Migrating to Mastodon: Power and social media dynamics in the great #TwitterMigration

Following Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter in October 2022, a large number of users started "migrating" to the decentralised social media platform Mastodon, part of an open source network of social media servers known as the Fediverse. We argue that the rise of Mastodon is a grass-roots resistance practice in response to the new, over-centralised configuration of Twitter in the hands of one extremely powerful and politically controversial figure.

This paper draws on critical discourse studies (KhosraviNik & Unger 2016) to investigate the motivations and beliefs of Twitter and Mastodon users in relation to the platforms in question and to social media in general, and explores their attitudes around power, politics and practicalities of social media use in such a rapidly changing situation. We consider the extent to which, in the midst of this rapid change, the risk of losing long-established relations and communities within platform-specific networks (Preece 2000; Hine 2017) is an important factor in users' choices around which platforms they use.

To conduct the study, we collected data from participants via an initial survey followed by an online focus group. Participants were asked to respond to questions about and discuss with each other their own social media use, and power dynamics in relation to the Twitter migration. The responses and discussions were then analysed, focusing on specific discursive strategies such as argumentation, to look at how these actors and phenomena are constructed, as well as what people think about dominance issues on social media. Initial findings suggest participants deliberately position themselves in relation to power/social media dynamics, attending both to technical details of platform affordances and wider political/ideological aspects of the "migration" via a range of strategies.

References

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