



Extended Abstract

A comparative analysis between Twitter and Sina Weibo - When design and hysteric matter

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Introduction

Microblogging history begun less than a decade ago, although it could not be explored under a long-term perspective, however there is already a wide set of publications that covered the development of microblog platforms both in the West, analyzing the success of Twitter and in China in case of Sina Weibo.

Most of the literature addressed more attention to the reasons that drove the quantitative growth of the medium, focusing on the relationship between new media and important events such as the U.S President election (2008), the Arab Spring (2012) but also the Wenzhou train collision (2012) and the scandal of the Red Cross Society of China in 2011. Articles with comparative approach between Twitter and Sina Weibo have been published highlighting the role of control provided by the government in case of Sina Weibo; the orientation towards news and information sharing in the case of Twitter. In other words management of the platforms and content have been the focus of the comparison (Gao et al, 2012; Chen et al, 2011; Sullivan, 2012). Other studies criticized the effectiveness of microblog in terms of political empowerment highlighting a dystopic perspective (Morozov, 2011; Fuchs, 2012; Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011; Franceschini et Negro, 2014). Nevertheless, less attention has been addressed to the role played by the aesthetic design and the constitutive choices that characterized the two microblog services.

Methods

The aim of this paper is to present the constitutive choices of the two platforms (Starr, 2004) describing all the main steps and changes they had since the time they were officially launched. The analysis will

take in account the six versions of Sina Weibo on one hand, and the three ones of Twitter (the original, the “new Twitter” and the “new new Twitter”) through a historical diachronic approach. The author will apply the three layer aesthetic analysis (Benney, 2013) analyzing the two microblog platforms through: their concentration on consumption and entertainment; their strategy to implement surveillance and identify (if any); their level of “hackerbility” (see Santo, 2013) offered to their users in order to guarantee a control over the interface. The author will also argue how the role of aesthetics layout as well as the design of the two microblog platforms impact users flow of information supporting political and economic strategic decisions *ex ante*.

Results and Discussion

The second part of the article will be dedicated to explore the operational design of both services evaluating the level of openness and interaction with other platforms. Questioning to what extent they could be considered walled gardens systems and in which way they interact with application programming interface. This second level of analysis argues in which terms microblogging could be purely defined as “information networks”; whether it implement specific policies addressed to *trading and marketing sites* (TMSs) and/or *play and game sites* (PGS) (Van Dijck, 2013) and eventually how these platforms implement their ideas of business model.

Conclusions

To be defined and discussed

References and Notes

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