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**Issues of memory preservation in the digital era: The case of
Facebook**



Christos Chatoglou (6113605)

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Supervisor: Dr. Ingrid Hoofd

Second Reader: Dr. Stefan Werning

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Table of contents

Abstract	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Theoretical framework	5
Memory.....	5
Henri Bergson.....	7
Jacques Derrida’s dialogue with Freud.....	8
Bill Brown’s Thing Theory.....	9
Memory in the digital era.....	10
Digitised memories.....	11
3. Research method	13
Affordance analysis.....	13
Limitations of affordance analysis.....	15
Discourse analysis.....	16
Limitations of discourse analysis.....	18
Selection of platform and its features.....	18
4. Analysis	19
<i>On This Day</i>	19
Affordance analysis.....	19
Discourse analysis.....	21
<i>Friendversary</i> videos.....	23
Affordance analysis.....	23
Discourse analysis.....	24
5. Conclusions	27
6. References	29

Abstract

In a heavily digitised era, in which technology seems to play a critical role in seemingly every aspect of our lives, among other factors, interpersonal relations and social practices need to be constantly and critically scrutinised in order to effectively reflect on and respond to these contemporary rapid changes. Being a pivotal part of our understanding of the world, memory seems to have also been affected by these changes and the ever-present social media, which are equipped with an unprecedented capability to assess, configure and bring out each user's "memories". But are those really memories?

The aim of this thesis is to explore the notion of memory within this framework and examine how it is framed by the most popular social media platform, Facebook. To further narrow down this objective I intend to examine On This Day and Friendversary videos, Facebook's memory-dedicated features. To this end, the research question is: How does Facebook's archive as represented via On This Day and Friendversary videos frame our understanding of personal memories online? The research method employed to answer this question constitutes a combination of affordance and discourse analysis focusing equally on the platform's attributes as well as the users' understanding of memories online. Finally, I intend to establish a thorough connection between theory and my research findings in order for a cohesive conceptualisation of how exactly personal memory is framed on Facebook to emerge.

Keywords

Memory, archive, Facebook, social media, affordances, discourses, *On This Day*, *Friendversary*, nostalgia

Introduction

Being a key part of our perception of the world, human memory throughout the ages has been subject to constant change and configuration regarding the contemporary means of communication, information distribution and even storytelling. In this context, it is evident that living in the digital era, along with our perception of the world, modern ways of communication and an overall understanding of our heavily digitised environment, memory constitutes part of the equation in terms of adjusting to these circumstances. Subsequently, the discourses surrounding the notion of memory are also subject to change and adjustment to our contemporary era. One place where memory can be perceived in conjunction with the digital environment is the social media sphere. Users of social networking sites are able to upload, edit, share and even delete digital ‘memories’ of theirs at any time, anywhere. Put differently, they can take over the creation, configuration, and fate of their own digital ‘memories’, a phenomenon unprecedented, at least to this extent.

However, since the rise of social media is a moderately new phenomenon, many aspects and implications have not been adequately researched. Concerning relevant research, scholars have emphasised the need for more methods, since existing ones are becoming outdated due to the constant reconfiguration of premises that surround our relation to new media. Thus, José van Dijck (2005) emphasises the need for more research on questions such as “how digital technologies are affecting the nature of our remembering processes” (324). Other scholars, such as Van House and Churchill (2008), Bartoletti (2011) and Sturken (2008) have mentioned the need for research on the relation between memory and Web users, something that “has to a large extent been ignored up to now” (Bartoletti ch. 1, n.p.).

To effectively examine the issue of memory in the digital era, one must narrow down their research scope. Therefore, I intend to focus on Facebook and how memories are organised, framed and eventually brought out in the world’s most popular social media platform (“Global Social Media Ranking 2018 | Statistic”). Thus, the overarching research question would be: How does Facebook’s archive as represented via *On This Day* and *Friendversary videos* frame our understanding of personal memories online. To answer this question, several additional sub-questions must be formulated to further examine the related parameters. For instance, phenomenological questions such as: What is human memory? How does it work? will constitute the foundations of my research. Also, the question of how digital tools affect the process of memory and what is the difference between human memory and digital storage are of great importance too.

Theoretical framework

Memory

Before delving into the core arguments, theories and perceptions that constitute the theoretical framework of this thesis, it is important to adequately clarify the notion of memory. One way to narrow down and examine this is by delving into the ways in which media frame our understanding of what constitutes memory. In the following paragraphs, I am going to clarify the ways in which I will utilise and position the term *memory* within the framework that reflects my research scope.

Memory has been subject to philosophical as well as scientific investigation throughout the years. Its examination dates to ancient Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle and Plato, but can be also observed in the work of the 19th and 20th-century thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim, Walter Benjamin, etc. (Garde-Hansen 2). A rather simplistic approach would define memory as the “process of retaining information over time” (Zimmermann). A more figurative one, by Mary Carruthers, would describe memory as “a kind of photographic film, exposed (we imply) by an amateur and developed by a duffer, and so marred by scratches and inaccurate light-values (1). However, these definitions lack the depth enclosed in the notion of memory and examine it merely in terms of media.

French philosopher Henri Bergson points out that memory should be examined in terms of space. As Garde-Hansen claims, “a question that would fascinate Bergson and, some might argue, drives our desire to archive our lives: where are all the memories you cannot recall that are not useful at this present moment?” (7). This question ties in with contemporary discussions about memory in terms of its digitisation, storage and recovery from hard-disks, clouds, social media, etc. Thus, memory is not only confined within the boundaries of the human body, but also extends to non-human objects, the discourses and materiality of which shape our understanding of memory.

As we have seen, memory is difficult to be examined through a broad lens. Therefore, it is significant to position it within the framework of media to gain a better understanding of the term, its potential and limitations for this research. Van Dijck (2005), Sturken (2008), Guðmundsdóttir (2014) and Mayer-Schönberger (2009) have provided a considerable amount of insight about the relation between memory and (new) media, mainly by focusing on the agency of the latter and laying out theoretical foundations for further research. Considerations of the digitisation of memory, its relationship with Social Networking Sites (SNS), the

continually expanding memory-keeping capacities that new media provide, as well as critical approaches about privacy issues are cases in point.

A good starting point when examining memory in relation to media, is personal memory, namely “the process by which we tell the story of our life to ourselves and to others, a process that is felt and acted upon” (Garde-Hansen 3). Media, as the name suggests, function as mediators of ordinary life events that ultimately define our identity and the way that we perceive ourselves. Evidently, human memory is fallible, and its storage and retrieval capacity is limited. Put simply, humans forget. Thus, as Garde-Hansen explains, “media are recording devices – audio, video, photographic, digital; they are mnemonic – verbal, visual, kinaesthetic and auditory aids to help us remember; and, of course, representational – creative, manufactured and artificial techniques for making emotional connections with visualisations of the past” (8). However, Garde-Hansen omits to include an equally important affordance of media in relation to memory, namely the fact that they also co-construct both the way in which we remember, but also our memories. In other words, media do not only constitute tools of memory aid, but also active factors of its shaping and understanding. The dependence of memory upon media can be observed in the case of photo albums be they analogue or digital. Photo albums can store information that remains relatively unspoiled by time, helping humans to remember past events. Of course, the same function applies from books to hard disks, clouds and SNS. It can be suggested that media, as tools, are intertwined with human memory and their features as well as their forms of mediating memories, should be equally researched as memory itself. These elements will be analysed in-depth in the following chapters.

However, the fact that media, constitute memory co-constructors, does not render them memory replacements. In “A note upon the ‘mystic writing-pad’”, Sigmund Freud demonstrates how the writing pad allows for “unlimited receptive capacity for new perceptions” and the ability to save memory-traces of those perceptions (227). Nevertheless, what differentiates the human mind is the fact that it is imperfect, hence (almost) impeccable memory machines cannot reproduce this exact feature that defines humans, namely our defects. Jacques Derrida critically tackled Freud’s work, maintaining that technological tools are potent enough to affect the way the mind is shaped and subsequently defining the relationship between the psychic apparatus and the archive. Thus, it can be hypothesized that similarly to Freud’s mystic writing-pad, Facebook and other SNS allow for and produce “unlimited receptive capacity for new perceptions” and the ability to save memory-traces of

those perceptions (Freud et al. 227). However, it remains to be examined on the one hand, how exactly Facebook as a digital tool can shape, confine and bring out those memory-traces and on the other hand how the digital mediation of Facebook possibly affects our understanding of those memories.

Henri Bergson

In his work *Matter and Memory* (1896), Bergson developed a theory of how memory functions. Bergson's approach was rather innovative for his time, as he demonstrated the importance of considering distinct types of memory as well as the necessity of examining the notion of memory in relation to *perception*. As McNamara explains, "When remembering is triggered via a current perception or cue, a series of images and past perceptions become available to the rememberer. These memory images must be related to the current perception—they must be similar or analogous to the current perception" (221). Thus, Bergson's ontological understanding of the unconscious is what allows him to have a solid comprehension of the past. For him, the past and the present co-exist and they both contribute to shaping the future. Therefore, memory does not only operate in terms of reproduction, where the past is just being transferred into the present, but it also co-creates it as well as with a view to the future. Hence, memory is not merely a reproduction of the past but an actual sense.

Moreover, for Bergson, the autonomy of human memory plays a crucial role, since human memory is unique in relation to the agency provided by tools, not just in terms of forgetting or not forgetting, but in a qualitatively different manner. Human memory not only establishes a connection to the past, but also looks towards the future and is able to be triggered regardless of external cues. According to McNamara's interpretation of Bergson, "memory has its own rhythms and laws—its own "agenda." Memory's usefulness lies in the fact that it allows us to escape the influence of the present environment and thus confers on us a certain measure of autonomy" (222). In that sense, tools like archives, digital photographs or clouds cannot be compared to human memory.

But what is the criterion of the selection of memory images? McNamara maintains that Bergson's conceptualisation is based upon a selectionist approach, meaning that the process of memory image selection is driven by usefulness. Thus, the image that prevails does not necessarily reflect the exact past situation or even the present perception of things, rather it configures itself in a way that serves a useful purpose in the current state of affairs.

Jacques Derrida's dialogue with Freud

As previously mentioned, a theoretical cornerstone of this thesis lies in Derrida's critical assessment of Freud's conceptualisation of the psychic apparatus in relation to memory and the archive. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Derrida begins by investigating the term *archive* - 'arkhē' and its relation to the ideas of commencement (there is a *there* where things take place) and commandment (where authority and order are exercised). According to Derrida, the notion of archive derives from the Greek word *arkheion* (ἀρχεῖον), a domicile "of the superior magistrates, the archons" (9). There, the documents were gathered, ordered and guarded. Derrida raises the issue of the private and public spheres into which archives can exist and he maintains that there can be a passing from one sphere to another, but that does not automatically translate to secrecy or non-secrecy of the document. Moreover, archives are characterised by a form of authority and political extension. As remarked in a footnote of the lecture, "There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (11).

One of the most profound points that Derrida makes is the one concerning "inscription technology's relationship to both the psychic apparatus (as it is conceived and as it may function) and archives" (Sampson). In this part, Derrida challenges Freud's conceptualisation of the psychic apparatus in relation to technological advancements as the latter are able not only to influence the process of archiving but also affect the structure of the mind. Referring to Freud's *Mystic Pad*, a particularly precise analogy of the abilities of the mind in relation to memory, Derrida referring to contemporary archival machines, claims that "Nor does Freud examine the possibility of this machine, which, in the world, has at least begun to resemble memory, and increasingly resembles it more closely. Its resemblance to memory is closer than that of the innocent Mystic Pad: the latter is no doubt infinitely more complex than slate or paper, less archaic than a palimpsest; but, compared to other machines for storing archives, it is a child's toy" (16). Consequently, he wonders about what effects can the "technical mechanisms for archivization and for reproduction, for prostheses of so-called live memory" (16) have on the psychic apparatus. What stands out from Derrida's critique on Freud is that advanced technological means of archiving are not just a proportional representation of the abilities of the human mind, neither do they simply have a more direct agency on the human psyche. For him, these means of archiving are fundamentally *us*, for they so directly affect the mind and thus they should be given attention. However, Derrida equates

human memory with neither the archive per se, nor with the technological means that are able to foster the archive. According to him, “The archive will never be either memory or anamnesis (having the ability to recall past events) as spontaneous, alive and internal experience” (14).

Also, according to Derrida, the notion of the archive is closely related to this of the future: “It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow” (27). Thus, the importance of the archive is not apparent only in the present, but mainly in the future, where the choice of what should be maintained or disposed of, becomes evident and affects the understanding of what has been archived and possibly ourselves.

How technological tools of archive affect the structure of the mind and determine what should be maintained in our memory, will prove particularly useful for my thesis, functioning as a foundation for my understanding of the archive and how it relates to memory and the technological object that bears it. It can be hypothesized that similarly to Freud’s mystic writing-pad, Facebook allows for “unlimited receptive capacity for new perceptions” and the ability to save memory-traces of those perceptions (Freud et al. 227).

Bill Brown’s Thing Theory

Thing theory was created by the phenomenologist Bill Brown and belongs to the broader field of critical theory. Based on Heidegger’s distinction between things and objects, it reflects how the inanimate object world helps to form and transform human beings. Generally, the notion of materiality constitutes the state of something being material, however in the field of humanities, materiality has been denoted as a concept suggesting that humans and objects are both part of a dynamic relationship framed by questions about identity, power, time, etc. Moreover, Brown maintains that things and their material nature need to be analysed because they assert themselves on humans (4). These concepts will prove particularly helpful regarding the establishment of the extent to which the materiality of the object, namely the mobile media device and the platform of Facebook, has an impact on how memories are perceived by the users. Put differently, what is the agency that the inanimate object has in our understanding, or, borrowing from Bill Brown’s wording, how exactly do these objects assert themselves on humans? Furthermore, objects can also assert themselves on humans in a discursive manner, namely through the way in which we develop discourses that surround those objects. Besides, even the terms ‘material’ and ‘object’, let alone the

terms used on Facebook's interface (e.g. Friendversary, likes, Timeline, etc.) constitute words, that bear their own significance and are deemed subjects of examination.

One of Brown's contentions is that there are two main interpretive lenses through which one can examine the relationship between inanimate objects and human beings. These are the theoretical and the methodological approaches. The former indicates that "human actors encode things with significance" (Brown 6) and the latter that things "illuminate their human and social context" (Brown 6). In the context of my thesis, Brown's methodological approach is what seems to fit my research question, since I intend to examine the agency that objects have in relation to how memory is perceived by Facebook users. However, it is not the objects per se that shape our understanding of respective notions, but also, as mentioned earlier, the discourses surrounding those objects. Thus, the mobile media device, in this case the smartphone and the platform of Facebook will be examined in relation to the discourses formulated around them. The reason behind this choice is that thing theory does not merely rely on the notion of materiality. According to Brown, objects are codes that are being interpreted and thus made meaningful (4). Hence, the interpretation of codes can be conducted by examining the discourses that both surround the objects and potentially formulate meanings concerning the users' perception of memory.

Finally, Brown pinpoints the significance of spatial and temporal contexts in the examination of the subject-object relationship. It is worth mentioning that inanimate objects and the notions stemming from them are not only surrounded by spatiotemporal conditions but also defined by them. Hence, the fact that users of social media can post, browse, feel and remember almost anytime, anywhere, means that the consequent perceptions about various concepts such as relations, memory, time, space, etc., are correspondingly altered or framed by this dynamic.

Memory in the digital age

So, what are the parameters that affect and ultimately shape our understanding of memory in our digitised era? Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir's work, "The Online Self: Memory and Forgetting in the Digital Age" (2014), appertains to the notions of memory in the online framework of Social Networking Sites (SNS). She proposes that the stories people tell of themselves are based on a "complex interaction between self, identity, remembrance, forgetting, and narrative" (43). These notions are negotiated when applied to a digital framework, in the sense that they constitute mediated memories and narratives.

Guðmundsdóttir maintains that “by ‘sharing’ an image of ourselves, by posting an item on a site, our presents become pasts” (44). Through this process, the “creation” of memories translates into a narrative conveyed through and to cyberspace. However, users of SNS are not aware of who has access to their memories, due to the complexity of the so-called black box. Regarding the process of formulation of memories, SNS do not only require specific sets of personal data, but also pose constraints about the type of data through which the user can enrich their profiles. Hence, memories become mediated and standardised. According to Guðmundsdóttir, our digital memories, mainly shared via social media constitute a new hybrid form of public and private memory (48). Thus, the boundaries between public and private space transcend the physical, offline dimensions and can potentially affect the way we perceive our memories. Moreover, forgetting, an inherently biological function is also affected. As Viktor Mayer-Schönberger maintains, “Since the beginning of time, for us humans, forgetting has been the norm and remembering the exception. Because of digital technology and global networks, however, this balance has shifted” (2). The question that arises is how exactly our involvement with SNS influences our memories. It can be hypothesized that the form through which memory is shared on SNS not only shape or limit our online presence but also compromises our general perception of our memory. Building on this argument, “This lack of control over what will be remembered and what will be forgotten must have an effect on how we perceive our selves, not only in the past but our sense of identity in the present” (Guðmundsdóttir 52).

Connecting Guðmundsdóttir’s work to my research, I intend to approach the notion of memory in social media and particularly Facebook’s *On This Day* and *Friendversary* videos and examine how they frame our understanding of what constitutes a memory online.

Digitised memories

Another scholar who has engaged with the relationship between memory and digital tools is José van Dijck. In “From Shoebox to Performative Agent: The Computer as Personal Memory Machine” (2005), she analyses how personal memory machines utilise the computer to reflect on the ways in which memory functions. Some of the dominant themes of the article involve the notions of digitisation and memory in relation to software. Van Dijck is interested in exploring the connection between digitally mediated memories and how users of online photo storage systems perceive those memories.

Van Dijck tackles the question of “how digital technologies are affecting the nature of our remembering processes” by pointing out three concepts: the digitization, ‘multimediatization’ and ‘googlization’ of memory, namely, “the material inscription of signifiers in bits, the convergence of singular media in multimedia machines and the embedding of personal collections in global networks, confront users with profound changes in their conventional cultural practices” (324). Moreover, she emphasises the importance of *tactile qualities* (van Dijck 325) and materiality of memories that constitute an intrinsic feature of the ‘sensation of memory’. When we store our memories in immaterial databases, we are being deprived of their tactile qualities and thus our perception of them is altered. Furthermore, she argues that individual memory is innately connected to a “constantly evolving social context” (327). This claim relates to why I have chosen Facebook as my focal point in my research. The platform’s social nature will potentially allow me to examine the configuration of remembering processes through an analysis of some of its basic memory-related features, namely *On This Day* and *Friendversary* videos. These features enable users to store their memories in a specific section of the platform and retrieve them. Nonetheless, those memories constitute an intricate sort of recollection, since they have already been made public. Subsequently, the social context within which memories have been created, shared, stored and retrieved differs from an analogue photo album creation and visual or tactile retrospect.

Regarding van Dijck's notion of ‘googlization’ of memory, she contends that memories are not fixed entities waiting to be retrieved “from the shelves of the mental library” (327). Quite the opposite, memories constitute intricate entities that have been formulated by complex technological, mental and social processes. Subsequently, digitally mediated memories are not arbitrarily brought out, but there is an overarching element of narrative that determines the framework in which we receive them. For instance, Facebook’s *Friendversary* videos constitute the memory story of two people, often embellished by elements such as music and sound effects, but most importantly, pictures of shared memories in chronological order. This way, a simple yet apparent pattern of narrative encloses those memories. Nevertheless, both these “memories” and the narrative framework cannot be compared to human memories, even less to the way they are retrieved. This argument relates to what has already been established about the distinction between human memory and digital storage, especially reflected in the works of Bergson and Derrida.

So far, we have seen only a small part of the vast interpretations of human memory and it can be argued that it is not only confined within the boundaries of the human body, but it exceeds it in the sense that it can be shaped by social frameworks. Moreover, memory will be examined mainly in terms of space as opposed to time, namely how memory is perceived within Facebook's virtual space. Part of this examination constitutes the materiality and the discourses of this space that will be also taken into consideration in terms of how they mould our understanding of memory. Subsequently, the agency that technological tools have on the way both memories and the mind are shaped will be presumed. However, it needs to be clarified that human and digitised memory are two clearly distinct notions. Lastly, memory will be examined as personal and cultural and my research will not consider other aspects such as traumatic, prosthetic, historical etc.

Research method

The intended method to be followed is a method mix of affordance and discourse analysis of two specific features of Facebook, the *On This Day* feature and the *Friendiversary* videos, that pertain to the notions of personal memory keeping and the archive. These methods work well as a method combination, since they both allow for an interpretive analysis executed on a specific framework. Generally, even though these two methods do not allow for elaborate, user-generated qualitative results, they allow for a dynamic analysis of the user-platform relation.

Affordance analysis

Affordance analysis constitutes a rather new research method in the field of new media. Hence, I intend to focus on the work of Bucher and Helmond, "The Affordances of Social Media Platforms" (2017), because I deem that they cover a wide range of the conceptualisations and research utilisations of affordances within the new media spectrum that can be applied when examining concepts such as platforms and interfaces.

The term affordance was "originally developed in the field of ecological psychology (Gibson, 2015) and later adopted in design studies (Norman, 1988), the concept of affordance is generally used to describe what material artifacts such as media technologies allow people to do" (Bucher and Helmond 3). According to Norman it refers to "the actionable properties between the world and an actor (a person or animal). To Gibson, affordances are relationships. They exist naturally: they do not have to be visible, known, or desirable" (39). Moreover, Norman argues that "affordances reflect the possible relationships among actors

and objects: they are properties of the world” (42). Subsequently, affordances constitute an intriguing lens for my research, since they directly relate to the relationship between actors and objects. Hence, I expect that through affordance analysis I will be able to observe the relationship between the user (actor), the platform and the device (objects) regarding how memory is framed and what is the role of the platform in our understanding of it. This factor also relates to my theoretical framework. One of the main points that can be deduced from the latter, is that objects constitute inanimate, yet actively involved parts in the human memory processes. Thus, affordances also constitute “a key term for understanding and analysing social media interfaces and the relations between technology and its users” (Bucher and Helmond 3). To further connect the general framework of affordance analysis to my research, “as a concept that captures the relationship between the materiality of media and human agency, affordance continues to play an important role in media studies and social media research specifically” (Bucher and Helmond 11). As previously discussed, one of the pillars of this research lies in the materiality of technological tools and more specifically in the importance of their material attributes in shaping the relationship between them and the user. Hence, I contend that affordance analysis constitutes an appropriate method that also ties in with the theoretical framework of my thesis.

Utilising the notion of affordances is a complicating venture, since the term has changed its connotations depending on the scientific field that has been applied to. Hence, the psychologist James J. Gibson, first used the term to describe the relationship between an animal and the environment, while it was later “adapted in design studies and the field of Human–Computer Interaction (HCI) through the writings of Donald Norman” (Bucher and Helmond 5). Later evolutions include social and communicative interpretations of the term. Thus, it is crucial to limit the term affordances within the scope of this research. For this reason, I will mostly delve into Norman’s and Bucher and Helmond’s conceptualisations of it, as they are steered more towards my field of interest. Thus, the question would be “how certain objects could be designed to encourage or constrain specific actions” (Bucher and Helmond 6). Moreover, as Bucher and Helmond mention, “affordances are not just limited to the visible senses but can also be felt or heard. William Gaver suggests that, “affordances are primarily facts about action and interaction, not perception” (Bucher and Helmond 7). In fact, this attribute is particularly relevant to my research, since the affordances that relate to specific features are mostly invisible, with the only exception being their textual elements, such as the names that are given. Hence, affordances also relate to what Wellman points out as “the possibilities that technological changes afford for social relations and social structure”

(Wellman 228), or, put differently, that “technology affords social practice” (Bucher and Helmond 9). Evidently, this social aspect of affordances relates to my research of Facebook, currently the most popular social network with 2.2 billion monthly active users as of January 2018 (“Global Social Media Ranking 2018 | Statistic”). It could be hypothesised that technological advancements in the context of social practices, enable corresponding changes in the way social activities are exercised. A case in point is the establishment of social media as key communicative and social-interaction facilitators. Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms enable for particular forms of social practices such as memory keeping. Given that the preservation of memory constitutes an inherently social practice, at least in the Western world, then Facebook memories facilitate a specific type of social practice, that is the need for archiving, which is technically structured by and enabled through the digital platform. Consequently, digital preservation of memory differs from a physical-world one, in the sense that it is structured, configured, mediated and shared through technology, which in turn “affords social practice” (Hsieh ch. 2).

Summing up, I plan to implement a feature-oriented conceptualisation of affordances to examine how Facebook’s memory features generate several probable meanings and practices related to how memories are perceived. The reason why I have opted for an examination of features is because they are “symbols and the connotations they carry matter” and they “produce meaning and meaningfulness” (Bucher and Helmond 2). My approach is based on the dynamics between social practices and interactions offered by these two features. Another reason why I have chosen this approach is that I am interested in examining the extent of agency that platforms like Facebook have in our perception of memory.

Finally, despite being a risky venture, the fact that I will have to adjust my focal point based on my critical understanding of the corpus enables me to accurately and interpretively manage the balance between theory and corpus in a productive way.

Limitations of affordance analysis

The fact that affordance analysis is a particularly interpretive research method also means that it embeds several limitations. According to Bucher and Helmond, it “arguably makes a difference which conception of affordance is used—as it puts certain epistemological limits on what can be known about affordances and where to find them in the first place” (16). Hence, the fact that I have opted for a feature-oriented conception of affordances deprives me of examining their communicative aspect for example. Being inclusive to interpretations,

affordance analysis cannot provide me with answers that can be generalised. This factor also applies to the observations of social nature. Hence, possible social practices that will emerge and relate to how memory is perceived are not to be generalised either, since they only constitute an individual researcher's critical observation.

Another weakness of affordance analysis is its detachment from qualitative results that would allow for more concrete, analytical answers to my research question. The selection of affordance analysis as research method had to be made in relation to time and space management as well. In that sense, opting for an elaborate, qualitative method would probably have to be confined to only a few interviews.

Discourse analysis

I have chosen discourse analysis since I am interested in examining not only how users describe the respective memory aspects on Facebook but mainly, how the platform names and pitches in those features. I will focus on how people understand and utilise the tool through which memory is archived and the specific characteristics like the seamlessness and materiality of the tool that potentially affect the user's understanding. However, discourse analysis, being a method that is based on the researcher's critical interpretation, does not allow for general conclusions, yet it can often reveal "unspoken and unacknowledged aspects of human behaviour, making salient either hidden or dominant discourses" (Morgan 4).

Since it constitutes "an umbrella term for the many traditions by which discourse may be analysed" (Morgan 1), I intend to employ critical discourse analysis (CDA). In the following paragraph, I will lay out the fundamental principles of CDA and further connect it with the theoretical framework and general scope of my research.

CDA is "an interdisciplinary field that includes linguistics, semiotics and discourse analysis (the field of discourse studies) and is concerned with theorising and researching social processes. Being deeply political in its analysis of societal policies and practices, critical discourse analysis shows how 'elites play a prominent role in reproducing dominant discourses'" (Morgan 3). Academics of CDA differentiate themselves by employing distinct conceptualisations in terms of methodology, even though the definition applies to most of the published work. However, the academic on whom I plan to base my research method on, is Teun A. van Dijk. He argues that CDA is "primarily interested and motivated by pressing social issues, which it hopes to better understand through discourse analysis" (van Dijk 252). One of the most crucial notions in CDA is this of "social power of groups or institutions"

(Hamilton et al. 354). According to van Dijk, power “involves control, namely by (members of) one group over (those of) other groups. Such control may pertain to action and cognition: that is, a powerful group may limit the freedom of action of others, but also influence their minds” (254). Hence, a rather relevant parallel can be drawn in the case of Facebook and more specifically in the way that it configures the discourses on its interface and features. It could be hypothesised that Facebook, being a powerful social medium is able to, discursively limit the actions of its users by enabling only specific operations, therefore having a say in the influence of their minds. The format by which a collection of photographs can be classified as *Albums* or the fact that Facebook memories can only have a specific size and shape are cases in point. Subsequently, the question that arises is whether Facebook, while exerting its discursive power, can affect the user’s mind. As discussed in the theoretical framework part, the power of technology to influence the mind and its structure plays a critical role in Derrida’s work as well and should be given attention. Finally, van Dijk maintains that not all participants of the discourse have the same power or control. The role that factors such as modes of participation, turn-taking, style, etc. play in the discursive relationship between participants is determined by their respective power (256).

Taking van Dijk’s conceptualisation into account, I intend to divide the implementation of critical discourse analysis into two parts. The first one pertains to the way users of Facebook refer to its two particular memory-related features *On This Day* and *Friendversary* videos and the second one to the way that Facebook as a platform names them. By dividing my discourse analysis into two components, I believe that I will possess a clearer picture of how the respective discourses interconnect with each other and with the overarching notion of memory and its understanding within this framework. Moreover, I will be able to approach how “specific discourse structures determine specific mental processes or facilitate the formation of specific social representations” (van Dijk 259).

Concerning the user’s perspective, I intend to analyse the discourse of five male and five female new media Master’s students and more specifically the way in which they refer to and understand the aforementioned features in relation to memory on Facebook. The age spectrum of the users ranges between 20 to 24 years old. Even though the number of the subjects is far from being quantitatively sufficient, it nevertheless provides me with a potentially fruitful amount of data that derive from people whose academic interest and critical thinking lies within the framework of my subject matter. My goal is not to exhaustively scrutinise the discourses, but to delve into the discursive elements that pertain to

how the subjects perceive the corresponding features in relation to memory. All in all, what interests me are the discursive elements such as metaphors, similes, innuendos, as well as the use of words depending on the context of each response. Finally, the textual corpus that will be analysed derives from written answers given by the subjects to the questions of: “What do these features mean to you?”, “How do you perceive these Facebook “memories” in comparison to your “real” memories?”, “Do you think they affect your memory?”.

Concerning how Facebook involves those two features, I intend to examine both their names per se and the narrative context in which each one of them is integrated. For instance, the term ‘*Friendversary*’ will be examined under the fact that it refers to the word ‘anniversary’ and that the video is directed in a way that it stresses the importance of Facebook for preserving the memories of a friendship. Moreover, I intend to focus on the narrative and discursive elements of the short clips such as captions, animations and overall presentation to discern the agency of the feature over our understanding of memories within the platform. More specifically, I will be examining the exact words of the interface that surround each “memory”, such as specific date, place and time that the post was created, the graphic design that accompany each “memory”, as well as post privacy settings and location information. All observations concerning the discursive elements of the features will be conducted based on my personal *On This Day* and *Friendversary* content as appeared on the Android mobile version of Facebook (update version 157.0.0.38.97). The examination of this particular material took place in Utrecht from 05/04/2018 – 13/04/2018 and the content was accessed via my personal mobile phone.

Summing up, CDA will provide me with an interpretive angle to my subject matter and a potentially fruitful stimulus for critique on Facebook’s means of shaping our understanding of memory.

Limitations of discourse analysis

Like affordance analysis, the interpretive nature of discourse analysis also constitutes a limitation, thus, the outcome of the research depends heavily on the critical assessment of the researcher. Subsequently, the method does not allow for extensive quantitative and thus generally standing results. In addition, according to Morgan, “the general lack of explicit techniques for researchers to follow has often been cited as a hindrance” (4). Finally, for richer results to arise, discourse analysis should be complemented by qualitative components such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, etc.

Selection of platform and its particular features

The reason why I have chosen Facebook for examining the above-mentioned notions is that it constitutes a new media platform that encloses features and practices of memory keeping through various tools. Even though today most social media platforms offer plenty of tools that foster, organise and bring out their memories, Facebook offers its users the option of instantly enriching their posts that later become memories with additional information including feelings, geo-tagging, friend-tags, etc. Thus, Facebook allows for the construction of a complex, multidimensional and multi-layered archive of memories that enables rich textual and locative information to enhance each input. Regarding the two features which I intend to examine, I have selected them because they are specific enough and enclose rich discursive elements that allow for in-depth analysis. Furthermore, the content of those features comprised by individual memories, is distinct for each user, making especially the discourse analysis section particularly intriguing in terms of looking at how each user perceives their memories through these features.

Analysis

On This Day

Affordance analysis

On March 24, 2015, Facebook introduced *On This Day*, “a new way to look back at things you have shared and posts you’ve been tagged in on Facebook” (Gheller). *On This Day* is a default feature that allows Facebook users to look back at content they have shared and have been tagged in each day. For instance, users might encounter photographs, status updates, shared links, etc. from each year on that day since they joined Facebook. Moreover, “memories” that appear in *On This Day* include registered major life events such as marriage, new relationship, pet adoption, etc., and the so-called *Friendversary*, namely when the user became Facebook friends with other users. This way and by default, Facebook includes a wide range of platform specific actions, converting them into content that can be presented as “memories” in the future. It could be argued that the amount of memories available to be displayed each day is rather all-embracing, excluding only ‘casual’ Facebook actions such as liking, commenting, creating or joining groups and sharing content in other user’s Timelines. It might not be far-fetched to maintain that Facebook seems to have the upper hand when it comes to “producing” our memories. This is not merely achieved through its algorithms that

are responsible for bringing them out, but also through its affordance to relate individual and potentially noteworthy and life-changing memories of events to *On This Day* feature in the first place and therefore to Facebook per se. This argument will be further developed in the discourse analysis part of *On This Day*, in which I intend to examine the discursive elements and factors that form Facebook's power over our personal digital archive hosted in the platform.

Moreover, deleting or blocking friends on Facebook are not part of the *On This Day* feature and thus, such actions are not, at least not directly, part of the user's digital "memory". However, memories with friends or family members that might have passed away, currently estranged partners or alienated friends will still be displayed in the daily notification. Subsequently, what is the factor that determines which memories are brought out. Put differently, how does the algorithm choose which past content to display? According to Anna Howell, UX research manager at Facebook, the platform has to be "extremely caring and sensitive" about what is included in *On This Day* (D'Onfro). However, even though the algorithm "presumably tries to present us with pictures from our past that we are most likely to share with others [...] the problem is that algorithms have no empathy" (Shaw). As a result, unwanted memories might still be part of the user's *On This Day*, since the number of likes, shares and, recently introduced, *reactions* are what determine whether a memory is worth to be displayed or not. Nevertheless, in its official website, Facebook is not clear about which "memories" are displayed in the *On This Day*, stating only the kind of "memories" that are brought out, but not the actual selection process. Additionally, Shaw maintains that Facebook appropriates "the very term 'memory' classifying things as 'memories' only if they were posted on its site" (Shaw). As discussed in the theoretical framework part, especially through the works of Bergson, Derrida and Guðmundsdóttir, the archive is fundamentally different compared to human memory, thus what Facebook entitles "memory", is but a misuse of the actual notion. I would argue that it is not merely the fact that something has been created on Facebook that determines whether it constitutes an *On This Day* memory or not, but also its Facebook-related attributes, namely the number of likes, shares and reactions that it has obtained. In fact, while scrutinising the feature, I noticed that there are some "memories" that are not displayed in *On This Day*, even though they fall into the categories mentioned by Facebook. What stands out is the fact that the excluded memories are posts (mostly YouTube links) that have not been liked or shared by my Facebook friends. Therefore, similar to the previous argument, it seems that Facebook gives prominence to "memories" that are essentially and practically associated with its key functions of liking and sharing content.

One of the main points discussed in the theoretical framework pertains to the notion of materiality and how it potentially affects our memory. Tying in materiality with *On This Day* feature, it could be argued that since inanimate objects, in this case, the platform and by extension the feature per se, assert themselves on humans, users are affected by this relationship. More specifically, I would contend that the feature affords a subconscious connection between a user's perception of memory and Facebook as a platform, as well as the establishment of the latter as representative archive, since it possesses the authority to valorise each "memory", even going as far as to exclude those that fail to fulfil the requirements rendering them not worth remembering. The concept of the authority entailed in the archive is also stressed in Derrida's work. Through the way in which *On This Day* as archive selects worth-remembering "memories", Facebook exerts its authority not only from a visual content standpoint, namely by bringing them out, even more so from an institutional and political standpoint by determining what reaches the user's understanding as memory. Thus, even though *On This Day* constitutes a private feature, meaning that each user's content is only available to them, unless they choose to share it with other friends or publicly, the algorithm in charge applies likewise to all Facebook users, deploying a consistent control over what constitutes a memory. The authority exerted by Facebook via *On This Day* constitutes an invisible affordance framed by visible elements that will be discussed in the next part. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that there is no way to conclusively disable the feature, which rather underscores Facebook's omnipresence over its users' personal archive.

Discourse analysis

Regarding the name of the feature, Facebook has chosen a rather comprehensible title that leaves no margin for misconceptions as to what is to be expected. The title is identical or reminiscent of historical retrospection TV programmes, applications and websites. It could be argued that the title itself nudges the user to "look back" at their past life events and "memories" that might have slipped their minds.

As to how Facebook discursively frames *On This Day*, the upper part of the screen is embellished with colourful graphic design drawings of polaroid photographs depicting various themes including a calendar with the corresponding date, a young couple, music instruments, etc. Each year is divided by the phrase "'x' years ago today" and each "memory" appears in the form of a Facebook post. More specifically, there is the user's profile picture, the specific date, time and place that the post was created, as well as the

privacy preference and description that accompanies each post. Additional information such as feelings and friend tags are also included if they had been used in the original post. The number of likes, reactions and comments as well as the option to share the memory appears in the lower part of each post. Concerning the latter, shared memories reflect Guðmundsdóttir's point that digital memory embodies a hybrid form of public and private memory (48). Subsequently, the personal, private memory can be directly shared and thus rendered public. Finally, the lower part of the screen is also decorated with graphic design drawing accompanied by the phrase "That's all for today.". Each memory is confined to the familiar, recognisable format of a Facebook post regardless of the kind of memory (e.g. photograph, check-in, YouTube link, etc.). As stated above, this observation relates on the one hand to Derrida's argument that there is a form of authority that is being exerted since Facebook constitutes the archon, the keeper of the archive and on the other hand, to one of the principles of CDA that pertains to how the power possessed by a group can influence the mind of another. Subsequently, it could be suggested that Facebook's power affects both the archive and the user's mind. By collecting, organising and bringing out memories within its interface framework, Facebook colours the archive with specific attributes and visual elements such as spatiotemporal information, format, shape, etc. Similarly, the mind of the user can be potentially affected by the fact that memories retrieved from the digital archive are essentially associated with the platform per se rendering the latter the mediator of personal, often precious memories. From a critical standpoint, Facebook functions not only as storage and showcase for "memories" but also as a powerful organisation that benefits from user loyalty and emotional investment.

Some of the subjects claim that checking *On This Day* constitutes a daily activity for them ("I am now used to this feature in the sense that I almost see it as a part of my morning news.", "Every day I get the *On This Day* notification. It reminds me of music that I used to listen to when I was younger and that I had forgotten about."). One of the most notable contributions was that *On This Day* constitutes "a reminder that Facebook knows more about me than I do myself." Indeed, the majority of the subjects stress the function of the feature as something that exceeds their ability to recall events, while stimulating nostalgic feelings ("Sometimes they make me nostalgic and remind me of the 'good old days'", "Sometimes it will be a post from a long time ago that I forgot about, so that might give me a slight feeling of nostalgia", "always triggers nostalgia").

Moreover, the majority relates their experience with the feature to regret and embarrassment seeing what they had posted as teenagers, even going as far as to delete the posts that don't appeal to their current beliefs ("I often feel embarrassed of the posts I made in the past, especially from my teenage years so I end up deleting them", "I either feel amused or embarrassment for my teenage self").

The most notable finding is that several subjects notice that their daily exposure to *On This Day* has led them to revise their thoughts about memory ("My opinion about what memory really is has subconsciously changed, maybe because I am served a ready-made memory every single day", "Memories on Facebook seem to fit within little boxes. So, memory seems to be the content of the little box and nothing more", "There is an artificial edge to these memories as I'm not reminiscing naturally, and they are also isolated to interactions that happen on Facebook which is only a fraction of our interactions").

Concerning the relation between digitally mediated and 'real' memories, all subjects claimed that they distinguish the two categories, whilst acknowledging the fact that the former function as aids for their physical memory. Lastly, three of them emphasised the communal aspect of digitally mediated memories presented via *On This Day* ("I also think that digital memories on Facebook are almost always meant to be consumed communally.", "Even if seeing them makes you nostalgic, the goal is to share them with friends, because this benefits Facebook."). Thus, the medium might seem as a mere memory aid, but it is more than that. It leads the users to perceive their memories as public content, subject to platform-specific actions and norms.

Friendversary videos

Affordance analysis

Friendversary videos constitute another memory-related feature, which essentially indicates that two people have completed several years as friends on Facebook. Like *On This Day*, *Friendversary* is a default. Concerning the format of the videos, they are brought out in the standard form of a Facebook post and their duration depends on the number of years the two people have been friends, whilst they do not last more than 70 seconds. Whenever available, the *Friendversary* video appears first in the News Feed, being the first piece of content that the user can see and interact with after having logged in. Hence, it could be argued that Facebook seems to promote its "social" aspect by emphasising its users' interpersonal

relations at the first opportunity. Subsequently, this practice might result in users commenting and sharing their so-called *Friendversary*, therefore attaching importance to a social event that otherwise might have gone unnoticed. Of course, there might be a temporal difference between the commencement of an actual friendship and the corresponding online one, thus *Friendversary* videos do not necessarily mark the essential beginning of a social relationship, but the online confirmation of it. As Lauren Cassani Davis argues in her article, “The Unexpected Charm of Facebook's Friendship Anniversaries”, Facebook is legitimising the anniversary of an online friendship by “branding it publicly and creating a new kind of signpost for it. And the anniversary date itself is also a little arbitrary—the precise moment of mutual Facebook connection is now, to most people, not inherently momentous” (Cassani Davis).

Building on the social affordances of *Friendversary* videos, it is crucial to examine the parameters that determine which friends are eligible to be included in a user’s featured video. Similar to *On This Day*, Facebook’s algorithm picks friends with whom the user interacts the most. So, for instance, a friend with whom I regularly exchange comments under posts, check-in to places together, like, react or share their content, is highly possible that they will be featured in a *Friendversary* video. Conversely, Facebook friends with whom I rarely or never interact, have never appeared in such a video. What stands out, in this case, is the fact that Facebook’s algorithm determines the importance of an event based on its platform specific quantitative variables, namely the number of likes, tags, comments, etc., that two users have exchanged over the course of a specific time span. Subsequently, a user’s anniversary-worthy memories with another person are brought out based on the same principle as *On This Day*. Put differently, memory is worth presenting if it complies with the distinct characteristics of the platform. Therefore, Facebook exerts a certain authority over the archive in terms of what is selected and brought out from it and ultimately over the user’s perception of what constitutes a worth-remembering friendship.

Regarding the materiality of the object, *Friendversary* videos fall under the category of inanimate objects, which nevertheless are potent enough to assert themselves on humans. Thus, the feature potentially affects the way in which users perceive the institution of friendship by isolating platform-specific attributes as parameters that, similar to the platform algorithm, assess the importance of it and ultimately the significance of a subsequent memory. As mentioned in the theoretical part of my thesis, two things can be considered as things in this examination: the platform itself and the device bearing the platform, in this case

the smartphone. Concerning the latter, due to its external, physical characteristics such as its size and shape, as well as its capacity to establish Internet connection, the smartphone enables specific emerging meanings in relation to memory. For instance, the fact that memories and more specifically *On This Day* and *Friendversary* videos can be accessed seemingly anywhere, anytime, means that the archive and subsequently digital “memories” constitute an ordinary, easily accessible type of content that does not require the user’s intervention for classification, prioritisation or even presentation. The materiality of the inanimate object is also apparent in the discursive level into which I intend to delve into in the next part of my analysis.

Discourse analysis

The name of the feature is a combination of the words “friend” and “anniversary”. This combination signifies a joyous occasion that ought to be celebrated or commemorated. Similar to *On This Day*, the word *Friendversary* potentially prompts the user to conceive the content of the feature as something of significance and worth their attention. However, as mentioned previously, the meaning of the word ‘friend’ seems to acquire a particular complexion, in the sense that the criteria for someone to be considered a friend rely on the platform-specific attributes such as the number of likes, shares, comments and check-ins that have been exchanged between two users during a specific period of time. Or as Cassani Davis maintains about Facebook, “the social network that diluted the meaning of the word “friend” to mean one of thousands of weak online links” (Cassani Davis). Consequently, even though our perception of what constitutes a strong friendship might not be directly affected by Facebook’s algorithmic assessments, nevertheless, it might as well be framed by it, since, as discussed earlier, Facebook constitutes the *archon*, the entity that is responsible for the archive. Hence, the authority possessed by Facebook can affect the structure of the mind of the user, in this case concerning the importance of a friendship. Correspondingly, since *Friendversary* constitutes a memory-related feature, I would contend that our perception of memory is equally framed by the platform and ultimately by the feature itself since the latter is essentially an aspect of the archive per se. Put differently, *Friendversary* represents and embodies a dynamic part of the archive, which in turn, is powerful enough to affect humans in certain ways, one of them being prompting a change in their understanding of memory.

Concerning the way in which Facebook brings out the feature, the latter is presented as a typical Facebook post, containing the names of the two people celebrating their *Friendversary*, with the exact date, time and privacy preference right below them. If the

person has shared the short clip accompanied by text or a hyperlink, the latter is placed between the aforementioned information and the video itself. Facebook incorporates the phrase “‘x’ and ‘y’ are celebrating ‘z’ years of friendship on Facebook!”, fenced in two graphic design drawings like those mentioned in *On This Day*’s part. Of course, the main element of the post is the video itself, while right below it one can like and comment on it. Evidently, like *On This Day*, the *Friendversary* feature is accompanied by the widely recognisable elements of Facebook, namely the post structure and the like, comment and share buttons. Thus, once again I would contend that Facebook emphasises establishing its presence, in this case in a discursive level, at the expense of its users’ personal “memories”, by employing its distinctive attributes in terms of interface, something that could cognitively frame and associate its power with its users’ understanding of the platform as an entity that has the upper hand concerning their memory keeping.

The narratological elements of the video itself validate this argument. Due to limited space, I will not thoroughly examine all discursive elements that appear in the video, but I intend to pinpoint a few key ones that support my aforementioned argument. Firstly, one of the key components of the video are pictures of the two Facebook friends whose *Friendversary* is celebrated. Some of these pictures are brought out in the form of old polaroid photographs whose lower part contains the number times other people have liked each one of them. Other pictures are shown as part of a photo album, while comments posted on these pictures are also revealed. However, what stands out is that a page of this virtual photo album contains the phrase “You seem to like each other a lot” fenced in leaves, while the next thing one can see is the exact number of exchanged likes between the two users until this point. Another written phrase of the video reads “And while there are billions of friendships...there’s only one like yours” amid flying balloons. Lastly, one can see two hands holding a small piece of paper that reads “That’s amazing!”, followed by a ‘wow’ emoticon, one of Facebook’s latest trademark reaction emoticons. One can observe that the elements embellishing the short clip on the one hand are reminiscent of more traditional types of archive (polaroid photographs, photo album) and on the other hand there are elements that reflect typical Facebook attributes such as the post form, the importance of likes, the comments, etc. Concerning the latter, I would compare it with a watermark on a picture, a symbol of possession and ownership of a product, in this case, the memories of users. In fact, Facebook, as discussed in *On This Day* part, associates personal memories, in this case of two specific people, with its interface trademark. Moreover, the pictures that are selected and presented in the video are not necessarily the most memorable or significant ones, something that ties in with

Guðmundsdóttir's argument about the lack of control on the part of the user when it comes to configuring their personal archive. All in all, these factors reveal Facebook's discursive dominance over this part of its algorithm-generated archive and therefore its power over how the user perceives the archive and ultimately their memories.

When asked about the *Friendversary* videos, the subjects of my research seemed to be generally indifferent, especially in terms of its content. ("Totally indifferent to annoying. Even when it is about an actual friend of mine -and not just a Facebook friend- it is just a reminder for me that I created a Facebook account long later than the featured friendship. It is kind of ironic. I only shared it with the respective friend once or twice just to make fun of it. Next year it was not even funny anymore", "It's a feature that I rarely care about for two reasons. Firstly, after watching two or three *Friendversary* videos in the past I quickly realised that they have the exact same format and info that does not mean anything to me really"). Like *On This Day*, some of the subjects expressed feelings of embarrassment and discomfiture when watching the *Friendversary* video ("Sometimes I get notifications of *Friendversary* with people that I'm not really friends with and just happened to be tagged in the same photos over a period of time. This makes me feel awkward sometimes knowing that the other person might get the same notification and feel as indifferent as I do", "The person I share the *Friendversary* with might not even be a close friend. It's funny because I once got a video with my dad!", "It's awkward when these embarrassing pictures pop up in this allegedly official friendship video").

A few key words and phrases used to describe the feature and stand out are the following: lightbulb moments, curated memories, inconsequential, superficial if not staged memories, 'window to the world'. Most of these descriptions bear a rather negative connotation, even going as far as to undermine the way in which their memories are brought out. Evidently, the subjects draw a line between what constitutes a 'real' memory as opposed to a curated, digital one. It seems that Facebook's narratological and discursive elements that are incorporated in the video as well as in the interface framework that encloses the feature, are perceived as negative interventions in relation to how "memories" should be brought out. Nevertheless, the rather negative feelings of embarrassment and discomfiture do not necessarily stem from the way "memories" are presented in the video, but from the selection of the person featured in the user's video and the unsuitable choice of what should be memorable content that reflects the special relationship between two friends.

Conclusions

The objective of this thesis was to explore the notion of memory within the framework of new media and examine how it is framed by the most popular social media platform, Facebook. Firstly, I endeavoured to lay out a few key conceptualisations of memory and the way it functions. Utilising Bergson's and Derrida's theoretical understanding of memory and the archive, I established the relation between the past, the present and the future, as well as the intricacy of the archive that can affect the structure of the human mind. Brown's thing theory provided me with a clear understanding of the agency of inanimate objects, exerted via their material and discursive assertion on humans. Guðmundsdóttir and van Dijck's conceptualisations of memory and its connection to digitised environments such as SNS, proved critical to further frame the notion within my research scope, especially by highlighting the clear distinction between 'real' and digitally mediated memories.

Concerning the conclusions of my analysis, what Facebook entitles "memories" is not what scholars refer to as such. Facebook "memories" are essentially past user-generated content that emerges on the News Feed according to the day in which it was originally posted. However, Facebook promotes "memories" that comply with its distinct platform-specific characteristics. In other words, a memory is worth presenting if it is accompanied by several likes, comments, shares, etc. By discursively embellishing *On This Day* and *Friendversary* videos, Facebook acquires a certain power over what constitutes an individual user's personal digital archive and ultimately their perception of it. This is achieved on the one hand via Facebook's algorithm that gives prominence to "memories" that incorporate likes, shares and comments, while excluding other that do not. On the other hand, Facebook exerts its power by visually enriching the archive interface with platform-specific attributes, nostalgic graphic design and particular video direction narrative, which results in personal memories being cognitively associated with the platform per se. Essentially, Facebook colours its archive with these attributes, which in turn exert their discursive power and ultimately affect the user's mind. This is backed up by the contributions of the subjects that were asked to express their understanding of *On This Day* and *Friendversary* videos. Although the majority claimed that the features hardly play a role in how they perceive their memories, all of them acknowledged feelings of nostalgia, embarrassment and even surprise after seeing their past posts. Nevertheless, their perception of the archive and their digital "memories" is indissolubly linked with the way Facebook brings out the latter.

From a political economy standpoint, it is in Facebook's best interest to exert this sort of power over its users. Constituting the most powerful social medium worldwide, Facebook

benefits from user loyalty, since the time spent browsing, sharing, commenting, liking, etc., results in invaluable data for the company, as well as for third-party ad-targeting applications. In this context, memories and especially their designation and celebration as something of considerable importance constitutes a powerful means for this cause. Thus, Facebook is not solely perceived as a social medium, but also as an appointed and authorised archive of personal memories. Generally, it could be argued that mainstream social media like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc., seem to integrate and bring out what is essentially past content disguised and entitled as “memory”, a notion much richer in significance and emotional investment that eventually strengthens the bond between the user and the platform. Consequently, our understanding of what and how something is stored online as memory, requires a critical, holistic and persistent assessment.

Finally, concerning future research, a qualitative angle could be employed to provide the researcher with richer data regarding our understanding of online personal memories. This could be materialised via interviews on active social media users or ethnographic observations in focus groups. A closer examination of the algorithms responsible for selecting which memories are suitable to be featured in *On This Day* could also potentially offer more insight into how Facebook evaluates its users’ “memories”. Also, other digital archive platforms and tools such as Instagram, Snapchat, clouds and network-attached storage devices (NAS) could potentially be examined in relation to human memory for possible similarities or differences to be observed and further analysed.

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