Societal Implications of Media Platformisation

Opportunities and Pitfalls for Policy and Governance in the Digital Age
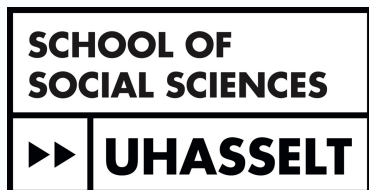
Data disentanglement for safeguarding European public values in media platforms

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Digital platforms as entangled infrastructures: Addressing public values and trust in messaging apps

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Contents
- Rationale
- Public values & platform society
- User disempowerment
- Entangled infrastructures
- Data disentanglement
- Conclusions

Governing artificial intelligence in the media and communications sector

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EUROPEAN MEDIA AND PLATFORM POLICY
The Euromedia Research Group

With the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

sDEPS

Shared Digital European Public Sphere: We share the belief that there is a need for **public digital infrastructures** that are based on **democratic values**

public···spaces

internet for the common good

- **Introduction**
  - In 2018—almost thirty years after the invention of the World Wide Web—many essential applications on the internet, while being **indispensable tools in our lives** as economic and social citizens, have turned into **vehicles for political control and economic profit**. In these essential applications, citizens are no longer subjects, but objects.
  - We share a common view that an alternative is necessary and are **reimagining the internet as a public space.**
  - Therefore we formed a coalition to design a new platform for social interaction, where users are **not viewed as exploitable assets or data sources**, but as equal partners that share a common public interest.
  - We, as founding partners, call this **coalition** PublicSpaces.

- **Our goal**
  - PublicSpaces is committed to providing an **alternative software ecosystem** that serves the **common public interest** and does not seek profit.
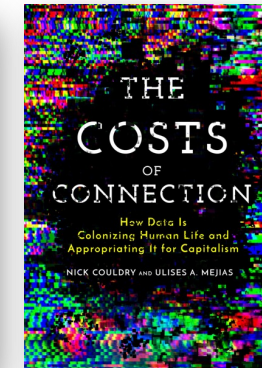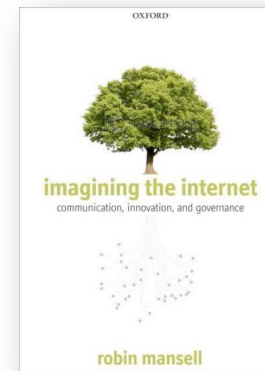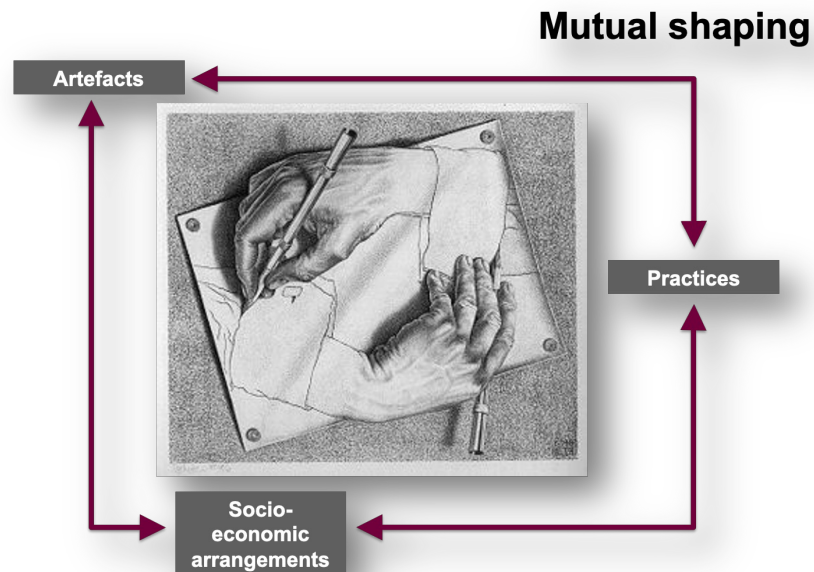
Rationale

- **Responsible digitalisation**

  - How do we **design, organise and govern** data-driven (media) platforms in order to safeguard and strengthen European public values?
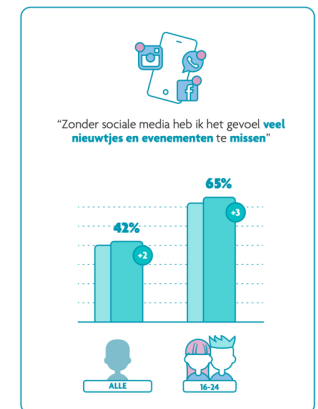
Public values & platform society

- **European democratic societies** are built on **public values** for empowering citizens, but increasingly under pressure

  - Enshrined **fundamental human rights** (CoE, 1950; EU, 2000): privacy and data protection, freedom of expression and information, non-discrimination, fairness,...

- **Platform society**: watchful of role and impact of **corporate data-driven platforms**

  - Ubiquitous and deep (inter)penetration in everyday life (**domestication**)

  - Becoming **essential intermediaries** ('obligatory passage points') for basic public utilities in liberal democracies: news, information provision, public debate, education, health (cf. Covid-19), justice,...

  - Change in responsibilities for organising public space and safeguarding public values: **'cooperative responsibility'** (Helberger, Pierson & Poell, 2018)

Dependence of social media
Flemings struggle with their social media use
2020 2021

"Zonder sociale media heb ik het gevoel **veel nieuwtjes en evenementen** te **missen**"

65%
42%

ALLE   16-24

"Without social media I have the feeling to **miss out** on **many news and activities**."
www.digimeter.be

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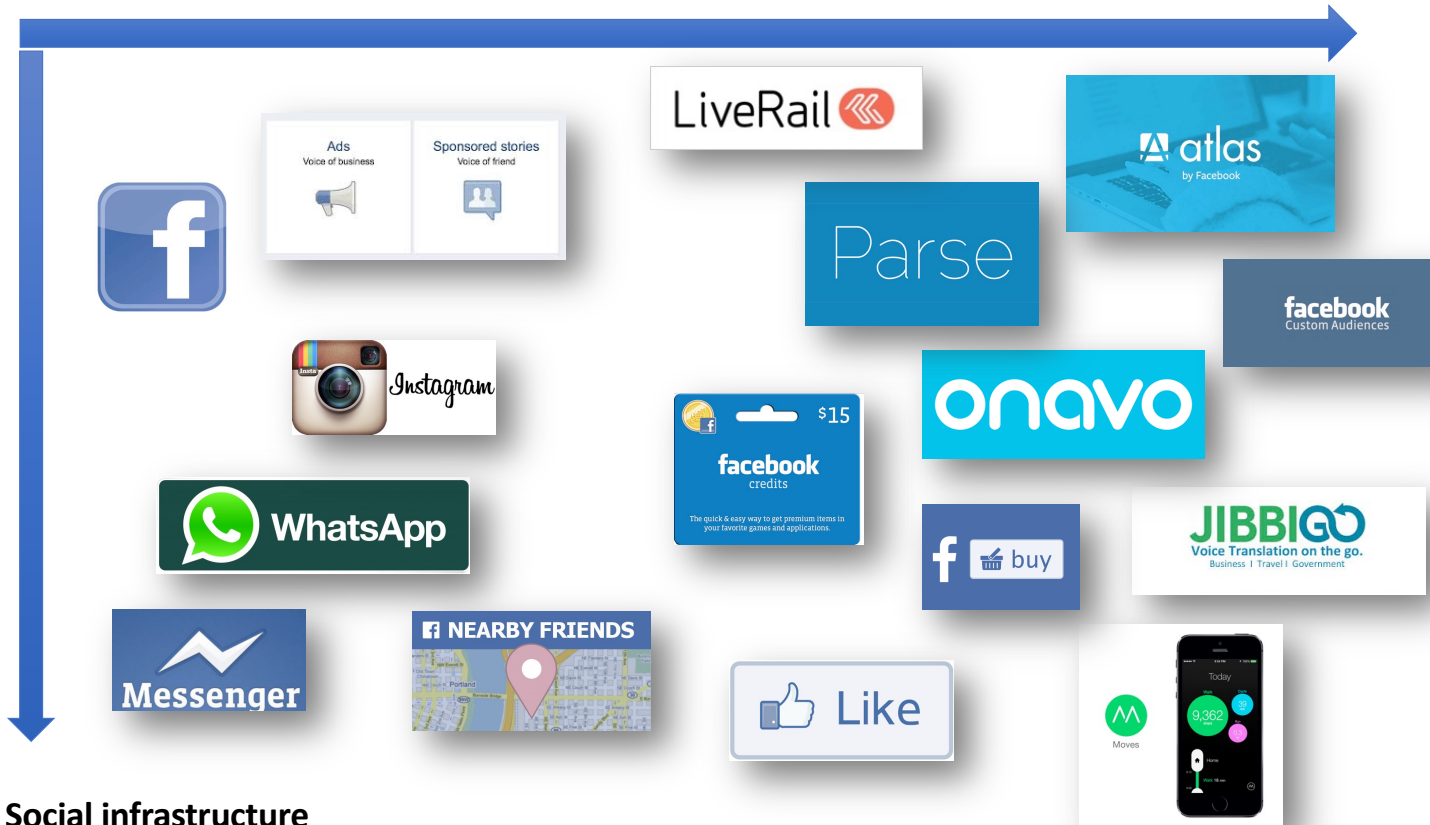
User disempowerment

- **Entanglement** of social and corporate-computational infrastructures

- **Process** of enabling **user disempowerment** (cf. Agre, 1994)

  1. First positioning themselves as **trusted tools** becoming vital for everyday social life (e.g. news, social communication, education, health, etc.)

  2. Data generated through **dependent position** (cf. datafication), converted in obfuscated way into **trade value** (cf. commodification), thereby leveraging loss of control of users over their data

  3. Driving forces for further developments of platforms **steered** by commercial motives (cf. selection), potentially in disregard of **public interest values** (e.g. disinformation, filter bubbles,...)

Special Issue Article

The political economy of Facebook's platformization in the mobile ecosystem: Facebook Messenger as a platform instance

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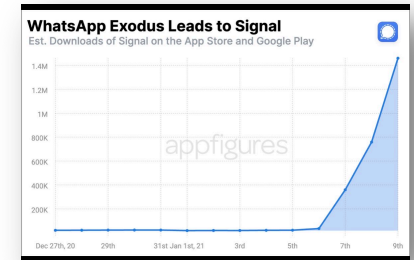University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Data disentanglement

- **Data disentanglement** = identifying and analysing how **corporate-driven capturing, processing and sharing of data** in media platforms for **social and public purposes** does **not happen at the expense of public interest values** in particular context (e.g. media, education, health,...)

- Related concepts

  - **Contextual integrity** (Nissenbaum, 2009)

    - Data privacy in terms of appropriate flows of personal information, based on context-sensitive informational norms

  - **Seamfulness** (Couldry & Mejias, 2019)

    - Instead of prioritising seamless handling of data, embedding boundaries to continuous flow and processing of data

    - *"The principle of seamfulness therefore becomes a potential tool for resisting social worlds that are less accountable, harsher, and characterized by ever higher levels of inequality, mistrust, and despair."*

  - **Sphere transgressions** (Sharon, 2021; Walzer, 1983)

    - Instance of illegitimate sector creep

    - *"Currently, we are witnessing a series of sphere transgressions by tech companies, whereby the (legitimate) advantages they have accrued in the sphere of digital goods are translated into (illegitimate) advantages in other spheres."* (https://sphere-transgression-watch.org)
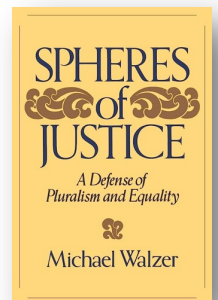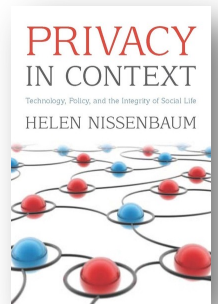
Conclusions

- **Alternative pathways** towards data disentanglement (cf. mutual shaping)
  - Through media coverage and exposure of **industry practices**
    - E.g. data breaches, WhatsApp explicit data sharing with Facebook (January 2021),…
  - Through **user practices**
    - E.g. algorithmic literacy, black-outs (e.g. 2021), active non-participation,…
  - Through **technological tools**
    - E.g. tools revealing and possibly blocking data sharing with third parties, like PETs (e.g. Ghostery), adblockers (e.g. AdGuard) and Apple's iOS App Tracking Transparency feature,…
  - Through **multi-stakeholder initiatives**
    - E.g. Digital rights civil society, digital ethicists, independent advisory boards (Smartschool), Public Spaces,…
  - Through **regulatory affordances**
    - E.g. GDPR data access requests (Art.15), AI Act, Data Spaces, DMA, DSA, Data Governance Act, Data Act,…

WhatsApp Exodus Leads to Signal
Est. Downloads of Signal on the App Store and Google Play

Privacy

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Thank you for your attention