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Abstract

Personal publishing has led to the crystallisation of dynamic public spheres on the web, which mainstream mass media have failed to facilitate due to their inherent lack of discursive potential. Using as a theoretical framework Jürgen Habermas' public sphere theory as postulated in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, this work examines the relation between personal publishing and the public sphere with a focus on weblogs as an exemplary application of social software on today's web. Based on empirical findings from a range of studies, it is shown that both weblog usage and the publics forming in the blogosphere are of a personal nature. Habermas' normative conception of a bourgeois public sphere is not fully applicable to the blogosphere due to exclusivity mechanisms and the unequal distribution of attention to weblogs. Instead, his construct of a literary public sphere is deemed more compatible with the blogosphere. It is concluded that the relevance of weblogs—often dismissed as an irrelevant and trivial format in German media—lies in their ability to enrich the public sphere by providing a much broader range of opinions and issues than those presented in mainstream mass media.

Keywords: amateur content creation, blogosphere, Habermas, Internet, long tail, media use, personal publics, personal publishing, public sphere, user-generated content, Web 2.0, weblogs, zines