

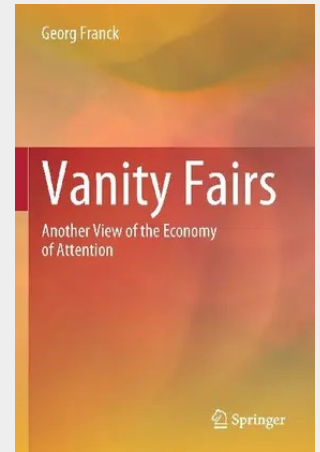
Vanity Fairs

Another View of the Economy of Attention

This book offers readers a comprehensive introduction to the economy of attention from the perspective of the basic motive of the pursuit of attention: self-esteem. As a jumping-off point, it states the stark equation at the heart of this economy— that the self-esteem one can afford depends on one's income of appreciative attention. The information markets in which participants compete to play a role in the consciousness of others are described as 'vanity fairs'. Since the pursuit of self-esteem is highly effective when it comes to mobilizing human energies, vanity fairs are not just playgrounds of individual passions, but have been utilized by society since time immemorial as markets for particularly challenging demands.

Starting with an analysis of the interface that connects the social economy of attention with the intra-psychic economy of self-esteem, the book then examines two main cases in point: modern science and the post-modern media culture. On the one hand we have scientists working for a 'wage of fame', who invest their own attention into getting the attention of others. On the other, today's dominant media have left the sale of information behind to focus solely on the attraction of attention, which is sold as a service to the advertising industry. In each case the use of attention as a means of payment is key to its phenomenal success. But success comes at a price: the dark side of this monetization of attention is a kind of 'climate change' in the collective mental sphere which threatens the very existence of our social fabric.

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