

French regulator bars 'Follow us on Twitter' on TV

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(AP) -- Broadcasters in France must not use promotional lines like "Follow us on Twitter" or "Find us on Facebook" on the air because they violate a ban on secret advertising, a regulator says.

Bloggers pilloried the government over the decision, suggesting it was another sign that France is too inflexible on Internet innovations.

In its May 27 ruling, France's Superior Audiovisual Council, or CSA, ruled that broadcasters could legally point viewers or listeners to their sites on generic "social media" but could not specifically cite services like Facebook or Twitter.

The CSA said Monday that Facebook or Twitter could be cited only when a report or program merits a specific reference about those sites.

The ruling went largely unnoticed in traditional media until French bloggers - many of them critical - picked up on it.

It came soon after French President Nicolas Sarkozy hosted Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg and other Internet magnates for a conference on how much to regulate the online world.

France has long had a reputation as tough on [cyberspace](#), notably in efforts to protect copyrights. It was not immediately clear whether other countries had enacted similar airwave bans about references to Facebook or Twitter.

In its one-paragraph ruling in response to a query from an unspecified [broadcaster](#), the regulator said specific references to the [social networking sites](#) would violate a 1992 law banning secret advertising.

It argued that redirecting viewers to generic social media instead would still be "informative" without plugging a specific site.

A CSA spokeswoman, who said she could not be identified by name because of agency rules, noted some networks often blur out the images of corporate logos in the backdrop of TV shots to avoid secret advertising.

Loic Le Meur, a French blogger who once advised President Nicolas Sarkozy on Internet policy, lambasted the decision. "French regulation forbids TV networks to say Facebook or Twitter? My Country is screwed," he wrote on [Twitter](#).

Sarkozy has embraced some [social media](#) sites, and some 450,000 people "like" his [Facebook](#) page. He is generally in favor of more Internet regulation, not less.

The CSA, created in 1989, is charged with ensuring fairness on French audiovisual communication, such as TV time granted political candidates, and with the protection of children from some types of programming.

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