Target Group Clients: Time Patterns in the Use of Internet Forums of Sex Workers' Clients ("Johns") in Germany

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Aim:

Prevention of HIV/AIDS and of STI primarily aims towards sex workers in Germany. But since their clients (johns) have set up internet forums for their "hobby" during the last decade, they have became a reachable target group for health education. Even though sex work is not illegal in Germany, little has been reported about the on- and off-line behavior of johns. Therefore, we have investigated whether there are certain temporal patterns in the use of German community based johns' forums, to understand their organization and patterns.
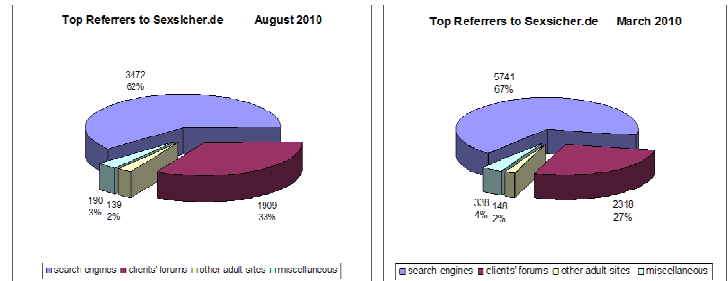
German community based forums:

Rheinforum
www.rheinforum.com

BORDELL COMMUNITY.COM
www.bordellcommunity.com

ROEMER FORUM.COM
www.roemerforum.com

sachsenforum
www.sachsenforum.com

Heißes Owl
www.owlforum.com

Ladies.de Erotik Online-Zeitung
partly commercial:
www.ladies.de

BW7
www.bw7.com

Methods:

Quantitative: We started with an analysis of the log file data of the internet project Sexsicher.de provided by the web server log file analysis program "Webalizer". Sexsicher.de provides information on sexual health for men and is closely connected to dozen major johns' forums, both commercial and community based. It generates 30% of its internet traffic through direct links ("referrers") within the johns' forums. In order to verify or falsify the findings in the Sexsicher.de data, we additionally analysed and compared log file data from a selection of four community based johns' forums with more than 10,000 registered users each. Finally, in order to crosscheck the Webalizer data, we ran an analysis with the program Google Analytics for one of the four forums.
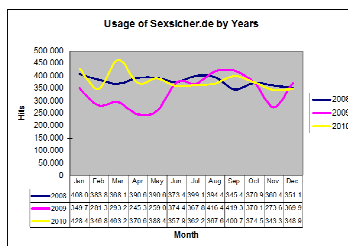
Qualitative: Afterwards and in order to interpret the data, we set up three focus groups: one of johns, one of female sex workers and one of HIV/STI-prevention experts.

Graphs: Transcription of Webalizer's referrer list data into an MS-Excel sheet
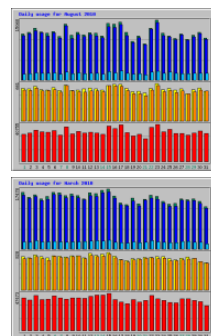
Results:

Monthly usage

For monthly usuage of johns' forums there is no clear pattern detectable.

Graph: Webalizer data transcribed by MS Excel
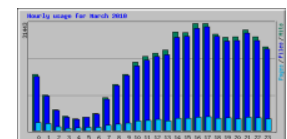
Daily usage

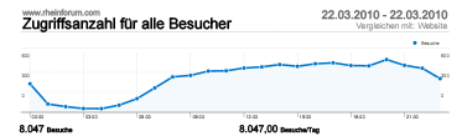Johns' forums are frequented most on Mondays and least on Saturdays.

Graphs: Webalizer

Hourly usage

Hourly usage of the forums shows a distinct peak between 4 and 6 p.m.

Graph: Webalizer

Graph: Google Analytics

Interpretation:

Focus groups of johns, sex workers and HIV/STI-prevention experts discussed the meaning and impact of the log file data results. They suggested:
- Johns try to follow up weekend experiences with pay sex (writing and reading reports) right after the weekend
- Johns plan the week ahead (coordination with business trips, fixing dates with sex workers)
- Johns visit their forums at their work place briefly before they leave the office or they visit them straight after arriving home

→ Thus, employment conditions would influence a relevant number of johns' forums users, e.g. by a workplace computer that is (not) monitored

Conclusion:

Focus groups suggested how the findings could be used for further aproaches in health education:
Sexual health experts reported "busy Mondays" (more calls and questions than on other days). They can schedule their own online activities (e.g. STI-prevetion interventions). Webmasters and admins of johns' forums are able to schedule activities like moderated chats and offer "Meet the Expert" sessions. Sex workers are able to prepare for johns' appointment requests.

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Reference: Langanke H. / Ross M.W.: Web-based forums for clients of female sex workers: Development of a German internet approach to HIV/STD-related sexual safety; in: International Journal of STD & AIDS 2009; 20:4–8.