Twitter Thread by Kristian Niemietz wants several competing Twítters



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@K_Niemietz



The People's Twitter.
And it would definitely not selectively censor unfashionable opinions if it were run by a government bureaucracy.
Because public sector bodies only ever maximise The Common Good.
Could even call it The International Common Good Association, just to make sure

> As Twitter is the virtual equivalent of a natural monopoly both left & right should agree that it needs to be nationalised as a public utility & subordinated & regulated as a public good but as it is a global phenomenon perhaps it could be governed by an international regulator?
>
> — Phillip Blond (@Phillip_Blond) January 9, 2021

"I don't like the fact that Twitter is so subservient to the woke elites. Let's create a massive state regulator, so that the woke elites, which have a stranglehold on most institutions... oh no, wait..."

(I mean, he's not entirely wrong. His solution may be rubbish, but there is an issue here. Twitter really does have a substantial amount of market power.
Still: There are people who I just will not ever side with, even when they have a point. And that includes Communitarians.)

As far as I can see, there are no good solutions here.
5 years ago, I would have said "Lol, Twitter is just a private company, like any other. The Guardian wouldn't publish anything by me, but that's not "censorship". They're just not letting me use their platform."
However...

...Twitter really does benefit from substantial network effects. We are on Twitter, because everyone else is also on Twitter. You can set up a rival platform, but that would be like being the only person who has a telephone: not very useful, because there's no one you can call.

Does that make Twitter a natural monopoly?
Not automatically. Before Parler came along, my prediction was: One day, a rival platform will pop up. A lot of Cool People will switch to it. Then lots of people will follow, because most people imitate what The Cool People do.
So...

...in that way, the network effect problem can be overcome. All you need is a group of high-status early adopters, ready to switch en bloc. And then, you can have a competitive marketplace. You get "competing Twitters", trying to woo the trendsetters.
And then, Parler happened ■

Parler was doomed from the moment a couple of prominent right-wingers decided to set up shop there, because that meant that it was now perceived as a "right-wing Twitter". Since "right-wing" = low-status, that was the death sentence.
It was...

...the exact opposite of the effect I had in mind.
My prediction: some high-status people will switch ➡■ everyone will follow.
The reality: some low-status people switched ➡■ nobody followed, because nobody ever follows low-status people. Everyone tries to steer clear of them.

And THAT is the true source of Twitter's market power. It's not about the technology, or traditional network economics. It's the fact that Twitter is dominated by the sort of people who have what the Krauts call "Diskurshoheit" (=the dominance of public discourse).

The trouble is that everyone wants to be where those people are. Because those people are the ones whose views matter. There's no point in switching to a different platform if it means talking to a bunch of stranded Milo fans, whose views are fundamentally unimportant.

This means that the only type of platform that could challenge Twitter's market power would be a platform that attracts Twitter's high-status users.
And how could you do that? Why, by out-twittering Twitter. By being like Twitter, except more so. Woker, greener, more communist.

If people like Owen Jones and Ash Sarkar said "We've had it with Twitter; we're switching to platform X" - X would have a very good chance of success. Because millions would follow them.
But nobody else has that sort of cultural power.
And what sort of platform would they choose?