Women 2.0
Female Lifestyles in a Hyper-Connected World

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The Web is becoming more social, more interconnected, and more creative – this development is currently described as the emergence of a Social Web or summed up with the term Web 2.0. In the next 15 minutes my objective is to sketch all of its´ key developments that I believe to be relevant for the future of female quality of life. I will introduce you to a number of women, their personal concept of what adds life to their years and how they use Web 2.0 tools to increase their quality of life. I will end my presentation by sketching chances for the future lifestyle of women around the world for the year 2015.

What exactly is Web 2.0?
 The term Web 2.0 does not stand for the reinvention of the Internet as one could assume. It is not a single core innovation, but rather a great number of improvements and contributions - all working towards a "Web-Architecture of Participation". Whereas the "Web 1.0" was a collection of billions of static WebPages, which one could access via hyperlinks, Web 2.0´s technologies have an almost inbuilt inclination to network content, places, people, opinions, and events. Let me explain this in depth by introducing you to 3 women and their usage of different Web 2.0. technologies.

The first aspect of the Web 2.0 is that the Web is becoming more intelligent.
In order to prove this point, I will introduce you to my mom. When I asked her, what adds life to her current and coming years, one of the first things that came to her mind was health. As long as I can remember my mother had to struggle with doctors, especially when her parents (and my grandparents) both became cases for nursing care but also concerning her own health. I think a general feeling of ever-helplessness is common, when one´s own opinion is incommensurate with a medical advice.
So what does that have to do with Web 2.0 technology? Well, in the last two years my mom has started to consult different health-related wikis & blogs. She will for

example look up her prescription & she will read what other people have experienced taking the same medicine and sometimes she will consider their opinion on available alternatives. Of course this is not the solution for all her worries, but she now goes to see her doctor feeling well-informed and being in a position to stand up for her observations, interpretations and opinions. What is true for my mother is also true for other women and men: Web 2.0 technologies enable us to profit from the so-called "wisdom of crowds" – (A book title by James Surowiecki). The Web provides us with a digital space, where the information and knowledge of millions of people is not only accessible but can be shared & combined to form a greater whole - the online encyclopedia Wikipedia is probably the most well-known example on how people successfully work on a joint knowledge project. And there is hardly no topic that is not discussed in it´s own blog. A current study by Nokia estimates that by 2012 25% of all consumed media content will be content, which was produced or remixed be other users.

But there are lot´s of other features that assess, so to speak, the users´ valuable mind and knowledge: Not only can we profit from a much wider range of information, but we can also link this information to people and their personal experiences and opinions. We can profit from the insights of like-minded people or people in a similar situation to ourselves ("You are probably all familiar with e.g. Amazons feature "customer who bought this item also bought..."). This is a very human and social way of making information manageable and tangible. The technical improvements behind the scene are mainly search and ranking algorithms that steer users to content, which has already been positively selected by others, this is for example also how digg.com works, a news site, where in a kind of collective intelligence process all participating users form a global editorial staff - working 24/7 on selecting the most interesting news from around the world.

The next aspect of Web 2.0 technology is that the Web is becoming more social
Due to Web 2.0 technology individual homepages are losing their insular character, commenting, ranking, and voting features make them part of a community. Additionally a lot of social networking portals allow the accessing of second or higher degree contacts and thereby tremendously extend one´s social and business reach (e.g. websites like facebook.com allow you to see your friend's friends). This makes it

possible to get in touch with nearby-living, like-minded people, either with regard to business or pleasure.

Two women who profit from this development are my girlfriends Sarah and Isabell. Let me tell you about Sarah first: Friendship is defiantly one of the things that add life to her years - as long as I can remember she was always surrounded by lot´s of friends. Things changed, when Sarah became a mother and moved to another town short time after her daughter was born. That was because her boyfriend got a really good job there. Suddenly she turned into one of those young isolated mothers, who sits at home and waits for her husband to return. She would meet up with other mothers, that she met at the playground but it drove her mad to talk about babies non-stop. I think, to her it felt like being on a downward spiral: the less contact she had to the outside world, the less interesting her life became and the less she felt capable of making new contacts...

Social networks, like myspace and facebook.com, where you can find old and new friends, helped Sarah to feel close to her friends, even though they were far away. And Sarah belongs to a fast growing community: Social networking is an activity that 37% of US adult Internet users and 70% of online teens engage in every month, and the numbers continue to grow. eMarketer projects that by 2011, one-half of online adults and 84% of online teens in the US will use social networking. One of the trends driving this development is an increasingly multi-locational lifestyle, meaning that most people will live in different towns or regions during their lifetime. In a mobile world social networks provide us with a digital space, where the impossible is possible: All your scattered friends and all your lose acquaintances are in one spot – you can get a glimpse of what is happening in their life anytime you feel like it and you can easily let others know your news – actually it is similar to how news gets around in a village. I am not saying that social networking turned Sarah´s life around, but it certainly cheered her up and I would also say that it added life to her the first years when she was new town.

A network that did turn Isabell´s life around is www.etsy.com, an online marketplace for buying & selling all things handmade. Inga is a interior decorator and a single mother, she stopped working in an office after her second child was born. Today she is a so called minipreneur and sells her handmade things on different crafts networks, such as etsy or also www.ponoko.com. Isabell is part of a new web-based social movement, which Arwen O´ Reilly (staff editior of the MAKE and CRAFT Magazine)

describes as a digital "Do it yourself movement": Amid of mass production and consumption more and more people enjoy to craft, repair or design things by themselves. Craftsmanships once handed over from one generation to the next - and in the last years increasingly in danger of being forgotten - are currently booming in web-based networks.

And guess who provides a lot of the instructions, recipes & hints on those networks? A lot of women, who are in my mothers and my grandmother´s generation. So what at first might seem like an odd couple: web-technology and the fostering of traditional craftsmanship as well as intergenerational knowledge-transfer – turns out to be a fruitful partnership and it enabled Isabell to help herself and earn money with a work she enjoys.

Jeff Howe established the term „crowdsourcing" for the fact that jobs are increasingly being outsourced to the WebCrowd. According to him the Web is turning into a huge connector for human resources. Websites, like humangrid.eu already crowdsource tasks, that computers can not perform to so-called "click-workers": click-worker are people who work individually and are paid for each music or video file they tag; each picture they identify or each phrase they translate. Web companies, like innocentive.com go a lot further: "Innocentive" is a plattform-business, where big companies, like Procter & Gamble "crowdsource" unsolved R&D questions and who ever is able to solve the questions gets a fixed award (which is usually between 10.000 and 100.000 USD).

From an economical point of view Web 2.0 has the potential to foster local or small niche markets and strengthen a broad community of minipreneurs like Isabell; it can also provides anonymous low income jobs and foster open innovation processes, where people are rewarded for solving a problem irrespective of their sex, skin color or origin.

Now I come to the last part of my presentation: A future outlook

If you sum up the different concepts of what adds life to the years according to the women I have introduced you to, you come up with: health, friendship & closeness to loved ones, as well as economic independence and the possibility to work in a job that one enjoys. What Web 2.0 technologies can contribute to those quality of life aspects is access to information, education and social neworks. I believe these three aspects to be an important prerequisite for making self-determined decisions.

My speech so far has only concentrated on my own context and surrounding: I told you stories of women I know, I told you about their worries in life and their achievement and I told you how Web 2.0 technology helps them to add a little more life to their years. But they are all women who have a similar background, education level and lifestyle than me and all of them live in western countries.

The most interesting question for me is: What has to happen in the next years, so that I will be telling you a truly global story in the year 2015?

In 7 years from now I would like to meet up with all of you in New York and tell you a truly global story. Probably a few new technological innovations here and there, but basically the same story I told you today about knowledge sharing and business and social networks only with a global setting.

In 2015 I would like to tell you, how a group of independent African female scientist won an award on one of the many websites that are similar to the open R&D platform innocentive.com and how well they invested their 100.000 USD award. I would like to tell you about successful start-up companies that provide webspaces, where women can meet other women and enable them to start their own business with peer2peer money lending or mircro-credits. And I would also like to tell you how around the world local knowledge and culture has been fostered by Web 2.0 technology. And to prove my point I would introduce you to a intergenerational female network in Latin-America, where young and old women work together and sell their handmade goods directly to buyers all around the world.

I could go on an on, but what are the key factors that could turn my vision into reality?

1. First of all: The global digital divide must be narrowed: There are good chances that we will observe great improvements in this field, due to the initiatives like the 100$ per child laptop and global corporations like Intel or Microsoft who are well aware that the most important future market for their products lie within the rural regions of the emerging and developing countries.

2. And secondly: We should be aware that there is another digital divides: it is the divide between those with access to valued online social networks and those without. Existing research mostly focuses on the first divide. But equal access to the Internet does not ensure equal access to social resources on the Internet. I

believe that this is a crucial point in order to secure that Web 2.0 technologies can be used by women to their own advantage.

I am convinced that we need research programs and business ideas that focus an the question, how to foster the use and development of social networks in general and in particular on how to enable women to use these tools for the increase of their personal quality of life.

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