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Governance by infrastructure of social media platforms and their affections/effects in the case of a specific event

Abstract

Platforms for social media are central points of user interaction, control, and governance on the Internet (DeNardis et Hackl, 2015). This refers primarily to digital monopolists such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and Amazon, covering a wide geographic area and serving billions of users. In this paper, on the basis of a literature review, we address two main objectives. On the one hand, we analyze the research interest of social sciences for social media infrastructure and its governance to answer the question: what does the infrastructure of social media consist of and how it is governed? On the other hand, we try to explain in what way existing studies make it possible to discuss or criticize the practices of online expression observed in the coverage of the F te des Vignerons by social media. Being an important event in the history and culture of French-speaking Switzerland (around one million visitors), the F te is unique: it only happens every 20-25 years. The 2019 edition, it took place in a world where social media is widely present for the first time in its history.

Studies in the social sciences show us different approaches and problems in the understanding of social media infrastructure: different levels of invisible and visible elements (Farman, 2015; Packer & Wiley, 2013; Sheller & Urry, 2006); content and interface, e.g. affordances studies, looking at how default options and buttons constrain practices (Hayes et al., 2016; Jorge, 2019); user strategies and practices (Wagner, 2018; Arriagada & Ib ez, 2020); participation different infrastructures that make platforms possible including fibre optic cables, mobile switching centres, air conditioning units, data centres and data exchange points, servers that connect people and data (Farman, 2015); hybrid elements that migrate from virtual-space to physical-space (chats, multiuser domains, online role-playing games) (Souza e Silva, 2006). The complexity and multi-layered nature of social media infrastructure determine the complexity of its governance, which involves different institutions: formal and informal, national and supranational, public and private, large-scale and small-scale (Freedman, 2008).

This literature review serves to formulate a series of questions about the governance of infrastructure of social media platforms and the affections their uses in the case of a specific event (F te des Vignerons) including: mediations and affections observable in the F te; ownership by the private sector and the structure of participating companies; role of European rules concerning; public debates around social media platforms; uses actually observed of social media. Through this work we want to show how the knowledge produced on platforms contributes or could contribute to the governance and regulation of social media platforms and social media uses in a specific situation.

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