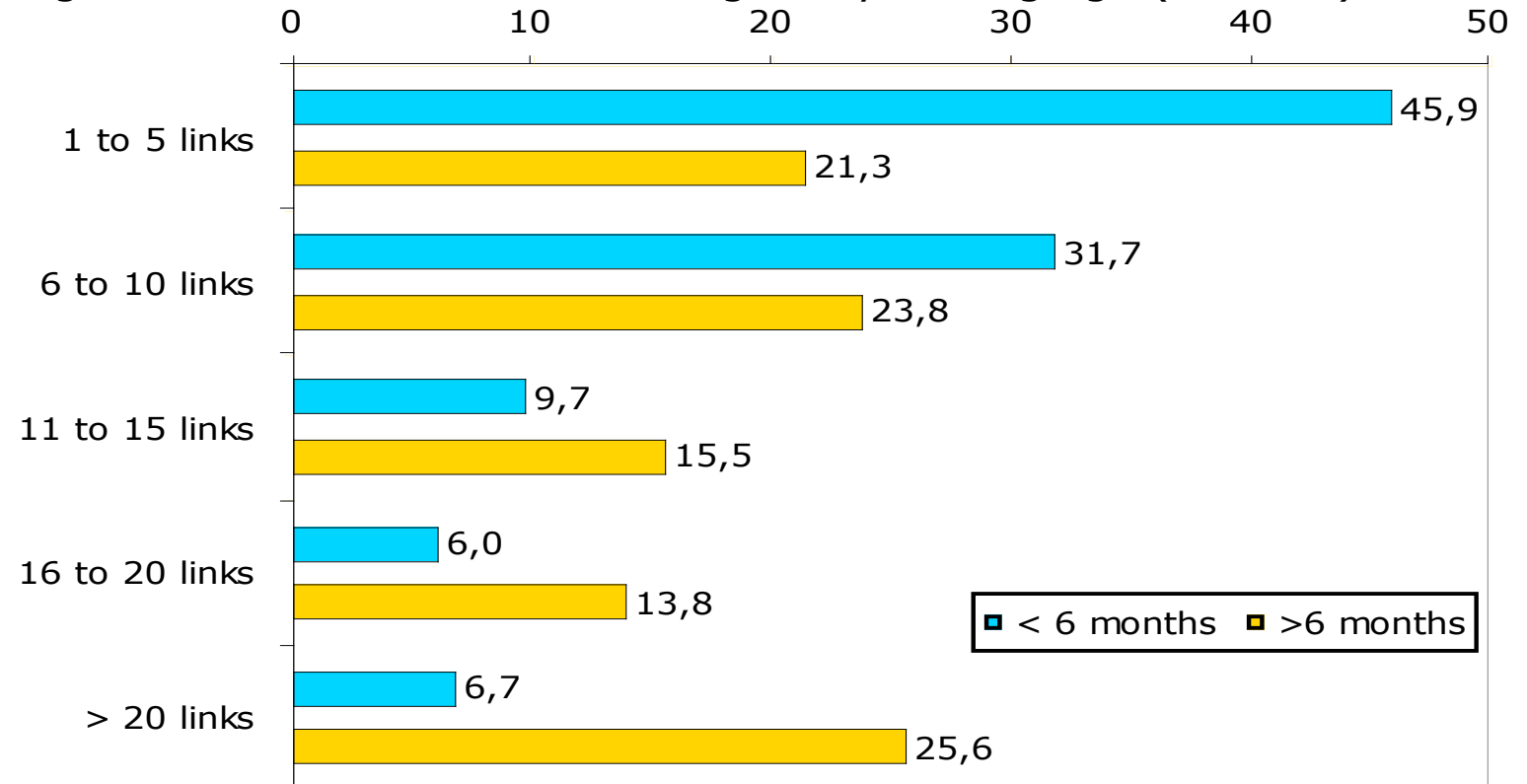
# Relationship management: Blogroll

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- 55,2% of all authors maintain blogroll
- Linking mostly to Weblogs the authors read themselves (85,0%) and/or friends' blogs (60,3%)

Diagram 8: Number of Links in Blogroll by weblog age (n=2119)



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# Information management: Blogs read

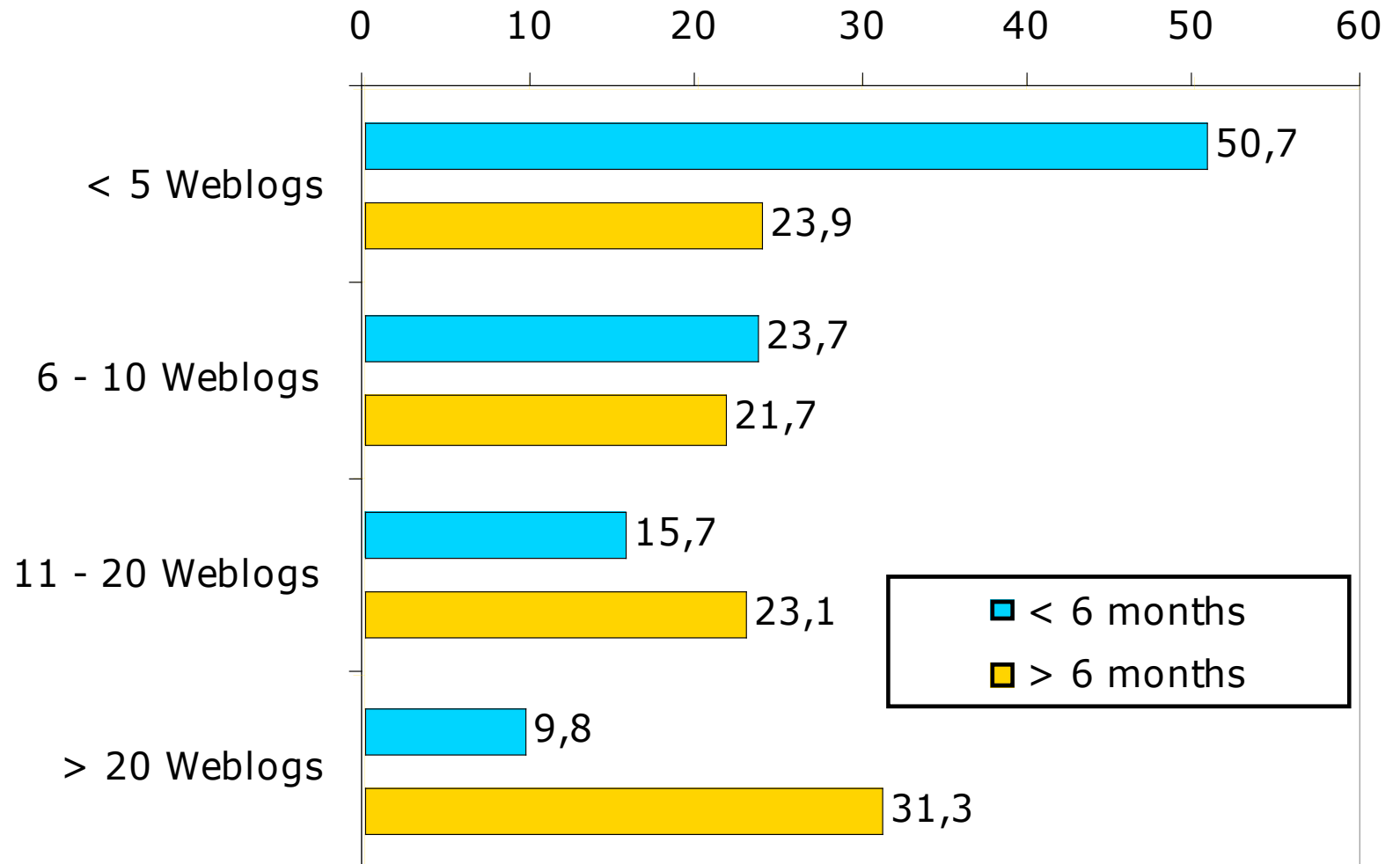
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Diagram 11: Number of Blogs read regularly by weblog age (n=3571)



# Trendsetting

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- Questionnaire included validated scale on „trend-setting“ (cf. Batinic/Haupt/Wieselhuber 2005)
  - Nine items, e.g. „I often take some time to explain things to my friends they don't know about“ or „There are some areas where I strive to be up-to-date“, 5-point-answer scale
  - Low values indicate high trendsetting and vice versa
- Results from a representative scale-validating study show that trendsetting correlates moderately with age (the younger, the higher the trendsetting) and to a small degree with income

# Trendsetting and Blogger characteristics

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Bloggers scoring high on Trendsetting are ...

- ... more likely to be male
- ... more likely to have a high formal education
- ... more likely to have started using the Internet early
- ... more likely to have higher income

Age	-,067 (**)
<b>Sex (1=male; 2=female)</b>	<b>,240 (**)</b>
<b>Formal education</b>	<b>-,115 (**)</b>
<b>Household income</b>	<b>-,137 (**)</b>
Weblog age	-,040 (*)
Frequency of posting	,068 (**)
<b>When first online?</b>	<b>-,238 (**)</b>
Duration of internet use	-,038 (*)

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

# Trendsetting and motives for blogging

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Bloggers scoring high on Trendsetting are ...

- ...more likely to share knowledge or to blog for professional reasons
- ... less likely to blog for private-emotional reasons

<b>Share my knowledge on certain topics</b>	<b>-,251 (**)</b>
<b>For professional reasons</b>	<b>-,187 (**)</b>
<b>Get feelings off my chest</b>	<b>,135 (**)</b>
Share ideas and experiences	-,067 (**)
Make new contacts	-,034 (*)
Record ideas and experiences for myself	-,015 (n.s.)
Stay in touch with friends and acquaintances	-,011 (n.s.)
Like to write	-,006 (n.s.)
For fun	,003 (n.s.)

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

# Trendsetting and Weblog content

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Bloggers scoring high on Trendsetting are ...

- ...more likely to comment on other online content, on political issues and on professional/academic content
- ... less likely to blog about private episodes or stories

<b>Commented links to other online content</b>	<b>-,164 (**)</b>
<b>Comments on current political issues</b>	<b>-,143 (**)</b>
<b>Comments on profess./school/academic topics</b>	
	<b>-,118 (**)</b>
<b>Episodes/Stories from private life</b>	<b>,101 (**)</b>
Poems, lyrics, short stories	,096 (**)
Podcasts	-,071 (**)
Video clips	-,028 (n.s.)
Pictures/photos	,016 (n.s.)
Episodes/Stories from profess./school'/university	-,015 (n.s.)

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

# Conclusion I

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- Findings of the „Wie ich blogge?!“-survey show that different strategies for information management, identity management, and relationship management through weblog-based communication exist
- Routines of identity management depend on bloggers' age, while routines of relationship management and information management depend on weblogs' age (= experience with weblogs)
- Individuals scoring high on trendsetting exhibit different blogging practices (e.g. using their weblog more often as a tool for information and knowledge dissemination)

# Conclusion II: Future Research

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- Assess changes and stability in blogging practices and online-based networking in general – ideally through internationally comparable, longitudinal, both quantitative and qualitative studies
- Assess differences and interdependencies between opinion leadership and trendsetting in blogbased communication
- Assess relationship between individual characteristics and network position by combining self-reported data on blogging practices and trendsetting with network data (e.g. centrality of a weblog)

**Thank you for your attention!**

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[www.bamberg-gewinnt.de/wordpress](http://www.bamberg-gewinnt.de/wordpress)

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