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The Shaping of Environmental Information in Social Media: Affordances and Technologies of Self-Control

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This article studies environmental information as it circulates in social media, specifically in personal blogs and microblogs. It rests on a thematic analysis of a selection of Swedish language, personal, everyday life environment blogs active during 2011 and 2012 and the social media applications connected to these blogs. Gibson's concept of affordances and Foucault's notion of governmentality are brought together to work out how material and technological affordances of social media and the structures of governmentality work together to engender a type of information on environmentally friendly living that is rooted in the conditions of the web and in a view of society, which is structured around choice and individual responsibility. The article argues that information is woven into the texture of the social on every level, including everyday life practices, and hence social media, as tools in such practices, contribute to shaping the way in which information on environmentally friendly living is articulated, shaped and filled with meaning.

Keywords: *Environmental information, social media, blogs, governmentality, affordances, everyday life*

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Introduction

Information on how to live in a more environmentally friendly way as an individual or a family is produced and circulated online. This happens in various forms. For instance, government agencies, special interest organisations and occasionally also businesses distribute information on certain topics or produce online campaigns to raise awareness of specific issues that are connected to, for instance, climate change or a common environmentally damaging behaviour. This could be, for example, information on how to recycle, why to save energy and how to do it, or why to avoid a certain food that is unsustainably produced. There are also communities of interest that form around online forums for exchange of information (Merrick, 2012). Here, personal experience and advice are typically mixed with references to formal sources of information. Such forums also support the formation of identities around greener living and act as facilitators for "normalising" such efforts (Merrick, 2012). Both these aspects - i.e. the formation of identity through connecting online and the normalising of practices of environmentally friendly living (cf. Shove, 2003) including of information practices (Nathan, 2012) - have also appeared as significant in personal environmentally friendly living blogs and to a degree in other social media (Haider, 2012).

Importantly, how an issue is represented online has a bearing on the type of information that is available on specific issues and in turn forms the very issues at stake (Eklöf & Mager, 2012; Rogers, 2006; 2013). This is also the case in how we talk about the environment (Haider, 2014). Ultimately, given the significance of online platforms in all kinds of information related activities, the possibilities for engagement, which they afford or impede, contribute to shaping how we frame a common understanding of those norms and values that ground environmentally friendly living and what environmental information looks like (cf. Yeo, 2014).

This article examines a specific sort of environmental information that circulates in social media and in particular in personal blogs and microblogs (Twitter). The main thrust of the article lies in developing an empirically grounded, theory-based argument outlining how the materiality of informing on what it means to live in a more environmentally friendly manner is socially and technically constituted - at the same time as it is an intrinsic part of information itself. Accordingly, the article's purpose is twofold. To begin with, it aims to show how social media use contributes to forming what we see environmentally friendly living to be in Western consumer culture, and how practices of control and self-control as they are inscribed into these tools conspire with the disciplinary regimes underlying practices of environmentally friendly living. Building onto this argument the article then aims to delineate the, at times, ambiguous shape of the type of environmental information that emerges and is made available in this way. To do this two theoretical concepts are brought together; firstly Michel Foucault's (1991) notion of governmentality and secondly the concept of affordances, originally proposed by James J. Gibson (1979). More specifically the interest lies with selected material and technological affordances; that is how specific tools, or their functions, afford opportunities for certain actions and, although not necessarily entirely excluding them, they make others less likely.

The next section presents an overview of the material and methods used in the study. This is followed by a brief account of the notion of governmentality and of some significant ways of conceptualising expressions of the individualisation of environmental politics. Subsequently a short description of the concept of affordances, specifically focusing on technical and functional affordances of online platforms, is presented. The article then moves on to work out the specificities of the type of environmental information that is in focus. In the process the concept of affordance is discussed and developed further, in close conjunction with a presentation of selected excerpts from the empirical material.

Method and Material Collection

The argument made in the present article rests on a thematic analysis of a selection of Swedish language, personal, everyday life environment blogs active during 2011 and 2012 and the social media applications, i.e. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, connected to these blogs. Constant comparative analysis was used to establish returning topics, which were analysed by means of a theoretical reading (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) drawing on the theoretical concepts introduced above as analytical devices for understanding and structuring. Using a snowball approach starting from a now defunct, curated list of environment blogs in general [http://miljobloggaktuellt.wordpress.com], 46 Swedish language everyday life environment blogs that fulfilled certain criteria were selected (see Appendix A).

The criteria were that the blogs had to be active, i.e. one blog post in the two preceding months and a clear connection between the bloggers' everyday life and environmental issues had to exist. Material collection and analysis were inspired by the non-intrusive methods of observation as developed in observational netnography (Kozinet, 2010), which allow for immersion into an online site in order to comprehend its cultural meanings, relations and values. I subscribed to the three most central blogs (see Appendix A and Appendix B) as well as all Twitter accounts and Facebook profiles or pages that were connected to these blogs for a period of six months during 2012. I used these three blogs as entry points as well as anchor points for my investigation. I read the blogs' updates as they came in, I followed their links and suggestions and I browsed their archives and static pages, but I also connected to other profiles and subscribed to other pages, blogs and profiles that were recommended and browsed their archives. I continued to read the other blogs and tweets that made up the original larger selection of blogs.

This combination of intense focus on a small number of central blogs together with ongoing, but more cursory, attention paid to connected blogs and to blogs further away

from the centre of the established network allowed me to compile a rich and varied collection of material. During the process of following, browsing, taking notes and saving screenshots, I gained an understanding of the structure of a site of engagement, at times cohesive and at times fragmented. This site was co-constructed by me as the observer, as it unfolded through links, comments, fall-outs, content of various sorts in different formats, campaigns, adverts, concerns, and the like while I was investigating it (boyd, 2009). After the first intense collection period was concluded, I kept following the various accounts all through 2012 - although less frequently than at the outset. This was done in order to obtain richer material and a more diverse picture and I continued to take notes and collect material in the process. I returned to some of the blogs and Twitter feeds in 2013 in the process of writing. The material that found its way into this article in the form of direct quotes stems from blogs and from Twitter from 2008 to 2013. In addition, although I do not quote from it directly, observations from Facebook, Instagram and YouTube also contributed to the development of the argument.

One theme [2] emerged as particularly consequential with regard to information on how to live in a more environmentally friendly way in a contemporary western society and which is profoundly shaped by the conditions of today's Internet. Notions of control, and here specifically self-control in various guises, can be located as a returning topic in accounts of environmentally friendly living as it is represented in social media. Furthermore, and connected to the point made on self-control, environmentally friendly living is often explicitly reported as being done in the form of everyday life projects. This is expressed in ways that are formed by opportunities and restrictions that today's internet, and specifically social media, afford and is bounded by notions of what it means to live in an environmentally friendly manner within the settings of contemporary neo-liberal societies. How this plays out more precisely, what it can look like in social media and how to frame it, is in focus after a brief

theoretical scene-setting accounting firstly for governmentality and the politics of everyday life and secondly for the notion of affordances.

Everyday Life Politics as Material Self-Control

Increasingly, environmentally friendly living, in all its different forms, is discussed in the form of personal narratives in blogs, microblogs and other social media (cf. Cooper, Green, Burningham, Evans & Jackson, 2012; Graf, 2012; Haider, 2012; Yeo, 2014). Documenting personal decisions and depicting practices of greener living online, whether in blogs or other social media applications or in dedicated discussion forums, makes these often short narratives also part of an online ecology of information on environmentally friendly living, i.e. information on which behaviours are considered to be more environmentally friendly, how to enact them in social practices and for which reasons. Furthermore, documenting one's activities online is a form of self-management and administration that also exposes them to others and to their scrutiny and possible control.

The notion of governmentality (Foucault, 1991), what Foucault described as the conduct of conduct or neo-liberal societies' deeply embedded self-disciplining regimes of control, can help to understand aspects of both environmentally friendly living (Paterson & Stripple, 2010) and social media (Sauter, 2014). Specifically, governmentality conceptualised as the "contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self" (Foucault, 1988, p.19), where those "technologies of the self" incorporate components of self-examination and confession (Foucault, 1988), is a productive theoretical device to make sense of how statements on greener living, as they are made in social media, are part of normalising systems that are the basis for the internalisation of values and which shape discourse and material engagements. This framing also underlines how the task of administration stretches

into the lives, bodies and practices of individuals in a way that has implications for where responsibility is situated.

In such an understanding of neo-liberalism as a regime built around market economy and the enterprise model as master categories that are instilled into how things are done on all levels and all the time (Foucault, 2008), policies, power and meaning are viewed as dispersed and as acting not just on, but also through individuals. It is in this sense a regime, a system of governing, which is at once totalising and individualising. With this in mind, the potential political meanings of greener living and of blogging or tweeting about it acquire additional complexity. Frameworks focusing on *governmentality* have been employed previously to understand the normative, controlling and self-controlling character of environmentally friendly living, as not least the term *green governmentality* (Luke, 1999) attests. In an interesting, more recent, take Matthew Paterson and Johannes Stripple (2010) specifically draw attention to the role of projects and project-like activities that are devised to enable people to "do their bit" to counter climate change, and situates those within a governmentality framework. They use the many ways in which individuals are encouraged to account for their own carbon output to show how, in neo-liberal market economies, power "operate[s) by shaping and producing individuals as particular types of subjects (managing their carbon budgets, etc.)", who manage and control their own doings according to internalised rules of government and marketplace. Specifically they also argue for the need to take these mechanisms underpinning the curious relationship between freedom and control, as captured in the notion of governmentality, seriously in a policy context as well.

A number of different concepts have been put forward to capture the political character that underpins choices and everyday life practices, as they are relevant to environmentally friendly living. Environmentally friendly or greener living often relates to decisions with ethical dimensions, which are then embedded in quite mundane practices of

everyday life (cf. Marres, 2012). For instance, fairly all-encompassing efforts like downshifting or attempts at self-sufficiency but also more modest changes related to consumption, transport or food, might be undertaken because of concerns regarding environmentally damaging consequences of global economic and socio-political structures. Yet these become tangible in ordinary practices of, for example, commuting, cooking or shopping (cf. Shove & Spurling (ed.), 2013). Different framings of how to connect the private and the public spheres that meet here have been advanced over the years (cf. Lury, 2011 pp.165-190). These are often framed in terms of a "lifestyle politics" (Bennett, 1998) and have tended to have a strong focus on consumption - as notions like "ethical consumption" (Lewis & Potter, 2011) or "political consumerism" (Michelletti et al., 2006) reflect - as well as on the significant role of individual choice in today's society as, for instance, the term "individual collective action" (Michelletti, 2003) suggests. Most prominently Anthony Giddens's (1991) *life politics* or Ulrich Beck's (1992) *subpolitics* together with his and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim's notion of *individualisation* (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), have informed these understandings to varying degrees. They have in common that they put the spotlight on the ethics of the personal, which although consisting of seemingly individual acts and private decisions, function as ways of engaging with - and shaping - social matters. They foreground how private life and seemingly mundane everyday actions - such as, in the case at hand, not buying out of season, showering less often, eating vegetarian, recycling and so forth - are socially structured and deeply political. To varying degrees they also work to make visible, and through this criticise, the transfer of the burden of risk to the individual in late modern society, as has been theorised extensively - not least by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002). Recently Noortje Marres (2012) introduced the notion of *material participation* in order to highlight *device-centred* aspects of participation. Writing in a tradition of Science and Technology Studies, but drawing on American political pragmatism

(Marres, 2012, pp. 28-58), she investigates the role of objects in the performance of public participation, specifically as it matters for sustainable living. In contrast to most other accounts of the material and everyday life politics of environmentally friendly living, she specifically also wants to consider the normative character of material forms of participations, yet without neglecting their liberating potential. It is interesting to remember that, aside from the materials written about in them and the devices needed to produce and consume them, blogs - and other social media tools - can themselves be conceptualised as such devices; devices which are enrolled in performances of participation when engaged to enact and reflect on practices of greener living.

Material/Technological Affordances and Environmentally Friendly Living

Social media have certain characteristics that make them especially suitable for a type of individualised awareness raising campaign that is increasingly common in the marketing of environmentally living, as exemplified in prominent campaigns such as *Earth Hour*, *Meatfree Monday* or *Buy-Nothing Day*. Two are especially important here. Both derive from the networked architecture of interconnected profiles and followers, which typically make up social media's underlying structure, in the form of a friends list or similar (e.g. Ellison & boyd, 2013). This supports, firstly, so-called viral distribution of content/updates and, secondly, it makes it easy for users to produce and share content with their connections or followers. Having said that different social media should not be thoughtlessly lumped together. Clearly they also differ from each other in important aspects. Blogs, microblogs, social network, photo, video sharing or audio distribution sites, although similar in important ways, differ in many other ways, concerning what is technically possible and not least which activities or which content are encouraged and rewarded. The latter is far from only a

technical question and makes it quite apparent how here, social, cultural and technical conditions collide and together have a bearing on information and meaning.

A theoretical tool for framing this collision of conditions comes with the concept of *affordances*, originally introduced by James J. Gibson (1979). The notion of affordances brings to the fore how specific settings and also tools afford opportunities for certain actions and make others, not necessarily impossible, but less likely. Social media have certain characteristics that privilege some forms of content over others. For example, a limit of 140 characters, as Twitter has, is not conducive to longer texts. While these quantitative measures do not preclude social orientations of media use and qualitative content, they still give rise to a specific way of writing and interacting based on an exchange of shorter notes. Likewise, status updates, blog posts, Instagram images, and so forth - at least in order to be successful in the context they are intended for - need to observe certain rules.

Recently, Ronald Day (2011) suggested operationalising the notion of affordances for the study of information use in order to escape technological and other determinisms, as well as cognitive approaches, while taking into consideration how social, cultural and physical objects are co-determined (cf. Rivano Eckerdal, 2011). Exactly this co-determination has earlier been in focus for a branch of information behaviour and specifically information literacy research. Here, the notion of affordances has often been used within a wider socio-technical framework to highlight how information literacies and behaviours are context and tool specific, yet constantly being re-negotiated in social situations (e.g. Rivano Eckerdal, 2011; Sadler & Given, 2007; Tuominen, Savolainen & Talja, 2005). It has even been drawn on within a practice theory framework in order to emphasise the non-generic character of information literacies (e.g. Lloyd 2006, 2010).

The idea of co-determination is fundamental to understanding affordances and is already present in Gibson's original description, where he writes:

> /.../ actually, an affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like. An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and the observer. (Gibson, 1979, p.129)

I consider specifically framings of affordances in relation to information and communication tools (e.g. boyd, 2010; Conole & Dyke, 2004; Ellison & boyd, 2013; Fragoso et al., 2012; Graves, 2007; Hsieh, 2012; Hutchby, 2001; Huvila, 2009; Jordan, 2009; Wellman et.al., 2003).

Ian Hutchby (2001, p. 206) underlines that "[t]echnologies for communication possess materiality not only in the physical sense but in the sense of their very conditions of possibility". He develops another important point, which Tim Jordan (2009) also notices, namely the realisation of affordances in the moment of an action:

> In this sense the uses and the 'values' of things are not attached to them by interpretative procedures or internal representations, but are a material aspect of the thing as it is encountered in the course of action. We are able to perceive things in terms of their affordances, which in turn are properties of things; yet those properties are not determinate or even finite, since they only emerge in the context of material encounters between actors and objects. (Hutchby, 2001, p.27)

This emergence of affordances in the moment of action can be seen to occur as a part of everyday practices, as Jordan (2009), in his study on hacking and power, suggests. This resonates also with Nicole Ellison and danah boyd (2013), who in their definition of social network sites start primarily from technical features and affordances, yet highlight that "affordances that define a social network site have become increasingly fluid" (Ellison & boyd, 2013, p.152) and, furthermore, the need to consider user practices and social implications of these practices.

In fact, the middle position between tool, use, social conditions and implications, is what distinguishes the notion of affordances from simply talking about, for instance, technical features and what makes it so useful for the study of information. Not only

to co-determine blogs' and microblogs' specific conditions for communication, connecting, collaboration and what can meaningfully be said, how and to whom, but affordances themselves can only be made sense of when seen in action and when put in relation to each other.

Project-Based Information and Environmentally Friendly Living

Social media, including blogs, microblogs, and social network sites, have become arenas for distributing information on how to live in a more environmentally friendly way and to raise awareness and have become sites for negotiations – fragmented and individualised – of what environmentally friendly living entails. Often this takes the shape of campaigns for encouraging or discouraging certain behaviours akin to those we know from viral or social marketing of products of services that circulate in social media (Haider, 2012; Merrick, 2012; Corner & Randall, 2011; Yeo, 2014). Prominent examples of recent campaigns, which also made their appearance in my material, include: *Earth Hour* (to save energy), the Swedish campaign *Anti Scampi* (to stop the selling and ultimately production of tiger shrimps), or *Buy-Nothing Day* (to curb over-consumption). Such a list could be made very long. What all these campaigns have in common is that they promote one simple action centred around material objects – switch-off the lights at a certain time, don't buy tiger shrimps and complain if you find them on menus, don't buy anything at all for one day –in order to change certain practices and more significantly in order to instigate behaviour change (Corner & Randall, 2011). Although not undisputed in their role as policy tools for engaging the public in environmental issues (Corner & Randall, 2011), social marketing campaigns of this sort contribute to making a broader issue visible (cf. Marres 2012; Patterson & Stripple, 2010) – in the above example the energy crisis, unsustainable production of shrimps and food in general

and overconsumption/production – and they also function as points of reference to convene around for those attempting more environmentally friendly living.

The following tweet is illustrative of this:

> *@karinsenvironment [3] "is a satisfied coffee break champion. Baked brownies, invited friends and reported our coffee break to #Fairtradechallenge [link]" (karinsmiljo, 2012 October 18).*

The tweet also included a link to an Instagram photo on another user's account, showing a vegan brownie as the accompanying text explains. *Fairtrade Challenge* is part of an awareness raising campaign by the organisation behind the *Fairtrade* certificate. People are encouraged to organise a coffee break with *Fairtrade* labelled products and to announce it on a special website, where it is then documented and made accessible together with all other coffee breaks through a Google maps interface [http://fairtradechallenge.se] at the same time as the hashtag *#Fairtradechallenge* collects tweets on the various coffee break events. The hashtag (#) used for organising tweets, and increasingly also other social media expressions, is especially suited for this type of engagement. It has the potential to cross-connect content and profiles or people and weave them into loose communities of interest and, at least in principal, it also makes content easier to find. Now campaign names include the # from the start, as, for instance, #byttilleko (#changetoorganic) by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation.

Interestingly it does not stop with projects tied to campaigns, but people also design their own projects based on challenges that suit their specific situations. They either use a campaign as a ready-made template to build on, draw inspiration from each other, or start an entirely new project from scratch (Haider, 2012). Popular examples amongst Swedish environment bloggers include *in-and-out lists* to control one's own consumption, *buy-nothing periods* of varying length and variations of *Meatfree Monday*. For instance, in one blog we can read the following:

> Yes this week's veggie report is nothing to be proud of. And this is I think also somewhat of the meaning with this entry, or – ehem not that there was a shortage of vegetarian food. There is already a category on this topic and there we have Meatfree Monday, but I have Harvest Monday instead … and I think I would like to eat vegetarian several times a week… so it must be Veggie Report as a category instead with a focus on getting more vegetarian meals during the week. (Bondjantan, 2012, August 12)

The blogger, *Farmer Lass*, in fact has a number of different theme days besides Harvest Monday around which the blog - as well as everyday life - are structured. Categories which can be accessed in the navigation bar include: "Wednesday: Reduce.Reuse.Recycle"; "Friday: Health and Well-Being" and "Sunday: Veggie Report".

Regardless of whether the project is ready-made and connected to a social marketing campaign, as the Fairtrade Challenge above, or home-made as in the latter example, information on a particular issue is tightly connected with - or even located in - certain material practices (Hobson, 2006; Marres, 2012). At the same time it is anchored in a social context that makes it meaningful and a technical context that makes it easy to share, comment on, archive, search and access.

Traversable Connections

I want to draw attention to one particular characteristic of many social media applications that was already introduced above and that we can now re-examine in the light of the notion of affordance, and the example above. The possibility to compile lists of contacts, friends, followers, profiles and the like and to make them - and the connections between them - public to varying degrees, constitutes not just the most characteristic technical feature that is typically used as a common denominator for definitions of social network sites (Ellison & boyd, 2007, 2012), and social media more broadly, but it can also be conceptualised as an affordance in the sense introduced above. Blogs are a special case since, for one thing, blog rolls, followers and other links are optional in them and this feature is not usually considered the most defining characteristic (Garden, 2012). Yet, as Ellison and boyd (2013, pp. 157-158)

also underline, with the introduction of template-based blog services early on blogs became, in fact, a precursor of what is now known as social media and even social network sites, precisely because of incorporating traversable and visible connections in the form of blog rolls and other followers. Hence, both microblogs and blogs afford traversable connections with other profiles, either in the same or on another platform.

For instance, on the blog tellingly called "It's easy being green" [*English in original*] by now over two years' worth of weekly in-and-out lists have been collected. The very first in-and-out list dates from November 2010 and it is introduced with a short text:

> Now I nick a really good idea from Voluntary Simplicity [link to another blog] and hereby start listing the week's IN:OUT. That is to say – what has left the flat and what has come into it. […] Shame that I start with this the same week that I broke my shopping stop! ;-) The list does not apply to consumables. (Pernilla/ekoenkelt, 2010 November 7)

One year and 52 lists later the blogger can proudly announce a negative result:

> IN:OUT for one year results in 480 belongings OUT and 320 belongings IN. I see a clear and distinct room for improvement! I am a bit disappointed because the last half year was worse than the one before, but enough complaining – an excellent chance for consuming even less. […] ?" (Pernilla/ekoenkelt, 2011, October 30)

The post received twenty comments by followers - including congratulations, encouragement and also questions by other bloggers who ask for advice on how to structure their own in-and-out list projects, or other projects for controlling consumption. We can follow their profile links and find new variations of the project as it travels between blogs. Usually it is manifested in the form of a tag or a category in the menu bar and each list contains more comments by followers congratulating, encouraging, sharing advice and experiences.

This leads to a further point which is relevant for the present material and that is how different social media applications tie into each other. Ellison and boyd (2013) talk about an increasing fluidity of affordances. They are not specific about it, but it seems to me that this also needs to be understood in the light of how social network sites and other social media become increasingly mashed-up and interconnected. Drastically formulated, this makes them each

other's affordances – at times. That is to say, connections traverse not just to other profiles, e.g. Twitter account to Twitter account and blog to blog, but also to other platforms, e.g. Twitter to blog, Facebook to Instagram and so forth. Content and connections are exchanged across platforms and given new meaning within new sets of different ranges of affordances. Although problematic in its literal likening of social media spaces with publics (cf. Fuchs, 2014), danah boyd's (2010) notion of *networked publics* is nonetheless useful here in that it locates the dynamics of technology in its affordances: "Networked publics' affordances do not dictate participants' behavior, but they do configure the environment in a way that shapes participants' engagement" (boyd, 2010, p.39).

Challenges and Self-Control

Connections with other profiles and users afford two things that are relevant for us – firstly, the possibility to share specific types of content and, secondly, visibility or publicness (cf. Batemen et al., 2010; Baym & boyd, 2012). These affordances are realised in everyday practices that actualise the possibilities and restrictions of tools in certain ways. One of the ways relates, I suggest, to control and specifically also to self-control. This chimes with Conole and Dyke's (2004, p.120) overview of affordances of ICTs for learning, where they include possibilities for surveillance and control, grounded in a disciplinary perspective on control. In contrast, in order to get to grips with the role of social media for people's writing about the practicalities of environmentally friendly living, the study at hand shifts the focus to self-control and governmentality and sees those as afforded by the networked visibility of social media.

"I suddenly felt it was a very long time ago that I challenged myself to reduce my environmental impact. Tips, anyone? #swgreen" (karinsmiljo, 2012, August 22) asks one blogger in her Twitter account. In her tweet she links to a longer blog post entitled "To

constantly challenge oneself" (Karin, 2012, August 22), where she develops the question somewhat and provides a link to a list of what she already does for the environment, called *My Environmental Choices* (Karin, n.d.). Here you find things like eating vegan, buying fewer clothes, bicycling to work, avoiding flying, recycling, buying second hand, avoiding chemical additives in beauty products, only showering every other day, using organic cat litter and so forth. She also questions the idea that it is difficult to live environmentally friendly in the way she does and asks readers to chime in with advice on how to actually challenge herself. On her blog she is advised to probably take even fewer showers and to recycle better and more by joining a particular recycling scheme which the commentator also works for. A Twitter follower of hers, after first writing some words of encouragement, recommends her to try a buy-nothing period.

What is visible here is, firstly, how social media tools are integrated with each other and, secondly, how they afford a certain type of engagement with each other, with the self and with the way in which we frame environmentally friendly living. It is presented as broken down into tasks which can then be complemented by other tasks in the form of mini-projects or challenges which can be easily communicated in a tweet or a blog comment, such as - in the above example - buy-nothing periods or joining a recycling scheme. What's more, they circulate and gain new meaning in different settings. For instance, years after the first comment was posted, one blog reader, posting under the name *Green Simplicity*, remarks on the above mentioned post "My Environmental Challenges": "I look for blogs with eco-inspiration and was happy when I finally found your blog" (Grön enkelhet, 2013, August 13). These public accounts of consciously challenging oneself to becoming better in diminishing one's "environmental impact" that explicitly want to engage others, make the political dimensions of this way of living more environmentally friendly quite palpable. In order to further highlight the synergies between the individualising technologies of the self and the

individualising affordances of social media, the next section examines how these types of material and informational engagements can be described through the lens of governmentality and the connected notion of self-formation.

In the light of this, it is interesting to return to the notion of environmentally friendly living as an individual challenge. As one blogger writes:

> The environmental challenge is simple on paper and difficult in practice. It started when JT got in touch because he felt that it was time we pulled ourselves together. I guess as a new father he had started feeling responsible for the future. His idea was simple: One environmental improvement per week. But how do you make one improvement each week if you already cycle to work, sort all your garbage and have already exchanged all the light bulbs for energy saving ones? Still, I accepted the challenge. Competition wasn't part of the idea. Just to spur each other on and to constantly improve. But the first week I lost by miles. (Miljöutmaningen, 2008, November 23)

This is the first entry in a blog tellingly called "The Environmental Challenge" and where over several years, although with at times several month long breaks, a blogger describes his different attempts (and failures) to improve himself and his lifestyle in a way that is considered environmentally friendly. Campaign specific projects feature in the blog as do various impact counters or self-tests and even others who take him up on the challenge.

Communication and information tools are complicit in shaping and controlling subjects in this way, as not least Foucault himself develops (e.g. Foucault, 2002). In recent decades this has become almost overly visible in television shows, including reality TV, docu-soaps or talk shows with the outspoken aim to better people and fix their lives - in the form of improving, for instance, their bodies, homes, pets or children (e.g. Oulette & Hay, 2008), at times even in the form of eco-makeover programmes (Craig, 2010). In web-based social media, which afford interconnected profiles and user-generated content and which are deeply embedded in the very fabric of everyday life, similar mechanisms can be seen at work from yet a new angle. As Theresa Sauter (2014, p.829) emphasises in a study of Facebook, the "techno-social hybridity of modern western societies shapes practices of self-formation",

yet as she also outlines in some detail, this is anchored in a long tradition of self-writing and self-control.

Sauter develops an understanding of how today's technologised practice of self-writing, as it exists in Facebook and other social media, is deeply rooted in a history of self-writing that goes back to antiquity, but how it is also specific to the ways in which in today's neo-liberal society people are expected to control their own conduct; to improve and work on themselves and to also perform their accomplishments and failures in public according to internalised rules. This perspective shifts the focus from the staging of identities to the formation of selves on social network sites (Sauter, 2014, p. 825). Hence, "[a]nalysing online self-writing can indicate what some modern western social norms are and how they are being followed and transgressed. The public availability of these self-inscriptions provides real-time insights into how people try to make sense of their lives and guide their conduct" (Sauter, 2013, p.825). In addition, I suggest, these "real-time insights" as Sauter calls them, can also be seen as information on, in the case at hand, environmentally friendly living - more specifically as depictions of possible ways of undertaking environmentally friendly living, shaped also by the affordances of tools with which they are produced and distributed.

Therefore it is not surprising that the reason to start greener living blogs or to report on such choices in other social media is often connected to displaying these choices and self-selected restrictions. The following example shows and also problematises this:

> [The energy] just doesn't suffice to move forward any environmental positions. We buy organic, recycle and avoid using the car just like always, but we never look outside the box and we trip over some of our good intentions. The blog is a representation of my bad conscience. Bad conscience for plastic party presents, fast food, electricity consumption. A bit like it probably is for most people – and a part of what was the reason for me to start this blog. But is this something to read about?" (Eva, 2011, March 15)

The blog has the telling name "To live moderately. An entirely normal family converts to a life that puts a little less strain on our common resources." Just the name is a clear indication of how understandings of the need for self-control form the discourse of environmentally

friendly living and the everyday lives of people, as well as how it is governed by notions of normality and moderation. The blog post reflects on such restrictions and, in its course, it also brings in the reader, the observer, as an active element which also shapes the process of self-writing. As has been obvious throughout publicness - however it might actually be realised in each individual case of use - is an important opportunity afforded by social media built into its basic functioning (cf. Bateman, Pike & Butler, 2010). The role of a public, imagined or not, for the process of self-formation as environmentally friendly citizens and ultimately of perpetuation and reproduction of control, comes into relief in this short reflection. Not surprisingly, the followers' comments are encouraging. Still, after two further blogs posts, the blog ceases to be updated. Yet it remains online. It appears in blog rolls and it remains searchable. As we have seen in earlier examples these blogs are deliberately used as sources of inspiration - in other words information, judged to be relevant and meaningful - on how to actually live in a more environmentally friendly way and, in due course, on what it is to be an environmentally friendly person.

Furthermore, although the underlying rationale of most of the set tasks and mini-projects people write about and reflect on is individualistic, we also see that it happens in networks of shared interest and of publicness - which can be seen as a form of online civic engagement. Specifically this is the case, I suggest, when pre-fabricated social marketing campaigns are hacked and turned into new mini-projects that travel between networked profiles and gain new meaning through constant re-negotiation, while working as points of reference for those connected and engaged.

Conclusions

Environmentally friendly living, as documented online, relates to ethical decisions that play out in practices relating to one's own body, to the family, to living spaces; often in the form of consumption and related to other media, products and 'ready-made' projects and challenges.

Buy-nothing periods, avoiding additives, not using anything made of plastic or keeping in-and-out lists to control consumption are common, as are set mini-projects that relate to various organisations' social marketing campaigns. The neo-liberal ideal of the enterprising citizen governing her own conduct (Foucault, 2008; Gordon, 1991) is articulated and in fact also challenged in blogs and other social media, which privilege marketing-inspired challenges, campaigns and projects. Social media and, in particular, blogs, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, have become important tools in this – often criticised (cf. Corner & Randall, 2011) – individualisation and self-administration of greener living, not least since this is often a main arena where environmentally friendly living and its administration becomes visible, is documented and circulates. Yet making visible through documentation means also engaging in and connecting to a larger setting, as well as tangible participation in the shaping and reproduction and also contesting of discourse on what it means to live in more (or less) environmentally friendly ways. Specifically, this has implications for the type of information that is available on greener living, which becomes even more acute when coupled with the affordances of social media.

For the purpose of highlighting some of the ways in which this happens the article provides glimpses of how people in Sweden articulate and make sense of their efforts to live more environmentally friendly in consumer culture, and how they self-manage their conduct for this goal. Expressions of self-control regarding environmentally friendly living practices in relation to social media use are traced and connected to the role of an individualised politics of the self, concerning an issue of global relevance, as environmental destruction is. Writing and posting pictures online expose both their own and their families' lives to public, or at least semi-public, scrutiny frequently, with the explicit aim of motivating and controlling themselves. In a terminology focusing on governmentality this can be framed, as I show, as an individualised politics of the self (cf. Paterson & Stripple, 2010), as a form of

conduct of conduct. Here, social media act as literal technologies of self-control and function as tools for keeping track of the shaping of bodies, houses, children, gardens and other components of everyday life in ways that suit images of an environmentally friendly life. Specifically, the way in which projects as individual acts of choosing to make a difference are performed publicly in social media is interesting, and can only be understood if we also consider aspects of control - and most of all self-control - that are, I argue, inscribed into the workings of these tools.

The article brings into sharp relief how material and technological affordances and the structures of governmentality work to engender a certain type of information on environmentally friendly living that is deeply rooted in the conditions of the web and also in a neo-liberal view of society structured around choice and individual responsibility. If we think of information as woven into the texture of the social on every level, including everyday life practices, then the tools used in such practices - for instance social media - shape the way in which information on environmentally friendly living is articulated, shaped and made meaningful. Hence at a more abstract level what comes into focus more clearly is how the materiality of informing is firstly social, and secondly an intrinsic part of information.

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Notes

[1] This was established based on a link analysis using the IssueCrawler tool: Available: http://www.govcom.org/Issuecrawler_instructions.htm (see appendix B for a visualisation of the link network)

[2] For another more quantitative analysis of the same material see Haider (2014) and of overlapping material see Haider (2012).

[3] All quotes are translated by the author. Since the blogs' names and Twitter handles are informative in themselves even these are translated into English.

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Appendix A

Blogs collected and followed

Name (original)	Name (english)	URL	Central in Issuecrawler direct link-network
Alla vill ha en bättre framtid	Everyone wants to have a better future	http://braframtid.blogspot.com/	
Bondjäntan	Farmer ass	http://bondjantan.blogspot.com/	x
Ekonördarna på lyckobacken	The eco-nerds on happiness hill	http://www.lyckobacken.se/	x
Ekostil	Eco-style	http://www.ekostil.se/	
Emelie i Resele	Emelie in Resele	http://emelieiresele.blogspot.com/	
Grön handling	Green action (or deed)	http://gronhandling.blogspot.com/	
Hippiehäxan	The hippy witch	http://hippihaxan.se/	
I will never give up	I will never give up	http://iwillnevergiveup.blogg.se/	
Frivillig enkelhet	Voluntary simplicity	http://frivilligenkelhet.se/	
Karins miljöblogg	Karin's environment blog	http://karinsmiljoblogg.blogspot.com/	
Köpstoppbloggen	Stop buying blog	http://notbuying.blogspot.com/	
Katarinas projekt	Katarina's project	http://katarinasprojekt.se/	
Lucas tankar	Lucas' thoughts	http://lucastankar.blogspot.com/	
Ylven	Ylven [name]	http://ylven.blogspot.com/	
36 organic m2	36 organic m2	http://36organicm2.blogspot.com/	
Hemma hos fru C	At home at Mrs C's	http://hemmahosfruc.blogspot.com	
Miljöutmaningen	Environmental challenge	http://www.miljoutmaningen.se/	
Mimmis mammaliv	Mimmi's life as a mum	http://www.mimmismammaliv.blogspot.com/	
Om livet på landet	On life in the countryside	http://omlivetpalandet.blogspot.com/	
Tagganer	The spikes	http://tagganer.blogspot.com/	
Theréz – several passions	Theréz – several passions	http://zereht.se/	
Ekomamman i stan	The eco-mum in the city	http://ekopyssel.blogspot.com/	
Vegofamiljen	The Vegie-family	http://vegofamiljen.blogspot.com/	
Ecocentrisk	Eco-centric	http://ecocentrisk.wordpress.com/	
Homeriver	Homeriver	http://homeriver.blogg.se/	
Fru Purjo fixar	Mrs Purjo is fixing	http://frupurjofixar.se/	

Terra Nova	Terra Nova	http://themarblefaun.blogspot.com/	
Ekomam	Eco-mum	http://ekomam.blogspot.com/	
I huvudet på en grön mamma	In the head of a green mum	http://www.gronmamma.blogspot.com/	
Gröna grenen	The green twig	http://www.gronagrenen.blogspot.com/	
Hellre hållbart	Rather sustainable	http://hellrehallbart.blogspot.com/	
It's easy being green	It's easy being green	http://ekoenkelt.wordpress.com/	x
Gelas hem och trädgård	Gelas home and garden	http://gelashemochtradgard.blogspot.com/	
Home on the range	Home on the range	http://homeonrange.blogspot.com/	
Hemmamammans liv	Life of the stay at home mum	http://hemmamammansliv.blogspot.com/	
Ett annat sätt att leva	A different way of living	http://ettannatsattattleva.wordpress.com/	
Ekosvensson	Eco-Svensson	http://www.ekosvensson.se/	
Att leva det levande livet	To live the living life	http://attlevadetlevandelivet.wordpress.com/	
Mindre prylar	Fewer things	http://mindreprylar.blogg.se/	
Att bli en eco-queen	To become an eco-queen	http://attblienecoqueen.blogspot.com/	
Min ekoresa	My eco-trip	http://ekoresa.blogspot.com/	
I'm falling in love with nature	I'm falling in love with nature	http://greenberrymuffin.blogspot.com/	
Harmonia	Harmony	http://harmoniamaria.wordpress.com/	
Livets hemlighet; Allt kommer att bli bra	The secret of life; All will be well	http://cillasaxplock.blogspot.com/	
Grön är det nya svarta	Green is the new black	http://grontardetnyasvarta.blogspot.com/	
Blauauge [german]	Blueeye	http://blau-auge.blogspot.com/	

Appendix B

Direct link network established with IssueCrawler, January 2012

(31 blogs are present as nodes in the network representation. The remaining 15 are too weakly linked to the others to show up as nodes)