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# **A Bloggers' Perspective on Responsibility in Sustainable Lifestyle Blogs**

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Department of Urban and Rural Development  
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## Abstract

The internet has changed the way we communicate. Through blogs it is now possible for everyone to raise a voice that can be heard. Sustainable lifestyle bloggers provide an opportunity to spread environmental knowledge and encourage individuals to embrace a sustainable lifestyle. However, when discussing the relation between citizenship and blogs, particular types of blogs such as lifestyle, fashion and online diaries are often not considered relevant in studies (Sinanan, 2014). The social practice of sustainable lifestyle bloggers is likely to influence the citizens' values, perception and assessment of the problem. Hence, it is significant to understand how sustainable lifestyle bloggers appoint responsibility and how they frame the citizens' role and their responsibility towards causing environmental threats through everyday activities and consumption habits. This thesis aims to investigate how sustainable lifestyle bloggers ascribe responsibility to themselves in the role of sustainable lifestyle bloggers. The material for the analysis was obtained through five structured written interviews with five sustainable lifestyle bloggers as well as through four blog posts from each blogger. As the method of analysis a qualitative structured content analysis based on Mayring (2010) was chosen. Further, this research is based on the epistemological view of social constructionism. This thesis concludes that the bloggers assign a high individual responsibility to citizens for making sustainable consumption choices and that sustainable lifestyle bloggers hold the power to create a space where a dialogue and deliberation can occur. In this space online communities are created and citizenship can be practiced and exercised individually (Luck & Ginanti, 2013).

*Keywords:* Blogs, citizenship, responsibility, sustainable lifestyle, environment

# Table of content

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Problem formulation	2
1.2	Aim and research questions	2
<b>2</b>	<b>Literature review</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	Blogs	3
2.2	Public sphere	3
2.3	Valid information sources for sustainable living	4
<b>3</b>	<b>Theoretical framework</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1	Responsibility	5
3.2	Active citizenship and democracy	6
<b>4</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1	Data gathering	9
4.2	Sample	9
4.3	Selected blogs	10
4.4	Data analysis	12
4.5	Categories	13
4.6	Critical reflection of methodology	14
<b>5</b>	<b>Results and connection to theoretical concepts</b>	<b>15</b>
5.1	Bloggers address responsibility	15
5.2	Information sources for sustainable living	16
5.3	Bloggers' responsibility for cooperation between bloggers and companies	17
5.4	Responsibility – consumer-citizen	19
5.5	Alternative consumption recommendations by the bloggers	20
5.6	Online Citizen	21
5.7	Blog as a tool for transformation	22
<b>6</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>26</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>27</b>
	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>I</b>
	<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>II</b>
	<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>III</b>
	<b>Appendix 3</b>	<b>IV</b>

# List of tables

Table 1. Overview of the created categories .....	16
Table 2. Labelling of the analysed data (interviews and blog posts) .....	18

## Abbreviations

DIY	Do it yourself
SC	Social constructionism
BA	Bachelor of Arts





# 1 Introduction

The blogosphere is a space for the bloggers to use their imagination and creativity to share their views (Bell, 2007) and to present greener solutions for the future. Besides the numerous formats, the medium blog is used by individuals to gain insight on how sustainable living can look like. Blogs are a collection of different media forms such as text, layout, videos, voice, etc. In these assemblages the bloggers' personality is constructed and communicated. Blogging takes diary keeping a step further as it is a unique form of a publicly made personal document, a digital narrative open for the world to read (Graham, Rouncefield, & Satchell, 2010).

In the past 'sustainable living' has often been researched through how to make behaviour and lifestyle change possible (Shove, 2005). However, this focus has shifted into investigating social practices to understand everyday behaviour (ibid, 2005). Everyday choices for a sustainable lifestyle and social practices that contribute to have or make sustainable lifestyle choices can be seen as 'everyday politics'. This term explains different contributions of the multi-faceted ways in which civic and political engagement are part of one's daily private life e.g. minor decisions, lifestyle choices and other mundane activities. In regards to sustainable living, these routine activities could be different forms of recycling, buying seasonal and organic products, buying fair-trade products, choosing a vegan or vegetarian diet, not travelling by plane or buying sustainable fashion.

Formats like personal blogs are relevant to investigate because they are positioned at the intersection between public and private, like everyday life and civic and political engagement (Walker Rettberg, 2009).

When discussing the relation between citizenship and blogs, particular types of blogs like lifestyle, fashion, online diaries are often not considered in studies (Sinanan, 2014). Usually journalism is used as a source of collecting data such as news or political commentary but not blog posts, yet (ibid, 2014).

This thesis is interested in how sustainable lifestyle bloggers ascribe responsibility to themselves in the role of a sustainable lifestyle blogger. It also seeks to find out how bloggers show this responsibility on their blogs since their communication about the environment can have an effect on how they perceive the environment but also on how readers of their blog perceive the environment.

Thus, it is important to include blogs since sustainable lifestyle blogging can be considered as a form of communication and are therefore important for environmental communication. Robert Cox (2016) argues that how we communicate about nature, shapes the way we think and form our relationship with nature. This stresses the importance of communication for the relation-

ship between humans and nature. Thus, blogs act as a medium in which communication about the environment takes place and therefore influences how citizens consider and develop their relationship with the natural world.

## 1.1 Problem formulation

Sustainable lifestyle bloggers offer alternative consumption actions to the public. Thus, the social practice of a sustainable lifestyle blogger presumably influences the citizen's values, perception and assessment of the issue. It is significant to understand how sustainable lifestyle bloggers appoint responsibility and how they construct the citizen's role and their responsibility towards causing environmental threats through everyday activities and consumption habits.

## 1.2 Aim and research questions

This thesis seeks to understand why sustainable lifestyle bloggers act the way they do in the communication processes they are involved in. Therefore, this thesis investigates from the blogger's point of view. Further, it is important to point out that the effects that the blogs might have on the reader are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Sustainable lifestyle bloggers provoke an opportunity to spread environmental knowledge and encourage individuals to embrace a sustainable lifestyle. Thus, the 'digital narrative' created by the bloggers in their blogs as well as the conducted interviews are investigated for how bloggers view their responsibility as a sustainable lifestyle blogger. The use of interviews especially allows the researcher a deeper insight into information not displayed on the blogs. Thus, this thesis investigates how bloggers assign themselves responsibility in their role as a sustainable lifestyle blogger, like how bloggers perceive their responsibility for creating valid content and making a recommendation about alternative sustainable living options. Further, this thesis will show how bloggers deal with company cooperations such as writing product reviews or being a brand ambassador. In order to reach this aim, the following research questions developed:

*How do bloggers explain their responsibility as a sustainable lifestyle blogger, especially in regards to providing information and making recommendations for a sustainable lifestyle? And how is the explained responsibility shown in their blogs?*

## 2 Literature review

In the following section, the relevant literature for this thesis is summarized. First, the medium blog is introduced since sustainable lifestyle blogs are the key element of the investigation of this thesis. Second, the importance of blogs within the public sphere will be explained. Finally, the obstacles a citizen has to face when looking for valid information on how to live a more sustainable lifestyle are explained in 2.3.

### 2.1 Blogs

Blogs are a worldwide phenomenon. Every person can create his/her blog with the help of free software. Thus, a numerous variety of blogs with different themes exists. In the World Wide Web, one can find blogs devoted to fashion, art, food, politics, news, travelling, etc. Within the blog sphere, it is possible for a person to express his/her personality and experience (Bell, 2007).

The essence of a blog is a frequently updated website where a blogger can publish a written entry on a regular basis. Thus, the blog posts are displayed chronologically where the current blog post is displayed first. A blog can be run by an individual, a group or a company and usually reveals personal matters (Bell, 2007). Within a blog, one can find multiple media forms like: texts, videos, graphics, illustration, photography and much more. Further, a blog often has a list of links that refers to other blogs (blog roll) using the hyperlink structure of the internet. So, the enlargement of the blogger network is supported by encouraging the viewers to visit other blogs that are recommended by the blogger (Schulz, 2009). Most of the blogs offer the visitor the opportunity to comment on a blog post, enabling a direct contact between the visitor, the bloggers and other visitors. The comment section is facilitating an open discussion about the published content into which every blog visitor can join (Luck & Ginanti, 2013).

Further, there are two common ways to look at blogs in the literature. These two views are different in the way they refer to use and create content in a blog. One way sees a blog mainly as a way of journaling and diary keeping. In this view, blogs are more embraced as a space for personal writing and the emphasis lies on how bloggers write about personal opinions and experience. The other view perceives a blog as a space for gathering information and internet links. In this view, an emphasis lays on the commentary the blogger writes about the collected information (Bell, 2007). In a third view, Bell (2007) combines the two other views. Thus, blogging is seen as space for personal writing space as well as providing information and commentary. These different points of view place blogging in a central position where private and public matters overlap and intertwine (Bell, 2007).

### 2.2 Public sphere

Blogs are part of the public sphere, described by Habermas as “*a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body*” (Habermas, 1947, p. 46).

This is also supported by Cox (2016) who defines the public sphere: “*as a realm of influences that is created when individuals engage others in communication- through conversation, debate or questioning- about subjects of*

*shared concern or topics that affect a wider community. The public comes into being in our everyday conversations as well as in our formal interactions when we talk about the environment”*(Cox, 2016, p. 21).

However, the public sphere is more than just words, also visual and nonverbal symbolic action forms the public sphere. Visual and nonverbal symbolic actions can be photographs, banners, editorials, speeches and TV newscasts, etc.

As citizens are getting involved with others, they render their private concern into public matters. This generates circles of influence affecting how citizens view the environment and their relation to it. The rendering from private to public matters can take various practices and shapes. One of these shapes can be blogs where dialogues and discussions emerge (Cox, 2016, p. 21). Blogs with a sustainable living theme are a relatively new phenomenon within the blogosphere. The sustainability-blogosphere offers a space for dialogue where mass media statements or controversial scientific results can be discussed (Schultz, 2009). Cox (2016) states that the public sphere emerges as a potential sphere of influence (Cox, 2016, p. 21). Sustainable lifestyle blogs are part of the public sphere. Hence, the sustainability-blogosphere supports the exchanges of new ideas and information about sustainable consumption to be spread (Schultz, 2009). Therefore, the sustainability-blogosphere has the potential to influence citizens. It is import to reflect on the information bloggers publish and how they define responsibility for themselves in their role as bloggers, especially for proving information and making recommendations for a more sustainable lifestyle.

### 2.3 Valid information sources for sustainable living

Sustainable lifestyle blogs can be considered as a source that provides information for citizens on how to live more sustainable. Scholars state that gathering information is usually the initial step of an environmental education (Ostman & Parker, 1987). Hence, according to research, media sources are the go-to platform for the acquisition of information regarding environmental topics (ibid, 1987), especially when looking for information on how to act more sustainable.

However, some obstacles occur when trying to find valid information regarding on how to act environmental friendly. Usually, the gathered environmental information is generally imprecise, highly technical and widespread in different media sources and on top of that often biased (Luck & Ginanti, 2013). Thus, the huge amount of different and sometimes contradicting tips one can find in various sources and media forms on how to be live more sustainable can make it difficult for the individual to find valid information on the topic they are searching for (Marjen, 1994). Further, the acquisition of environmental information or finding one’s way through the green maze (Norman, 1991) may be influenced by the searcher's background like education or social class (Bailey, 1971).

Also knowing where to look for information or asking for help if it is not possible to understand the given information or the ability to pay for information plays a significant role in acquiring environmental information. The communication and fabrication of environmental communication can take place in various formats and venues (Marjen, 1994). Further, one should also include the importance of social media formats, forums or blogs, which allow a participatory form of communication on the internet (Luck & Ginanti, 2013).

### 3 Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework will be presented. First, the theoretical concept of active citizenship and democracy is explained as this thesis investigates the appointed responsibility in regards to citizenship. Active citizenship and democracy are theoretical key concepts within the framework. Second, the theoretical concept of responsibility is explained. It was chosen because a core aspect of the on hand thesis is how bloggers address responsibility to themselves in the role of a sustainable lifestyle blogger in creating valid content. Further, these theoretical concepts play an important role in the analysis section and discussion of this thesis.

#### 3.1 Responsibility

When discussing matters of today's society, responsibility is becoming of high significance, especially in regards to environmental behaviour (Barr et al., 2011). Responsibility is a complex social construct consisting of multiple definitions. Thus, authors agree that responsibility emerges in social contexts and portrays the conjunction between society and an individual (Auhagen and Bierhoff, 2000, pp. 1-3).

Individuals may feel responsible for their action as well as for the consequences their action might have. Further, individuals may feel responsible for other individuals also known as social responsibility (Auhagen and Bierhoff, 2001). However, it is also possible for individuals to deny responsibility. The reason for denying responsibility can be a lack of control as well as not being able to see what consequences their action might have for the future (Montada, 2001).

It is also possible that individuals will try to reduce their responsibility by ascribing their responsibility to others. Jonas (1984) draws a connection between responsibility and power where he points out that every action has an impact on the world and that everyone has the control over their actions. Also, Jonas (1984) suggests that every individual is aware, at least to some extent, of the consequences their actions might have.

Uzzell (2000) points out that individuals think they have a little responsibility towards solving global environmental problems. Further, individuals assign responsibility to the local community and even more to national governments and international agencies for solving global environmental problems.

Scholars propose that freedom of choice plays a vital role for an individual in regards to responsibility (Auhagen & Bierhoff, 2000). Moreover, these scholars state that freedom of choice derives from the conditions that people's action are not entirely predictable.

Therefore, responsibility can be assigned internally and externally to an individual. Auhagen and Bierhoff (2000) point out that the assigned responsibility to an individual e.g. citizen can either result in acceptance or denial. Internally assigned responsibility is usually in alliance or partially in alliance with the individual's moral duty (ibid, 2000, pp. 1-3). Thus it is likely that individuals accept the assigned responsibility (Kaiser et al., 2000, p. 110) and choose to follow the internally assigned responsibility freely (Auhagen & Bierhoff, 2000, pp. 1-3.).

Contrasting, externally assigned responsibility is a responsibility that is assigned towards the individual from others factors like power, change or other

individuals. Usually, this externally assigned responsibility limits the individual in her/his choice. Further, externally assigned responsibility shows control over individual which is often an indicator for a denial of the personal externally assigned responsibility since the freedom of choice for the individual is limited (Kaiser et al., 2000, p. 110). Responsibility is firmly connected to personal duty the individual feels towards the problem (ibid, 2000, p. 121) and how they judge their individual impact on society.

### 3.2 Active citizenship and democracy

Boyte (1997) defines citizenship as the permanent citizenship involvement for engaging and solving public and community-based problems as well as creating the world around us. The concept of an active citizen in a democracy helps to understand how citizen engagement can have a positive effect towards solving environmental problems. However, citizens need to realize that they have a responsibility to create social change. An online platform such as blogs can play a role in empowering citizens to take their responsibility for social change. But first of all, it is important to elaborate what active citizen means.

Thus, the duty of an active citizen in a democracy should start with voting but also contains: agenda setting, deliberation, debating, performing community service, making public judgments and supporting and working with public interest groups or in a political party (Barber, 1989). Through education, a citizen should be enabled to act above their individual self-interests (e.g. consumption). Abala-Bertrand (1995) detects four dimensions of citizenship education: democracy, human rights, sustainable development and human development and peace at the international as well as national levels. Newmann (1989) states the objective of citizenship education is an active citizen which would show itself in a higher quality of participation as well as an increasing rate of participation.

The shopping behaviour of the individual consumer is more and more seen as a public act. The concept consumers-citizen ascribes citizens to be agents of change who take action against environmental issues, in particular through their consumer behaviour. In consequence, much communication aims at behaviour changes towards environmental problems and appoints citizen-consumers with the responsibility regarding the environmental issues. The concept of citizen-consumer is embedded in a neo-liberal paradigm and stresses individual agency (Barr et al., 2011).

In addition, the citizen-consumer approach is criticized by Barr et al. (2011) for the lack of the societal and collective dimension of responsibility within environmental issues.

Thus, citizenship is a relevant topic for consumers. However, Sagoff (1988) divides individual interest into 'consumer' and 'citizen' interests. Further, Sagoff (1988) states that the interests of 'consumer' and 'citizen' are always in competition. Sagoff (1988) also points out the importance to overcome the challenge to figure out ways in which individuals can make decisions based on their 'citizen' interests rather than 'consumer' interests.

Among citizens, the internet is a well-known platform for communication on environmental issues among consumers (Rokka & Moisander, 2009).

The medium blog engages the citizen in a dialog through the participatory function of a blog. Thus, the easy access as well as usability to the public and the commentary function of a blog can be seen as participative. The commen-

tary section of a blog plays the most important role in regards to democratization. The interaction of commenting, adding blogs to blogrolls, and linking outside pages creates a community feeling by connecting the individual with the blog sphere (Rettberg, 2003). Therefore, within the blog sphere, people with similar interest from disparate geographic locations can connect, share and interact with the community. These emerging communities created through blogs can be seen as the democratizing power of the internet since blogging has empowered the masses to use the internet for their own purpose and benefits.

Further, online communities play a vital role in setting a platform for new collective forms of environmental dialogue and cultural production. Through this new form of environmental dialog the role of consumers in sustainable development shifts, since the online communities create a virtual space where citizenship can be practiced and exercised individually (Luck & Ginanti, 2013).

## 4 Methodology

This research approach takes place within the qualitative research. Qualitative research is *"any research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of qualification"* (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 10). A qualitative structured content analysis based on Mayring (2010) was chosen as the method of analysis. Unlike, the quantitative content analysis the qualitative content analysis does not aim to discover numerical relationships and to be representative of the statistical population (Schreier, 2014).

Further, this research is based upon the epistemological view of social constructionism (SC). First, the epistemological view of social constructionism will be explained. Second qualitative structured content analysis according to Mayring (2010) will be introduced. This thesis investigates how 'we' as a society construct abstract concepts, particularly in this thesis how bloggers assign responsibility. Thus, the nature of the research questions as well as the theoretical framework (responsibility and citizenship) are motivated by an epistemological view of SC. Social interaction, especially language, is of great importance to social constructionists. It is through our daily interactions between people that our versions of knowledge become fabricated and knowledge and social action combine (Burr, 1995). Further knowledge is influenced by historical and cultural traits. Our understanding of different categories and concepts has changed over time and knowledge is the product of a particular cultural context depending on the economic and social arrangements of that time. Thus, social processes ensure knowledge. It is important to stress that social constructionists deny that knowledge is a direct perception of reality. Rather, they state that *"as a culture or society we construct our own version of reality between us"* (Burr, 1995, p. 6). Hence, there is no such thing as an objective fact e.g. reality since *"All knowledge is derived from looking at the world from some perspective or other, and is in the service of some interest rather than others"* (Burr, 1995, p. 6).

A qualitative structured content analysis has been applied as the method of analysis. The qualitative structured content analysis is a variation of the qualitative content analysis and was developed primarily by Philipp Mayring in 1980. The qualitative content analysis is a method of data analysis in the field of empirical social science research. The aim of qualitative content analysis is the order and structure of manifest and latent content. These contents can be contained in various types of material, such as in transcripts of interviews, newspaper articles, as well as images or video recordings. The material used in the on hand thesis are structured interviews which were conducted in written form as well as blog posts. The choice of the sample will be explained in detail further in this chapter. The qualitative structured content analysis complements the research question because the systematic and intersubjective verifiable text analysis method holds up to scientific standards. In the chapter of the data analysis the systematic approach of developing categories is explained in more detail. The systematic development of categories is based on the theoretical framework (deductive). In addition, categories are also formed out of the material (inductive). Thus, the mixture of deductive- inductive allows a continuous adjustment of the categories on the material (Schreier, 2014).

An illustration of the methodological approach can be found in Appendix 2. In the following section the data gathering, sample and the analysis will be explained in detail.



## 4.1 Data gathering

The material for the analysis consists of structured interviews with the blog owners and blog posts of the particular blogs. Due to the limited time frame of the thesis the structured interviews took place before the analysis of the individual blog posts. To get a blogger's personal viewpoint, the analysis of the blog posts was complemented by interviews conducted in text form. A structured approach for the interview process was used. Thus, the bloggers were contacted via email and were asked to answer the interview questions in written form. In a structured interview approach, all the interviewees are asked the same questions. Hence, a structured interview approach does not allow any improvisation or prompting by the interviewer (Silverman, 2015, p. 166). The structured interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.

A pre-analysis helped the researcher to gain an overview of the blogs and helped to create the design of the structured interviews. The pre-analysis consisted of reading through the narrative of the blogs in order to find out how plots are developed and to further detect similarities and differences in the blogs. Further, the researcher considered the theoretical concept of responsibility and how and if bloggers used responsibility in their blog posts, which helped to design the structured interviews. The idea behind using structured interviews as well as blog posts as the material for the analysis is that the structured interviews allow inside views on the perspective of the bloggers which cannot be gained by only analysing blog posts. Additionally, looking into the off- and online communication will help to clarify how responsibility is used and understood by the bloggers and contributes to clarifying which meaning responsibility has for the bloggers.

## 4.2 Sample

The thesis will look at five selected sustainable lifestyle blogs which are run by private individuals. In the next paragraph, the selection process for the five blogs is explained in detail. The starting point for the sample is the Ethical Writers Coalition. The Ethical Writers Coalition was chosen because it was founded by bloggers within the ethical and sustainable living scene. Further, no similar Writers Coalition that deals with the theme sustainable lifestyle could be identified. Therefore, the Ethical Writers Coalition is seen as a valid starting point for selecting a sample since the blog network is based within the blogger community and is based on sustainable values.

The Ethical Writers Coalition consists of a group of 47 journalists, writers, and bloggers across the world who seek to support an ethical and sustainable living. The Ethical Writers Coalition is also a network of writers as well as brands and companies who share the ethical lifestyle vision of the network. For the Ethical Writers Coalition lifestyle consists of the fields fashion, beauty, lifestyle, wellness, food, home, and music. Further, the Ethical Writers Coalition states that: "*ethical and sustainable living is a journey, not a destination, and believe in collaboration, community, and making conscious choices*" (Ethical Writers Coalition, 2016).

In a next step the blogs by members of the Ethical Writers Coalition were evaluated with the criteria listed below:

- The blogger narrates sustainable lifestyle

- The blog is written by a private person (not authored by celebrities or media).
- The blog includes only visually and textually blog posts (no video blogs).
- The blog is recently updated (at least one post within the last month, January 2016) and well situated (is run for at least one year).
- The blog includes a mission statement (e.g. 'About me').
- The blog is written in English.

After evaluating the 47 sustainable living blogs according to the set criteria 27 blogs were left. In a next step, these blogs were contacted via emails for written interviews. The five bloggers answered to the written interview request were:

- EcoCult.com
- Sasustainable
- W A S T E D
- Sustainability in Style
- Leotie Lovely

In order to choose blog posts for the sample, the researcher decided to use up to four blog posts, which were featured on the blogger's main site (on the date of 4th of July 2016). The featured blog posts were chosen because they act as eye-catchers on the particular websites for the readers. Thus, these featured blog posts were considered of high importance during this time by the bloggers. Further, it is important to point out that this sample only focuses on the written material in the blogs posts. Other forms of media like layout or photographs, etc. were not included in the sample, since a consideration of these aesthetic elements into the analysis would have exceeded the frame of the thesis. In the next section of the thesis, the blogs are introduced.

### 4.3 Selected blogs

#### **EcoCult.com**

EcoCult.com is a blog run by Alden Wicker. Alden Wicker graduated in 2009 from Washington and Lee University with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Journalism and a BS in business administration. She is a freelance journalist and Editor-in-Chief behind EcoCult.com. In EcoCult.com Alden Wicker covers all things sustainable in New York City and beyond. Alden Wicker includes topics like fashion, food, beauty, home design, and events in New York. With EcoCult.com Alden Wicker wants to break the stereotypes about eco-friendly living and shows that living consciously can be beautiful, fun, and desirable. EcoCult.com has on average 62,272 page views per month (Wicker, 2016a).

#### **Leotie Lovely**

Leotie Lovely is written by Holly Rose. She designates her blog as her ever-evolving guide to living more consciously. Holly Rose is a freelance writer and ethical clutch designer and creative director behind Leotie Lovely. She writes about topics like fashion, food, travel, people, spirituality, music, poetry and global issues. Holly Rose's educational background is in Public Relations and she has worked in the fashion industry for her entire career. Now

Holly Rose committed to blogging full time on eco lifestyle and designing eco-friendly ethical clutches. On her Blog she currently established an informative series: #GoneGreen2016. In this series, she posts one post per day and gives suggestions on how to either switch to a sustainable product or edit habits to your repertoire that are less harmful to the earth. She divided the series into weekly themes. She explains that this series is a diary of her own discoveries. At the moment Leotie Lovely has about 7,000 visitors per month (Rose, 2016e).

### **Sasustainable**

Angela Wallace is the entrepreneur and founder of Sasustainable. She has a BA Arts & Contemporary Studies and a Master of Sciences in Environmental Management. She worked in corporate social responsibility, sustainability, climate change and strategic planning, marketing, and communications. At the moment Angela Wallace is working as a Project Ambassador at Holt Renfrew, Canada, as an independent consultant for Beautycounter and is also a consultant for the So Ripe Social communications and branding agency. Her passion for the environment grew out of her family's rural property in Raglan, Ontario, now a Natural Heritage System area in the Ontario Greenbelt. In her blog Sasustainable she covers topics like beauty, food, fashion, lifestyle and news on sustainable living. Sasustainable has an average monthly view of about 5000 (Wallace, 2016c).

### **Sustainability in Style**

Katie Roberts describes herself as a "self-confessed write-a-holic". Her blog origins from writing a series of clothing swaps at her university during her bachelor studies of Environmental Science and Sustainability. Katie Roberts states that Sustainability in Style became a blog when she wanted to document her yearlong personal style journey when she decided to stop shopping for clothing (including second-hand clothing).

Before her bachelor studies, Katie Roberts studied Clothing Production: Textiles Clothing and Footwear and Frontline Management and worked in a variety of positions in the fashion industry. Katie Roberts is currently studying a Master of Environment with a major in Sustainability Education and is working as a Plant Science Research Technician. Katie Roberts' blog Sustainability in Style emphasizes fashion. She also covers other topics related to sustainability. Katie Roberts is often using her blog as a way to document challenges she assigned herself to like the "Wardrobe Workout Challenge" that got her blog started. Sustainability in Style has on average 8266 page views per month (Roberts, 2016b).

### **W A S T E D**

Florine Hofmann is the founder of the blog W A S T E D. It is a Zero Waste lifestyle blog that focuses on topics like food, fitness, fashion and travelling. Florine Hofmann is a full-time law student living a zero waste lifestyle. Besides being a student, she is training to become a certified health instructor.

In her blog, she writes about fashion from a minimalist's perspective, focusing on statement pieces and capsule wardrobes. Further, her blog includes a food segment where she focuses on creating healthy, nutritious and vegetarian recipes while maintaining a Zero Waste lifestyle. Moreover, she makes all her beauty products herself and shares her DIY projects on her blog. W A S T E D has average monthly views of about 5000 (Hofmann, 2016b).

#### 4.4 Data analysis

A qualitative structuring content analysis based on Mayring (2010) has been applied as the method of analysis. The qualitative structured-content analysis is a variation of the qualitative content analysis and was developed primarily by Philipp Mayring in 1980. The systematic approach of a qualitative structuring content analysis underlies the building of categories and coding schemes. The process of the coding is eventually done by a content-related structuring of the data and according to Mayring (Mayring, 2010). That includes that the material is summarized and extracted according to a certain topic (ibid, 2010). For the on hand thesis, it is the topics of blogger's responsibility and citizen's responsibility.

The term category is used to sort all kind of general phenomena: concepts, constructs, themes, etc. and grouping items that are similar. However, categorization describes the analytic process of sorting units of data in regards to their elements that they have in common (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Categories can be created in different ways. The categories for this thesis were developed in a mixed deductive- inductive approach. Steigleder (2008) is criticizing Mayring's design of a content structured content analysis, in regards to that only a deductive approach of category development is not specific enough when developing a category-system. Thus, Steigleder (2008) is developing a modified variation of the method which combines deductive and inductive development of a category-system. This means that an adjustment of the categories can be carried out of the material. This is not possible in the sole deductive approach of category development by Mayring (2010). Different combinations of mixed deductive- inductive approach are possible. For this thesis, the researcher chose to develop the main-categories guided by the theoretical framework. Additionally, the sub-categories were developed of the material as well as one additional main-category. In the next step, the development of the categories will be explained in detail.

Starting from the research questions, the researcher applied relevant theoretical concepts to predefine the categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Thus, the first design of the categories was based on the theoretical concepts: responsibility and citizenship. Further, the first design of the categories was also influenced by the different actors that are involved (bloggers and citizens). This was done in order to organize the appointed responsibility from the blogger to the different actors in order to answer the research question. The first design of the categories was:

- Blogger's responsibility
- Consumers-citizen responsibility

During the first steps of the analysis, the researcher looked if and how the first set of categories appeared in the data. The analysis took place by working step by step through the data while coding the data at the same time. Codes have a more practical purpose and act as a link between data and categories. Codes are used to mark units of text to sort, connect and display the data. This approach supports the researcher to deal with an enormous amount of data. Further, the coding process helped the researcher to have an overview over the data while labelling relevant words, statements or sections that were repeated statements, could be connected to theoretical concepts, or were remarkable for the researcher (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Thus, it was possible for the researcher to be open towards opportunities for other relevant themes

to arise. The coding process delivered information that allowed the definition of additional categories and sub-categories.

In fact, the researcher defined additional categories to make the best use of the data from the blogs and interviews allowing covering blogger's aspects outside of the initially designed categories. At the same time the number of categories was limited to find the best match for answering the research questions. Within the process of creating sub-categories, the categories have been revised multiple times. This process ensured that the information of the data is represented in a way to allow the researcher to explore the potential of the data from multiple views. This is in line with Lindlof & Taylor (2011) explaining that researchers need to decide on the most relevant codes and combining them to minimize the content of the material.

An overview of deductive/inductive process of category development can be found in Appendix 3. In the next chapter, the final categories and their subcategories as well as the coding will be explained in more detail.

## 4.5 Categories

In four rounds of coding the data of four blog posts from each blogger has been analysed to finally derive the categories. An equal focus was given to the blog's section where the four bloggers introduce themselves and explain their aim of their blog (about me) and the conducted interviews complementing the data from the website. The final categories are three main-categories and four sub-categories.

Table 1. Overview of the created categories

<b>Bloggers' responsibility</b>	<b>Consumers-citizen responsibility</b>	<b>Online citizenship</b>
Information sources for sustainable living	Alternative consumption - Recommendations by the blogger	Blog as a tool for Transformation
Bloggers' responsibility for cooperations with companies		

**Bloggers' responsibility:** To answer the research question, an emphasis lay on how bloggers view and address responsibility. Thus, the categories help to identify the addressed responsibility from the blogger in different areas and levels. Thus, bloggers address their responsibility as a sustainable blogger to spread the message and to educate about sustainable living.

- a. **Information sources for sustainable living:** Bloggers' explanations on how they research for their content and how they appoint themselves with the responsibility to have credible sources for their blog posts.
  - b. **Bloggers' responsibility for cooperation with companies:** Bloggers address responsibility for cooperations between bloggers and companies. This cooperation can vary from promoting a certain product to being a brand ambassador. Here bloggers stress their responsibility for being transparent to their reader about cooperations and their aims.
2. **Consumers-citizen responsibility:** Bloggers express their opinion about the influence of citizen-consumer behaviour on the market.

- a. **Alternative consumption recommendations by the bloggers:** In their blogs bloggers make alternative consumption recommendation for the reader to live a more sustainable life.
3. **Online citizenship:** In this category, the element of citizenship addressed by the blogger is displayed. Concerning participation, bloggers point out the importance of an online community and the encouragement of the reader to engage in the comment section of the blog.
  - a. **Blog as a tool for transformation:** In this category, the bloggers explain their point of view, how and if a blog can contribute to a transformation to a (more) sustainable future.

#### 4.6 Critical reflection of methodology

Each research approach contains certain disadvantages and challenges. For this research design, a structured interview approach has been selected. However, a structured interview approach in comparison to semi-structured interview approach has a disadvantage since the researcher does not have the possibility to interact with the interviewee and adapt the question during a structured interview.

Further, the randomly picked date (4th of July) of the sample had an influence on the results. For the sample, the featured blog posts on the main site of the bloggers were chosen. However, the bloggers update their main site frequently. Thus, the picked sample was influenced by the randomly chosen time frame.

The analysis process deconstructs the data in order to construct meaning. Hence, it is important to point out that a researcher is directed by his/her interpretation of the material and other interpretations might be possible. Thus, it is of high importance for a researcher to make his/her approach as transparent as possible allowing to understand how the researcher's interpretations were made. Therefore, the analysis data and process have to be documented comprehensively for the reader.

However, various variations of qualitative content analysis exist. Especially in German-speaking countries, the qualitative content analysis by Mayring (2010) is a commonly used analysis method. However, a misunderstanding at the first site can occur since especially in the English literature another variant of qualitative content analysis is more dominant, which is more attributable to the quantitative content analysis tradition. Eventually, the researcher is aware that her academic background played a role when planning the research design.

## 5 Results and connection to theoretical concepts

In this chapter I would like to discuss and answer my research questions:

*How do bloggers explain their responsibility as a sustainable lifestyle blogger, especially in regards to providing information and making recommendations for a sustainable lifestyle? And how is the explained responsibility shown in their blogs?*

First, I would like to address the responsibility the bloggers assigned to themselves in the role of a citizen and in the role of a sustainable lifestyle blogger. So, the categories of the analysis will be used to structure the answer of the research questions.

During the analysis different levels of responsibility assigned by the bloggers could be identified: micro-level (individual) and macro- level (society). Quotes from the data have been used in order to illustrate and increase the transparency of the analysis. The interviews and blog posts have been labelled as followed:

Table 2. Labelling of the analysed data (interviews and blog posts)

<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Blogs posts</b>
I1 EcoCult.com	B1 EcoCult.com
I2 Leotie Lovely	B2 Leotie Lovely
I3 Sasustainable	B3 Sasustainable
I4 Sustainability in Style	B4 Sustainability in Style
I5 WASTED	B5 WASTED

### 5.1 Bloggers address responsibility

In the analysed material the bloggers state that they aim to inspire others to adapt a more sustainable living behaviour. They do this while showing that living more sustainably is not only the right decision but that it is fun and aspirational. For the blogger it is of high importance to point out that a sustainable lifestyle does not mean to sacrifice quality of life rather than showing all the amazing, beautiful, delicious, fun, exciting, well-designed and sustainable options that are available (I5, I1). Besides, sustainable blogs can provide a counterpoint to conventional fashion blogs which are promoting unsustainable consumption (I1). One interviewee states that she believes social media and associated blog content play an important role in normalizing the ideas and values of living a more sustainable life (I4).

Sustainable lifestyle blogger use their blogs as space for personal writing, providing environmental information and commentary while writing in a diary style format. For the bloggers documenting their journey also means to include obstacles and mistakes in their blogs. Bloggers express their desire to share information they have gathered as a result of their lifelong learning pursuits (I4, I5). Therefore, in sustainable lifestyle blogs private and public matters overlap and intertwine (Bell, 2007).

Sustainable lifestyle bloggers ascribe themselves the responsibility to provoke new thoughts, to encourage readers to try something new and to show how to make a sustainable lifestyle more available and more represented (I1, I5, I3, B2, I3). One interviewee states that it is her goal to convince people to

live a more sustainable life in an honest and forthright way (I1). Another blogger has the approach not to want to tell anyone how they should live their life. It rather is their goal to raise awareness by providing access and ideas to live sustainable (I5). Bloggers state that their main responsibility is to supply information for their readers and to educate and inform them in an ethical and honest way about sustainable living. (I1, I5, I3, B2).

Nitsch (2000) states that a communicator may not know best. This relates to the bloggers since they claim not to be experts on fashion and sustainable consumption they rather see themselves as an individual who is environmentally aware and tries to reduce their impact on our planet (B2). Even so, bloggers do not see themselves as a perfect role model or expert and are stressing that a blog is used to document their journey while embracing a sustainable lifestyle. So, the narrative nature of a blog gives a reader a more personal insight on the blogger's life. Therefore, perceiving their blogs as space to document their journey while embracing a sustainable lifestyle makes it more likely for a reader to identify themselves with the blogger and to relate to their story.

The blogger stresses their concern that it can be difficult when readers read "*Do what I say, not what I do*" (B2). Thus, they think that transparency about the blogger's individual mission is the solution to overcome this unbalance (B2). Further, one interviewee states that it is not her aim to tell anyone how they should live their lives. Rather, that they are trying to raise more awareness and to provide sustainable alternatives for people who are looking for it (I5).

To conclude, bloggers ascribe themselves to the role of a sustainable lifestyle bloggers with the responsibility to share the message that a sustainable lifestyle is fun, aspirational and easy to obtain without decreasing the quality of life. Also, bloggers want to make sustainable lifestyle more available and more represented in society.

## 5.2 Information sources for sustainable living

Overall, the bloggers have a background in studies connected to environmental studies or journalism. The bloggers are also aware of the difficulties when it comes to research of an environmental topic. Thus, in order to find their way through the green maze bloggers rely on fact-checked, impartial sources such as scientific journals and studies, industry experts, books, articles or databases, news organizations (New York Times, Guardian and Die Zeit) and blogger's networks as sources for their blog posts (I3, I1, I2, I4, I5). Thus, bloggers highlight their great responsibility to use sources which are credible. Bailey (1971) points out, that someone who is searching for information may be influenced by its backgrounds such as education or social class. Therefore, every blog is defined by the blogger's background and editorial choices. However, the interviewed bloggers explain that they embrace journalistic values of honesty and transparency (I1).

The high number of various sources and media forms is one of the greatest problems when looking for environmental information (Marjen, 1994). Hansen (2010) states that environmental knowledge is rather acquired through interpersonal media for example blogs and formal media rather than through formal education. Further, formats like personal blogs are interesting to investigate because they are positioned at the intersection between public and private, as everyday life and civic and political engagement (Walker Rettberg, 2009).



One interviewee explicates that it is the individual citizen's responsibility to engage in educating themselves (B2). Thus, bloggers offer citizens the opportunity to access environmental information. Further, scholars point out the internet serves as the 'tool of choice' for getting access to information as well as being a platform for consumers and environmental activism (Luck & Ginanti, 2013).

So, blogs play an important role to educate and inform the citizens. Blogs with a sustainable theme are a relatively recent phenomenon. The sustainability-blogsphere is an innovative and promising tool for sustainability communication (Schultz, 2009).

The sustainability-blogsphere offers a place for discussions where mass media statements or controversy of scientific results can be reviewed critically and questions can be raised. Further, within the sustainability-blogsphere new information and ideas about sustainable consumption and other topics can be exchanged and spread (Schultz, 2009). However, it is still unclear if the communication within the sustainability-blogsphere is also reaching new audiences. E.g. if themes that were addressed in the blogs will be displayed in other media forms or if this had happened through other actions of different initiatives (Schultz, 2009). Blogs within the sustainability-blogsphere refer to content outside the topics, which are usually covered by the mass media. Thus, blogs take over the function of sorting and pre-selection of information about sustainability for their users (Schultz 2009).

Nevertheless, when it comes to education bloggers agree that this should be done in the "*least annoying way*" as possible (B2). Further, a blogger points out that education (knowing the basics, which are provided by the blogger) are the base for readers to take action as best as possible towards having a more sustainable lifestyle (B2). Literature shows that the knowledge people have about the negative consequences of their actions towards the environment does not automatically resolve into a transformation of their actions (Shove, 2005). However, bloggers are not only communicating environmental information they are also pushing their underlining values in their blogs.

In conclusion, it shows that bloggers ascribe themselves, in the role of a sustainable lifestyle blogger, with the responsibility to educate and inform with their blogs in an ethical and honest way about sustainable living. Further, it shows that bloggers ascribe themselves with a high responsibility to only use credible sources when it comes to doing research for their blog posts.

### 5.3 Bloggers' responsibility for cooperation between bloggers and companies

Using collaboration between companies and bloggers is a common way in the blogsphere to generate income. Some bloggers run a blog as a hobby in their spare time and do not have an economic interest (I5, I4) others use their blog to generate income or would like to generate income with a blog (I1). Blogging is a money- and time consuming activity. Bloggers state their concern that the finances for blogging have to come from somewhere (I4). Bloggers balance earning money and expanding their reach, however usually not at the same time (I1). For collaborations, bloggers get either contacted by companies (I1, I4), or they are contacting brands themselves that suite their planned content (I2). Collaborations can vary from being a paid 'brand ambassador' to reviewing products.

When collaborating with companies, the bloggers look for authenticity, which means that the selected companies prove that sustainability and ethics

are anchored in the core of their business (I1). Bloggers worry that it is often difficult to decide on a collaboration since a lot of times the available imperfect information makes it hard to make an assessment about the company or product (I3, I5). One interviewee points out that third-party certifications can make a decision easier but it is quite seldom the case that brands have these certifications (I3).

Some of the bloggers set up their own criteria to judge if a company is suitable for a collaboration (I1, I4, I5). For example, one interviewee states that a product needs to fulfil two or more criteria of sustainability like the product being ethically sourced and made from recycled materials, etc. for her to agree to a collaboration. Another interviewee in particular stresses that she is only promoting brands which are beautifully designed because for her aesthetics of a product, ethics and sustainability have similar importance. For this reason, she does not support “pity shopping“ which she defines as making purchases just because a product is sustainable but that the consumer does not like its appearance (I1). Thus, the bloggers vary in their opinion towards agreeing to cooperation. One blogger points out she says ‘no’ to a company before she says ‘yes’ because for this blogger it is of higher importance to stand behind the company and to know the full story than to promote any products that do not fulfil her values (I5). However, all interviewees go through a reflection process if a brand or a product they are asked to promote is suitable for their blog: *“I try to establish whether it is 'good enough' - can I justify to myself and my readers why I would support this brand, product, service? How will it reflect on me if I do? I'm not a perfectionist in any area of my life - including my ethical and sustainable values. I believe in progress and purpose, not perfection (I3)“*.

The bloggers also see the amount of free/discounted products that you receive from brands critically. In a blog post, one blogger addresses the controversy of still consuming more clothing/products when you preach not purchasing/attaining new things (B2). Further, she explains that this is the *“elephant in the room“* (B2) since this controversial topic has not been addressed by the sustainable and ethical blogger community yet. Further, she explains that as a blogger they have the platform to promote brands which do spectacular things in the sustainable world. However, it is hard to promote a product which you have not ever seen or used. *“It might be fair to say that I am consuming too much, but I don't think it's fair to say that I am doing too many collaborations“* (B2).

It is important to point out that there is a discussion within the community of bloggers about the question of a minimalist lifestyle versus consumption. Further, the blogger explains that some sustainable bloggers review products on a daily basis because these bloggers may think that the more brands they can promote the better it is. Thus, some sustainable blogs are more shopping blogs than others.

Nevertheless, one blogger rises the question what the end goal of a sustainable style blog should be. Because it is undeniably true that a big part of making thoughtful purchases is only making fewer purchases (B2).

Most countries do not have disclose policy, which means a blogger does not need to state if a product endorsement was paid or not. This could cause readers getting more sceptical about messages conveyed since it is not transparent if collaboration took place (I4). However, bloggers approach this controversy with transparency. They point out that transparency for cooperation between bloggers and companies are essential and state the importance of holding up journalistic values (B2, I1).

Bloggers see trust as an emerging issue for their readers. They agree that transparency about the blogger's individual mission is the solution to create and keep trust with their users (B2). Trust is especially important for a sustainable lifestyle blogger in regards on how to deal with consuming less while promoting to buy sustainable products since this controversy can also lead to a lack of trust. To conclude, bloggers understand that they are responsible in the role of a sustainable lifestyle blogger to create a trustful relationship with their users under the premises to be transparent about their mission, collaborations and how they deal with the controversy to consume less while promoting to buy sustainable products.

#### 5.4 Responsibility – consumer-citizen

Bloggers stress the individual's responsibility for making changes towards a more sustainable lifestyle. This statement also includes the blogger as individuals as well as their readers (I1, I5, I3, I2, I4). Therefore, this individual's assigned responsibility relates to the role of each individual as a consumer. Bloggers point out that individuals need to be more thoughtful and need to evolve their consumption habits towards a sustainable lifestyle (B2, I4, B5). Further, bloggers stress that it is the individual's responsibility to use its consumer power for the greater good. For example to give up consumption habits, like purchasing products, which are not made in an ecological and sustainable way (B2). However, the assigned responsibility lies mostly on a micro level. They state that every individual is responsible for their actions and not for the action of others (I3, I2, B2, I5). They also stress that every individual is equally responsible (B4, I2, I4, B2). For example, bloggers emphasize the individual consumer power as following:

*“It is our individual responsibility to use our purchasing power for the greater good. To give up products and brands which aren't made in an ecological and ethical way. To act as true humanitarians and as stewards of this planet, which is our only home“ (B2).*

Thus, framing the individual as a consumer gives them not only power to decide on their consumption choices, it also shows the interaction of the individual with the market. The consumer has the power to boycott or demand a particular product. However, the consumer is limited by the framework of the economic system. Therefore, only if the market is acting upon their demand for more sustainable products, the mission can be accomplished.

*“So if you as a consumer demand fewer handbags, fewer handbags get made, which means less demand for resources to make handbags and less to chuck into a landfill when you get bored of said bags. Simple!“ (I4)*

However, responsibility on the structure level could also be identified. Bloggers identify the role of politics and companies as important actors. Thus, one blogger states that individual responsibility has its limits. She says that the individual purchase of a sustainable alternative still makes an impact but also that the individual needs to participate in systemic political change and actions to reach a wider positive impact (I3). Further, bloggers acknowledge the impact our current consumption habits have for the society and further generations: *“If we go around being thoughtless a\$\$holes then there is a good*

*chance that there won't be anything left for future generations. We, as a species, will eat ourselves out of house and home*"(I4). So, bloggers address the societal and collective dimension of responsibility to the individual for the state the world is in.

One interviewee points out that systemic political change and actions are needed to create positive impacts (I3). Further, bloggers identify the role of politics and companies as an important actor to create a market where a consumer can make an 'informed decision' about their purchases and it is easier to access sustainable choices in our everyday lives (I4, B2). Thus, bloggers appoint companies with the responsibility to inform consumers about harms (ethical as well as environmentally) about their products. However, bloggers also see that this is not the reality today. They stress that the whole industry needs to reform (I4, B2). One blogger states that companies do not provide this information about their products, productions and risks for the environment since this would lead the consumer to stop buying their products (B2).

The viewpoint of a citizen having the responsibility for his/her individual action is shared among the interviewees. The concept consumers-citizen ascribes citizens to be agents of change and to take action against environmental issues, in particular through their consumer behaviour.

Thus, ascribing the individual as a consumers-citizen with a high agency, gives the consumers-citizen not only power to decide on their own consumption choices but also to boycott or demand a particular product on the market structure. However, the consumers-citizen is also limited by the framework of the economic system. Only if the market is acting upon their demand for more sustainable products, the mission can be accomplished. Therefore, handing the individual the responsibility of a consumer shows a display of agency within the current economic systems by the consumers.

Nevertheless, the citizen-consumer approach is criticized by Barr et al. (2011) for the missing acknowledgement of the societal and collective dimension of responsibility within environmental issues.

In conclusion, bloggers do acknowledge the societal and collective dimension of responsibility the human impact has for the state the world is in for the society and further generations. For example, bloggers identify the role of politics and companies as principal actors. One blogger in particular stresses that individual responsibility has its limits (I3). Thus, the individual purchase of a sustainable alternative makes an impact, but a citizen needs to take action and responsibility for systemic political change since these actions have a wider positive impact.

## 5.5 Alternative consumption recommendations by the bloggers

Bloggers promote consumption habits outside the economic-capitalistic system, since bloggers also make recommendations for alternative consumption methods in their blogs. Overall, the alternative consumption recommendation takes place on a micro level.

For alternative consumption methods, the bloggers promote reflection on people's behaviour, like to go through your trash can to reflect on unnecessary sources of waste that can be eliminated by using a more sustainable alternative (B5, B2, I4). Furthermore, they encourage their readers to reflect on their existing wardrobe and to look for some new outfit combinations (B3) rather than buying a new outfit. Overall, the bloggers promote to switch unsustainable products with a sustainable alternative (B1, B5, B3, B2, B4).

One blogger in particular states that “*refusing is key*” (B5). Thus, this blogger encourages his/her readers to refuse a product which is not in line with their values (B5). Bloggers embrace shopping at second-hand stores and clothes swaps as an alternative shopping opportunity. In their blogs the authors review their outfits and these outfits are usually bought second-hand (B4, B5, B3) or are produced by a sustainable company. Alternatively, they promote to pimp items that already exist in their wardrobe (B3, B1). Another blogger in particular embraced Do It Yourself (DIY) tutorials on her blog. Here, readers can follow instructions to make sustainable products at home. (B5). DIY projects like making toothpaste help to reduce waste. This zero waste lifestyle is especially encouraged by some bloggers (B5, B2). Overall, the recommendations the bloggers make on their blogs are solutions for a sustainable lifestyle on a micro-level and can be incorporated by an individual in their daily life.

Eventually, bloggers promote consumption habits outside the economic-capitalistic system since bloggers also make recommendations for alternative consumption methods in their blogs. However, overall the recommendations for their readers assign a high agency to the citizen.

## 5.6 Online Citizen

Bloggers embrace the ability of online space to build communities and connect with like-minded people (I4, B2). Bloggers hope to create spaces where society can care, learn, share and take responsibility to create a sustainable future together (I3).

*“As social networking brings our communities away from the neighbourhoods and streets of the past, blogging, or more specifically social media outlets (blogging on its own without social media is like talking to yourself), is the way forward for connecting with like-minded people”*(I4).

Online communities show that the individual has ‘power in numbers’. Blogs have impact on individuals when they are multiplied and act together as a community that works for the greater good. Further, blogs can create a space where a discussion in an aesthetic way can take place that is also less overwhelming for the readers(I2).

*“And it is a community - even if we don't always get to meet each other or have a long chat online - because we're learning from each other, encouraging one another, and calling each other out on making the whole community better”*(B2).

Blogging brings like-minded people together. Thus, a blog can be seen as a platform where a community of like-minded people is created. An active reader of the blog most likely has similar moral duties as the community they are part of. Hence, it is more likely that an active reader embraces the assigned responsibility as internally assigned responsibility by the blogger since it is in an alliance (or at least partly) with the moral duty of the individual.

Bloggers strongly encourage their readers to leave a comment or to connect with the blogger on other social media platforms like Twitter to start a discussion about their blog posts. Also, bloggers ask their readers specific questions in regards to their blog posts. Thus, they are encouraging their readers to share their experience, thoughts, and tips (B5, B4, B3).

*“I think as bloggers, readers, and humans we should be loving and understanding of one another and become aware that there is only one planet, one ‘human’ species (no races or geographical classifications), and that we should be working together to make sure we care for our one and only source of food, water, and air!” (I4)*

One of the interviewees states that they plan to provide their readers with more information about legislation and advocacy because they believe that participatory involvement such as voting, signing petitions, donating and becoming actively involved in the movement can advance the politically sustainable agenda. Following, a politically sustainable agenda will make it easier to encourage more sustainable choices in our everyday lives. For example, the interviewee plans to get readers involved in a campaign to ban toxins from beauty products (I1). Another interviewee points out that an underlining political message emerges naturally when one writes about sustainable living (I5). Bloggers agree that having a political message is not the main focus of the blogs (I5, I2, I4).

In conclusion, bloggers are assigning their readers with responsibility to engage in the comment section of the blog. Thus, they encourage a discussion about their written blog posts. Blogs hold a fundamental role in setting the stage for the production of environmental discussions. However, the commentary function that blogs offer is seldom used to their full potential. This can change when a blog gains a higher reach and attracts more visitors (Schultz, 2009). Within the blog sphere everyone can start his or her own blog, post links and information, express their commentary and discuss their opinion in the comment section:

*„Blogs were the actual catalysts that realized democratization, worldwide, of the internet. As much as democratization means engaged citizens; it also implies normalization (as in the setting of norms) and banalization...If you can't cope with high degrees of irrelevance, blogs won't be your cup of tea.” (Lovink, 2008, p. 4).*

Further, bloggers start to encourage their readers to engage into signing petitions, donating and to getting involved in the movement and advancing a politically sustainable agenda by providing more information about legislation and advocacy. Further, the interviewees state that establishing a political/sustainable agenda will make it easier to make informed sustainable choices in our everyday lives (I1). This development is promising since it shows a shift from assigning responsibility on an individual-level for daily consumption behaviour towards taking responsibility to a more societal level.

## 5.7 Blog as a tool for transformation

Bloggers explain that the sustainable blogosphere is contributing to society through education and personal growth of the individual (I5). It is a vital force to help spreading information and mobilizing supporters (I1). Blogging has become a powerful tool to not only companies but also to everyone who has a message they want to bring across (I5). Thus, bloggers point out that a blog can act as a change agent since a blog can inspire change (I2, I4, I5). Bloggers use their platforms for creating change through making recommendations, lobbying government and corporations (I2).

Bloggers see the online space as one of the biggest medium of change (I4, I3). However, it is important to point out that these platforms are no longer free from mainstream marketing and advertising tactics (I4). Bloggers stress their concern that it is getting harder for people to continue their trust in bloggers, social media 'stars' and 'video-bloggers' (vloggers) since marketing firms can often be found behind these 'stars'. People lose trust because most countries do not have to disclose their policy on transparent product placement and collaborations (I4). One blogger points out that it is not solely the blog that makes a difference but the writer behind the blog is the agent of change as well as the people who read it (I3). The sustainable community of bloggers is still finding their footing in the blogging world since they need to use the same formula proven to work for conventional fashion bloggers while promoting a lifestyle, which represents the exact opposite point of view: buy less, not more (B2). Bloggers stress that change must happen collectively (B2) and it comes with united efforts of individuals in the name of positive progress, joining hands, whether virtually or physically, educating each other, and demanding change (B2).

Moreover, some bloggers believe that blogging has little to no contribution to social change (I1, I4, I3). They think that their blog is just one small piece in the larger movement towards sustainable future (I1, I3). But a blog can be helpful to create community and draw attention to the challenges and opportunities of sustainability as it brings like-minded people together and those searching for a new or inspired way to live and think (I3).

Additionally, one blogger thinks that sustainable blogs act as an entry point for those interested in living more sustainably: *"I certainly don't think it's going to change the world, but for those who don't know where to start, it's a comforting and fun place to go to get information and resources on doing "less bad" to the environment"* (I1).

Other bloggers state that they believe the blogging medium is dead and people only access their blog through social media and do not access blogs as the first place of reference anymore. They concluded that if you want to get the message to the people social media is a good place to start. Nevertheless, they still view the blog as a separate medium that complements social media (I4). Blogging is a tool of influencing the public, government or 'regular people'. Thus, blogging can have multiple faces. Blogging can be activism, it can be journalism or it can be lobbying. The advantage of blogging is that many different styles of blogs exist which helps people to identify with the bloggers as peers (I2). Bloggers explain that the sustainable blogosphere is helping to encourage an active citizenship through education and personal growth of the individual (I5).

In conclusion a blog can be helpful to create communities and to draw attention to the responsibility an individual citizen has to face in society, in order to conquer a sustainable future together.

## 6 Discussion

In this part, the analysed material shall be discussed. This process aims at a broader general picture of the results and underlying assumptions connected to the results.

Scholars raise their concern about the statement that ‘being online’ will lead to a more political or civic use of the internet (Livingstone et al., 2007). Hence, it is still crucial to acknowledge that in some way participation in online communities will lead to a development of citizenship skills without any further engagement by an individual in political causes (Harris, 2008). Kann et al. (2007, p. 2) argue that this kind of online participatory communities has the power to (at least partly) improve citizens' participation in politics since these communities push the key democratic values of openness and involvement (ibid, 2007).

Barber (1989) points out that the responsibility of an active citizen in a democracy is voting. It also contains: agenda setting, deliberation, debating, performing community service, making public judgements and supporting or working for public interest groups or a political party. Abala-Bertrand (1995) characterizes citizenship education in four dimensions: democracy, human rights, sustainable development and human development and peace at the international as well as national levels.

From my point of view sustainable lifestyle bloggers contribute to citizen education, since the blogosphere opens room for the expansion of an individual thinking process. Also the analysed sustainable lifestyle blogosphere provides environmental information in their blogs about sustainable development and human development. Therefore, I think that the participatory element (easy access as well as usability to the public and the commentary function) of a blog and the environmental information provided by the sustainable lifestyle blogosphere helps to create more active citizen.

The essence of blogging is connecting and sharing. The blogosphere is a space where bloggers and readers can interact. Hence, I think that the blogosphere holds the potential to create an open space where a dialogue and deliberation can occur (Schulz, 2009). Under the premises that the blogger allows an open discussion in their comment section a mutual dialogue could emerge about what kind of world we want to live in (Collins & Nerlich, 2014) and that comment section is used to an extend that dialogue and deliberation can occur (Schulz, 2009).

Further a blog provides a possibility to connect like-minded people. Since, the user can pick what he/she wants to read and choose from a diversity of topics (Thompson, 2003). Further, I think that a blog has a significant educational power since readers use the medium blog to inform themselves about a topic that they are interested in. In particular because the comment section of a blog allows users to reflect and share their thoughts within the community.

Cox (2016), describes agenda setting as the potential influence the media might have on an individual's perception on the importance of an issue. However, Cox (2016), states “*news reporting may not succeed in telling people what to think, but it succeeds in telling them what to think about*” (Cox, 2016, p. 361). In my opinion the editorial choices bloggers make contribute to an **agenda setting** within the sustainability blogosphere.

Nevertheless, I think that the citizen-consumer does not solve environmental threats, since the citizen-consumer approach does not reflect the complexity of environmental threats and the complex interconnection of structure and



agency contributing to the problem. Therefore, addressing societal and collective dimension of responsibility of human-made environmental threats is important. Thus, I agree with Barr et al. (2011) who criticizes the citizen-consumer approach for lack of societal and collective dimension of responsibility. In my opinion the elimination of the societal and collective dimension will not only exclude diverse perspectives on possibilities for change outside the individual's consumption choices but also restricts the responsibility to the sustainable consumption choices of the citizen-consumer and the solution to a greener future becomes rather behaviouristic.

Therefore, I think that it is of importance that bloggers of the sustainability blogosphere also acknowledge the societal and collective dimension of responsibility in their blogs. One of the interviewees states that they plan to provide their readers with more information about legislation and advocacy. Since she believes that involvement like voting, signing petitions, donating and getting involved in the movement can advance the politically sustainable agenda setting (I1). Thus, they want to use their blog as a platform to get readers involved in campaigning to ban toxins from beauty products (I1). Rather the blogger points out that a ban of certain toxins from beauty products will have a broader effect than an individual purchase of a toxin free sustainable alternative beauty product (I1). I think that encouraging the individual to engage in voting, signing petitions, donating and getting involved in the movement can be identified as signs of being an active citizen and even activist.

However, I think that telling individuals how to act within the current frame of society could risk a more transformative discussion in which individuals share their visions and suggestions.

Thus, I believe that individuals need to define sustainability for themselves and understand how their actions contribute to change from this understanding in order to take responsibility for their own world.

Therefore, in my opinion it is more important to empower an individual to define an understanding about sustainable living on his/her own. Through this process it is possible that citizens assign themselves with internal responsibility for taking action to tackle human-made environmental threats.

In my point of view sustainable lifestyle blogs hold the potential to empower an individual and to help them defining an individual understanding of sustainability and their responsibility as citizens. Hence, I think that sustainable lifestyle blogs provide an entry point to active citizenship.

## 7 Conclusion

The internet has changed the way we communicate. Through blogs it is now possible for everyone to raise a voice that can be heard. Thus, blogs can be launched and read at home with internet access from a computer, smart phone, tablet etc.

I think that sustainable lifestyle bloggers contribute to citizen education, since the blogosphere opens room for the expansion of an individual thinking process. Further, from my point of view sustainable lifestyle bloggers do not provide education per se but space where citizens can interact, raise their voices and dialogues can take place. Thus, I would draw the conclusion that blogs play an important role to educate and inform the citizens.

However, I think that it is of high importance that bloggers challenge the current economic and political structures and express ways to the reader of how to engage as an active citizen. Therefore, sustainable lifestyle bloggers possess the power to create space where citizens can embrace their responsibility. Hence, I think that the sustainable blogosphere has the opportunity to let active citizenship emerge.

In this virtual space online communities are created where citizenship can be practiced and exercised individually (Luck & Ginanti, 2013).

Further, more research is required on the comment sections of blogs. On how environmental and democratic values emerge and are being discussed, in effect to establish a form of bottom-up approach to social change.

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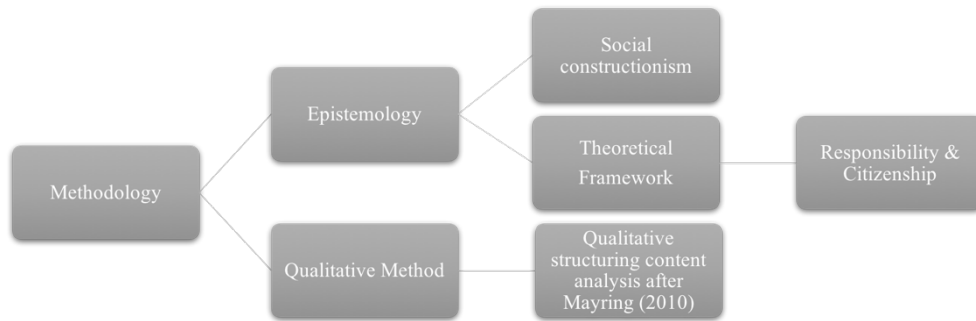
# Appendix

## Appendix 1 - Interview questions

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself (state your education and occupation)?
2. How would you define ethical and sustainable living? And do differentiate between ethical living and sustainable living or do you see it as one concept?
3. Could you explain how you became interested in ethical and sustainable living? And on which values do you base your ethical and sustainable lifestyle?
4. How does your decision process for a blog post look like?
5. What are your essential sources of information for your blog posts concerning ethical and sustainable topics?
6. What are your driving forces (values, virtues) behind running an ethical and sustainable living blog?
7. Why did you pick blogging to communicate your message? And what do you think can the medium blog and especially your blog contribute to society?
8. What do you hope to achieve by having your blog? Do you think that a blog can act as a change agent?
9. Do you have a political message (like communicating democratic values, ecological justice, human rights, participation) behind running your blog?
10. How do you view your responsibility as a blogger and your reader's responsibility towards the state the world is in and for creating a sustainable future?
11. Do you collaborate with companies or brands? If yes, how do you judge how sustainable and ethical a product or a company is? Do you have certain criteria you follow?
12. How do you view blogging in a broader ethical and sustainable movement?
13. How do you judge the impact of your blog towards your readers and them making greener choices?
14. And last but not least how many views does your blog have in a month?



## Appendix 2 - Overview of Methodological Approach



## Appendix 3 - Overview of deductive/inductive process of Category development

