Editorial article

The Struggle to Regulate Social Media Platforms

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"Content might be king, but distribution is kingdom"

Derek Thompson (2017: 6)

1. The struggle toward social media regulation

Three days before writing this editorial, U.S president, Donald Trump tweeted 'This will be a Big Day for Social Media and FAIRNESS!' (@realDonalTrump; 28 May, 2020) and then signed executive order 13925 that is known as 'Preventing Online Censorship'. The story broke out when Twitter marked two tweets of the president about mail-in ballots, with fact check labels: 'Get the facts about mail-in ballots' linked to a fact-checking page. The executive order and ongoing struggle revealed one of the major challenges for media policy and regulations that effect on media business.

Section 230 (c)(1), that the executive order has referred to, grants immunity from liability to the platforms that distribute third-party generated contents: "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider."

2. Questioning Safe Harbors

Proliferation of obscene content including pornographic, violent, abuse, piracy, fraud and illegal activities within the first generation of social media resulted to numerous lawsuits, not only against the producers of contents that in many cases were anonymous, but the platforms as the distribution channels. To defend platform from the liability of illicit content that anonymous users distribute and to protect them as a space for freedom of speech, section 230, as remaining part of Communication Decency Act (CDA), provides a safe harbor for interactive computer service providers, the platforms. Safe harbor holds platforms dischargeable of the contents their users exchange. This section also keeps safe harbor protection over the platforms that decide to police what the users say and do. The logic behind is to enable platforms to act in sake of the society benefit and delete illicit contents or suspend harmful accounts without risking their immunity; aiming to moderate in 'good faith'.

The critical point lies in the assumption that platforms are 'impartial intermediaries' that merely facilitate the circuit of information among third parties. Such assumption is under serious questions, because social media affordances shape the information flow and communication style within them:

"Platforms do not merely mediate communication and value exchange, but they shape the participation, what displays for who, how users directed toward some content or keep away from specific content, how information to be collected and processed and presented by algorhytm, *toward particular ends*" (Gillespie 2018: 257). The '*particular end*' can distinguish the intention of social media owners from goof faith, and lead them to do intervention to the circulating contentsbased on their interests. Therefore, the asumption that platforms act impartialy should be replaced with the natural intention of businesses to intervene and direct the information flow based on their own interest.

3. Blackholes: Anti-Web Characteristics of Platforms

I started this article by a quote from Derek Thompson in his book 'Hit Makers'. If content is king, the platforms that transfer the content to the target audiences are the territory under command of this content. Thanks to their access to the billions of people as active users, social platforms are 'the kingdoms' of our era, and the playground of the kings, the best contents. Nicholas Ostler in his impressive book 'Empires of the Word' (2005) innovatively reviewed the history of the world from languages' territories and explained how each language as an empire ruled the territory and conflicted with other ones. I borrow this concept from him and argue that empires of platforms have shaped a new world order, this time not political, but technological. Rule of these platforms on our lives has created new challenges along with wonderful opportunities. One major challenge for me is that they are, more or less, content and information blackholes.

In my classes I frequently use a spectrum of Facebook and Instagram to show how much platforms can be open or closed. While Facebook, and at some level, Twitter are open platforms, that made their data accessible with search engines, Instagram as a closed platform do not provide any chance for search engines to access the text-content such as captions. Instagram, surprisingly, even does not provide possibility of search inside the platform for its own users (at least until the time of writing this essay), that makes this platform a real information blackhole. If you have read something interesting somewhere in this platform but do not remember where, you have almost no chance to find it. The same is the case with messengers, such as WhatsApp or Telegram, latter is very popular in my country, Iran. While use of platforms are very easy because of mobile applications, the problem is that exchange of information in such platforms means burring that information and making it out of access of others for future uses. If someone investigates the history of Persian Web, they suddenly face a fall of information. Information that is created and consumed suddenly declines, not because users stopped generating content, but because they moved to the platforms and left their content in abandoned Telegram channels, Ruinous Viber chats, Obsolete WhatsApp groups, and other 'blackholes' that trapped the contents inside and failed to expose them to public. I believe this 'Anti-Web' characteristic of platforms is a challenge that demands academic attention.

4. A Look at the future

This article is not a critical note against social media; in the contrary, it aims to shed light on the inevitable challenges that platforms' owners and managers must consider to advance their business in a beneficiary way for the society and other stakeholders. Struggle over social media regulation in US will take place in other countries in the world, especially in the entrepreneurship-supporting economies. Platforms promoted media entrepreneurship by providing the individuals and small enterprises access to niche markets to deliver value. They are building blocks of an entrepreneurial economy and the main grounds for innovative activities. However, they need to adopt some new requirements to benefit themselves, society and other businesses. Policy makers can help this process by drafting some measures to free data from the blackhole after a certain period of time, or to ask social platforms to share some levels of data that can be used for analysis of social patterns, preferences, trends etc. This can be seen as payback of platforms to the democracies that made their businesses doable. This is not a cost for platforms, but expanding the value of data by other stakeholders such as governments, society, non-for-profit organizations and research institutions.

This issue impacted academic research works too. Cross-platform research is also poorly developed, and most of social media studies remain single-platform (Rogers, 2018). One reason is, again, the exclusive control asserted by platforms on data that do not give them any reason to provide the researchers access to the dara. API and hashtags are the main tools for extracting data from social media and to increase the access to data, researchers need expensive software such as premium versions of NodeXL. Regulating platforms to give access to researchers can benefit the businesses and societies by promoting the knowledge about cross-platform behaviors and social trends.

It is imperative for policy makers and regulatory institutions to bear in mind that Section 230 has been set in mid-1990s, when social media were not invented yet and their wide application and various aspects were not known to all. In such situation, apparently the technological regulations lag behind the novel and emerging needs. This is what I touched on in my policy review, addressing FCC for telecommunication act. I discussed that as an employee of Aalborg University I was involved in developing a platform technology, and within two months, the service evolved from the primary design and new concept emerged; so how regulation can be set for such a fast-paced technology that even the innovator is not sure about the final product and also it will be obsoleted within months or few years? Due to this, I proposed that there is a gap between regulations and the technology which widens as time lapses and for this reason, communication act should set policy rather than regulations (Khajeheian, 2016).

I suggest that censorship is not just removal of contents, but it can be considered as hiding the users' content (in public level) from the search engines and imprisoning them inside the walls of platform. Regulating platforms for making the content searchable for external users, or revealing data in public discussion groups in a specific time, like the copyright holding time, can give rise to some ideas that are study-worthy in future research. I believe we need new revisions in telecommunication law for releasing information out of ownership of platforms and to enforce them to share it with search engines.

Nordic Journal of Media Management declares its readiness and tendency to consider publishing related research works on the subjects of the challenges and opportunities for regulating social media platforms, both from policy and business-wise.

5. Articles in this issue

This issue includes 6 articles that are selected from the receiving submissions after rounds of review. As well as the inaugural issue, I am happy to see participation of high-profile scholars from outstanding institutions and universities in development and promotion of this newly launched journal. Authors from USA, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal and China have contributed in this issue. I summarize the subjects that are covered by the articles of this issue as following: Audience, media entrepreneurship, platform, business model, transaction cost economics, and advertising ecosystem.

Sylvia Chan-Olmsted, Lisa-Charlotte Wolter and Elisa Dorothee Adam participated with a study of video consumption behavior. In their article 'Towards a video consumer leaning spectrum: A medium-centric approach', an extensive systematic literature review has been used to develop a leaning spectrum that can replace traditional lean-back or lean-forward consumption. This spectrum has two dimensions of leaning direction and leaning degree. The results of their study can be used in enhancing advertising effectiveness.

The second article of this collection is authored by Min Hang, one of the first researchers in the area of media entrepreneurship. In her article entitled 'Media and Entrepreneurship, A Revisit with a Decade of Progress: A Bibliometric Analysis of Media Entrepreneurship Research Between 2005 and 2017', she conducted a bibliometric analysis of published articles from 2005 to 2017, that is

recognized as a booming era for media entrepreneurship publications. She contends that the media entrepreneurship study has entered to a new stage of its lifecycle from 2017 onwards, which can be labeled as growth stage. This article provides a bright picture of the research in the stage of introduction.

The third article is authored by Cinzia Dal Zotto and Afshin Omidi, both from University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland. Their article, 'Platformization of Media Entrepreneurship: A Conceptual Development' is a conceptual article that develops media entrepreneurship from a platformization framework. They suggest that media entrepreneurs need to be equipped with a multi-paradigmatic lens to sustain the media industry and enjoy the opportunities and confront with challenges of governments' interventions and monopolistic initiatives. They also suggested four areas for domains of study of platformization of media entrepreneurship, including business studies, software studies, political economy, cultural and labor studies.

Outsourcing or in-house managing decisions has been an important concern of organizations in general, and media firms in particular. Marta Magadán-Díaz and Jesús Rivas-García studied the role of knowledge intensive business systems in outsourcing decisions of Spanish publishers. In their article that is entitled 'A Transaction Cost Economics View on Outsourcing Decision in Spanish Publishing Industry', they surveyed 310 publishers and understood that application of KIBS is a facilitator of innovation and a key to successful adoption of new business models by the studied publishers. They also realized that use of this knowledge systems is moved from production to distribution.

The fifth article comes again from Iberia, where Miguel Crespo, Ana Pinto-Martinho, Caterina Foà, Miguel Paisana, Pedro Caldeira Pais studied the business models that media entrepreneurs adopt to sustain in the media market of Portugal. In their research, 'Business Models of Journalistic startups in Portugal: an analysis of product innovation, dissemination and monetization in media enterprises' they identified business model of five journalistic startups via interviews with editorial managers of each case. By thematic analysis of interviews, they illustrated Business Model Canvas for every single startup and showed how they manage innovation, dissemination and monetizing from the journalistic content.

Last article of this special issue addresses the change in advertising ecosystem due to technological advances in media industry. Kristian Sund and Henrik Jensen investigated the challenges of advertisers in finding an agency as partner. In their article 'Marketing Challenges and Advertising Partner Selection: Exploring Advertiser-Agency Relationships in the Danish Media Industry', they interviewed 146 Danish advertisers about their partner selection challenges and strategies. They identified a list of challenges that advertisers face in today media market, then they showed that agencies adopted new multi-channel business models to better serve their clients. Finally, they found out that advertisers prefer to employ multiple agencies in various types rather than hire one partner as a single-step shop. Their study contributes to our understanding of how relationships between advertisers, media and agencies as three main actors of advertising market change and re-establish.

The above selected articles have been selected after at least two rounds of double-blinded peer reviews as well as an editorial evaluation, and recognized as valuable research works that contribute to our knowledge from the different aspects of field of media management, and as well, relevant to the business perspective of this journal. I expect that such level of contribution continues in the articles that will be published in the future issues of this journal, and different business aspects of underdeveloped subjects in media management will be investigated and explored.

I acknowledge my team including Saeid Ghanbary as assistant editor and Habib Abdolhossein as English Proofreader to help boost the quality of this issue. Also I thank my editorial board that guide me with their knowledge and experience. In particular, I must appreciate all reviewers of this issue that helped me decide about the submissions with their expert opinions and constructive comments. I wish you will find the articles of this issue valuable and insightful.

Datis Khajeheian,
Editor-in-Chief

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Biography:

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