

Curiosity and experimentation with twitterbots and automated journalism – a practical course for teaching journalists

Theresa Körner | University of Bamberg (GER)



Speaker



Theresa Körner

Journalism Lecturer
University of Bamberg, Germany

theresa.koerner@uni-bamberg.de
@thekie1

This is a report for the lecture *'Bots and Automated Journalism – a practical course on mediainnovation within the Computational Journalism'* that took place at the University of Bamberg at the summer semester 2019.

Contents

- (1) Introduction: Teaching journalism during a Disruptive Age
- (2) Background and outline: challenges for journalists and essential concepts of change in journalism
- (3) The main learning and teaching goals
- (4) Structure of the course including objectives and specific teaching-learning situations
- (5) Experience and Evaluation

Teaching Journalism during a Disruptive Age

- Algorithms adopt more and more (journalist) tasks
- Common advice: «*concentrate on **innate and core competences** and use automation for all the other tasks*»
- Journalists both: need to use new technology and fulfill their function as a critic for society

Teaching Journalism during a Disruptive Age



Future journalists

- Discover, activate and concentrate on innate and core **competences**.
- (Re-)define and adopt business model continuously.



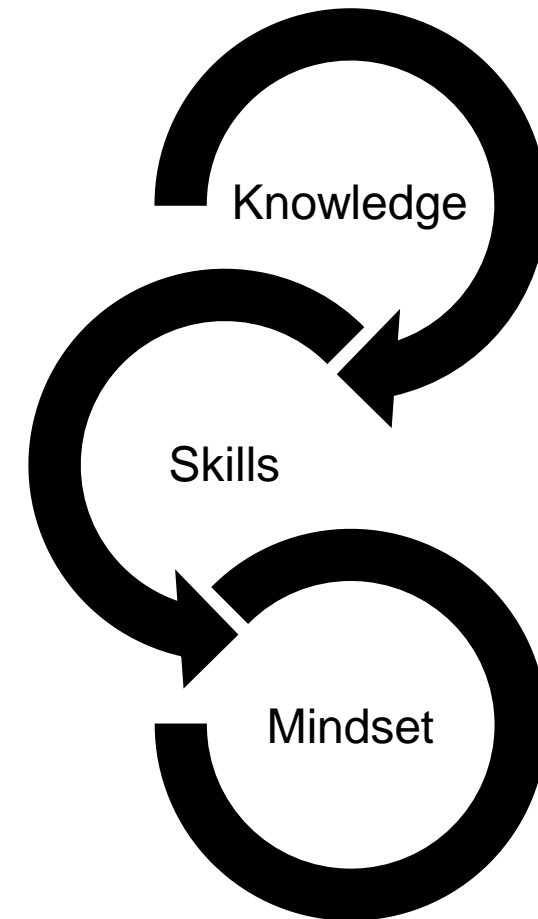
Lecturers and universities

Provide an environment where students **explore**, **get support** with their **projects**, have the freedom to **experiment**, experience the freedom to fail, **make mistakes** and find the support **to try again**.

Credits: (1) Photo by [Fox](#) from [Pexels](#) (2) Photo by Pixabay from Pexels

Challenges for journalists and essential concepts of change

- Main terms:
 - algorithmic media, computational journalism, automated/algorithmic journalism, (news-)bots
- Core and innate **competences**:
 - e.g.: enthusiasm and curiosity, learn to experiment and investigate and the ability for self-organized learning.
 - three categories: knowledge, skills and mindset.
- Two **challenges**:
 - use new software systems to fulfill journalistic tasks in a competitive way
 - provide a critical perspective and reflect the output of software systems and automation.



Main learning and teaching goals

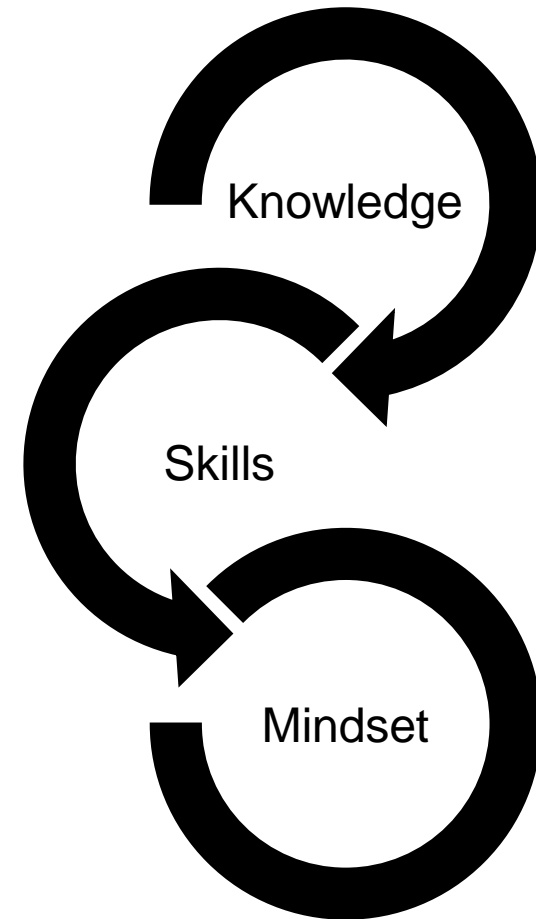
A) Practice and theory: Using software technology, taking action and start programming as well as developing a critical and reflective approach.

A1) **Knowledge**: Students should understand the definition and contexts of computational journalism.

A2) **Skills**: Students should experience, develop and demonstrate core competences for actively shaping their future.

A3) **Mindset**: Students need to start thinking in the appropriate mindset.

B) Creating a working atmosphere in which students are able to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and mindset to create their journalistic future.



Structure of the course

- Compact course taking place on two weekends
- Ten students participated. Each was a communication science mayor. Programming skills were not necessary.
- To pass the course the students worked in groups on **a practical project**, their twitterbot, and also wrote an **individual essay**.
- Five ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) points.

Structure of the course and main objectives

#1 Use technology

- First weekend
- Marie Kilg (journalist, botmaker, Amazon)
- Main goals:
 - gain first programming experiences
 - experiment, test, work with different coding software,
 - understand possibilities and limitations of twitterbots.
- variety of teaching and learning scenarios

#2 Be a critic

- Second weekend
- Main goals:
 - to develop a critical-reflexive approach to media innovations, algorithmic media and computational journalism.
 - be able to apply this approach to students projects.
- variety of teaching and learning scenarios

Objectives, methods, measurement of learning success (e.g.)

Educational objective(s)	Method(s)	Measurement(s) of learning success
Knowledge: At the end of the course the students are able to ...		
... describe some current developments in media innovation and implement a project yourself.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ‘Build your first twitterbot’• group project• contact with professional representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students independently describe typical examples of use.
Skills: Students demonstrate the ability to ...		
... be adaptable, e.g. to deal with changing patterns of thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• group project• simulation game ‘Media Tarot’	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If difficulties or changes occur in group work, the group is able to react appropriately to new circumstances.• The group can deal with changing patterns of thinking in the simulation game and solve various problems.
Mindset: Students show more and more ...		
... enthusiasm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• group project• contact with professional representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students also meet outside the course. The students continue their project work after the end of the course.• Students acquire further skills (e.g. programming).• The students talk to other people about their projects.

Specific learning-teaching situations

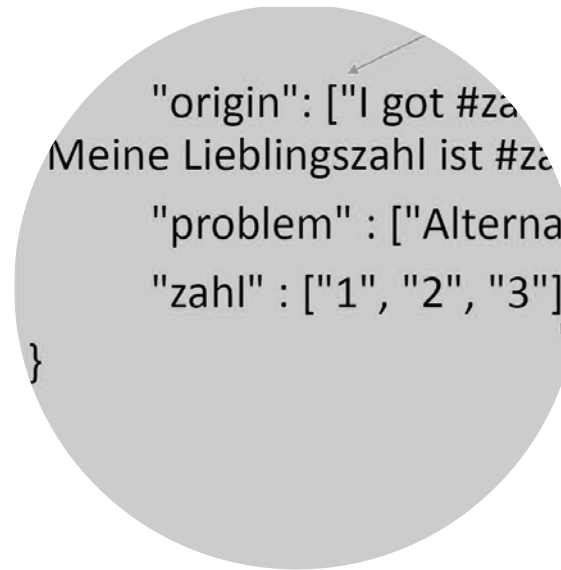
#1 Project: 'Build your first Twitterbot'



Marie Kilg



Brainstorming



www.cheapbots-donequick.com



Twittern!

Specific learning-teaching situations

#1 Project: 'Build your first Twitterbot'

e.g.: @DrinksandChill and
@1FitMick
All: <https://twitter.com/thekie1/lists/bambergbots/members>



DrinksandChill
@DrinksandChill Follows you

Schreibe uns deinen liebsten Alkohol und wir haben den passenden Cocktail für dich! 🍹🕶️

📍 Bamberg, Germany

📅 Joined April 2019

Tweets 472 Following 20 Followers 8

[Tweet to](#) [Message](#)

Tweets **Tweets & replies**

 **DrinksandChill** @DrinksandChill
Lust auf einen Cocktail? Dann schreibe uns deinen liebsten Alkohol und wir haben den passenden Cocktail für dich! Ale. Danach kommt noch ein Refresher! #DrinksandChill

Translated from German by Microsoft

Fancy a cocktail? You need to write us your favorite alcohol and we'll have the perfect cocktail for you! After that 2 cl cream is added. #Cocktail



FitMick
@1FitMick Follows you

Hier wirst du vom Lauch zum FitMick

📍 Iron City

📅 Joined April 2019

Tweets 201 Following 65 Followers 11 Likes 1

Tweets **Tweets & replies**

 **FitMick** @1FitMick · 1h
Servus Lauch, steh auf und mach 17452 Tweets. Wenn du 1 Marmorstein isst. #fitmick

Translated from German by Microsoft

Servus Lauch, get up and make 17452 tweets. If you eat a marble stone. #fitmick

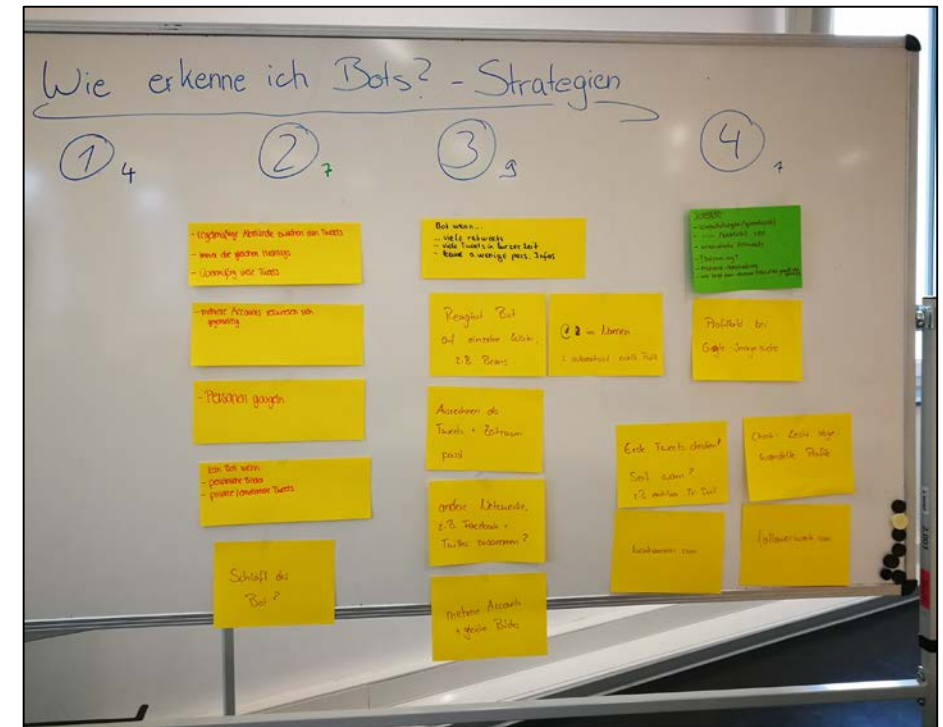
[Tweet to](#) [Message](#)

Specific learning-teaching situations

#2 Group discussion: 'Bot or Not'

19	Bot or Not? Das ist hier die Frage..
50	https://twitter.com/LisaGras mensch bot
51	https://twitter.com/Dave41929645 not exist
52	https://twitter.com/Peter73832399 mensch bot
53	https://twitter.com/PeterLu01330119 Bot
54	https://twitter.com/Stoneyghozi X Bot mensch
55	https://twitter.com/Adiamo999 X gesperrt
56	https://twitter.com/dr_dot X gesperrt
57	https://twitter.com/keeblerkween X gesperrt
58	https://twitter.com/1Romans58 X Bot bot
59	https://twitter.com/SenatorFuture X Bot SAFE bot
60	https://twitter.com/GavinStafford4 X Mensch mensch
61	https://twitter.com/Vinsanity74 X Mensch mensch
62	https://twitter.com/TheClaretView X Tendenz zu Mensch mensch
63	https://twitter.com/di_zin/ X Bot
64	https://twitter.com/Jens_Z Mensch? Rassistischer Bot oder rassistischer Menschgehört gesperrtauf jeden fall
65	https://twitter.com/Mohamed40784884 Mensch
66	https://twitter.com/1MICAH not exist
67	https://twitter.com/GoodLuciStar not exist

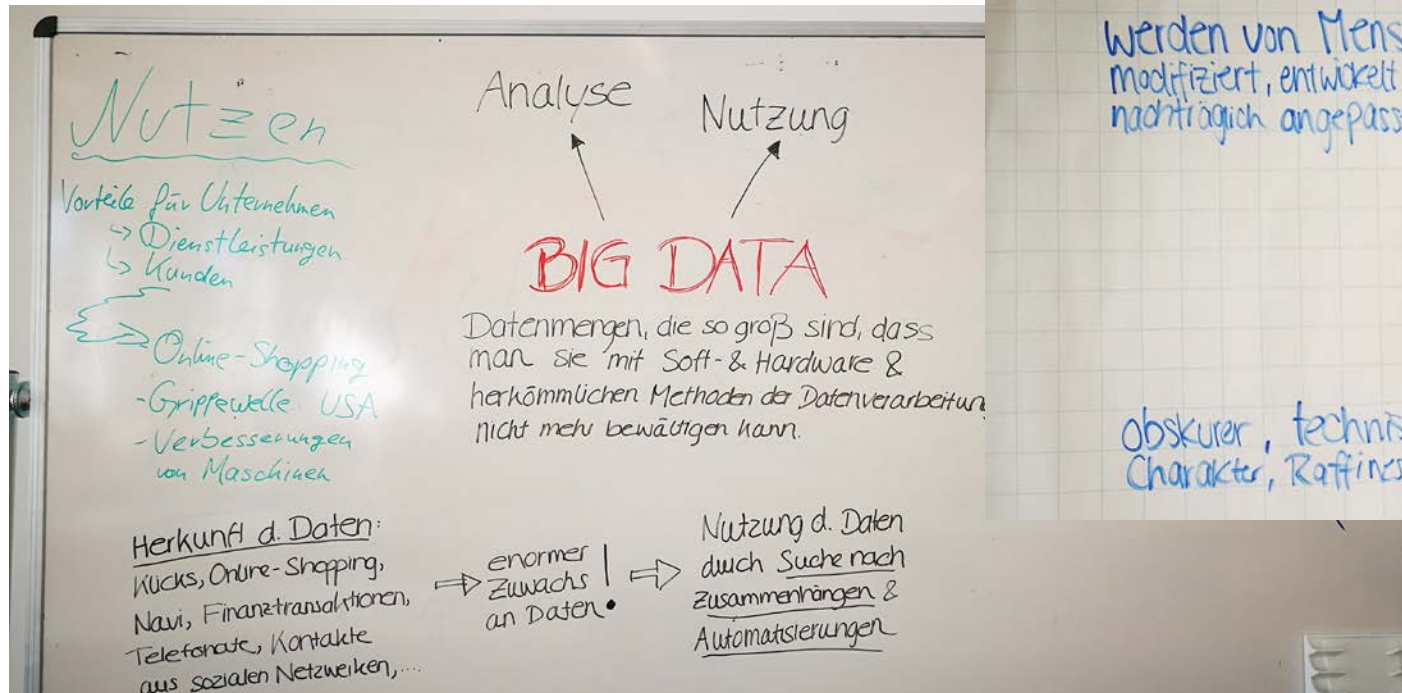
(1) PAD with List of Twitteraccounts: Bot or Not?



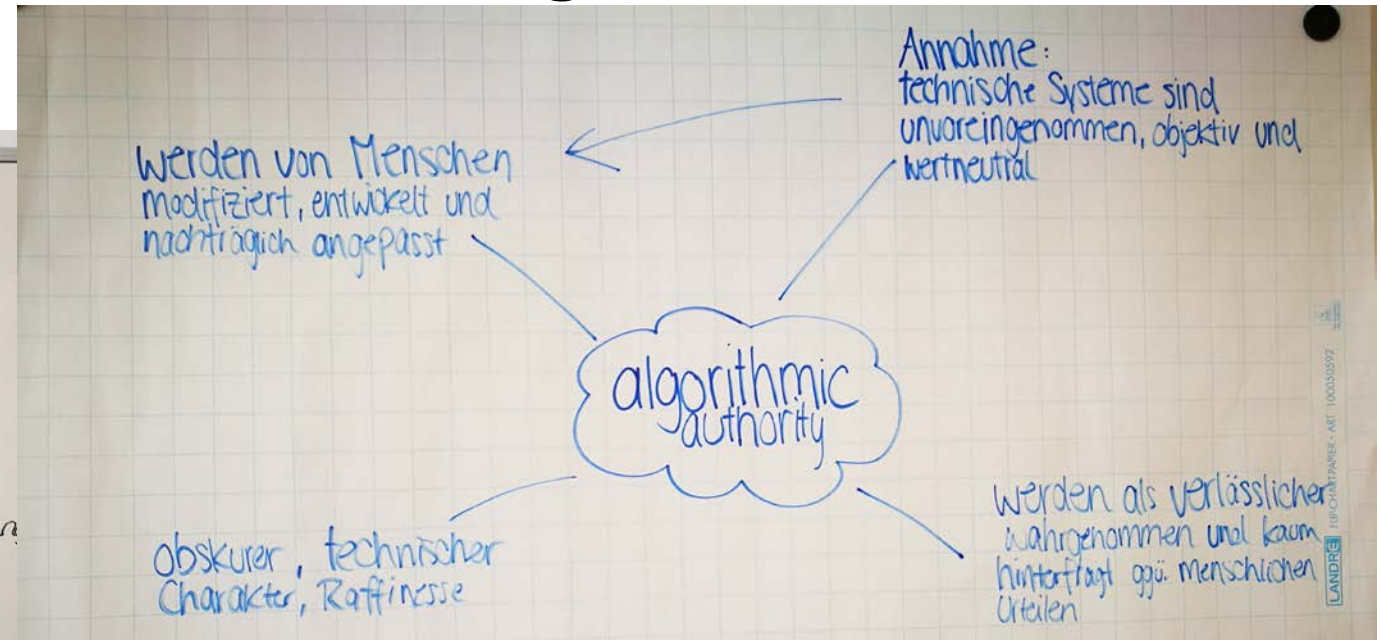
(2) Whiteboard: How do I identify bots?

Specific learning-teaching situations

#3 Poster presentation and discussion: algorithmic media



(1) Whiteboard: big data



(2) Poster: algorithmic authority

Specific learning-teaching situations

#4 Simulation Game: The Futures of Media Tarot



(1) Media Tarot playing cards



(2) Develop two scenarios



(3) Present and discuss ideas

Specific learning-teaching situations

Examination requirements: project report and individual essay

Evaluation: Knowledge, Skills and Mindset

Knowledge

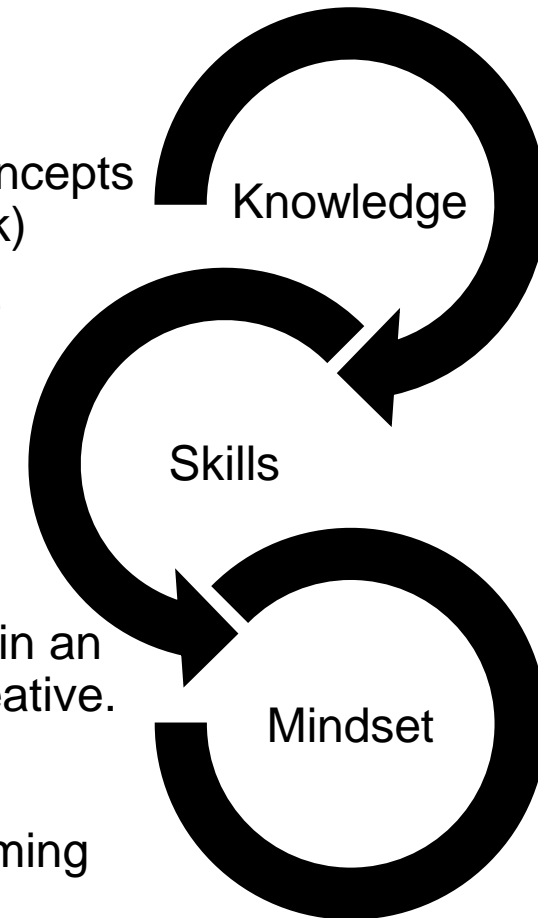
- correct technological vocabulary (essays, poster presentation, discussions), main concepts of computational journalism, integration of examples into theory (papers, project work)
- found and build own application examples, worked out concepts and put many of the components into practice (project work)

Skills

- use cases: automatically distribute journalistic content via Twitter (different data sources, chat functions and generated automated tweets of varying complexity).
- difficulties/hurdles have been solved, groups have adapted to unexpected situations in an appropriate and solution-oriented way. Teamwork has been solution-oriented and creative.

Mindset

- enthusiasm: students met after the end of the course, they acquired further programming skills, presented their project ideas to friends and families.
- recommended that lecture should be offered again, rated the course as 'very good'. This corresponds to the teachers' impressions of the students' motivation and mood.



IPJ Dauphine | PSL 

Thank you!



Theresa Körner M.A.

Institute for Communication Science
Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg
An der Weberei 5
96047 Bamberg (Germany)

E-Mail: theresa.koerner@uni-bamberg.de
Twitter: @thekie1