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Bloggers as research partners

The workshop 'Walking with Web Natives' was inspired by the authors' desire to respond to a range of generalisations about 'bloggers', generalisations made in the media, in marketing and, in consequence, in the market research industry. The other trend which makes the subject important for researchers is the way in which, over time, researchers have got closer and closer to respondents, and the relationship more equal, such that the latter are now 'participants'.

The logical conclusion was to engage with the bloggers themselves, in order to put individual identities in place of generalisations about a class called 'bloggers' and to seek their own views about how research might engage with them.

Ten bloggers from around the world took part in the supporting study – their blogs were analysed, they were interviewed one to one, and they took part in conversations about their blogging via a shared online space. Four themes were explored – Motivation, Identity, Audience and their response to 'Web Mining'. The last of these is a process whereby very large quantities of blog and forum posts are automatically harvested and analysed. It is of interest to market researchers because large scale analysis necessarily removes most of the context from what is being said – more specifically, the full 'identity' of the author.

In addition to confirming the sheer diversity of personalities and motivations within blogging, the study reached several conclusions. Many individuals who write blogs do not regard themselves as 'a blogger' – by which they mean someone who blogs more frequently, authoritatively and perhaps professionally than they do themselves. Blogging is often defined by the relationship with the perceived audience, and divides into two broad motivations – 'broadcasting' and 'recording'. Through blogging people create an identity and this should not always be assumed to be the same as their offline identity.

The work continues and, although web mining may prove useful in certain contexts, the authors commend two goals for anyone looking to carry out research in this area – the first is to 'humanise the blogger' by looking for context and narrative, and the second is to engage actively with bloggers as partners rather than treat them as subjects of study. One of the steps in this direction has been to share the presentation with the bloggers who took part and, via social media, to report back to them about the workshop.



Walking with Web Natives:

What bloggers can teach the
research industry

Alison Palmer - Josephine Hansom - Nick Buckley

GfK London



Introductions

The GfK team



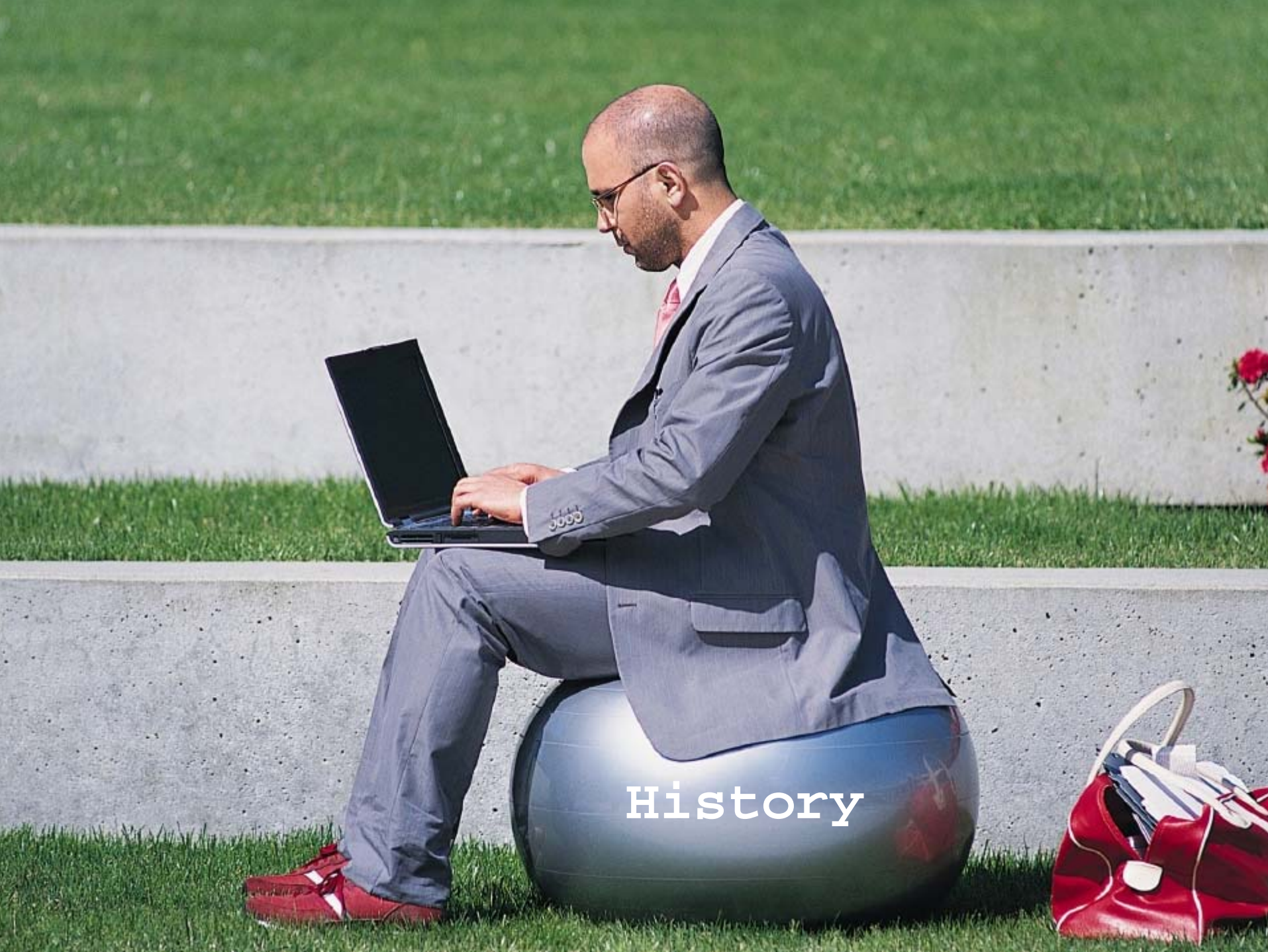
**Alison
Palmer**



**Josephine
Hansom**



**Nick
Buckley**



History

Social history of market research

Subject



Respondent



Participant



Partner

2009

Share

Engage



Extract



Observe



1940s



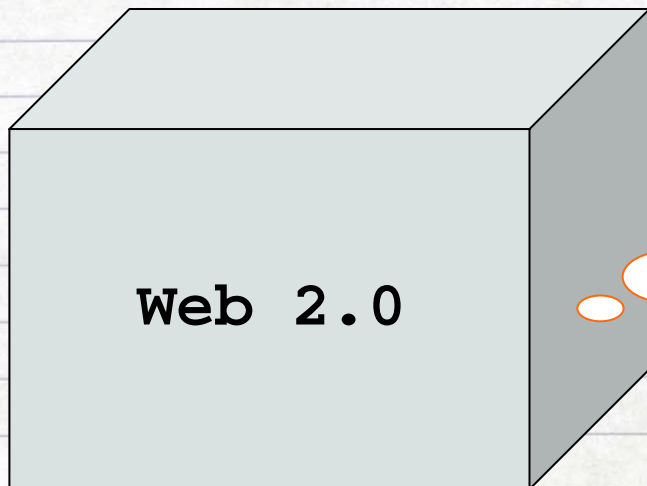
Research should mirror the real world

- Enabling and utilising tools
- Creating a research platform
- Maintaining an open agenda
- Balancing rigour with flexibility





To date researchers have relied on fusing Web 2.0 with established research techniques...



How can we use this new functionality in research?

e.g. asking non-bloggers to keep a blog diary or mining the web/blogosphere for client-relevant utterances



Utilising new online methods is not enough on its own.

Where is the...

CONTEXT ?



Example

Tuesday 10th October

I woke up late for work. In a rush. Got in 5mins late. Had a fair bit of work to do seen as I had Monday off, but was good because at least I would be kept busy and hopefully the day would fly. Went for sandwich at break and was hungry so got 2 sandwiches, a packet of crisps and a can of orange which was a lot for just a breakfast snack. Was kept busy at work with suppliers phoning, me phoning for quotes and measuring jobs from drawings. Work finally ended but stayed behind to clean car out in yard as I thought it was due a clean. On way home got petrol at station and **paid on credit card as had no cash on me.**

Got home, made and ate dinner - steak pie and chips. Tried to tidy room and do washing as I have cousins staying from Scotland at the weekend - spent about two hours doing that. Prepared clothes and gear for work next day. **Spent rest of night watching TV and relaxing.**

Rented a movie out on box office. Went to bed around 12.30.



Blogging

Icebreaker...

What do we know about blogging?

Do you
read
blogs?

EXPERIENCE

Are you a
blogger?

What have
you read
about
them?

What's
your
opinion
of them?

What
technology
do
bloggers
use?

TERMINOLOGY

Do you
know any
bloggers?

BLOGGERS

What are
bloggers
like?

What
motivates
bloggers?

What's the
blogger
stereotype?

What
jargon do
bloggers
use?



Knowledge pool...

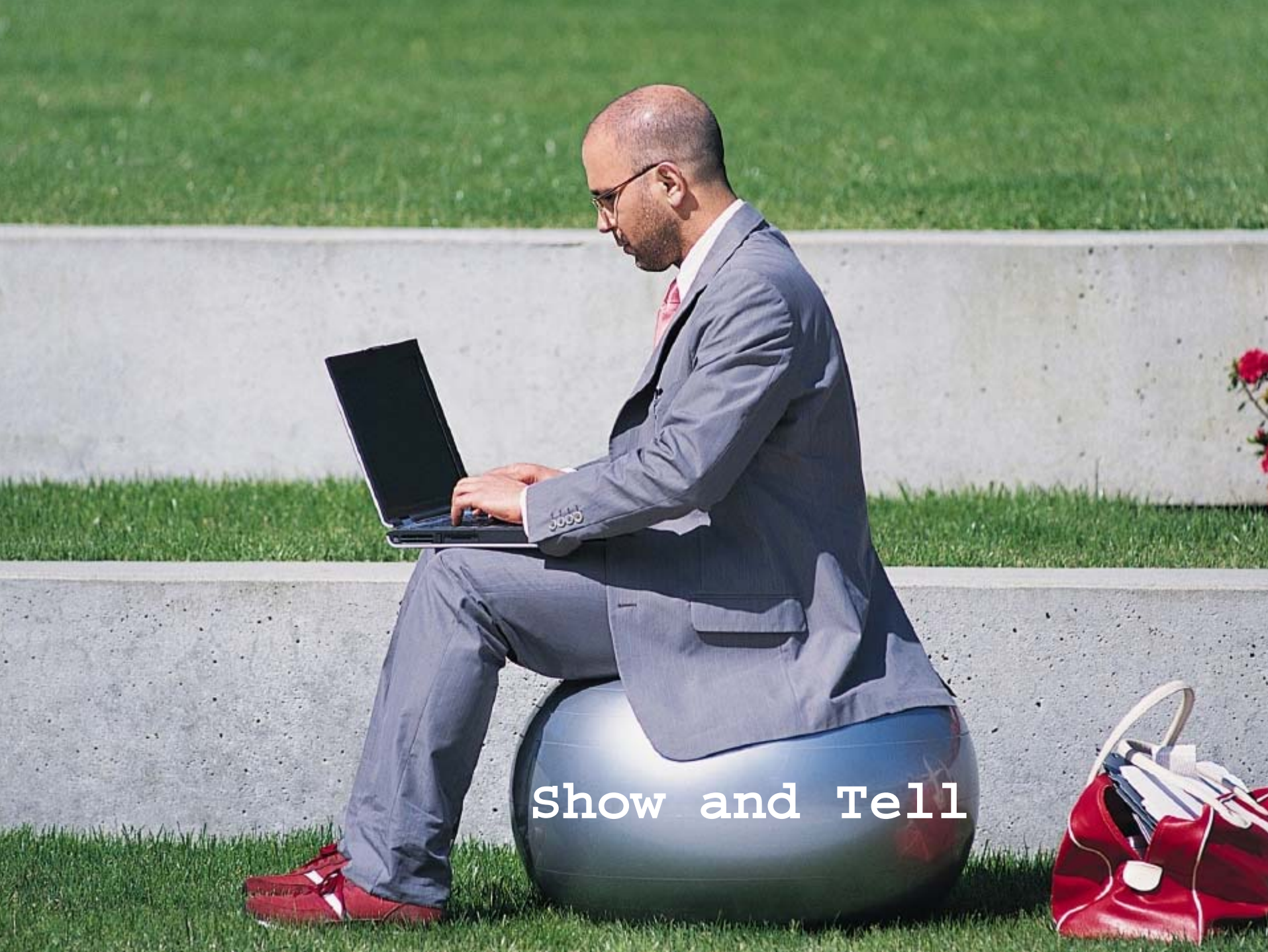
**Blogging
EXPERIENCE**

**Blogging
TERMINOLOGY**

**BLOGGERS
as individuals**

**and what the
bloggers say...**



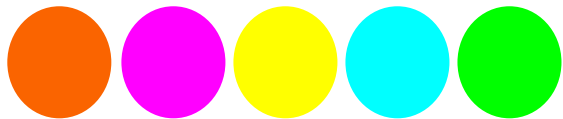


Show and Tell



Engaging with bloggers

We set out to explore...



10 (international)
bloggers



Grounded
theory

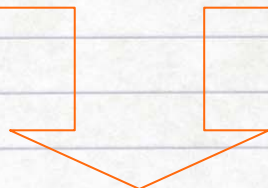
Experimental
design

Challenging the use of blog content
without context



Engaging with bloggers

Mixed method



TOPICS
on the GfK Bloggers
Space

ONE-TO-ONE interviews
(telephone and/or msn)

Windows Live™

Photos More • Search people or web

Tools Help

< Previous Next >

GfK Bloggers

Looking forward to meeting everyone
Market and Social Research in London
GfK is in your network.

... - and "how does this work".

Welcome to the GfK Bloggers Windows Live Space.

We hope you will enjoy using this area to compare notes with each other about how and why you blog, and to help us understand more about this. [See the separate post - ["Why are we doing this?"](#) - for more background.]

Summary

- April, 2009
- March, 2009
- February, 2009
- January, 2009

We will also be talking to each of you individually but we thought that the logical thing to do, to enable a group of bloggers to talk to each other, was to create another blog - this one. We hope that the blog format works for discussion. **Initially this means that we will be putting up posts and asking you to respond, and discuss, by posting comments - perhaps including links to other relevant sources and examples.** We hope this doesn't make it all too Question-and-Answer. If it does - then we could look at making it a genuine group blog, giving you author rights and letting you make your own posts - but let's see how it goes. OK, this isn't forum software and not everybody is a Microsoft fan, but we thought we should go for something simple and widespread. Also, by having everyone take a Windows Live account and befriend 'GfK Bloggers' we thought we would create the maximum number of ways of conversing, instant messaging, linking and connecting.

So if you are reading this you have created your own Windows Live account and become a friend of GfK Bloggers. In due course we will post some short pieces about blogging and encourage you to respond - both to us each other. Please look out for them.

In the meantime you probably want to know (a little) more about us and how much you are going to know about each other. So look out for another post entitled ["Who Are We?"](#)

We look forward to exploring the blogosphere with you 😊

The GfK NOP Team.

11:15 AM | [View trackbacks \(0\)](#)



Engaging with bloggers

Audience



Motivation



Identity



Web mining





Guess Who?

Exercise...

Read each of the blogs on the laptop

Profile each of the seven bloggers

Determine:

Gender

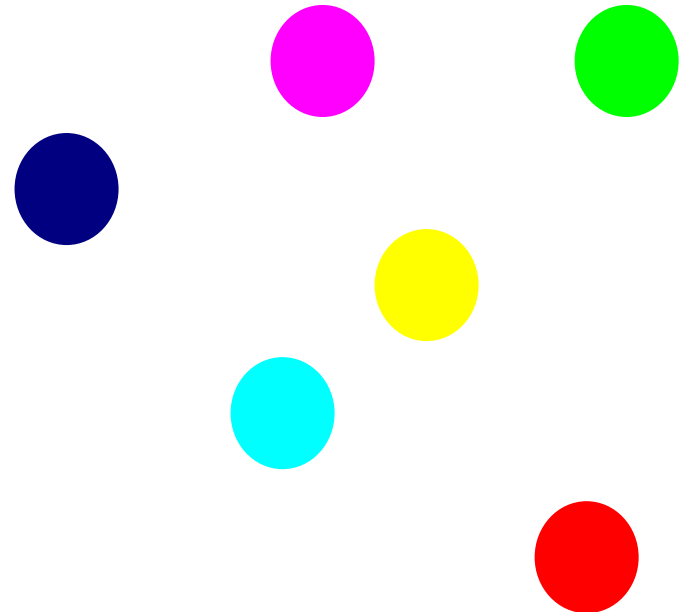
Age group

Nationality

Occupation

Appearance

Personality



Suzanne: www.readmyday.co.uk/suzannefletcher



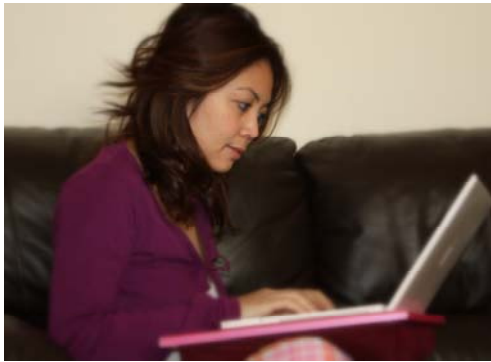
A Mushroom.

"Powers that be try to keep me in the dark and feed me with rubbish. The attempt to keep me as a mushroom does not necessarily work !

Female, 64, Married,
British, Councillor,
North England

A hybrid of a political animal concerned with justice, peace the environment and equality as well as nurturing communities. Also a human being who loves the countryside and family.

Anita: //finally-woken.com



A Cat.

"Looks spoiled and soft but has sharp claws. Plus I'm a tiger in Chinese horoscope which really describes who I am."

Female, Globetrotter,
Indonesian, Married,
25-35, lives in Scotland

I enjoy...

- writing
- travelling
- music
- gadgets
- photography

Pete: //view.wordpress.com



A Motorcycle.

"Focused and single-minded, yet extremely flexible in terms of purpose, usefulness and capability."

Male, 30, Married,
British,

User-Experience Designer

I live with my wife and 3 children. We enjoy spending time together playing, walking, reading, watching films and listening to music.

Pramal: www.pramal.blogspot.com



A Tree.

"A tree serves in so many ways, bears all conditions, is strong and can be used when dead and asks for nothing in return."

Male, 24, Single,
British, Volunteering
in India

I enjoy living outside of the box, doing what I enjoy to do especially if it makes a difference to the world we live in.

Richard: www.dedomenici.blogspot.com



A Chameleon.

"I feel that I am quite good at adapting to my surroundings, or at least that's what I aspire to be, anyway."

**Male, 31, Single,
Artist, British, London**

I am a one-man subversive think-tank ... approaching the limits of conventionally acceptable behaviour. My poetic acts of low-grade civil disobedience forcibly ask pertinent questions of society, while my subtle anarcho-surrealist interventions create the kind of uncertainty that leads to possibility!

Dave: www.musicfromblueskies.blogspot.com

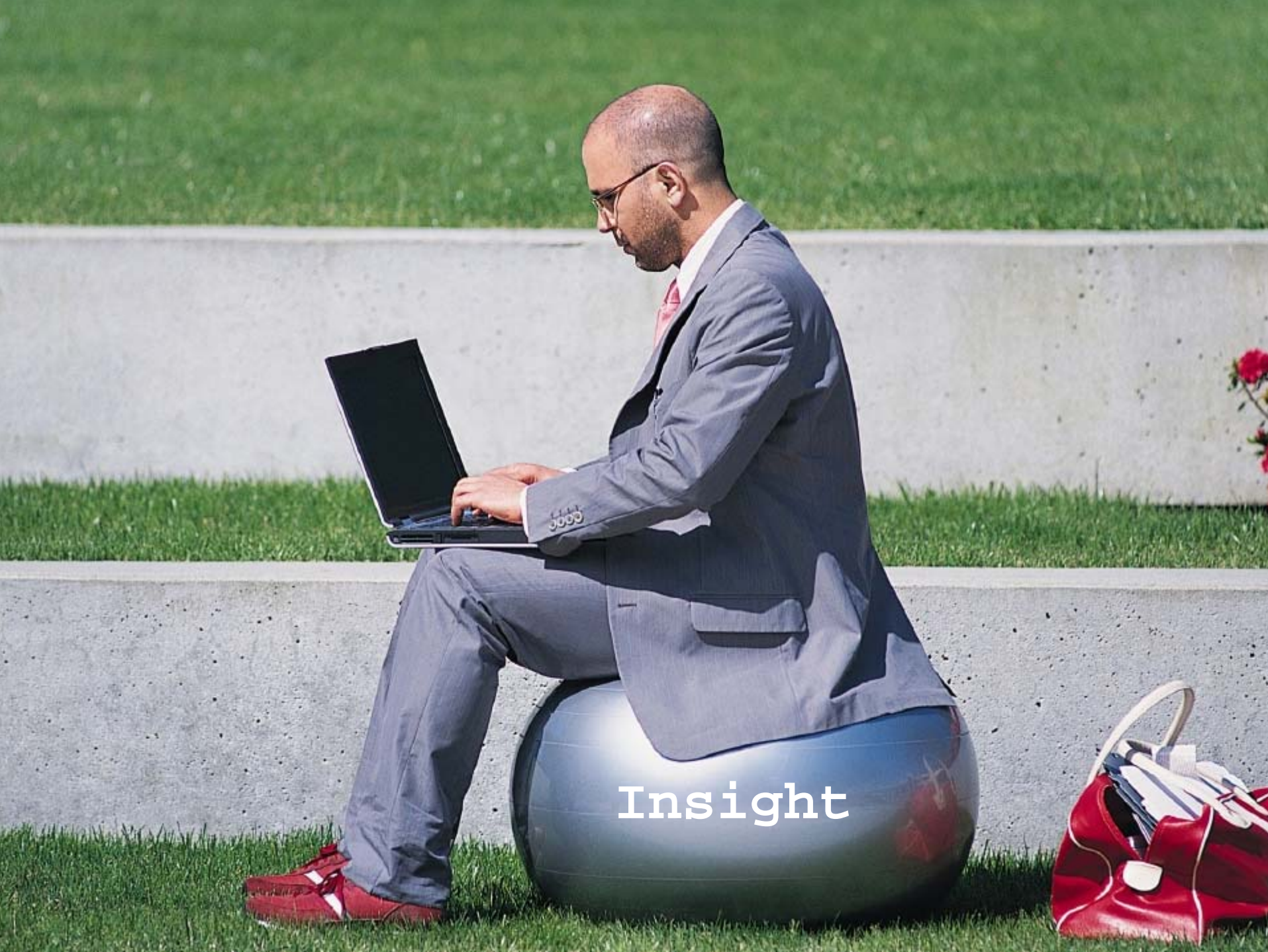


An Automatic Piano.

"One of those pianos that can play itself. Do those things actually exist? I've only ever seen them on tv..."

Male, 23, Single,
Musician, British,
England

I'm a musician, currently recording from home with a fairly large online audience. I am also quite interested in video editing and so youtube is where the majority of that audience is centred.



Insight

Defining Bloggers?

Not all our sample defined themselves as a 'blogger'

I have a blog: I am..

"a blogger"

Part of online community

High awareness/
understanding of audience

Reaching out and welcoming feedback

"not a blogger"

Documenting thoughts/ideas

Intuitive, personal activity

No need/expectation for feedback



Audience

A sense of audience defines blogging activity

My motivation is to..

"Broadcast"

Multi-way
communication

Provoke
reaction

Cause/agenda/
goal

"Record"

One way

Innate sharing/
need for self
expression

Without specific
outcomes





Identity

Can bloggers be defined
by their words?



by blogging, people
create a personal
online identity

BUT...

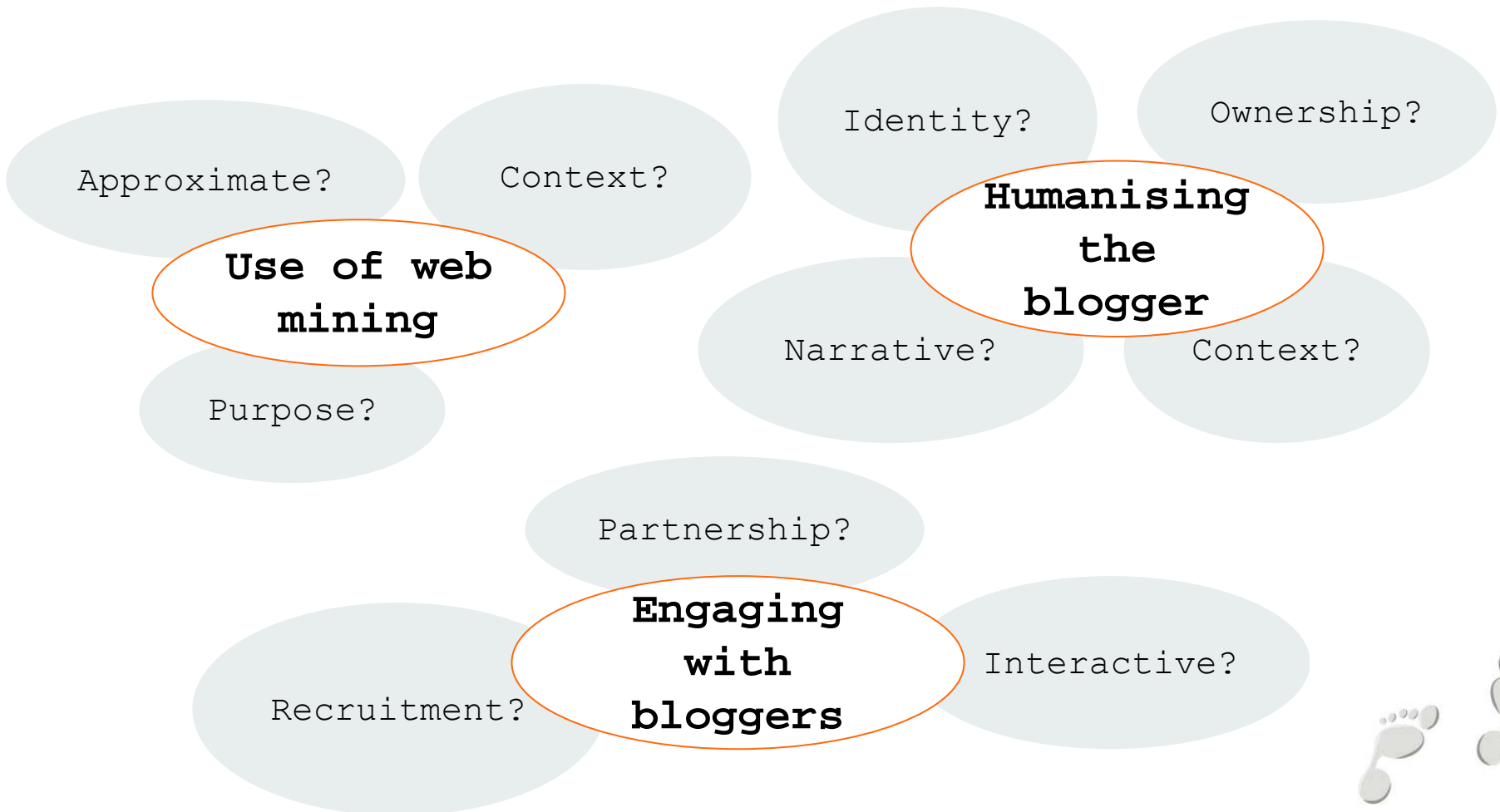
online identity is not
always the same as
offline identity



Coda

Can we go native...?

What does this mean for research?





Going forward, going native..



Take into account the two different types of bloggers



Avoid accepting the words of bloggers without context



Be wary of equating the blogging world with the offline world



'I am still here. I am not going anywhere. If I do leave, it's only for temporary. This is my home. Where I belong. With you.'

I'm Still Here

Forgive me readers for I have sinned.

I have been guilty letting my other passions took over, and before I knew it, 6 weeks has passed and I have only produced one thread. However, despite lack of postings, I have actually been taking part of 2 activities which still involve blogging. One is as the participant for a market research company which investigating the bloggers around the world and blogosphere in general. Although I couldn't reveal more than that, I am proud to be taking part of this project as this is a breakthrough where people see how serious and powerful the blogosphere could be. Another one is with Amnesty International, which is quite exciting as I have never done this before and taking part of this project opens up a brand new horizon. I will not discuss much about the latter but you will read later in my future postings.

Aside from those two projects, I have met the Indonesian bloggers for several times. Our last 'land coffee', that's how we call it, in Senayan City, turned into photo sessions as usual, where Toni, Elyani, and Tere continuously clicking their cameras away. Some of the bloggers also decided to attend Ecky's wedding in Tasikmalaya, which is not quite easy to reach as we have to drive 5 hours from Jakarta, where the hotel was full of ants but the scenery was breathtaking. What started as an easy meet-up turn into a greater form of friendships and I am happy that I actually could call them friends, not just blogbuddies. I believe that what we have had now is stronger and deeper than just leaving comments at each other's blog.

The real reason why I couldn't set aside 30 minutes to sit down and write, was because I have moved around so much. As you might have known I arrived in Jakarta, Indonesia, in January 24th, and two days later mr.mck and I ended up in Siem Reap, and several days later we were back in Jakarta. Then my journey began and for the next four weeks I went to Surabaya, Makassar, Tasikmalaya, Bandung, Jakarta, Singapore, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, then back to Scotland. Most of the time I had people with me or staying with me so it was impossible to sit down and concentrate. Plus I had dinner appointments every single night, Ecky's wedding and Nonie's farewell party to go to, and Jen and Yolanda coming over from Makassar and Hias respectively just to see me. I had also a matchmaking project which is a big success too.

It was meant to be 3 weeks holiday, but Ecky's sudden decision to get married in one month made me postponing my return to Scotland, as I wouldn't want to miss it in the world even though there were lots of consequences. After lots of emails and phone calls with the airlines, hospital, contractor, and vendor to rearrange the schedule, I could stretch my holiday into 6 weeks. I am lucky that mr.mck is so understanding and doesn't mind at all to let me stay back in Indonesia a while longer.

It was a wonderful holiday, a very long one which definitely makes everyone else jealous, and I am so happy that I managed to meet everyone, that I managed to attend Ecky's wedding and said goodbye to her before she moves down under, that I managed to attend Nonie's farewell party and went to Makassar with her, that I managed to see my best friend in Singapore although she *forgot* to take her new baby with her (!), and that I could meet my dearest cousin whom I haven't seen for years.

Forgive me readers for I have sinned.

I have just got back last Sunday and was hit by reality. Mails to open, emails to read and reply, appointments to attend to, schedules to meet, et cetera. After five days I manage to clear up my inboxes (yes I have more than 1 active email address, each one for different purpose). I have got a lot more things to do but I managed to steal 30 minutes tonight to say hello to you.

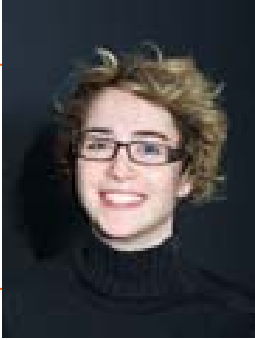
Of course, my feet are already itchy again and another trip is scheduled for May. And another, for June. But for now, I only want to be here.

I am still here. I am not going anywhere. If I do leave, it's only for temporary. This is my home. Where I belong. With



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