Institute for Media
and Communications Management

University of St.Gallen



# Participatory Surprises?

## Exploring the Intersections of Serendipity, Participation and Trust

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OIISDP 2013

July 8 2013

# Executive Summary




- Are beneficial, happy accidents – serendipity – more likely to occur among more participatory users? And among users with larger and more diverse social networks as well as more trust?
- New ways and role of experiencing serendipity with the web (digital serendipity)
- Happy accidents as drivers of innovation and change in science, art, but also in more mundane settings

# The Presentation in Context

1

**Forms of participation:**

Systematic literature review

**Aim**: Exploring salient topics, generate first hypotheses, encourage dialogue

Until fall 2013

Conceptual journal publication or book chapter: communication

2

**Drivers and consequences of participation:**

Representative survey in Germany, complemented by qualitative focus groups

**Aim**: Identification and differentiation of salient drivers as well as consequences of participation

Until fall/winter 2014

2 empirical journal publications and/or conference proceedings: IS or communication

3

**Participation types and fostering participation:**

Follow up emipirical study

**Aim**: Deducing differentiated recommendations
(for politics and education)

Until summer/fall 2015

Maybe practical publication

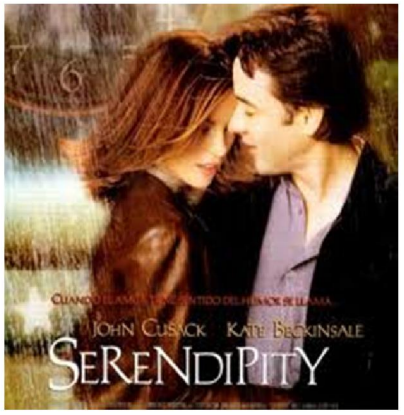
# Today

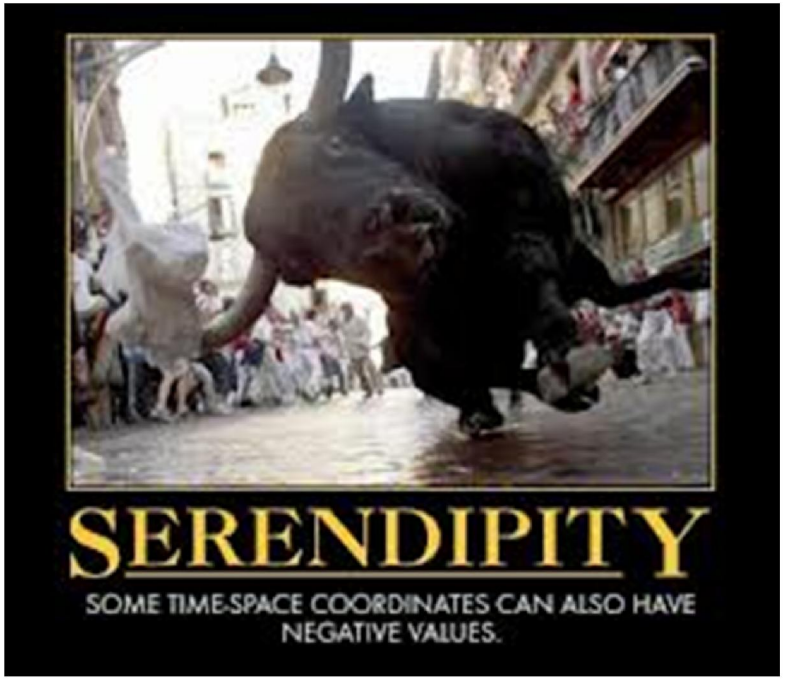
Focus on **consequences** of participation (Article 3)

1. Serendipity as a phenomenon to be explained
2. Participation as a possible explanator
3. Trust/Social capital as a possible explanator
4. Bringing everything together: research questions and model
5. Discussion

# Serendipity is very hyped




VENICE BIENNALE

## Serendipity Spices a Surprising Venice Biennale



Daniel Zakharov

In the Russian Pavilion, Mr. Zahkarov restages the myth of Zeus's seduction of Danae in the form of a shower of gold coins as a comment on the greed of modern times.

By RODERICK CONWAY MORRIS
Published: June 3, 2013

Yeas and Nays

## Sightings: Sasha Obama enjoys Serendipity 3

*June 9, 2013 | 7:15 pm*

0 Comments Like 2 Tweet 0 Submit Share



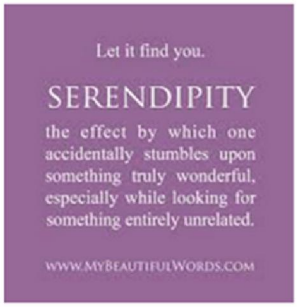
Nikki Schwab
Staff Reporter - Yeas & Nays
The Washington Examiner

On Thursday, **Sasha Obama** was spotted dining at Serendipity 3 in Georgetown. The younger Obama daughter was joined by four girlfriends, a restaurant source tells Yeas & Nays. All the girls enjoyed the D.C. Chicken Strips and Frrrozen Hot Chocolate. Obama also tasted the Oreo milkshake.

**Sign Up for the Yeas & Nays newsletter! ›**

# …It has (almost) become mainstream



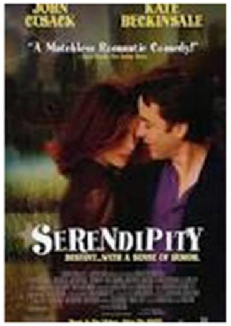








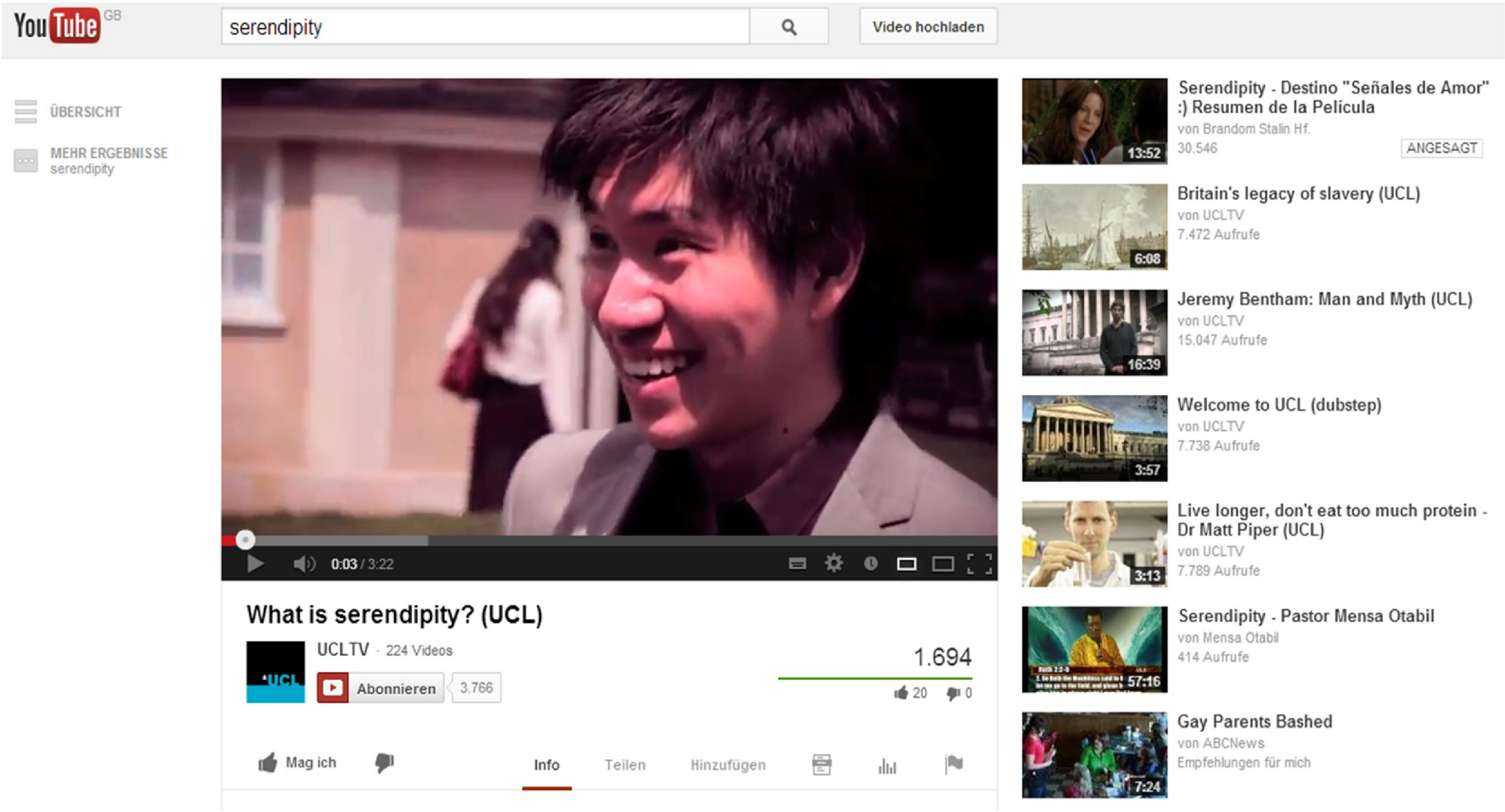





Source: Google Images; Search Term «Serendipity»

# And still many have no clue what it's all about




Source: Youtube

# Serendipity

(noun)

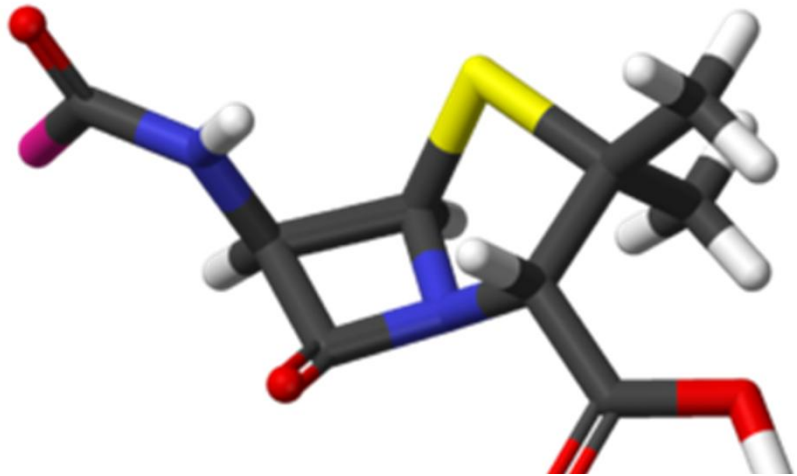
*"The occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way."*

A fortunate stroke of Serendipity

# Serendipity

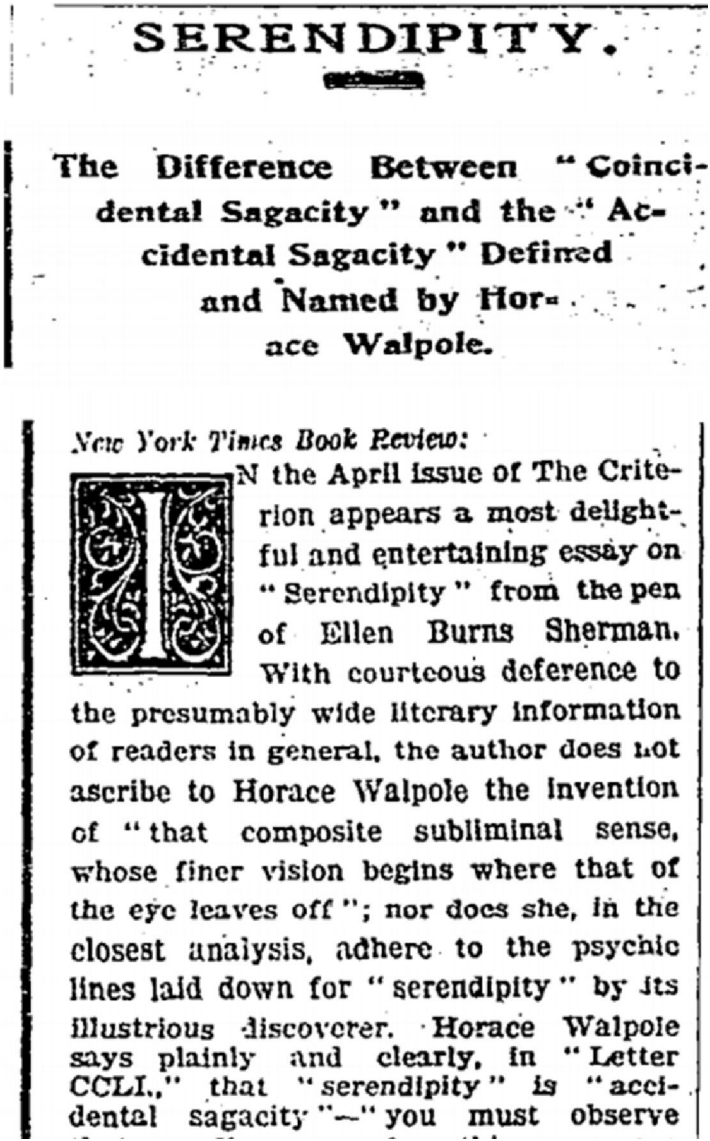
- Discoveries by chance encounters have intrigued generations of artists, scientists, and curious humans. The mode of knowing through the unexpected is at the basis of **important discoveries**.

- The fascination with serendipity has peaked with the **diffusion of the Internet**. All of a sudden information was immensely wide and easily obtainable. Especially **randomly**.



# Serendipity and Accidental Sagacity

- Accidental **sagacity** a necessary element for serendipity to take place. Discoverer must be able to recognize the value (else: serendipity lost). (André et al., 2009)
- "Chance favors the prepared mind."
- Comupter Science: How to design for serendipity? But how to take into account users' level of sagacity?



SERENDIPITY.

The Difference Between "Coincidental Sagacity" and the "Accidental Sagacity" Defined and Named by Horace Walpole.

*New York Times Book Review:*

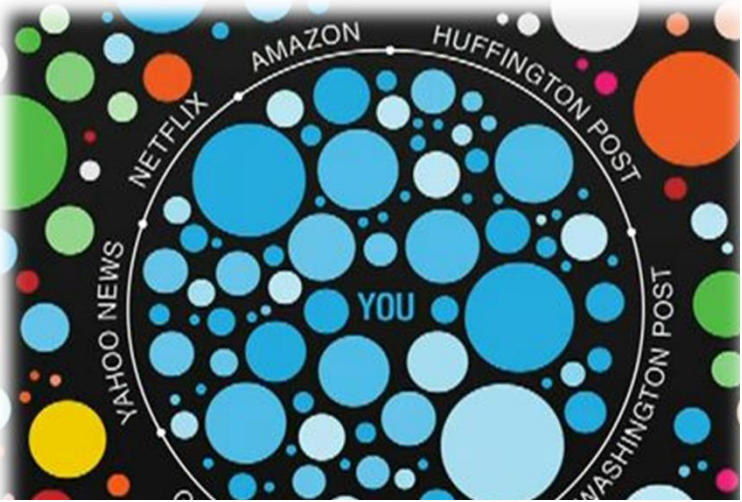
IN the April issue of The Criterion appears a most delightful and entertaining essay on "Serendipity" from the pen of Ellen Burns Sherman. With courteous deference to the presumably wide literary information of readers in general, the author does not ascribe to Horace Walpole the invention of "that composite subliminal sense, whose finer vision begins where that of the eye leaves off"; nor does she, in the closest analysis, adhere to the psychic lines laid down for "serendipity" by its illustrious discoverer. Horace Walpole says plainly and clearly, in "Letter CCLI.," that "serendipity" is "accidental sagacity"—"you must observe

# Digital Serendipity

- On the one hand, **social media** foster serendipity by providing surprising information from known and trusted sources (Dantonio, 2010).

- On the other, the gradual **personalization of web searches and Internet** services risks to annihilate serendipity.

$\Rightarrow$ Full predictability and filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011).



# Participation

*"Activity that is intended to or has the consequences of affecting, either directly or indirectly, government action."*

(Verba et al., 1995)

# Participation

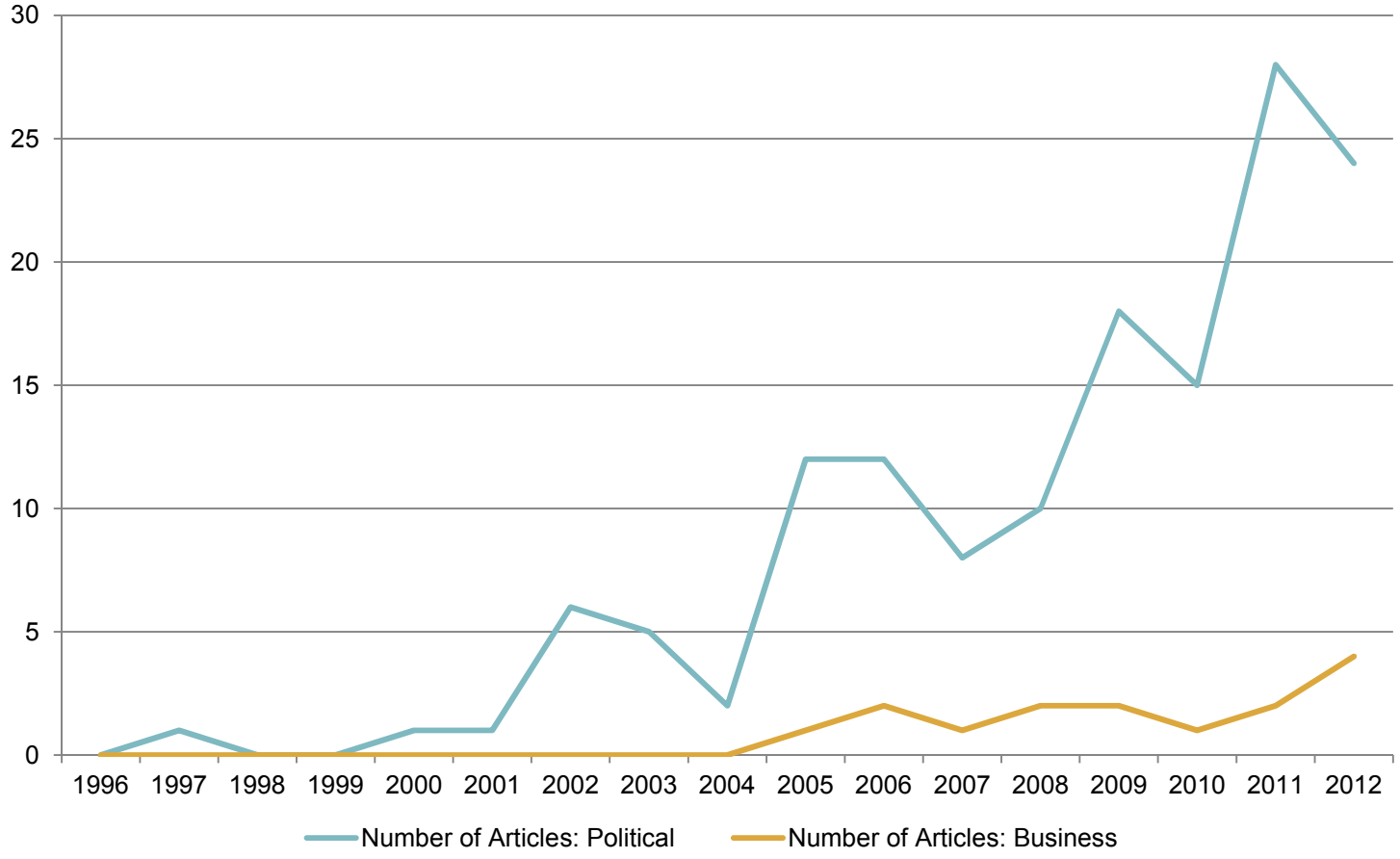
- Traditionally strongly political connotation

- Often normative: participation is something good and healthy

*"What new forms of participation does the Internet offer, what are its consequences in terms of political participation and civic engagement? What are drivers of participation and who is participating most?"*

$\Rightarrow$ Online Participation

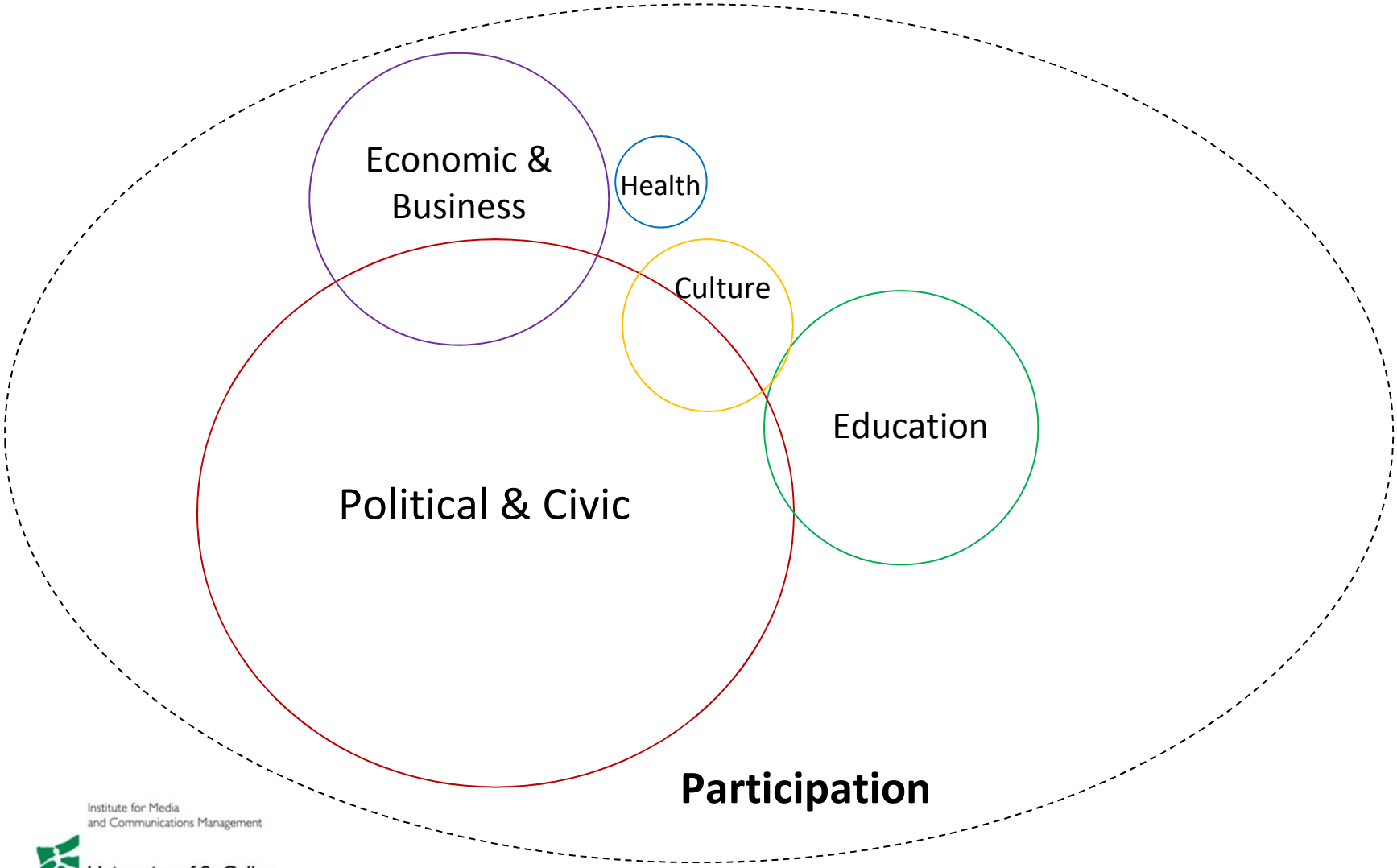
# Online Participation: Increasing Interest






Databases: WOS, Mendeley, ProQuest & Ebsco; after sorting

# Online Participation: Research Fields



# Online Participation: Current OII Study (Grant, 2013)

- **Skilled content** (blogs, websites, posts) produced by young, technically skilled people who use many devices and are comfortable revealing personal information; social status irrelevant.

- **Social and entertainment content** (pictures, music, videos) produced by young, technically skilled people who are not married and have lower incomes. More likely to be created by non-elites.

- **Political content** (e-mail & comment) produced by well-educated people who are either students or use the Internet at work. They are highly educated elites.

If serendipity requires a surprising encounter, but only happens if the encounterer has a “prepared mind”…

…then can we think of **participation** as having an impact on the exposure to new information and the experience of serendipity, especially on the Internet?

# Trust

*"A psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of another."*

(Rousseau et al., 1998)

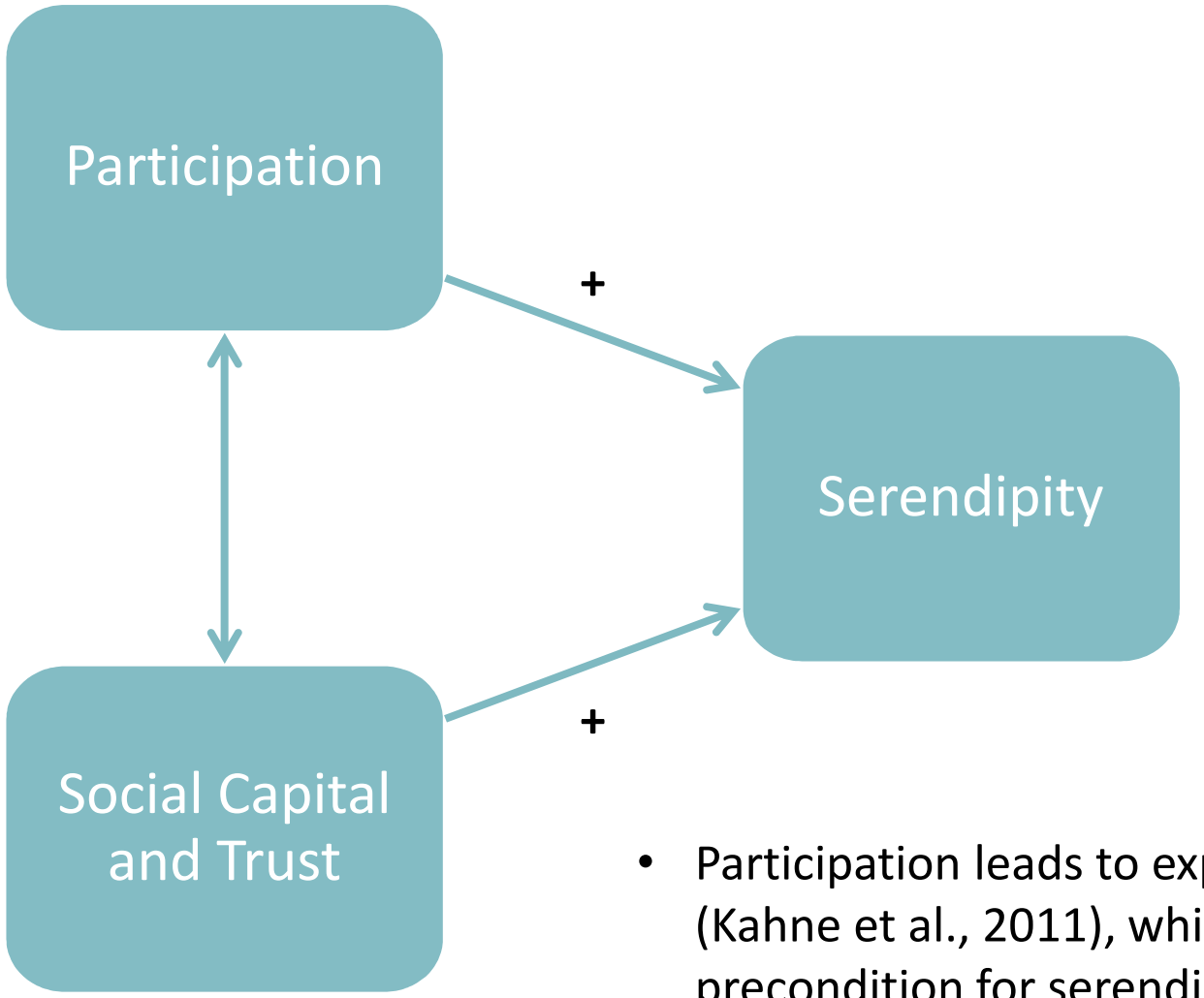
# (Online) Trust

- Online trust plays a role on people's desired level of exposure, privacy concerns, and commercial activities.
- The overall behavior of individuals on the Internet depends, at least partially, on their trust and skills.
- Special features of online trust: computer-mediation, often initial, strong reliance on (website) cues

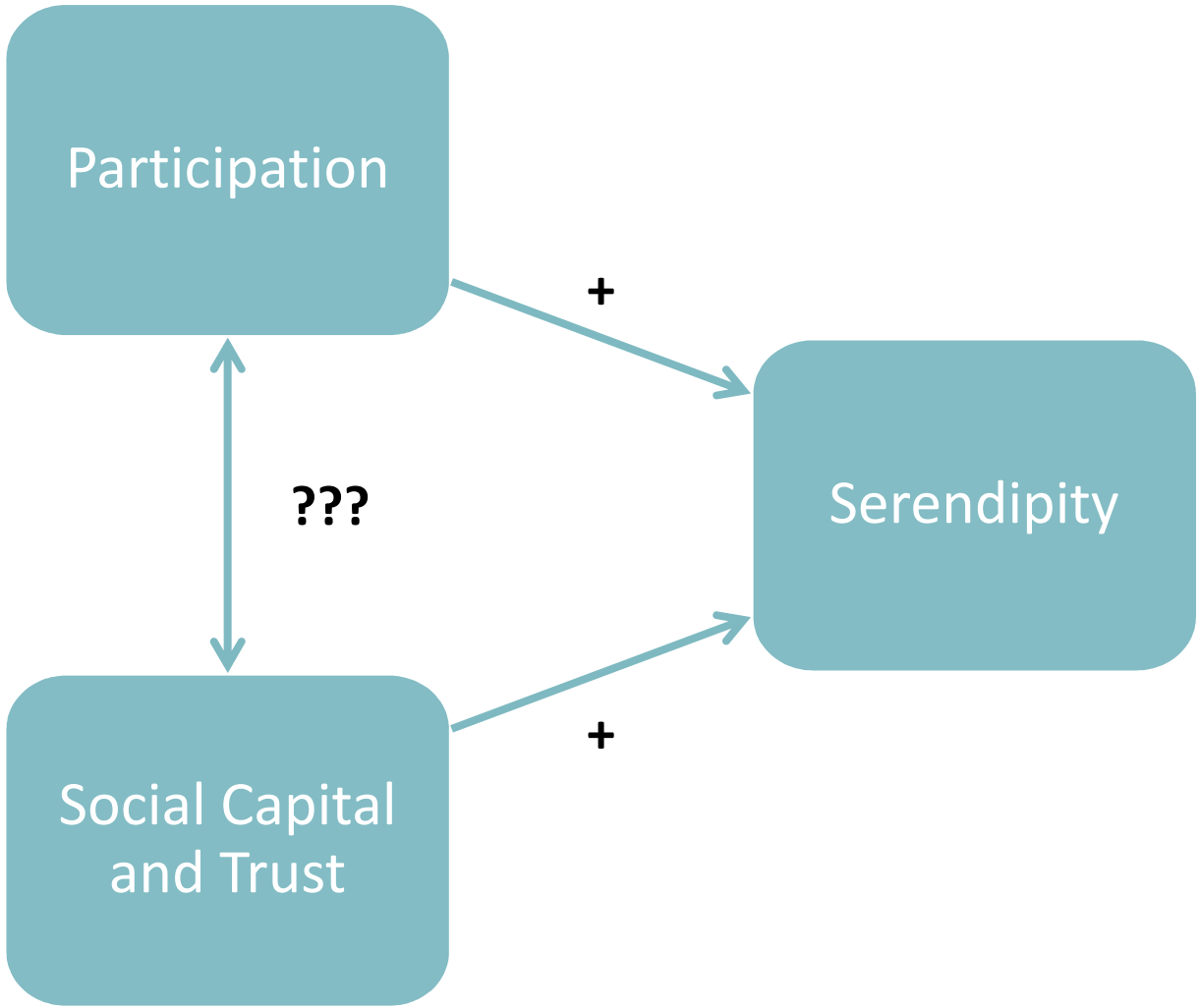


If serendipity requires a surprising encounter, but only happens if the encounterer has a “prepared mind”…

…then can we think of **trust** as having an impact on the exposure to new information and the experience of serendipity, especially on the Internet?




- Participation leads to exposure diversity (Kahne et al., 2011), which is a precondition for serendipity
- Social capital leads to exposure diversity, which is a precondition for serendipity




- What's the relation between participation and social capital/trust?

# Methods

- Representative **survey** in Germany in 2014 on online participation and trust, also integrating a battery of items on perceived serendipity

- Supplementing quantitative study with **qualitative interviews** and/or **focus groups** with participation extremists and outsiders

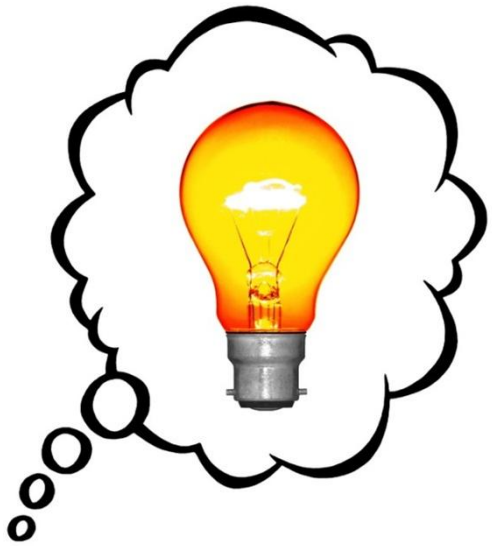
- If possible also use user-generated data



# Idea(s)

- Broad concept of participation
- If possible triangulating different sources of data
- Theoretical background: Bourdieu, participatory culture, social capital, or SNA
- Broadening the digital divide: including aspects of lifestyle and milieu (habitus)

$\Rightarrow$ Participatory habitus and super-encountering



# Your Turn: Let's discuss!



- Is serendipity an elite topic?
- Trust or (relational) social capital? Or both?
- How to conceptually integrate trust, participation, and serendipity?
- What is the link "trust -> serendipity"? What is the link "participation -> serendipity"? What is the link "trust <-> participation"? Feedback loops?
- Methodological challenges: data, scales, inputs, experiences?
- Theoretical background: participatory culture, digital divide, habitus, field, SNA…?



# Thank You For Your Attention

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**Feel free to contact me if you're interested in this research or in collaborations!**

# Resources

André, P., Teevan, J., & Dumais, S. (2009). From X-Rays to Silly Putty via Uranus: Serendipity and its Role in Web Search. *CHI '09 Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 2033–2036.

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# Resources

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