

Net-ordering: Conceptualizing Governance in Social Media

Niva Elkin-Koren

Abstract

Digital networks enable individual users to generate their own content and share it with communities of their choosing. The low cost of coordinating creative efforts and distributing creative works to a large audience, put users at the forefront of creative processes, enabling individuals to collaborate in the production and distribution of creative works.

The rise of Users-Generated-Content (UGC) is often understood as a process of disintermediation which is associated with the decline of commercial media. It turns out however, that social production of creative works is highly dependent upon commercial and non-commercial new intermediaries. Social media platforms allow users to share their content with one another and to collaborate in producing new creative works. Platforms coordinate and facilitate access to UGC, via search engines (e.g., Google and Yahoo), distribution platforms (e.g., YouTube and Flickr), social networks (e.g., MySpace and Friendster), and virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life).

Social media platforms facilitate new forms of collective action. They are governed by formal and informal mechanisms, which aggregate and shape the input and choices made by users at any given time. Yet, social media software is not simply a neutral facilitator of online communities. These platforms may vary in structure and governance styles.

The emerging models of social production for creative works raise new concerns related to the dual role of social media platforms. Platforms facilitate online communities, but at the same time commercialize them as market commodities. Another set of issues relates to the dual role of participating users as creators and consumers of original content. New modes of production further enhance the commercial pressures on individual users as they become an independent unit of production. Conflicting desires to share and control content may come into play. The interdependency between platforms and users makes both individual users and platforms vulnerable in novel ways.

Securing the interests of participants in this creative environment, may require a better understanding of the institutions and mechanisms that govern social production and identify their special features.