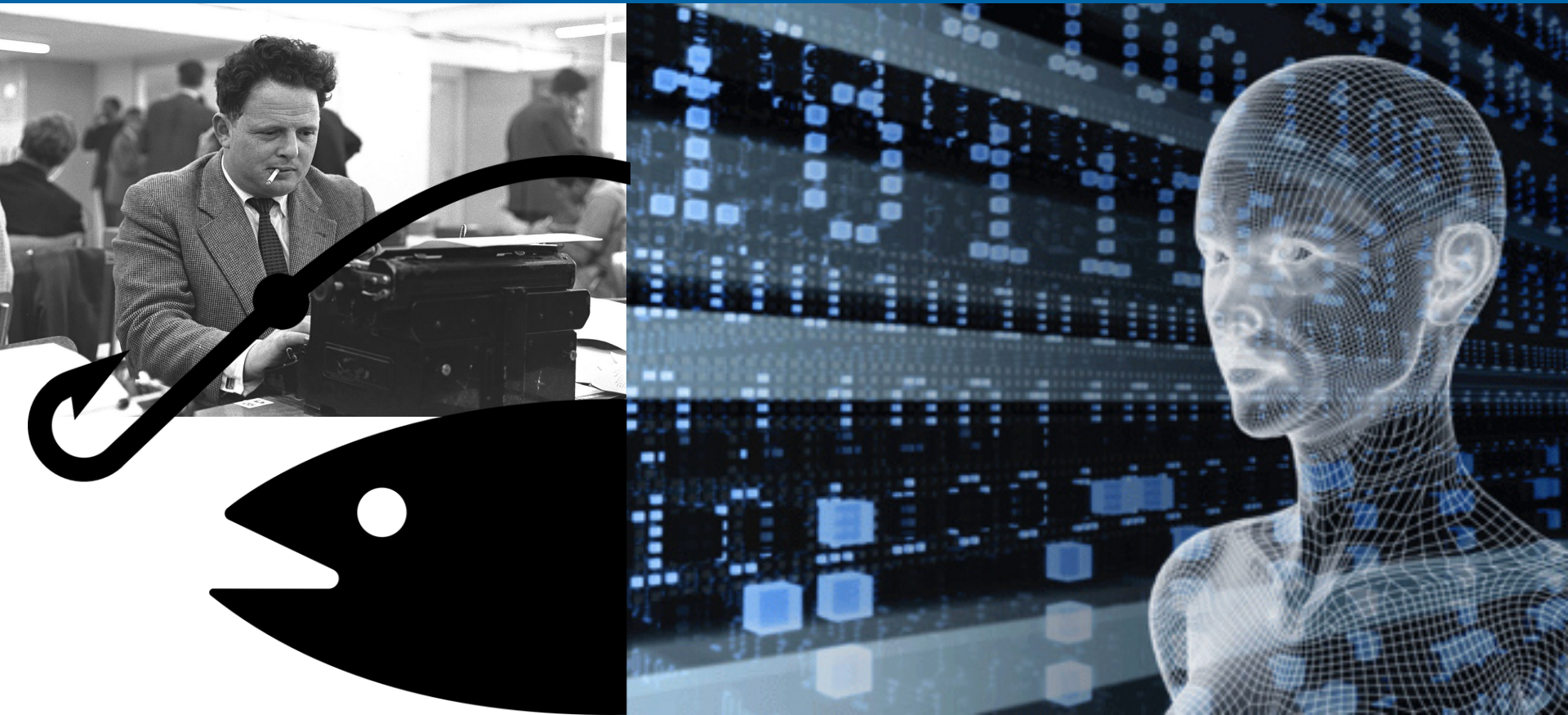


# The Filter Bubble of Journalism & its consequences

Michael-Bernhard Zita // May, 30<sup>th</sup> 2017



# I'm not a researcher, but a media literacy “activist” (I)

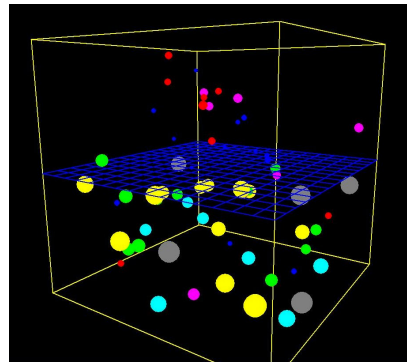
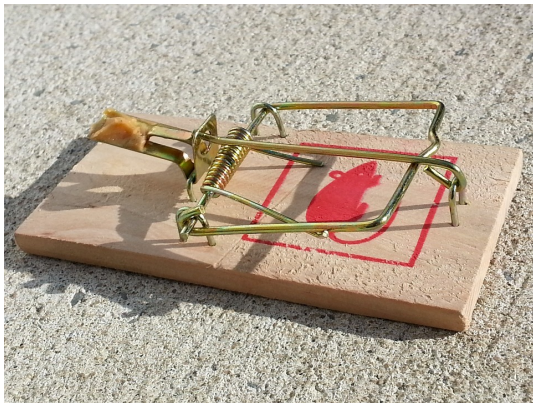
- Who am I?
  - A trained technician (“Technische Informatik HTL”/Technical College)
  - Worked
    - at a Web Agency for about 5 years (Text, Concept, Community & Project Management)
    - at the Student’s Union for about 4 years (Editor-in-Chief & Media Director)
    - at the University now for about 4 years (Tutor & Teaching Assistant)

## I'm not a researcher, but a media literacy “activist” (II)

- Who am I?
  - Now I'm a Project Manager for Media Literacy projects
    - Normative Position
    - MEDLIT: International Media Studies: Media Literacy as a Media Competence Program for Social Change (<http://medlit.univie.ac.at> / <http://medlit.vision>)
  - Still a student at the
    - Department of Communication &
    - Department of Development Studies

# The role of theory in the observation of the world

“It is the position from where we hunt.”



© Wikimedia (Free Art Licence)



© David Dugdale (www.rentvine.com)

There is a connection between question / what we want to achieve, theory and method.



WHY

WHY

Interpretation

## The function of this thought experiment / this lecture

- Connecting elements / theories
    - For the bigger picture
      - To understand
      - To better observe
      - To emancipate through
        - Knowledge
        - Ability to act
- } Media Literacy
- To create a “better” media use
  - To live in “better” media societies

A reason / theory driven approach

Normative

## Changes of Journalism

“Die Zeitungen haben früher das Niveau ihrer Journalisten gehabt und haben jetzt das Niveau ihrer Leser.”

Karl Kraus in the 1920s,  
according to the Web



Karl Kraus (Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain)

# Where news come from...

## (I) The last Millennium

- Social Determination
  - Journalist as Gatekeepers (News Factors & Agenda Setting)

Stuff media thought  
about their readers  
(Qualitative Data &  
Quantitative Overview)

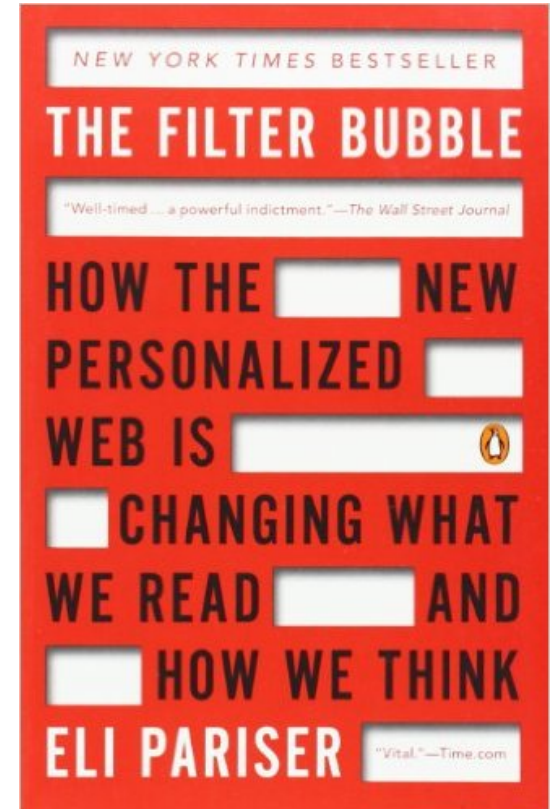
What people read

Optimization Strategy:  
Show people stuff that they like,  
so they buy the newspaper.

Sell a package people are willing to pay for

# The “Original” Filter Bubble

[https://www.ted.com/talks/eli\\_pariser\\_beware\\_of\\_online\\_filter\\_bubbles](https://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_of_online_filter_bubbles)

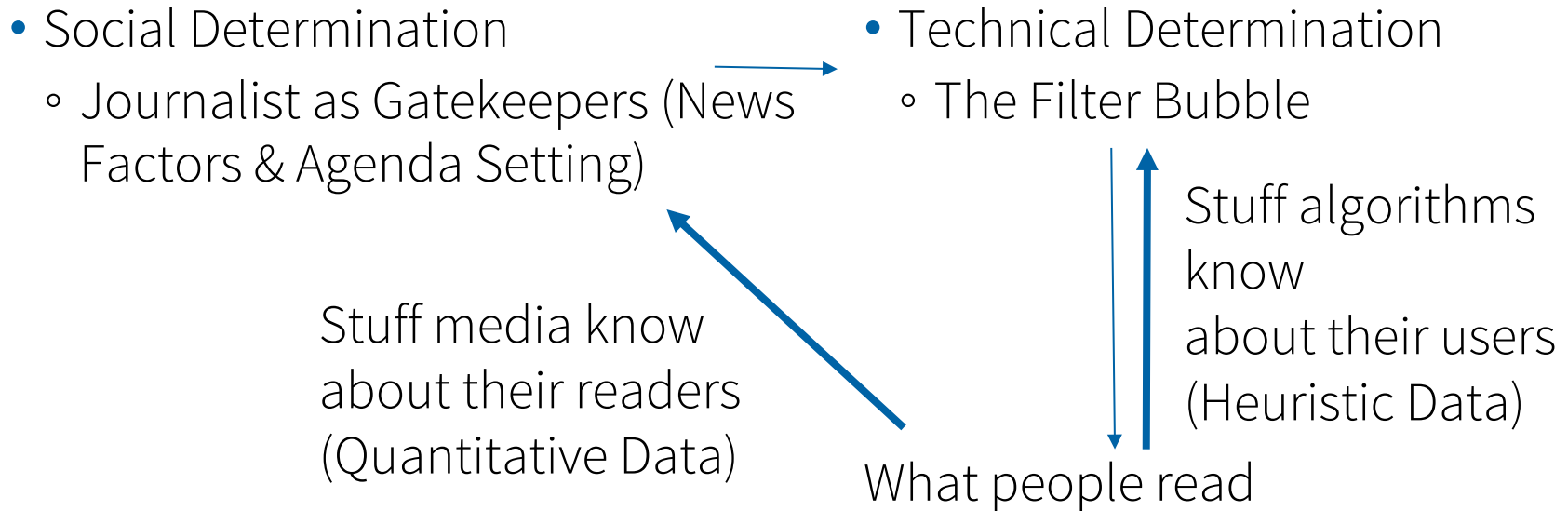


Pariser, Eli (2011): The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think



# Where news come from...

## (II) Welcome to the Web



**Optimization Strategy:**  
Show people stuff that they like,  
so they come more often and stay longer &  
get better ads served.

“It's the economy, stupid” (\$€£¥)  
Produce the content most people  
read



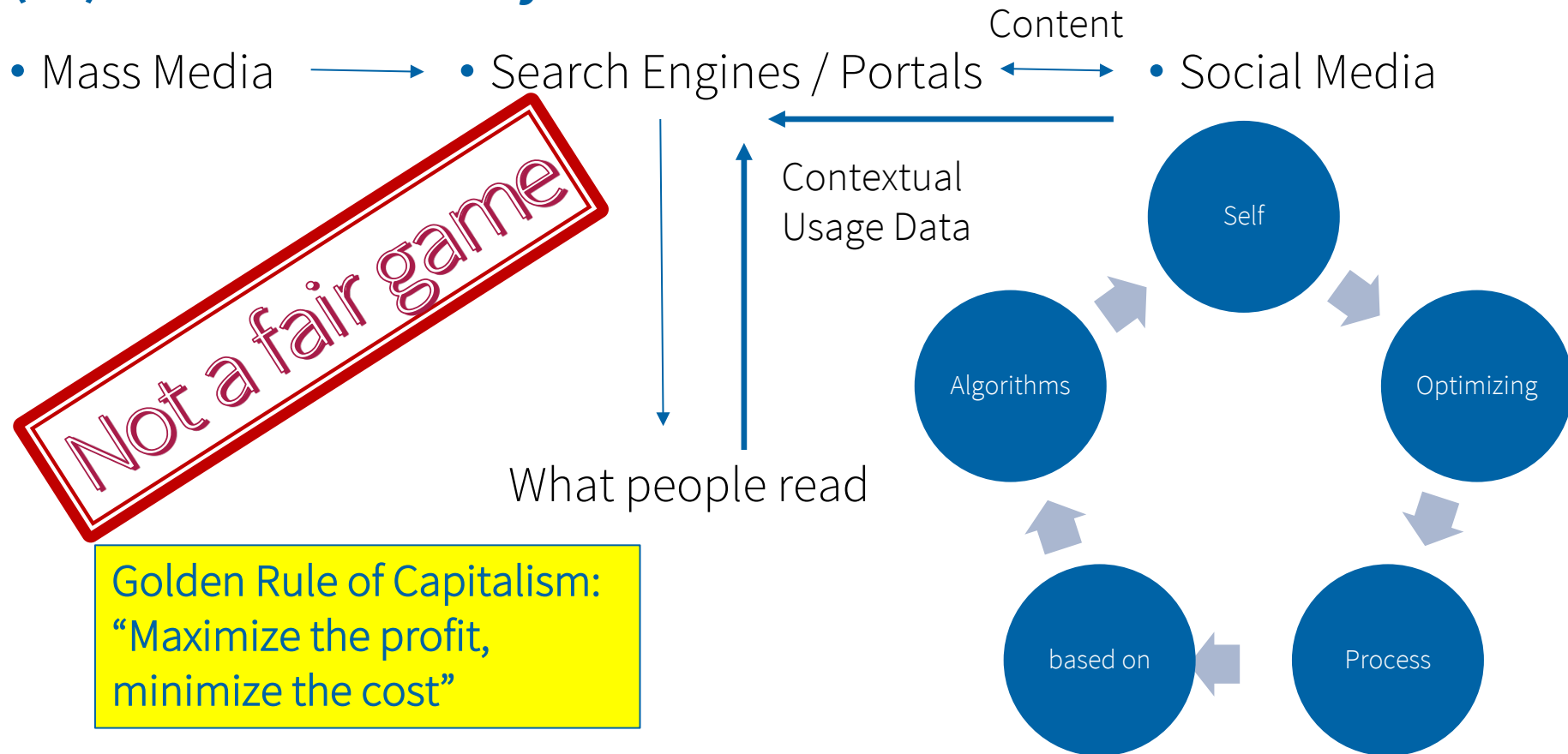
Change of  
Indicators

## How to handle Competition

- Between Media Facilities
  - be faster
  - be exclusive
  - have the better pictures
  - serve YOUR audience
  - make them come to you directly
- Search Engines / Portals
  - have it all
  - show the relevant &
  - all of above

# Where news come from...

## (III) The Invasion by Social Media



## What should media do now? (I)

Optimization Strategy I

Do the same as before,  
but save costs

Effect

Let Journalists Go  
Make them work more  
→ Decline of Quality

Optimization Strategy II

Find other sources of revenue  
for instance more Advertising

Effect

New Dependencies  
“unsafe” topics  
→ Decline of Quality  
→ Ad-Blockers / Unhappy Users

## What should media do now? (II)

New Business Models I

Free Media with  
Content People Love

Effect

More Advertising Needed  
New Dependencies

but

The Power of the Yellow Press  
Campaign Journalism

Return of the “blackmail” journalism  
or nicer said

“You pay, we are happy to report.”

→ Decline of Quality

## What should media do now? (III)

New Business Models II

**Pay Wall**

Effect

Less Users, but more revenue

(+) New York Times,  
but can every media facility be like NYT

(–) Failed Experiments  
Pay Walls don't work, we are doomed,  
Back to Optimization

→ **Model for the 1%**

Option of slow, natural growth



## What should media do now? (IV)

New Business Models III

Line Extension

Effect

Sell more of the brand

(+) Great New Journalism  
New but also recycled but  
recontextualized journalism

(-) More of the Same  
No clear profile of media

## What should media do now? (V)

New Business Models IV

**Find New Business**

Effect

No Media House anymore

(+) Indirect profitability

(+/-) Leave the field of Journalism

(-) Journalism is just a product

## What should media do now? (VI)

Stay on Course

Invest in Business

Effect

High Costs, better Quality

(+) Sustainable Business Model

→ Model for the 1%

(-) Burning Money

→ Need for a patron or

→ Crowd-Funding / Pay in Advance

(+/-) New Special Interest Media

→ Very Focused / Less Impact Media

→ Same Challenges in Case of Growth

## What should media do now? (VII)

Reciprocity

(Re-)Discovery of the  
Reader / User /  
Community

Effect

New methods of News Creation and  
Consumption

(+) Bring the users back to the News Facility

(-) Give the wrong users an audience

(+/-) Listen to an Echo Chamber

(+) Sustainable, if large enough

(-) Polarization

## What should media do now? (VIII)

Media Regulation

Change the rules

Effect

Change the rules for (new) competition

Examples:

- Leistungsschutzrecht
- Change of Copyright Rules & strict punishment
- Make algorithms public
- Competition Law
- ...

# What others do? (I)

## Citizen Journalism

(Quality) Journalism but by normal citizens

(+) (Become) Experts

(+/-) Highly motivated

(+/-) Not Neutral / Objective

(-) Not sustainable on its own

Options:

- A. Become regular media
- B. Self-Exploitation
- C. Connect with Regular Media
- D. Disappear
- E. Become Social Media Entrepreneurs



## What others do? (II)

### Social Media Entrepreneurs

Produce Content for the Social Media Market

(+) (Become) Experts

(+/-) Highly motivated

(+/-) Not Neutral / Objective

(-) Not sustainable on its own

Options:

- A. Become regular media
- B. Self-Exploitation
- C. Connect with Regular Media
- D. Disappear
- E. Acquire enough Advertising / New Dependence
- F. Become successful Entrepreneurs with other products

## What others do? (III)

### MediaTechs & Digital Assistants

Other Players especially focus on the use of Artificial Intelligence in the media business

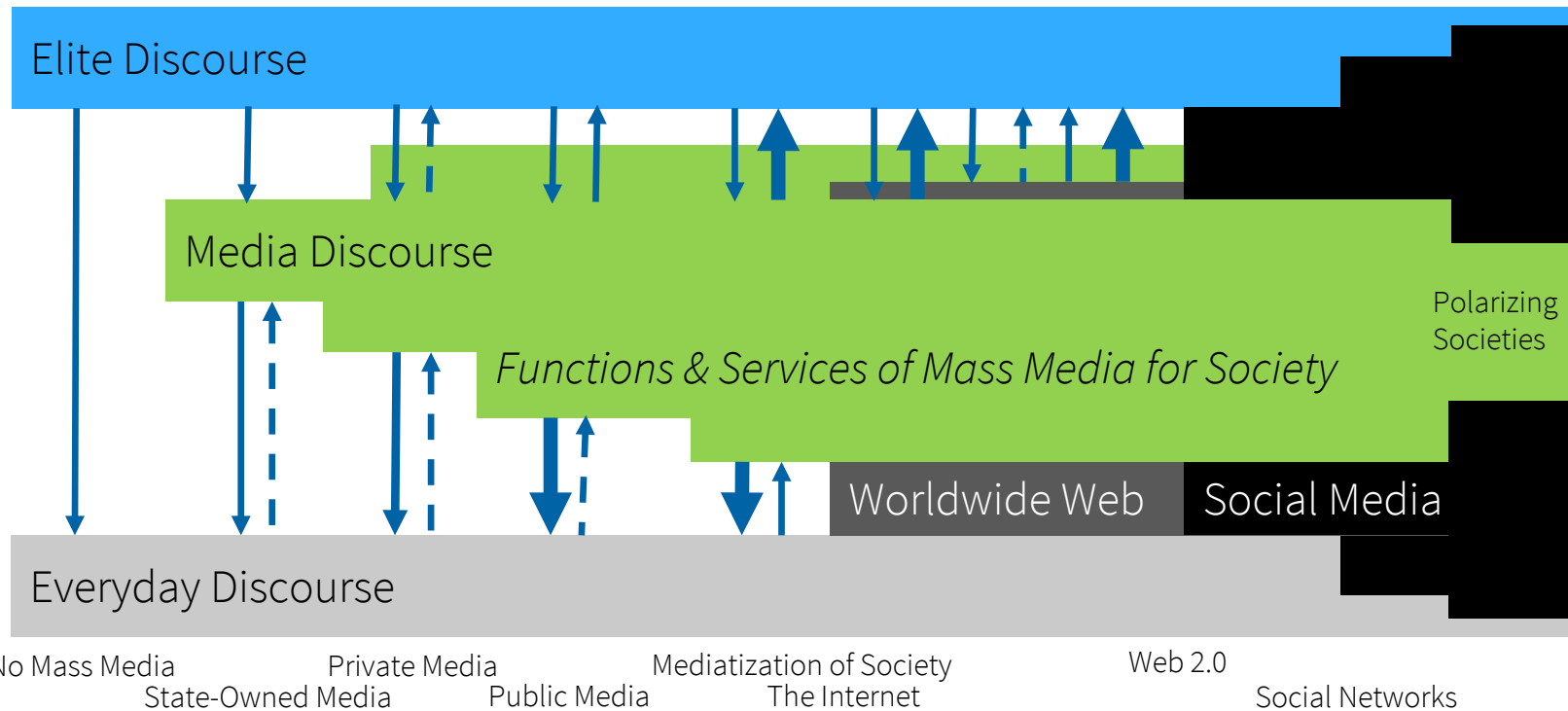
Examples:

- Robo-Journalism, especially for recurring news (Finance & Sport)
- News-Apps with Twitter-like-News-feeds (Newsbits)
- Chat-Bots, you can speak with and get more information if you want
- Digital Assistants that collect information and process it
- ...

# What's the difference between Mass Media and Social Media? (I)

## 1. Looking at the Interaction between Level of Discourse

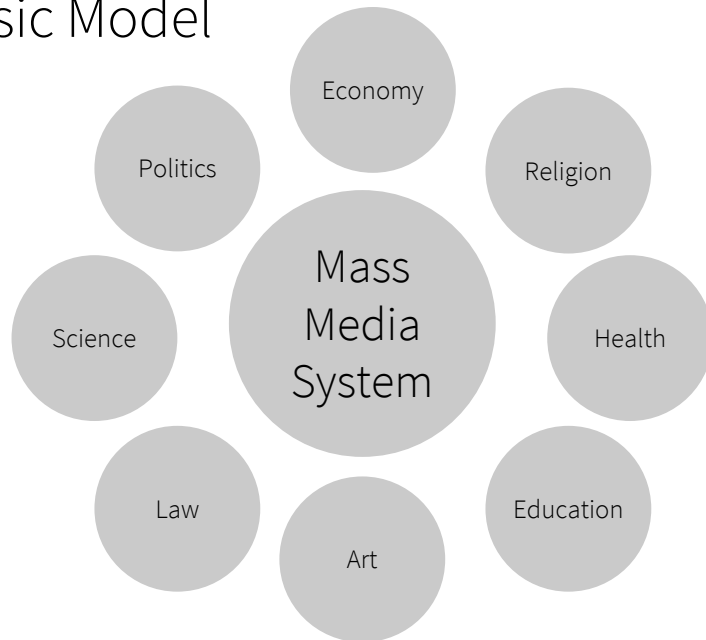
Filter Bubble & Echo Chambers



# What's the difference between Mass Media and Social Media? (II)

## 2. Looking from the System's Theory

### (I) Basic Model



The Role of Mass Media is to give the other function systems the possibility to communicate to each other

Communication means Observation

Translation is an act of Transformation

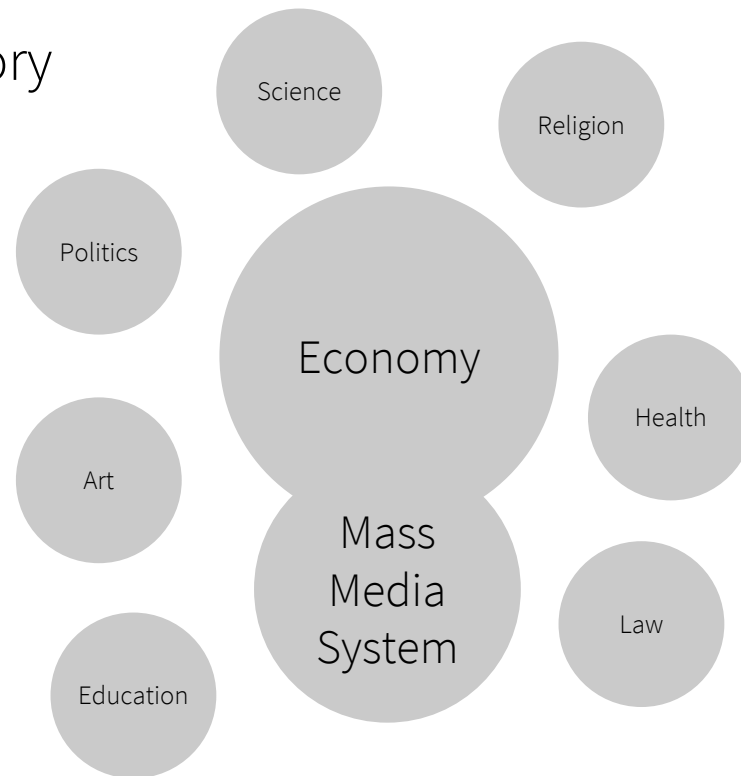
Every Systems stays within its own Logic ("Sinn") and Rules (Autopoiesis)

Societal Function-Systems according to Luhmann

# What's the difference between Mass Media and Social Media? (III)

## 2. Looking from the System's Theory (II) Capitalistic Society

In an capitalistic society the Question of cost and efficiency makes Economy always a central system that either constitutes an hybrid function system of mass media and economy OR: install the question of cost and efficiency as a sub-code in any function system.



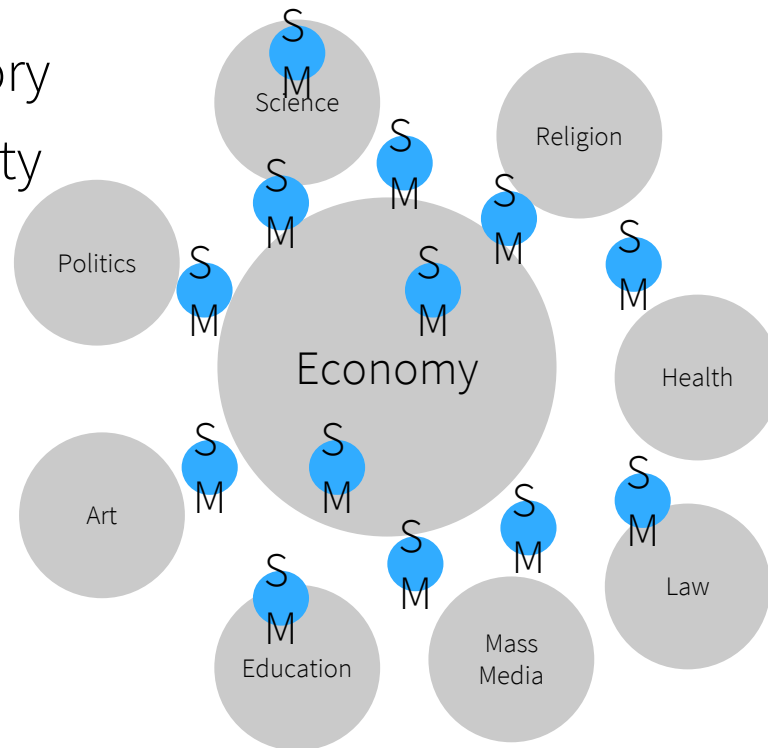
My personal view on the current differentiation

# What's the difference between Mass Media and Social Media? (IV)

## 2. Looking from the System's Theory (III) Capitalistic Social Media Society

Without a centralized process of observation (“trust”) the interconnection and the shared functionalization of society is broken

According to different theories a new balance will occur on its own (Self-Organization), as there is always a need for the reduction of complexity



But the open question is: How long will it take and what reach will the “linked” systems have?



## The filter bubble of Journalism (I)

- Journalism & Media had a central role in Society (Fourth Power)
  - To limit its power guidelines / codes, where in place (Self-Organization)
    - “Trust in Media” was the central interconnecting code
    - A historical developed process (What is news? How should it be reported?), made it trustworthy
- But no system is perfect
  - Journalists stayed within their communities / with the elites, with the consequence on not reflecting the entire society anymore
  - Especially economical and political groups always tried to limit the power and influence of journalism

## The filter bubble of Journalism (II)

- But with the arising of the Internet and especially Social Media (Mediatized Everyday Communication) the role of Mass Media itself started to crumble
  - Different reasons
    - Technological-determined: Filter Bubble, Echo Chambers,...
    - Economical-determined: New Competition and failing of Copyright
    - Social-determined: No trust in the Elites, especially when they are taking stuff away / don't protect the Status Quo
    - Not the fastest source of news anymore
    - Not comprehensive and profound enough as a singular news source
    - Education-determined: Not enough (Media) Literacy
    - ...

**thank you for your attention & interest,  
I hope I have raised your awareness**

Michael-Bernhard Zita // [michael.zita@univie.ac.at](mailto:michael.zita@univie.ac.at)

---

# Open Question: Where will we get our news from in the future?



## Conclusio

- We don't know which of these cases and developments will be successful, but it is very probable that it will be a combination of the presented models and it is pretty sure that the media system will change.
- Without further education and especially action on societal but also individual level, we will face a divided society. This especially includes:
  - Different levels of access to media and information
  - Further segmentation / polarization of society
- My personal suggestion: Future efforts should focus on the maintenance of the function and role journalism has in society but not on the current structures