

## ECONOMY OF ATTENTION: POSSIBLE STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL-PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to formulate possible strategies of social-philosophical analysis of the idea of "economy of attention". The article provides a brief overview and analysis of existing definitions. The main result of this work is the formulation of four main strategies for the study of the economy of attention in the framework of socio-philosophical discourse: political-economic strategy, socio-symbolic strategy, existential-anthropological strategy and communicative strategy. The first continues the line of marxism and considers attention as an economic resource and commodity. The second reveals attention as a factor of symbolic consumption and self-determination in society, as a factor of hierarchical division of society.

**Keywords:** economy of attention; media; consumerism; WEB 2.0; attention deficit.

### 1 Introduction

The economy of attention is a concept that is almost ignored by modern philosophical academic tradition. At the same time, this issue is considered in many other contexts, for example, in the framework of the theory of journalism (Dekalov, 2017), (Birjukov, 2016), economics (Kozyrev, 2019), philology (Pochepcov, 2017). A moderate amount of papers on this topic can be explained by the presence of competing terms "digital economy", "knowledge economy", "information economy", etc. We will try to consider the prospects of his philosophical analysis of the concept and concept of "attention economy". What is attention economy?

The term is attributed to Michael Goldhaber, who introduces it in a 1997 article (Golghaber, 1997). His main thesis is the interpretation of attention as a limited economic resource, the production and consumption of which gives rise to special economic relations that are qualitatively different from production and consumption in their classical sense. The main competition today is not for the goods, but for the attention. This, from the point of view of Goldhaber, should lead to equalization and smoothing of economic inequality: despite the presence of "stars" and "fans", almost everyone has access to public attention (social networks and new media).

Along with Goldhaber, he usually distinguishes three more theorists of the "attention economy": Esther Dyson, Herbert Frank and Tim Wu. Herbert Frank (Frank, 1999) takes a more restrained view of the prospects for the development of an attention economy. His main idea can be considered the merger of money and attention, their mutual expression through each other. Attention is not a commodity, but a "universal equivalent" of goods in which their value is measured. As an example, he cites a system for evaluating scientific works, which is tied to citation: the more my article is quoted, the more valuable it is. He suggests understanding social media as a system of accumulation and distribution of attention, similar to the banking system as a system of accumulation and distribution of money. Tim Wu (Wu, 2017) considers the processes of monopolization of attention. He introduces concepts such as "theft of attention" when a corporation spends enormous resources on creating technologies that attract attention: from the rules of window dressing to choosing the color and font of the "buy" button (Holsen, 2009).

D. Smythe already in the 1950s began talking about the production of an "audience" as a product for media advertisers. There is a blurring of the boundaries between the "working" time of a person and the "free": during the day I work as a proletariat, in the evening as an audience. Man turns out to be exploited permanently, 24/7.

Thus, the following can be considered the main provisions of the attention economy:

1. Attention is a limited resource around which a modern economy is being built around production and consumption (Goldhaber)
2. Attention is a "final value" that can measure other benefits like money. (Franc)
3. Monopolization and industrialization of the economy of attention, the division into "stars" (produced by a special industry, "factory of stars") and "fans". (Wu and Goldhaber)
4. "Exploiting" a person as an "audience" and "stealing attention" (Wu and Smythe)

Since the problem is relatively new, all studies are more an attempt to identify and describe the phenomenon than to analyze. The problem discovered at the intersection of economics and journalism (media) is described in the methodological framework of the relevant disciplines. We will try to outline possible directions of precisely the socio-philosophical problem of the phenomenon.

### 2 Methodology

The article provides a brief overview and analysis of existing definitions and developments. The main goal is to formulate the main strategies for studying the economy of attention in the framework of socio-philosophical discourse, we have proposed the following areas: political-economic, social-symbolic, existential-anthropological. The first continues the line of Marxism and considers attention as an economic resource and commodity. In the framework of this approach, the concepts of goods, resources, production, overproduction, and consumption are used.

The second considers attention as a factor of symbolic consumption and self-determination in society, as well as a factor in the stratification of society. Here such concepts and concepts as symbolic value, symbolic consumption, production of differences will work. The third approach considers attention as an essential characteristic of a person the ability to voluntarily concentrate attention and objectification. Important concepts here are information, intentionality, perception, mental action.

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Political Economy

The terms "information economy" and "attention economy" can be understood not as different ways of describing, but as a stage in the development of a phenomenon. The crisis of overproduction of the beginning of XX turns the economy of production of supply in the economy of production of demand. Similar to this process, the overproduction of information at the beginning of XXI entails the production of attention. Attraction of attention is initially part of the production of demand for a product, for example, part of an advertising campaign. So, for example, the concept of a "sales funnel", which has existed for quite some time, suggests attention as the first stage of work with a potential buyer. But today, attention is being produced by an independent industry, separate from the advertising and active sales industries.

It is primarily about the production of entertainment content. Initially, this area was occupied by corporations of mass art and the media. However, with the advent of social networks and similar electronic platforms, the layman has turned from a viewer and consumer of mass culture and media products into a content producer - a platform user. Now, the mass not only looks at itself through the television screen (Baudrillard, 1994), but also takes pictures and spreads itself. True, she did not look less from this, rather the opposite. The platform user is a content

producer, but he is also a consumer of other users' content - this is the principle of WEB 2.0. The passive consumer has become an active user.

The technologies for attracting and retaining the attention of a passive consumer of an active user are different. There is a special industry working to attract the attention of an Internet user to a particular content. And success here is measured not by the number of sales, but by the number of views, reposts and subscribers. So the entertainment industry is transformed into the attention production industry.

And although you can still divide users by the number of subscribers to bloggers and viewers, the border between them remains conditional. Not only for the conditional content producer attention becomes the main resource, but also for the conditional consumer. Not only does the blogger exploit the attention of the subscriber, drawing income from this attention, but the subscriber exploits the brand of another person and reputation. A subscriber who donates money to the author of the online broadcast does this so that his name appears on the screens of the entire audience. The audience's attention is exchanged for the attention of a specific viewer, the producer of the content or the media turns out to be an "aggregator" of someone else's attention, an information guide around which one attention is exchanged for another. A vivid example of such a reverse exploitation of someone else's brand and attention can be considered the call of the New Zealand terrorist Brenton Tarrant to subscribe to the PewDiePie channel, or the Instagram model's trick during the Champions League final in 2019.

At the same time, the main monopolist is not a conditional blogger-producer of content, but a platform where there is an exchange of attention, that is, a system of accumulation and distribution - media, large social networks, video hosting, etc. So, for example, when a blogger posts a video on Youtube, it cannot be said that he produces an audience and is its owner. Selling the audience and its attention to advertisers will be not so much on his own as on a platform that earns both on consumers of content and on its producers, the border between which has become completely blurred.

Attention, reaching a certain critical mass and accumulating in the media and platforms, becomes an economic factor, resource and product. Just as labor in the era of early capitalism broke away from a product, became a commodity and produced a worker as a commodity, so attention today is becoming an independent commodity and produces users as a commodity.

### 3.2 Social-Symbolic Direction of Research

If we understand society not politically-economically as a space of production and consumption, but as a space of exchange of signs and meanings, the economy of attention will also be described differently. The crisis of overproduction of the beginning of the 20th century led to the emergence of such a phenomenon as mass consumption. By Marx, man is understood as a working being, producing the world around himself and himself. For left-wing thinkers of the second half of the 20th century (Baudrillard, Fromm and many others), a person is understood as a creature that consumes the surrounding world. Under the basic movement of life, self-realization of a person is understood as consumption.

If consumption is the main existential need of a modern person, if it means to mean oneself and appropriate one or another symbolic value, then it is enough for the manufacturer to keep the consumer's attention for a long time for success. If I cope with this task, then a person will realize his need for being-consumption through my goods and services. According to this principle, modern mechanisms for distributing content work, which may not contain advertising at all and be freely available. But if the need for self-actualization-consumption becomes acute enough, while the consumer's attention is focused on my content, he will self-actualize by purchasing my "merchandise", "paid subscription" or simply "supporting my channel".

The apparent voluntariness and notorious "awareness" of consumption refers us to a mechanism that Baudrillard compares with an auction (Baudrillard, 2019). I do not buy the goods, but the symbolic value, which I will ascribe to myself. My existence is determined not by what I have done, but by what I spend my money on. It is one thing if I buy an expensive car or sneakers, another thing if I send money to maintain "world peace" or develop other people's creativity on the Internet. Social status is determined by the amount of money spent: the symbolic value can be up to 99.999...% of the final cost of the goods.

In the case of the information economy of attention, symbolic value is not hidden or hidden. Baudrillard is talking about replacing or replacing symbolic use value when a status item (gold watch, for example) mimics on the one hand a functional tool, and on the other a esthetic object (Baudrillard, 2019). The VKontakte sticker pack or premium account in an online game (for example, with the same gold watch) no longer has such a disguise - the aesthetic and symbolic completely replaced the functional.

Attention is not only a tool for manipulating and exploiting the consumer, but also the need of the consumer audience itself. His attention is artificially held by special techniques and techniques, that is, exploited. The consumer, buying himself a symbolic value, attracts the attention of others, exploiting someone else's brand, someone else's symbolic value. A blogger holds attention with the help of quality content, a consumer, sensing the need for a symbolic signification of himself, buys from the blogger an inscription-icon in his account. A blogger exchanges my attention for money, I exchange my money for the attention of his audience. The main income is received by the media platform, on which there is a mutual exchange of attention.

It is the distribution of attention, expressed in the number of subscribers, views and likes, that creates modern social differences. The number of produced or consumed economic goods fades into the background and is no longer playing an independent role as an information feed. If earlier the social hierarchy was determined by the quality of life, then it is the amount of consumption, today it is "hype", that is, the amount of attention. The need for self-realization and attention-building, fueled by platform-based content sharing mechanisms, is becoming a key characteristic of modern man.

### 3.3 Anthropological Direction of Research

Attention can be considered not only as an economic or social need, but also as a constructive ability of objectification. Understanding of man as a creator goes back at least to the Christian medieval tradition and goes through the main line through the Renaissance. In modern times, the ability to create is complemented by the epistemological aspect. At the beginning of 20th century, phenomenologists introduce the concept of intentionality, which is useful to us when analyzing the phenomenon of attention as a human ability.

Husserl understands intentionality as an essential characteristic of consciousness. Consciousness is always intentional, that is, always directed outward, including when we are not consciously focused on the object. Thus, my attention is always directed, but not always focused and conscious. It was this provision that prompted the psychologists of the turn of the 19-20th centuries to highlight attention as a special theoretical problem, different from the problem of perception. However, more detailed problematization and study of the problem of attention are associated with the development of cognitive psychology in the second half of 20th century. Within the framework of this tradition, attention is already treated as a special mechanism for processing information, by analogy with the technical means of processing information.

It is customary to single out two main models or metaphors for interpreting attention. The first is attention as a kind of "filter", designed to select relevant signals from the general flow of information. The second model understands attention as a special "mental action" that expends the "resource" of attention

(Kahneman, 1973). In the framework of this approach, attention is presented as a kind of “reservoir” filled with a resource of attention, a kind of “energy”. Accordingly, each mental action spends this resource, the amount of which is limited. With a deficit of this resource, human activity becomes less effective.

In part, the contradiction between the two models is removed by the division into “voluntary” attention, “involuntary” and “post-arbitrary” existing in the modern psychological theory of attention. Then we can say that involuntary attention works on the principle of a filter that sorts incoming signals according to certain properties, including physical (intensity, type of information channel, etc.). Post-spontaneous attention can also be understood as a filter that filters out signals based on not physical, but semantic properties of information. And voluntary attention can be understood as a special effort and “mental action” that consumes a limited attention resource.

Despite the fact that such a schematization ignores some aspects of the problem, it can serve as a tool for us in the subsequent analysis. In particular, it is important for us to fix this distinction between conscious or voluntary attention, which then will be fixed in pedagogical normative documents as “the ability to voluntarily concentrate attention” and the basic uncontrolled intentionality of consciousness.

Modern pedagogy postulates an orientation towards the formation of competencies, including competencies for an arbitrary concentration of attention. At the same time, urgent recommendations for the use of multimedia equipment, game forms of training, etc., are more likely aimed at manipulating involuntary attention. In this case, the pedagogue turns into a marketer. The main task is to influence the consciousness precisely in the interval when it is already directed, but not yet realized. Since the awareness of one’s own attention and its direction requires effort and time, the task of a marketing educator is to manipulate someone else’s attention and to alleviate (ultimately prevent) someone else’s efforts: the font should be legible, the color should be nice, the right button should be right in front of your eyes.

It is noteworthy that the metaphor of the filter is reflected in modern technologies for manipulating attention. Modern algorithms for selecting information output in accordance with the preferences of platform users form a kind of “filter bubble”. The understanding of attention as a limited resource made possible an economic approach to the problem in general.

#### 4 Summary

We have identified three possible areas of social-philosophical analysis of the economy of attention: political, economic, social, phenomenological. Thus, attention can be considered as:

- An economic resource, around the distribution of which special economic and power relations are built.
- The result of the overproduction of information when the user is no longer able to consume all the information produced by society.
- The universal economic equivalent, capable of quantifying all produced and consumed goods.
- The history of social differences and hierarchies, when social status is determined not by the amount of goods consumed, but by the amount of accumulated attention.
- Reasons for the transformation of a modern person from a passive consumer to an active user, content producer.
- The fundamental ability of a person to objectivize the world, intentionality.
- A mechanism for selecting relevant information from a common stream, a “filter” of perception.
- An arbitrary ability of a person to concentrate and abstract, limited by the amount of “strength” or “energy”.

#### 5 Conclusions

The areas identified by us differ from each other in methodological tools, however, we can distinguish the main aspects characteristic of each of the strategies:

- Despite a different understanding of attention in psychology, economics, media, psychiatry, etc., two main vectors can be distinguished: 1) attention as the human ability to select information and arbitrary concentration; 2) attention as an economic resource, around the distribution of which a special system of relations is built.
- It was the problematization of attention as a human ability within the framework of cognitive psychology as a mechanism for processing incoming information that allowed us to consider attention as a limited resource, including an economic one, and became a condition for the attention to be industrialized.
- The monopolists of the attention industry today are not content producing corporations, but platforms providing contact between content producers and consumers, that is, social media. They create a “blogger” and his “audience”, which in the limit are the same figure - the user of the platform.

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