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The Networked Public Sphere

Internet and Democracy

21 June 2008: Session III

Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaften
Universität Bonn

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Coming up …

1. ICT implications for democracy
2. „technologies of freedom“
3. *Monica: The Daily Me*
4. lunch break (~12 noon)
5. Old and new elites
6. *Romy: Counter-public spheres*
7. Gatekeeping on the Internet
8. Filtering and control online
9. Summary discussion
10. ends (4.30pm)

Summary

- democracy as people making the decisions, either direct or indirect
- need information in order to do this
- public sphere provides information and space to discuss, (reach agreement) and take action
- ICTs transform public sphere and offer opportunities for more participation and maybe even more direct democracy

Features of public sphere

• traditional public sphere	• networked public sphere
• one-way / broadcast	• one-2-one & broadcast / interactive
• high communication costs – limited bandwith – selection bias / gatekeeping	• low communication costs – information abundance – access to audience / visibility – pluralistic / unmediated information
• producer-consumer distinction – passive audience – hierarchy	• shift consumers to producers – active users – horizontal / equality
• time and space constraints – national – news cycles / synchronous	• no time and space constraints – transnational – always on / asynchronous

Implications for democracy

eVoting and opinion polling

forum for discussion and deliberation

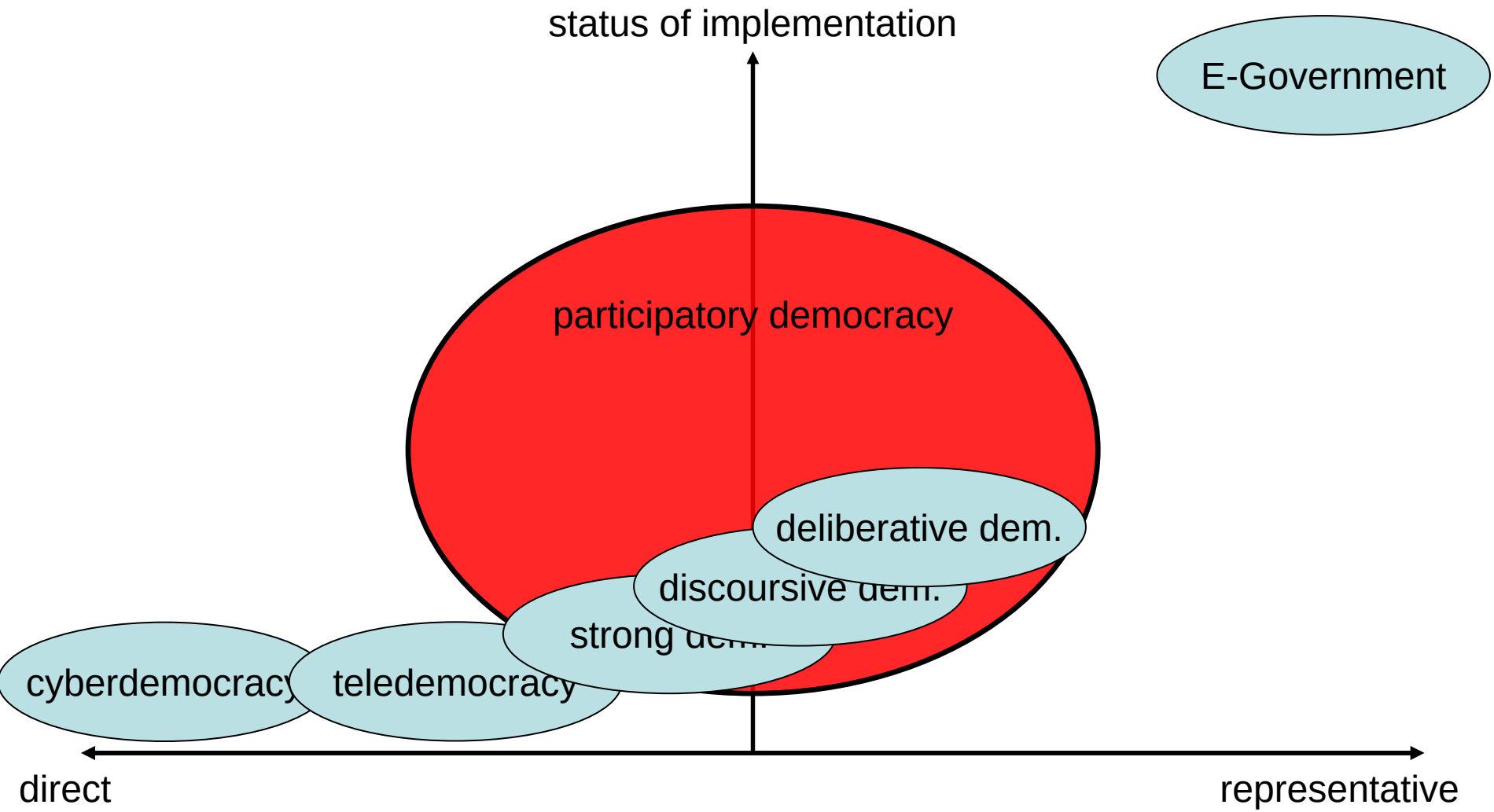
accountability by direct link to representative

peer production / self organisation

better access to gov services

arena of free speech / plurality of information and opinions

Which (e)Democracy?



Which (e)Democracy?

- cyberdemocracy
  - *"The two dreams of this virtual class mix in the Cyberdemocracy concept: the dream for true democracy, generally understood as direct, selfempowered citizen government, and the dream for material wealth, the individual pursuit of happiness (generally measured in dollars and stock values)."* (Hagen 1997)
- teledemocracy
  - *"Using advanced computers, satellites, telephones, cable, polling techniques, and other tools, an educated citizenry can, for the first time in history, begin making many of its own political decisions"* (Toffler 1980:430)
- strong democracy
  - *"a democracy that reflects the careful and prudent judgement of citizens who participate in deliberative, self-governing communities*" (Barber 1997)
- deliberative democracy
  - *"Despite their differences, these deliberative democrats all agree that democracy should be more than just a process for bargaining and aggregation of preferences. All suggest that true participation requires citizens to engage in direct discussion with other citizens."* (Hindman forth)
- discoursive democracy
  - *„Jeder soll an der Kommunikation teilnehmen dürfen und jedes Thema soll behandelt werden können. Zwischen den Teilnehmern soll Gleichheit herrschen und nur die Kraft des besseren Arguments soll im herrschaftsfreien Diskurs zählen."* (Habermas)
- E-Government
  - use of ICTs for government processes and citizen-government interactions

Which (e)Democracy?

- explicit model not so important
- broadly participatory, based on opportunities of networked public sphere
- some baselines
  - discourse
  - deliberation
  - inclusive
  - public
  - no particular interests but common good

„technologies of freedom“

- email
- discussion boards
- mobile phones

- Web 2.0 as
  - user-generated content
  - collaboration & sharing
- blogs
- wikis
- social networks
- photo and videosharing
- mash-ups
- screen scrapers
- standards / Advanced Programmable Interfaces (APIs)

Basic effect assumptions

mobilisation

- empowerment
- + political participation
- direct link to representative
- free speech
- deliberation
- ...

reinforcement/normalisation

- digital divide
- fragmentation
- further social biases
- information overload
- continuing dominance of traditional elites (media, politicans)
- surveillance and control
- ...

Calling at: pluralism

- **networked public sphere**

- one-2-one & broadcast / interactive
- low communication costs
  - information abundance
  - access to audience / visibility
  - pluralistic / unmediated information
- shift consumers to producers
  - active users
  - horizontal / equality
- no time and space constraints
  - transnational
  - always on / asynchronous

- interaction between users
- deliberation
- more information
- more points of view

- isolated communities of interest
- echo-chambers
- polarization

Daily Me

- Cass Sunstein: Republic.com
- democracy depends upon diversity of opinion
- communities of interest as echo chambers?

image source: Salon.com

Reasons for fragmentation?

- homophily: “birds of a feather”
- diminish dissonance
- seeking reinforcement
- social pressures to conform to majority opinion

Calling at: equality

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- equality of users
- distributed attention
- empowerment

- same old elites
- continuing media power
- offline resources

Old and new elites

- new center-periphery, determined by
  - online features (e.g. linking)
  - offline resources (status, reputation, etc)
- Hindman (forth):
  - analysis of top bloggers
  - *"With only one exception, all of the bloggers in our census [75 A-list bloggers] were either educational elites, business elites, technical elites, or traditional journalists"*
- Gonzalez-Bailon (2007):
  - link analysis, research on organisations
  - *„Organisations that are richer, older, and with a better access to offline media are the most central on the web"* p25
- Koopmans & Zimmermann (2003):
  - search engine results, newspaper content analysis
  - non-institutional actors have more visibility online but still much less than institutional actors (e.g. mass media)

Reasons for elites?

- (media) access and literacy required
- ease of publishing leads to more competition
- orientation function

Calling at: Counter-publics

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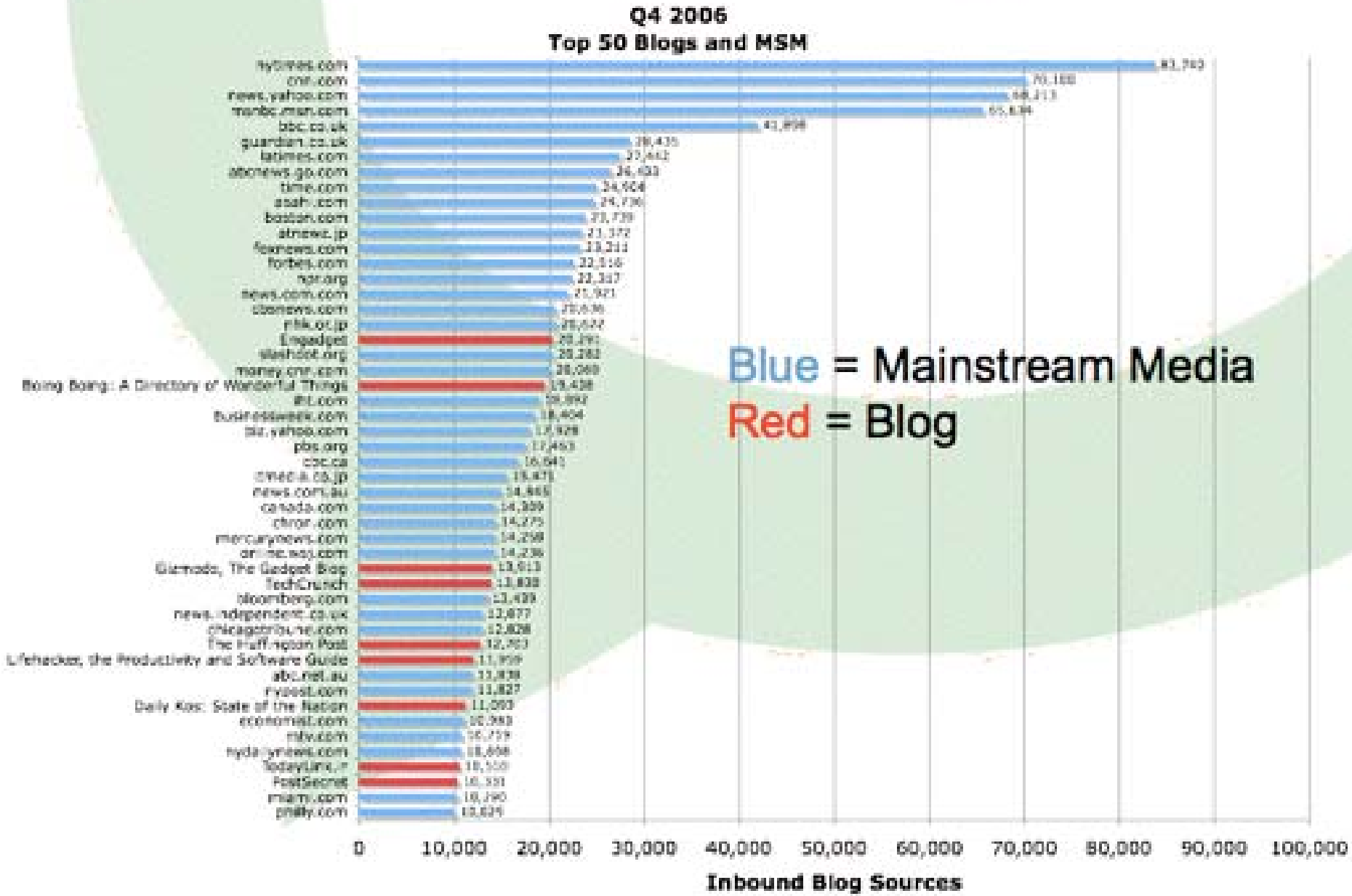
Technorati


Q4 2006
Top 50 Blogs and MSM
nytimes.com
cnn.com
news.yahoo.com
msnbc.msn.com
bbc.co.uk
guardian.co.uk
latimes.com
abcnews.go.com
time.com
washpost.com
boston.com
atnews.jp
foxnews.com
forbes.com
npr.org
news.com.com
cbsnews.com
nhk.or.jp
Engadget
slashdot.org
money.cnn.com
Boing Boing: A Directory of Wonderful Things
ft.com
businessweek.com
biz.yahoo.com
pbs.org
cbc.ca
news.com.au
canada.com
chron.com
mercurynews.com
Gizmodo, The Gadget Blog
TechCrunch
bloomberg.com
news.independent.co.uk
chicagotribune.com
The Huffington Post
Lifehacker, the Productivity and Software Guide
abc.net.au
Daily Kos: State of the Nation
economist.com
nytimes.com
PostSecret
miami.com
philly.com
Blue = Mainstream Media
Red = Blog
0
10,000
20,000
30,000
40,000
50,000
60,000
70,000
80,000
90,000
100,000
Inbound Blog Sources

Counter-publics?

- not counter but complementary
- provide commentary
- rarely initiate stories but CAN happen
- usually small audiences, limited budget
- successful blogs still rely on mainstream media
- bloggers often traditional elites
- content?

Calling at: unmediated information

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- free speech
- open access
- „publish, then filter“

- gatekeeping
- increased surveillance
- filtering

Gatekeeping

- Hindman (2003): Googlearchy
  - inlinks as proxy for visibility
  - *„Googlearchy - the rule of the most heavily linked - is the predominant feature of online political information“*
  - *“New media, like the old, still displays extraordinary concentration of attention on a few sources of political information”*
  - most of the top sites host quality content from established sources, little grass root sites
- new gatekeepers
  - search engines
  - blogs (e.g. slashdot effect)
  - user recommender systems (e.g. Digg, eBay)

Rationale for gatekeepers?

- unlimited bandwitdh vs. limited attention span
- need for orientation
  - for interesting content
  - for trusted content
- democratic gatekeeping?
  - Digg

Filtering & Censorship

- paradox of law enforcement online
  - legally hard due to limit of national laws
  - technically rather easy due to infrastructure (e.g. TiVo vs Echostar case)
- two main ways of filtering
  - at source (e.g. cease and desist, Google)
  - at destination, (e.g. via ISP)
- filtering as tool of censorship
  - e.g. political, sexual, religious sites in China, Iran, Saudi-Arabia
  - but also e.g. hate speech in Germany
  - for more information see OpenNet Initiative (opennet.net)

Rationale for filtering/control

- some filtering or control (might be) necessary
  - child porn
  - credit card fraud
  - online piracy
  - hackers
- creativity vs. security
  - for an interesting discussion, see Jonathan Zittrain (2008)

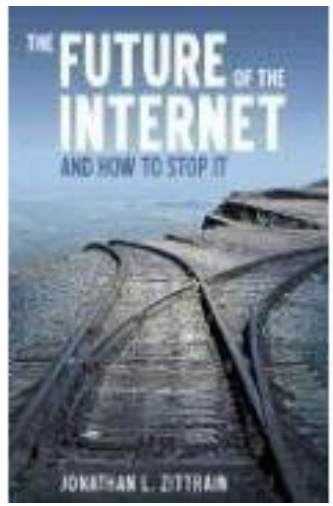

image source: Amazon.com

Summary discussion

- mobilisation vs. normalisation thesis
- prepare a brief statement (5mins max) outlining what you think applies

The End

see you Friday, 11 July at 4pm ☺

References

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