

The Internet in flux: Twitter and the interpretive flexibility of microblogging

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This article uses “interpretative flexibility” as a concept to analyze emerging Web 2.0 technologies by tracking the early development of one specific application: microblogging, more particularly Twitter. By deconstructing microblogging’s instable meaning in its infant years, we try to get a fuller understanding of a new technology in relation to its uses, users, content and the economic context in which it evolves. The process of interpretive flexibility is worth analyzing while it happens—as the world spins around the axe of the Internet—rather than just in hindsight, because such analysis may open up new perspectives on how power relationships transpire in a networked environment. The outcome of this process is never gratuitous or contingent: at stake in this battle is the shaping of our very channels for communication. While the Internet is in flux, a tool like Twitter is a contested object that gets molded by the larger political, economic and social forces in our societies.

Keywords

Microblogging; Twitter; social networking sites; Web 2.0; business models; networking theory; media technologies.