

Attention as a scarce resource in an information based society

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Abstract:

According to Georg Franck and Michael Goldhaber we live in an “attention economy”. Bearing this idea in mind, currently the conditions for information access have totally changed. Our society has been characterised over the last centuries by a lack of information. Nowadays, we are confronted with information overload, which means that we have to select on a daily basis between information and non-information. Furthermore, as computer processing power increases by leaps and bounds, the processing power of the human brain remains relatively the same and cannot be increased in the same way. The technological structure is not the problem (e.g. telecommunications bandwidth), but the human bandwidth is. In this area of conflict, “attention” becomes the essential source for the recipient, as well as for the information providers (e.g. web-portals) who want to sell their advertising panels. This topic needs to be explored from different perspectives not just through the field of new information and communication technologies. Herbert A. Simon observed in 1971: „What information consumes is rather obvious: It consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it.”(Simon, 1971 cited in Beck, 2001, 22)

The citation above helps bring into perspective that the growth of the internet and related applications resulting from it are simply one aspect of this development, though an extremely important one. (Information-) Technology, in terms of the research of Wolfgang Hofkirchner is seen as the method of human activity within the context and use of an artificial instrument, has always been closely connected to attention. Attention can be seen as a basic requirement for information transfer and vice versa as their result.

Lit.:

Beck, Klaus (2001). Aufmerksamkeitsökonomie – die Funktion von Kommunikation und Medien. In: Beck, Klaus/Schweiger, Wolfgang. Attention please! Online-Kommunikation und Aufmerksamkeit. Verlag Reinhard Fischer, München.