How Do Web Communicators Work?
NETSELECT: A Comparison of Motives and Aims of Five Groups of Web Communicators

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The survey presented was performed in fall 1998 at the Department of Communications at the Ludwig-Maximilian University of Munich. The aim was to determine the motives and criteria the various creators or editors of web sites consider when selecting the contents. For a comparison, five groups were chosen: media, political parties, special interest groups, companies and private persons. 206 persons responsible for the selection of contents of web sites were questioned. After being contacted first via telephone or e-mail they were asked to fill out an online questionnaire, which on request also was sent out by e-mail, mail or fax. The random sample was extracted from all German Internet sites listed at http://www.web.de and http://www.dino.de.

The questionnaire consisted of 26 questions including general usage of the WWW, the maintenance of the own web site and the process of content selection. It also included questions concerning general media usage and technical equipment. Relevant to the proposed presentation are the following variables: target groups; updating, contents and aims of the site; daily working processes and special elements used in the site, and the image of the typical user.

The sites of media target mainly on the users of their traditional medium (51%) and on online users in general (63.3%). The sites mainly consist of the latest news. A major part of their contents are copied from the traditional media outlet. The most important aim of media sites is to inform the user. Companies target mainly clients and buyers (79.5%) and all online users (74.4%). Their sites concentrate on a positive presentation of their company. Political parties intend to reach voters (94.7%) and subordinate organisations (89.5%). They mainly communicate news. Special interest groups target on interested people (65.4%) and members (61.5%). The sites are meant to represent the group and its ideas. Private persons target on people with the same hobbies (76.7%) and friends and acquaintances (67.1%). The contents of their sites mainly consist of links to other sites. The orientation of the media and private persons towards the interests of the users explains the strong influence of their reactions on the site production. However, the influence on the contents weighs heavier than it does on the creative side.

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The paper presents for the first time a comparison of different web site communicators regarding the motives, aims and structures of their sites. Hereby, the many different facets of the term "online communicator" become transparent.

Key words: web communicators, selection of contents, target groups, user relations