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Germans No Longer Want to be Taken for Fools

nextpractice-Study demonstrates media consumers are increasingly unnerved by the triviality of content / The latest media-satire "Free Rainer" reflects actual criticism

Bremen. The quality of offers does not necessarily increase with their quantity: Germans are evermore unnerved by the triviality of media content. In an interview study on changes in the media environment conducted by the Bremen-based research and consulting enterprise, nextpractice, the dilemma can clearly be outlined: "The interviewees criticized surprisingly decisively the typical Web 2.0 offers with mostly unfiltered, user-generated content for being superficial and useless," professor Peter Kruse, Chairman of the Board of nextpractice, recapitulates the findings. "Although the actual consumer behaviour still tells another story, people increasingly look for media that help them find their way and understand connections."

Without adequate benchmarking mechanisms the internet is drowning in the flood of the provided information. Thus disappointment is voiced even concerning the entertainment value of the offers that are perceived to be shallow and short-lived: "Only those internet offers that provide editorial revision or, in the case of Wikipedia, other mechanisms of quality assurance are ranked absolutely positively."

Generally, Web 2.0-users appreciate the opportunity to participate actively and network with like-minded people. But formerly highly-appraised offers like Youtube, Second Life and Weblogs are perceived to be out of line with the personal preferences. "In their intuitive assessment, the interviewees place them close enough to the yellow press and trash TV," Peter Kruse explains. "They do use them, but at the same time they ask themselves why they keep doing so." The hopes set on the Internet rather bear on innovative forms of medial editing of information and on the facilitation of social exchange processes. There is an undeniable helplessness in the face of the sheer amount of content. Users fear that in all media the tendency towards trivialization is proceeding.

The conclusion: „Web 2.0 is losing attractiveness. The desire for quality is increasing," Kruse says. The striking media-scolding in the recent movie, Free Rainer by Hans Weingartner, seems to hit the mark. However, quota-based benchmarking for TV-programming – the primary target of the satire – is but a symptom of the underlying problem. The results of the nextpractice study suggest that the expectancies of the users are shifting towards a new direction that is not adequately attended to by professional creators of media content. The assumption that only spectacular and easy-to-digest content would sell is not in line with the value preferences of those surveyed in the study.

According to the nextpractice-founder, Kruse, users are looking for media that combine the qualities of good journalism with the possibilities of Web 2.0. "For the interviewees, the ideal media blend reduction of complexity, sustainability and the mediation of meaning with active participation and spontaneous momentum. They tell the important from the irrelevant, increase the understanding of the world and deliver authentic information with high relevance to everyday life."

"Endeavors to channel the flood of information on the Web by user recommendations, active categorization or social bookmarking are no sustainable solutions for disburdening the system," the director of the study further explains. If anything, the multitude of primary information will only be amplified by the multitude of individual structuring patterns, thus further increasing the confusion. "If the amount of potential advisors increases at the same pace as the amount of potential problems, the advisors become a problem themselves," the Professor concludes.

Finally, the initial Web 2.0 euphoria and its impact on the media landscape could lead to a second internet bubble that, this time, will implode in the minds of the users, not on the stock market. "The more people actively participate in providing content on the Web, the more important and the more difficult it becomes to find information you need. Without innovative search mechanisms and increased relevance the internet will become a dinosaur with a huge body matched to a small brain," Peter Kruse warns.

As the fascination of the excessive diversity has diminished quickly, the question for the actual added value becomes prominent: "With the democratization of the access to information, the assessment of information becomes the key to success. To put it briefly: people want media that not only entertain but also advance them," the trend researcher clarifies. "In the future, those media enterprises and services which combine attractive visualization, open networking and orientating order formation will succeed."

About this Study

In summer 2007, nextpractice surveyed 150 participants concerning their media usage patterns, their opinions about the present and future of different information channels and media brands, and their personal values. In in-depth interviews lasting up to several hours, the computerized psychological technique nextexpertizer has been used. This method reveals even unconscious attitudes and evaluations. Nextpractice has repeatedly conducted studies on current social issues such as the alcohol intake of youths, conceptions of elite in Germany and the implications of different models of childcare.