From the Fordist Phone to Neoliberal Facebook: Changes in Standardizing New Media Practices

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Abstract:
Last February 2012, a Moroccan employee of the temp company oDesk leaked Facebook’s operation manual for content managers. The manual detailed what could and could not be shown on Facebook to employees who had been hired to scan daily thousands and thousands of photographs and posts. Yet the employees were not told that it was Facebook which was outsourcing this task, although most guessed accurately which company was behind the manual and their jobs. Why the secrecy? Under Fordism, these manuals would have been circulated freely, but clearly something has changed in the ways companies regulate information since then.

In this talk, I explore how changes in how markets are structured have led to changes in standardization, and in particular, in the ways that new media practices are standardized. I discuss how neoliberal companies now standardize practices, especially given that their primary concern is now with turning information, all information, into a commodity. In short, I compare how Fordism and neoliberalism encourage different techniques for standardizing practices, inspire different types of actors to be involved in standardizing, and foster attempts at standardization at different moments in people’s adoption and use of new media.