



THE OLD WITHIN THE NEW

A research on how 'flow' is embedded in the
platform LINDA.TV

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ABSTRACT

De term ‘flow’ die Raymond Williams in 1974 introduceerde, wordt al decennialang door mediawetenschappers ingezet om de tekstuele organisatie en kijkervaring van het medium televisie te omschrijven. Williams omschreef de ervaring van het televisiekijken als een constante stroom van beelden: programma’s, reclames, trailers, etc., werden zo geprogrammeerd dat de aandacht van de kijker vast werd gehouden in de ‘flow’ die ervoor moest zorgen dat de kijker de hele avond zou blijven kijken. Het is echter niet verwonderlijk dat binnen een voortdurend veranderend medialandschap ook de toepasbare termen aan verandering, en daarmee ook aan kritiek onderhevig zijn. In de afgelopen jaren is de term ‘flow’ dan ook veelvuldig hergebruikt, bekritiseerd en geherdefinieerd. Hierbij wordt rekening gehouden met de technologische, sociale en culturele ontwikkelingen die de televisie als medium ondergaat.

In dit onderzoek staat het moderne online video-platform LINDA.tv, waar gebruikers (anders dan kijkers) actief op zoek kunnen naar zowel redactionele video’s als ‘video-snacks’ van het internet. Aan de hand van een discursieve interface analyse, waarbij wordt gekeken naar drie vormen van ‘affordances’ (functionele, cognitieve en zintuigelijke), zal een antwoord worden geformuleerd op de volgende onderzoeksvraag: ‘In welke mate hanteert LINDA.tv ‘flow’ in haar klassieke vorm zoals deze is omschreven door Raymond Williams, en op welke manier ontwikkelt LINDA.tv nieuwe vormen van ‘flow’? Met dit onderzoek wordt getracht een bijdrage te leveren aan een nog onderontwikkeld veld binnen de mediawetenschappen op het gebied van online video-platforms.

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INTRODUCTION

“No commercial breaks and all programmes are presented to you in a clear timeline,” and *“You can watch at any time that suits you.”* These are just two examples of how LINDA.tv profiles itself, as seen on the website www.LINDA.tv¹. LINDA.tv is an online video-platform, developed for iPhone and Android smartphones, but also available at a desktop. The platform produces its own content, but also collects all kinds of videos from the internet that might suit its public’s (*“The most fun women in Holland”*²) interests. These videos come from YouTube, Dumpert or news-platforms and every day at LINDA.tv the user gets the new collected videos presented as “must-sees for today”³. When users watch a video, immediately they get invited to watch some more because of a couple of related videos that are being proposed to watch. Also, there is a search-engine which makes it possible for users to directly search for and watch any specific video they desire. LINDA.tv is, and always will be (as the founders state⁴), a free application which “only costs you a smile”⁵.

It might be notable that in the above the term ‘user’ is being used instead of ‘viewer’. A couple of decades ago John Fiske already choose to use the term ‘viewer’ over ‘audience’ because of the more active association that he claimed the term ‘viewer’ carried.⁶ This approach has been adapted and taken a step further towards the use of the term ‘user’, as also has been done by Eggo Müller⁷, because of the media-environment that has been through so many

¹ LINDA.tv. “Over LINDA.tv.” Consulted May 3rd, 2018.

<https://LINDA.tv/page/over-lindatv>

² Sanoma. “LINDA.” May 3rd, 2018.

<https://www.sanoma.nl/brand/linda/>

³ Original: “Moet je vandaag zien

⁴ LINDA.tv. “Over LINDA.tv.” Consulted May 3rd, 2018.

<https://LINDA.tv/page/over-lindatv>

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ John Fiske, *Television Culture* – 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 17.

⁷ Eggo Müller, “Televisie in een convergerend medialandschap: 1995-2010” in *Een eeuw van beeld en geluid: cultuurgeschiedenis van radio en televisie in Nederland*, edited by Bert Hogenkamp, Sonja de Leeuw and Huub Wijffjes (Hilversum: Beeld en Geluid, 2012), 15.

changes in the past decade and is still ever changing in a more (inter)active sense⁸. Therefore, the term ‘viewer’ is, in my opinion, no longer sufficient because of the whole changed experience of ‘watching television’ with nowadays’ interactive ways of watching programs mostly online. LINDA.tv is no different in this respect. These changes imply that one isn’t just passively watching whatever is being presented, but is able to actively select the content that he or she likes and wishes to see. This shift has at the same time to do with technological and social-cultural changes and therefore, with the convergence of television and the internet, contemporary phenomena like LINDA.tv are an interesting subject for research.⁹ Also it is useful to say that the user in this specific case is defined as a ‘she’, referring to the predominantly female target group intended by LINDA.tv.

What occurs to me when considering LINDA.tv is the way in which the interface functions in a way that makes it easy for the user to specifically search for content she is interested in. Also, the user herself is in control considering when and where to watch the selected content. This makes that the viewer-experience and the textual organization of television as we knew it, are subject to change. That is why, within this research, I will focus on the concept of ‘flow’ – the central concept within the Television studies with which both concepts, viewer-experience and textual organization, are being criticized and analyzed.¹⁰ The concept ‘flow’ was introduced in 1974 by Raymond Williams. He describes the phenomenon as the viewer who is not watching just one program, but is being “caught” by the channel in what seems a continuous stream of programs that are scheduled around it.¹¹ The notion of ‘flow’ was, beside ‘liveness’ and ‘broadcasting’, always considered as the central analytical concept

⁸ William Uricchio, “The Future of a Medium Once Known as Television” in *The YouTube Reader*, edited by Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 37.

⁹ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (London: New York University Press, 2006), 2-5.

¹⁰ William Uricchio, “Televisions Next Generation: Technology / Interface Culture / Flow” in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, edited by Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 232-261.

¹¹ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana, 1974), 84.

of television sciences to explore medium-specific properties of television.¹² But, with the rapidly changing media-environment, it is to be doubted if ‘flow’ still simply can be applied to contemporary media practices: If Williams’ notion of ‘flow’ can be understood as one long and uninterrupted text, it could be referred to as a ‘stream’ and “the internet (and platforms like Netflix, Hulu, Spotify, et al) are actually best described as de-streaming technologies, since they treat most content as discrete, distinct units which the audience accesses in an individualized, on-demand fashion.”¹³ This can also be described as a shift from television as a push-medium towards television as a pull-medium¹⁴, meaning that television is no longer pushing content towards the viewer as the viewer (now ‘user’) is pulling content itself. These ongoing developments and changes keep altering the notion of the televisual and are situating scholarly critiques of Williams’ notion of ‘flow’, not to undermine the work of Williams, but to “situate it within a particular televisual order and to suggest that these perceptions owe something to the ongoing technological redefinition of the medium.”¹⁵ With this in mind, I constructed the following research question:

To what extent does LINDA.tv still present ‘flow’ in its classical notion as described by Raymond Williams and in what way does LINDA.tv provide new forms of ‘flow’?

To help me find an answer to this question, I constructed three sub-questions:

- What are the possibilities for the user to navigate through the interface of LINDA.tv?
- What kinds of content does LINDA.tv present and in what way does LINDA.tv present its content to the user?

¹² Jostein Gripsrud, “Television, Broadcasting and Flow: the Key Methaphors in TV Theory” in *The Television Studies Book*, edited by Geraghty, Christine and Lusted David (London: Arnold, 1998), 27.

¹³ Bottomley, 1.

¹⁴ Muller, 15.

¹⁵ Uricchio (2004), 168.

- In what ways are the different videos available on LINDA.tv being presented in relation to each other?

I will at first create a solid base within which ‘flow’ can be considered in my theoretical framework. I will consider the classical notion of ‘flow’ as described by Raymond Williams. This concept has been used, criticized and commented on by many scholars over the years and has gone on to support many different arguments.¹⁶ As Uricchio says: “It has been deployed perhaps most consistently in the service of defining a televisual ‘essence’”.¹⁷ Therefore some important additions in this matter are the considerations of other scholars who used this term aiming to support Williams’ theory. Thereafter I will take ‘flow’ a few steps further by explaining how later scholars, accommodating to time and technological and social developments, are reconsidering and re-defining the notion of ‘flow’. This creates a solid base for me to position the ‘flow’ found within LINDA.tv.

As I will be applying a discursive interface-analysis on the platform LINDA.tv, as practiced by Mel Stanfill¹⁸, I will be analyzing the different kinds of affordances present at the LINDA.tv app. I use the definition of ‘affordances’ as given by Ian Hutchby and William Gaver: Technological and social characteristics of a medium which determine the way the content is produced and consumed.¹⁹ Both the discursive interface-analysis and the three different types of affordances which I use within this analysis will be extensively discussed in the method section of this research.

¹⁶ Uricchio (2004), 164.

¹⁷ Idem., 165.

¹⁸ Mel Stanfill, “The Interface as Discourse: The Production of Norms Through Web Design,” *New Media & Society* 17.7 (2015): 1-16.

¹⁹ Ian Hutchby, “Technologies, Texts and Affordance,” *Sociology* 35 (2001): 447.

William Gaver, “Technological Affordances,” *ACM Digital Library* (1991): 79-82.

RELEVANCE

Stephan Heath once wrote: “One of the main difficulties in approaching television is the increasing inadequacy of existing terms and standards of analysis.”²⁰ Maybe this is way a term such as ‘flow’ is been talked about over and over again. Scholars keep re-conceptualize the concept, time after time adapting its definition to a rapidly changing media environment. Though the environment is changing, it is important to keep track of the many different interpretations of ‘flow’ and how it still is or is not applied as a key-term within Media Studies.

The media landscape has changed considerably under the influence of the rapidly transformed media distribution, meaning that the way in which media content is distributed over the internet nowadays, brings many possibilities for a shift from mass-market towards niche-market.²¹ YouTube and Netflix for example, both are platforms which have been subject to many research projects, considering the above. Though online video platforms thus have been investigated and written about, I still find a gap in the field when it comes to researching a video platform that offers both editorial content as ‘video-snacks’ taken from the internet. Therefore, I argue that by investigating LINDA.tv as such a platform, an underdeveloped part of the changing media-environment is being mapped.

In the future this study, in conjunction with other subsequent ones, can contribute to new understandings and usages of the term ‘flow’. It is important to keep reflecting on this concept and, given the many influential developments, stay aware of the hybrid form the concept can adopt.

²⁰ Stephen Heath, "Representing Television," in *The Logics of Television*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 268.

²¹ Michael Curtin et al., "Introduction. Making of a Revolution," in *Distribution Revolution: Conversations about the Digital Future of Film and Television* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014) 1-17.

With this study, I also hope to contribute to the user's or viewer's broader understanding of the platforms they are using and therefore make them a bit more media wise in a landscape that transforms so quickly, that tomorrow's knowledge is already outdated today. It is important to give them as much insight in strategies which they are subject to as possible.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From the original notion of ‘flow’

“In all developed broadcasting systems the characteristic organization, and therefore the characteristic experience, is one of sequence or flow.”²² These words come from British media scholar Raymond Williams in his book *Television and Cultural Form*, where he describes his acquaintance with the American broadcasting system and how this confrontation with this specific way of ‘watching television’ has changed the way he defines television. In addition to this, he states how this phenomenon of planned flow is “perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting,”²³ and one that is central to the television experience. Since Williams’ notion of ‘flow’ forms the fundament of this research project, it is important to lay out the original meaning of the term, as meant by Williams and used (and altered) by other media scholars, and to fully understand the term we must see it in a more historical context: Williams wrote his book in an era where television had taken a relatively stable position in everyday society, the era of broadcasting.²⁴ As Uricchio puts it: “Williams experienced a historically specific form of television that included the final days of the “Big Three” hegemony²⁵ in the United States. In this sense, he was privileged to participate in (and thus write about) a particular generational experience, a distinct clustering of technologies and practices.”²⁶

When Williams turned on the television as he visited the U.S.A., he underwent an experience in which multiple programs were presented to him as one continuing stream of

²² Raymond Williams, “Programming as Sequence or Flow,” in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, (London: Routledge, 1974): 86.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Jostein Gripsrud, “Broadcast Television: The Chances of its Survival in a Digital Age”, in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* ed. Jan Olsson and Lynn Spigel (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 210-212.

²⁵ The “Big Three” hegemony refers to the three major traditional commercial broadcast television networks in the United States: ABC, CBS and NBC. Beginning in 1948 until the late 1980s, the Big Three networks dominated the U.S. television: Douglas Blanks Hindman and Kenneth Wiegand, “The Big Three’s Prime-Time Decline: a Technological and Social Context”. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 52(1) (2008): 119-135.

²⁶ Uricchio (2004), 167.

images which resulted in the fact that, when he tuned in to see one specific program, he kept watching the following and the next after that.²⁷ Every item shown on the television, seemed to go together as a whole. This planned flow made sure, as Williams describes, to ‘grab the attention in the early moments and this illustrates a reiterated promise of exciting things to come, if we stay.’²⁸ This was a totally different experience from what he was used to in the U.K. where television programs were presented as clearly separated sequences.²⁹

Williams places this experience of ‘flow’ in an economical perspective: He explains how broadcasters took over social-cultural events – like a musical concert – and informative habits – like reading a newspaper – and transmitted it into programs which, as the service extended, became series of timed units.³⁰ These programmed timed units together form a sequence which eventually result in a flow. This flow is used by big commercial broadcasters to get their audiences engaged and ‘sell’ them to their advertisers, as also explained by John Corner in his book *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*,³¹ and by Rick Altman in his book *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*. Altman talks about how flow is being used by big commercial American broadcasters who measure their audiences and sell them to advertisers and uses this phenomenon to underline his theory about ‘flow’ being part of a cultural habit.³² This is in line with Williams’ idea of how ‘flow’ isn’t just an unambiguous concept: Beside its economic and technical characteristics, it also has a lot to do in social terms. Both for Williams, as for my particular research project, an important indicator of ‘flow’ is the way we speak of ‘watching television’: “picking on the general rather than the specific experience.”³³ In other words: We no longer talk about watching a certain program, but we

²⁷ Idem., 89.

²⁸ Idem., 91.

²⁹ Idem., 86.

³⁰ Williams, 87.

³¹ John Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 60.

³² Rick Altman, “Television/Sound,” in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 40.

³³ Williams., 88.

appoint the action of using the medium in general, therefore ‘flow’ turned into an experience which characterizes not just the medium, “but important parts of modern social experience in general.”³⁴

Further important notions of Williams’ ‘flow’ can be seen in the way in which it is planned: The beginning is the most important part of the ‘flow’ as this is the part where the audience must be captured and not be tempted to change channels. Also ‘flow’ is the cause of the extension of viewing-hours, mainly due to its all-day availability and the fact that it is so hard to turn it off: “[...] the flow is always accessible, in several alternative sequences, at the click of a switch. Thus, both internally, in its immediate organization, and as a generally available experience, this characteristic of flow seems central.”³⁵

Over the course of the years Williams’ notion of ‘flow’ has been discussed, criticized and re-conceptualized by many media scholars. An example can be seen in the following: Williams states that, before the broadcasting area, media texts were isolated objects which were in no way connected to each other or even got associated with each other, but because of ‘flow’ the distinction between the independent segments is fading.³⁶ Like I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Williams thus argues to consider media texts together as a confluent whole without any clear separation.³⁷ John Ellis, although underlining the importance of Williams’ introduction of ‘flow’³⁸, states that the term is being misused and that this misuse is made possible by the way Williams defines the term:

“In arguing against two assumptions (that programmes are interrupted; that TV is a series of separate coherent programme items), Williams described flow as a liquid and even

³⁴ Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch, “Television as a Cultural Forum,” in *Television: The Critical View*, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 28.

³⁵ Williams, 92.

³⁶ *Idem.*, 81.

³⁷ *Idem.*, 83.

³⁸ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions. Cinema Television, Video* (New York: Routledge, 1982), 117.

confusing process by which broadcast TV tends to average out the various programme forms that its formal organisations of production claim to keep separate. According to Williams' model of flow, then, everything becomes rather like everything else, units are not organized into coherent single texts like cinema films, but form a kind of montage without overall meaning [...].”³⁹

Ellis then explains how this theory of Williams has both a strength and a weakness: The strength lies within the separate items being placed within the same experience, without being organized to produce an overall meaning⁴⁰, but, according to Ellis, the problem lies in how Williams defines ‘items’ as still separate texts, independent units like for example a cinema film.⁴¹ Furthermore Ellis argues Williams’ flow as a feature of TV that “compromises and alters the separate texts that TV has manufactured.”⁴² Ellis refers to this as a ‘cinema-style’ that underestimates “the complexity of broadcast TV’s particular commodity form, which has very little to do with the single text.”⁴³ In other words, Ellis does not agree with Williams’ idea of all separated items being one fluent whole, because that undermines both the items themselves as the existing broadcast system. Rick Altman also criticizes this part of Williams’ theory when arguing that Williams mixes up a medium characteristic (the ongoing stream of images) with a form of audience reaction (a stream of feelings and experiencing).⁴⁴

As mentioned before, the concept of ‘flow’ was introduced by Williams in 1974. ‘Flow’, as meant by Williams and underlined, used, commented on and criticized by many media scholars, carries multiple interpretations through the years and these interpretations are strongly time-bound. Interpretations that are being attributed to the term depend on many factors and

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Idem., 118.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Altman, 40.

influences. The context in which Williams' theory was developed is nowadays no longer in existence and fundamentally differs from the context of television as a medium in which we operate today.⁴⁵ Henry Jenkins uses the term 'convergence' to describe how different media technologies, media practices and media industries have been merging together. Due to these technological innovations there have been massive changes since the 'broadcasting era', which gave the viewer more control due to the 'on-demand viewer experience'.⁴⁶ That is why, through the years, there also have been scholars who wagered themselves on a redefinition, or a re-conceptualization of the term.

To a re-conceptualization of 'flow'

Jostein Gripsrud wrote in his 1998 work how the analytical concepts within Television Studies: 'broadcasting', 'liveness' and 'flow', were bound to specific historical and geographical circumstances and therefore argues that these 'key metaphors' are too much out of date to still be used.⁴⁷ As already mentioned before, Gripsrud also states that individual programs are still more important for the viewer than the 'flow' in general.⁴⁸ Due to the viewer's increased control, thanks to, for example, the remote control and the VCR, the viewer now is able to create his own personalized 'flow', or 'sub-flow'.⁴⁹ In other words: each with his own interests is now able to switch between channels and programs which makes it possible to 'get out' of the initial 'flow' and create one for his own.

⁴⁵ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 2.

⁴⁶ Idem., 2-5.

⁴⁷ Gripsrud (1998), 18.

⁴⁸ Idem., 28.

⁴⁹ Gripsrud (1998), 170-171.

William Uricchio also argues how the original notion of ‘flow’ is not anymore applicable to the new ways of watching television.⁵⁰ In his 2004 work he underlines the importance of remembering that:

“the realities of generational overlap and plurality complicate the lived experiences of television. [...] The issue is generational in the sense that television’s technology, its program access capacities, and its patterns of user interaction have appeared as clustered relationships.”⁵¹

Ever since the 1980’s, televisual developments can be understood as a shift from a program-based notion of ‘flow’, as introduced by Williams, towards a more viewer-based notion of ‘flow’.⁵² New technologies, like the remote control and VCR, gave the viewer more control over its own viewer-experience by giving him or her the chance to give direction to the ‘flow’. According to Uricchio, this was made possible by a “new type of interface between program and viewer” which results in ‘flow’ being fundamentally different from the years before.⁵³ Due to the upcoming digital devices and the use of algorithms, systems of metadata have become the leading characteristics of our viewer-experience which adapts to our personal viewer behavior.⁵⁴ The viewer behavior is being registered by the content supplier and thus forms the metadata on which algorithms base personal suggestions for more content to watch: This can be called a ‘metadata-based flow’ and so a whole new factor dominates the notion of ‘flow’: the metadata-programmers.⁵⁵ This theory makes the work of Uricchio useful for my research: since LINDA.tv makes use of meta-data and with this in mind I can figure out in which ways these meta-data are used to come to some kind of ‘flow’.

⁵⁰ Uricchio (2004), 168.

⁵¹ Idem., 164.

⁵² Uricchio (2004), 168.

⁵³ Idem., 172.

⁵⁴ Idem., 176.

⁵⁵ Idem., 176-177.

When Williams introduced the concept of ‘flow’ within the context of the broadcasting era, as discussed before, ‘flow’ was only related to the content of the streaming channels.⁵⁶ Several scholars however argue that nowadays, due to convergence, ‘flow’ can be described as a more ‘fragmented’ or ‘circulating flow’, which means that the ‘flow’ is spread out between different channels, platforms and devices between which the viewer himself can navigate.⁵⁷ According to John Caldwell, “successful multimedia development, therefore, means being able to track, monitor, and predict – or at least respond quickly to – multidirectional user flow migrations.”⁵⁸ Implying that ‘flow’ isn’t limited to the medium television anymore, but covers a “wide area and embraces so many different phenomena.”⁵⁹ These different phenomena and many new developments, like cable tv, VCR, the remote control, video-on-demand and the internet, challenge the traditional program strategies and fragment the ‘planned flow’ as they transform the traditional mechanisms of ‘flow’ into online environments where the viewer itself is in control and can navigate between different kind of content.⁶⁰ Jennifer Gillan calls the viewer on this respect a ‘clicker’: an internet-user who has total and active control of the way it ‘consumes’ content.⁶¹ Because of this self-providing way of watching content, Caldwell argues how difficult it is for producers and programmers to create one planned ‘flow’.⁶² The substitutional fragmented ‘flow’ Caldwell writes about will play an important role in my research.

⁵⁶ Jenkins, 104.

⁵⁷ Jenkins, 2.

⁵⁸ John T. Caldwell, “Second-Shift Media Aesthetics: Programming, Interactivity and User Flows”, in *New Media, Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*. Ed. Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (London/New York: Routledge, 2003) 136.

⁵⁹ Gripsrud, 28.

⁶⁰ Caldwell.,

⁶¹ Jennifer Gillan, *Television and New Media: Must-Click TV*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 76.

⁶² Caldwell, 134-136.

‘Scripted spaces’ and affordance

At the LINDA.tv application it is possible for the user to watch content she desires and to have control over the ‘flow’. This is in line with the theory of Daniel Chamberlain where he argues that online television-interfaces provide the viewer (as he calls her) with desired content and therefore adapts to the personal viewing behavior.⁶³ By using the interface of the application, the user gets the impression to have control over the ‘flow’.⁶⁴ However, this control is still limited because of the metadata which are part of the interface and are of great influence on the content the user gets to see.⁶⁵ Chamberlain claims that these interfaces can be seen as ‘scripted spaces’: the screen invites the user for interaction when at the same time hides its technological characteristics so therefore the design of the system is completely focused on the experience of the user.⁶⁶ Beside a technological function, Chamberlain argues that the ‘scripted spaces’ also serve a cultural purpose: to structure the contact between the user and the content.⁶⁷ In other words, he believes that ‘scripted spaces’ are designed to make the user believe that she is in control, when in fact she is not.

While this part will be more extensively addressed in the method section of this research, it is important to already introduce idea of ‘affordances’ as an important part of this research. According to Ian Hutchby, affordances can be seen as the technological and social characteristics of a medium which determine the way the content is produced and consumed.⁶⁸ Also William Gaver writes about affordances as specific technological characteristics that facilitate a certain usage.⁶⁹ Gaver explains that the use of affordances can provide a useful tool

⁶³ Daniel Chamberlain, “Television Interfaces,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 38.2 (2010): 85.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Daniel Chamberlain, “Scripted Spaces: Television Interfaces and the Non-Places of Asynchronous Entertainment,” in *Television as Digital Media*, ed. James Benett and Niki Strange (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 230-231.

⁶⁷ Idem., 231.

⁶⁸ Ian Hutchby, “Technologies, Texts and Affordance,” *Sociology* 35 (2001): 447.

⁶⁹ William Gaver, “Technological Affordances,” *ACM Digital Library* (1991): 79-82.

for user-centered analyses of technologies,⁷⁰ and because ‘flow’ can be explained as both a technological characteristic as a social-cultural one, my research can be categorized as a (partly) user-centered one and therefore make use of the interpretation of affordances as mentioned above. This will further be discussed in the following method section.

METHOD

To find an answer to my research question, I will perform a discursive interface-analysis as described by Mel Stanfill in her text “The Interface as Discourse: The Production of Norms Through Web Design.”⁷¹ By looking at the interface of the LINDA.tv app (like functions, menu-options and page lay-outs), underlaying processes can be exposed. Using this methodology, embedded assumptions about the purposes and appropriate usage of the app can be interpreted because the discursive interface-analysis studies the norms that are being produced by the affordances of the interface.⁷² The methodology of this discursive interface-analysis is based on the theory that the ways websites are constructed reflect certain assumptions of what the website visitors will, or will not do.⁷³

According to Stanfill, affordances can be divided into three types: functional affordances, cognitive affordances and sensory affordances.⁷⁴ Functional affordances relate to what a website can *do*, cognitive affordances relate to what the users of the website *know* what the website can do and sensory affordances relate to enabling the user to perceive (see, hear or feel) things.⁷⁵ While functional affordances produce certain norms (by implying a certain

⁷⁰ Idem., 80.

⁷¹ Mel Stanfill, “The Interface as Discourse: The Production of Norms Through Web Design,” *New Media & Society* 17.7 (2015): 1-16.

⁷² Idem., 1-2.

⁷³ Idem., 13.

⁷⁴ Idem., 3-12.

⁷⁵ Idem., 4.

behavior of its user), cognitive affordances make the user able to *choose* an action.⁷⁶ Cognitive affordances can be said to facilitate the user in processing information, while sensory affordances for example emphasize certain aspects of a website, by means of design choices, which divide the users' attention.⁷⁷ For my research, I will start the analysis with the cognitive affordances because I think that these affordances are the once that are being addressed at first when visiting the LINDA.tv app: The actions and possibilities that are assumed by the user, that she *knows* are possible.

Also, it is important to note that for this analysis, I will only make use of the iPhone application of LINDA.tv, since the application was at first developed for this kind of usage.⁷⁸ The platform is also available in a desktop web-browser version, but it appeared to me that certain options do not function at their best this way, so therefore I choose to only use the iPhone application.

For using the LINDA.tv app, the user is obligated to register. Since I am already a registered user, I will use my own account to have full access to all the content LINDA.tv is presenting in its app. I will collect data for all three of the affordances types as discussed before: I will look at what the user can *do* with the app (functional affordances), what the user *knows* about what can be done (cognitive affordances) and how the user is being enabled to perceive certain things (sensory affordances). These data will be analyzed and will be put in perspective considering the different theories and concepts as described in my theoretical framework to eventually answer my three sub-questions:

⁷⁶ Idem., 8-9.

⁷⁷ Idem., 7-8.

⁷⁸ "Tv-app Linda lijkt voorschot op onzekere bladentoeekomst," EMERCE, last modified at 27th October 2015. Accessed at 24th June 2018, <https://www.emerce.nl/nieuws/tvapp-linda-lijkt-voorschot-onzekere-bladentoeekomst>.

- 1) What kinds of content does LINDA.tv present and in what way does LINDA.tv present its content to the user?
- 2) What are the possibilities for the user to navigate through the interface of LINDA.tv?
- 3) In what ways are the different videos available on LINDA.tv being presented in relation to each other?

The above will then lead me to an overall-answer to my research question:

To what extend does LINDA.tv still present 'flow' in its classical notion as described by Raymond Williams and in what way does LINDA.tv provide new forms of 'flow'?

DATA

In this section I will focus on the different kinds of affordances. I will solely address those affordances which I can use in my analysis to find an answer to my research question. In other words: Only the affordances of which, in my opinion, contribute to the answer of one of my sub-questions or my main question will be discussed in this section.

Cognitive affordances data

As mentioned before, cognitive affordances say something about how users *know* about the possibilities a website or app provides them with. Cognitive affordance are thus elements which inform the user. To see how LINDA.tv informs its user, at first, I go to the page ‘ABOUT LINDA.tv’⁷⁹ (fig. 1).⁸⁰



This page makes clear that the app provides the user with unique LINDA.tv programs, without any commercial breaks. Also, it is said that all programs are presented to the user in one clear timeline.

The content of LINDA.tv includes short videos of people with special, funny, moving and sometimes mind-blowing stories. Also, the app provides you with unique web-series.

⁷⁹ Translated from: ‘OVER LINDA.TV’

⁸⁰ Unfortunately it is not possible to set the language in English. So the screenshots I will use, will all be in Dutch. I will however translate every part necessary for this research.

This page emphasizes the ease of use of the app: “Video-snacking, where and whenever you desire.”⁸¹ When you have access to a desktop, laptop, tablet or mobile phone, all you need is a good working Wi-Fi, and you are good to go.



Figure 2. Screenshot "VRAGEN & ANTWOORDEN" ("QUESTIONS & ANSWERS"), Accessed 24th June 2018.

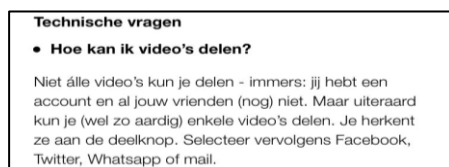


Figure 3. Outlined screenshot "Hoe kan ik video's delen?" ("How can I share videos?") Accessed 24th June 2018.

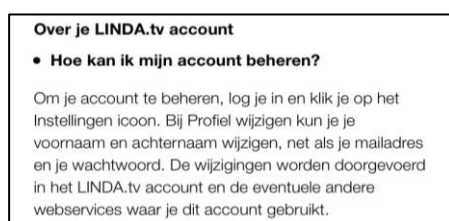


Figure 4. Outlined screenshot "Hoe kan ik mijn account beheren?" ("How can I manage my account?") Accessed 24th June 2018.

Beside the general information LINDA.tv provides the user with, there also is a more specific page with information about ‘how-to’s’ and ‘what-if’s’ (**fig. 2**)

At this page the user gets informed about the possibilities of the LINDA.tv app. There are listed some general questions, technical questions and questions about the user’s LINDA.tv account. Answers to these questions provide the user with knowledge of how to use the app and therefore this page contributes to the cognitive affordances of LINDA.tv.

When we watch more closely to some specific questions, this is being made clear even more (**Fig. 3, 4 & 5**). These examples show technical questions like “How can I share a video?” (**Fig. 3**) and the answer tells the user about the ‘share-buttons’ which are included on each video on LINDA.tv. It therefore informs the user about the share action that is being made

⁸¹ Translated from: ‘Video’s snacken, waar en wanneer je maar wilt.’

possible by the interface of the LINDA.tv app. Also, the question and answer about the LINDA.tv account “How can I manage my account?” (Fig. 4) shows some cognitive affordances since here is being explained how the user can log in and change her personal settings.

Functional affordances data

Like I mentioned before, functional affordances can tell us something about which actions are being made possible by the interface of the app or the website.⁸² So, the question to be asked in this matter is: what can we *do* with the app?

At first, I look at the homepage: The page on which the app starts when opening the app. Immediately the user gets to see a video which is being presented to her as a ‘must see for today’ (Fig. 5). This video often is an ‘fresh’ video: Newly uploaded by the editors of LINDA.tv, with the possibility of a LINDA.tv web-series or a ‘video-snack’ borrowed from platforms like YouTube, Dumpert or Nu.nl. Every day, between 1 and 6 videos are being uploaded and every time a new item goes live, it appears on top of the ‘must-sees’. Right below the ‘must-sees for today’, the ‘yesterday’s must-sees’ appear. The same applies here: The user gets to click on a couple of selected videos which are presented to her in chronological

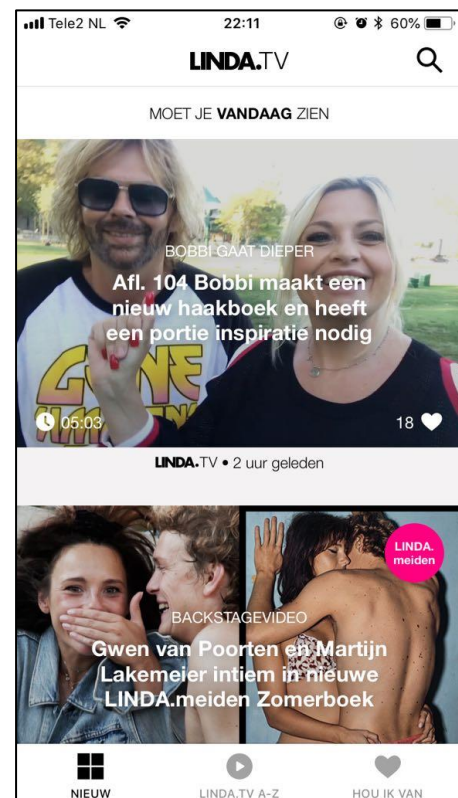


Figure 5. Screenshot “MOET JE VANDAAG ZIEN” (“MUST-SEES FOR TODAY”) Accessed 24th June 2018.

⁸² Stanfill, 8-9.

order of appearance. Because of the action of clicking and watching this presentation of items imply, these features are characteristics of functional affordances.

When the user selects the first video as presented above (**Fig. 5**), she is being linked



Figure 6. Screenshot “DEZE VIDEOS WIL JE VAST OOK ZIEN” (“YOU PROBABLY ALSO WANT TO WATCH THESE VIDEOS”) Accessed 24th June 2018.



Figure 7. Outlined screenshot “HOU IK VAN” (“WHAT I LOVE”) Accessed 24 June 2018.



Figure 8. Outlined screenshot “LINDA.TV A-Z” (“LINDA.tv A-Z”) Accessed 24 June 2018.

towards a new page where not only she can watch this specific video but where LINDA.tv offers her suggestions on what to watch next, and more notable: These are videos of the same program or category as the video she is already watching. LINDA.tv therefore again invites the user to proceed to a certain initiated action (**Fig. 6**). This is a perfectly set example on how the functional affordances presented on the interface of LINDA.tv is arranged in a way it gets its user to almost automatically do and watch whatever is being suggested to her.

When taking another look at **Figure 5**, in the corner bottom right, there is an icon inviting the user to use (**Fig. 7**). When clicking this icon, it brings the user to a page where she can overlook her ‘loved’ videos: videos that previously caught her attention and which she found worth saving.

The ‘LINDA.tv A-Z’ button (**Fig. 8**) invites the user to scroll through all the programs once presented on LINDA.tv. The programs are alphabetical ordered from A-Z and each invite the user to watch them

(again) or they link her to another related video.

Another important part of LINDA.tv is the possibility to leave comments, discuss these comments and give ‘likes’ to a video (**Fig. 9**). **Figure 10** shows how these comments look like and how, again, the interface here invites the user to undertake some action by suggesting that she can also comment on a comment.

In the app there also exists the possibility to actively search and find certain programs. With a ‘search-button’, there appears a search engine which invites the user to go look for her favorite program. In the meantime, below the search bar, some suggestions are being presented.

The above clearly illustrates how the interface of LINDA.tv makes it possible for the user to navigate through the application and therefore provides an answer to my first sub-question. The options to switch between different items, navigate through the search engine and make use of the ‘like’, ‘share’ and ‘comment’-buttons let the user find her way through the options which are provided by LINDA.tv.



Figure 9. Outlined screenshot of the ‘share’, ‘comment’ and ‘like’ button, Accessed 24th June 2018.

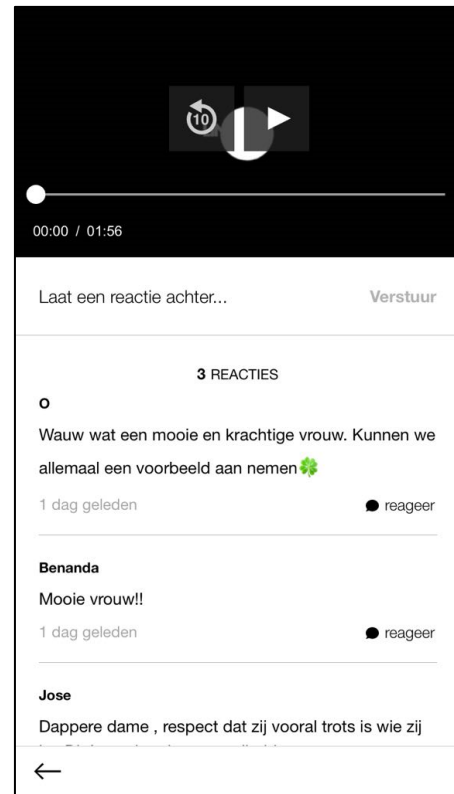


Figure 10. Screenshot “REACTIES” (“REACTIONS”) Accessed 24th June 2018.

Sensory affordance data

At last I will set out the sensory affordance data. These affordances make that the user is able to see, hear or sense certain elements that, by means of for example design choices, divide the users' attention.⁸³

When taking another look at **Figure 10.**, it can be noted that there is a 'play-button' in the middle of the video. This button implies the action to go and watch the video, but even before the user gets to reach the 'play-button', the video is already being played. This is a perfect example of how sensory affordance are at work: In principle, the user does not have to *do* a thing. Without even touching the screen she sees and hears the program starting and instantly gets caught by the video.

⁸³ Stanfill, 7-8.

ANALYSIS

While collecting my data, I already found an answer to my first sub-question: “What are the possibilities for the user to navigate through the interface of LINDA.tv?” It became clear that a list of functional affordances makes it possible for the user to, for example, switch between different videos, use the search engine, like or share a video, etc.

So, from there on, I move on to my next two sub-questions before getting to my research question and the accompanying hypotheses, which will be answered and discussed in the conclusion section. But first, I will give another short introduction on LINDA.tv, the platform itself. After that, in this part of my research I get to analyze the collected data from LINDA.tv. I will connect the data with the applicable concepts and theories as described in the theoretical framework and that way find answers to my next two sub-questions:

- 2) What kinds of content does LINDA.tv present and in what way does LINDA.tv present its content to the user?
- 3) In what ways are the different videos available on LINDA.tv being presented in relation to each other?

LINDA.tv

Linda de Mol - a well-known Dutch media-icon - and Jildou van der Bijl started this online platform, which first got online on October 26th of 2015. LINDA.tv is said to be the tv-version of their popular magazine LINDA. Both serve a niche audience of “busy women who do not want to miss anything”⁸⁴ and with LINDA.tv they claim to select the most fun, important, must-

⁸⁴ Translated from: “De drukke vrouw die niets wil missen”

“Linda de Mol vandaag gestart met abonneezender”, last modified October 26, 2015. Accessed at April 18, 2017. <http://www.mediacourant.nl/2015/10/linda-de-mol-vandaag-van-start-met-abonneezender/>

see video items that circulate the internet each day, besides the editorial content they provide (web-series, activations, etc.). The videos are being displayed in the LINDA.tv-app as well as the webpage and every day there is presented a new collection, about fifteen videos, of content. Through multiple communication channels the videos are being announced and promoted. For viewers, being a ‘video-snacking’ member of the LINDA.tv platform only ‘costs a smile’.⁸⁵

In the middle of a rapidly changing media environment and rapidly growing competition from online distribution platforms, it seems outstanding that a video-on-demand platform like LINDA.tv, relatively containing a small dose of video content, can be such a success with an average of 130.000 loyal everyday viewers.⁸⁶ If ‘flow’ used to be one of the important characteristics of successful television, it makes me wonder to what extend the notion of ‘flow’, whether it is in its classical notion or a more adapted version, is still embedded in online video platforms, and specifically in LINDA.tv.

‘Flow’ in LINDA.tv

The theoretical framework of this research gave insights on how ‘flow’, as introduced by Raymond Williams in 1974, is frequently said to be the central characteristic of television. I extensively explained how Williams argues that the continuous stream of images is one of the key elements of ‘flow’. This stream functions to get the audience engaged and sold to the advertisers, as also stated by Rick Altman and John Corner. As an important indicator of ‘flow’, as I explained, Williams notices the saying of ‘watching television’, which implies “picking on the general rather than the specific,”⁸⁷ and this is an element I also recognize in the LINDA.tv

⁸⁵ “Over Linda”, *LINDA.tv*. Accessed 18 April 2017. <http://LINDA.tv/page/vragen--antwoorden>

⁸⁶ “LINDA.TV BLIJFT GRATIS,” last modified April 8, 2016. Accessed at April 18 2017. <http://www.bladendokter.nl/linda-tv-blijft-gratis/>

⁸⁷ Williams., 88.

app. When taking a look at the cognitive affordances, I discussed how the user gets provided with information about the app, to make the usage easier. In these so called ‘guidelines’, there is constantly being said ‘LINDA.tv’ instead of programs being addressed. Whenever there is an explanation or a solution, it all comes back at the overall experience of the user watching LINDA.tv.

Another characteristic of Williams’ classical notion of ‘flow’ lies within the fact that programs are available all day, every day. Therefore ‘flow’ is an always accessible stream which the user can enjoy whenever she wants. Again, this suits LINDA.tv perfectly. Every day, LINDA.tv editors select new content to present at the platform and this content is available to watch from that moment on. It is possible to watch yesterday’s content and the day before, etc., so the ‘flow’ does not have to be stopped, if the user doesn’t want it to.

One last, but maybe the most outstanding argument to underline the presence of ‘flow’ on LINDA.tv, is the automatic ‘play’ whenever the app is being opened. The user doesn’t have to do a thing, just start the app (or web-browser), the video gets started and the user finds herself in the ‘flow’.

The above answers my last sub-question on how, at LINDA.tv, videos are being presented in relation to each other. LINDA.tv puts a great effort in linking videos with each other and does its best to let the user know which video at what time has to be looked at.

Although there are some similarities with Williams’ classical notion of ‘flow’, the re-conceptualized notions of ‘flow’, constructed by some of Williams’ colleagues, are also in some ways present in LINDA.tv. At first there is Gripsrud’s ‘sub-flow’ which immediately finds common-ground with the personalized ‘flows’ which can be created due to the functional affordances like the ‘like’ and ‘share’-button. Also, there are lists of suggested videos presented, constructed by collected metadata. These lists result in a unique and personalized interface for

every user and therefore creates a ‘sub-flow’. This also underlines Uricchio’s theory, as described in the theoretical framework, when he argues that, due to digital devices and the use of algorithms, systems of metadata have become leading characteristics in creating a ‘flow’. Uricchio calls this the ‘metadata-based flow’ and in the light of this research, it can be said that this ‘flow’ applies here. As well as the ‘fragmented-flow’ Uricchio talks about: LINDA.tv lets its user know, due to cognitive affordance, that it is possible to watch many short videos, suitable for any moment of the day. This results in users not using the app for a long time in a row, but fragment their ‘streaming-time’.

LINDA.tv as a ‘scripted space’

Chamberlain defines a ‘scripted space’ as an interface where the user *thinks* she is in control, but this control is limited because of the metadata and the underlying technological system. Due to this metadata and technological systems, online television interfaces, according to Chamberlain, provide the viewer with desired content and adapts to the personal viewer behavior.

Using the collected data, I argue that both cognitive and functional affordances are at work at the LINDA.tv app: With the search engine as a functional affordance, the screen invites the user for an interaction, which it has been anticipating on with its technological characteristics and this is why the suggestions appear. These suggestions, at their turn, invite the viewer into a new ‘flow’. This makes that the user thinks she is in control, because she herself gets into action, but at the same time she is being ‘tricked’ into a technological set-up.

All taken into consideration, my second and my third sub-question both find their answers in the analysis above. It is broadly explained how LINDA.tv presents its content to its users, in relation to them and in relation to the other videos.

CONCLUSION

Coming at the end of my research, it appears to me how an unambiguously answer to my research question is almost impossible. The first part of my research question: “To what extent does LINDA.tv still present ‘flow’ in its classical notion as described by Raymond Williams,” finds its answer in the first part of my analysis where it becomes clear how there are some characteristics of Williams’ ‘flow’ represented by LINDA.tv, like the all-day availability, the ‘flow’ being part of a cultural habit of ‘watching television’ and therefore addressing the action in general instead of the specific. Furthermore the ‘flow’ is unmistakably put into action at the very moment the user opens the app. On the other hand though, it cannot be said that the programs as shown on LINDA.tv really form a whole, or a continuous stream of images. Here Ellis’ idea of the programs that have to keep their individual value is at work and therefore nuances Williams’ classical notion of ‘flow’. This insight underlines the importance to keep reflecting on the concept of ‘flow’ and to stay aware of the hybrid form the concept can adopt, like mentioned earlier in the paragraph about the scientific relevance of this research.

Concerning the second part of my research question: “in what way does LINDA.tv provide new forms of ‘flow’?”, I argue that due to the underlying technologies, like metadata, provide a new flow as described by Caldwell and Uricchio. Also, the possibilities of a personalized ‘sub-flow’ contribute to this idea, and, last but not least, the contribution of the editors at LINDA.tv, who select a daily dose of new content. These factors make LINDA.tv a relatively ‘new’ kind of platform, which brings both editorial content as ‘video-snacks’ taken from the internet to its users. I do, however, argue that LINDA.tv could be more active in putting different mechanisms to work to create ‘flow’, if they wanted to. For example: they could make use of an automatic start of the next episode of the program that is being watched, or a different video that is in another way related to the one that is being watched. Platforms like YouTube and Vimeo already use this strategy to keep their audiences engaged.

With these insights, I hope to contribute to a broader sense of nowadays online video-platforms and the way they anticipate on new technologies, using old – and proven to be successful – concepts in a reconsidered kind of way.

DISCUSSION

Considering the findings in this research, I must conclude that I am surprised by the extend to which technology and its users influence each other. By this I specifically refer to how every little detail of a platform such as LINDA.tv has been thought through and optimized to, at the same time, make it as easy as possible for the user to watch her preferred content, and to seduce her to watch even more and stay engaged to the platform.

In addition, it occurs to me how LINDA.tv, by giving users power and freedom, has created a completely new form of the user's relationship with the platform. The method used in this research has made this possible. The discursive interface analysis is a method that looks at an object from three different perspectives: a functional, a cognitive and a sensory one. By combining these three different perspectives and therefore apply a collective analysis, interesting perspectives are being provided. I must, however, add to this that a similar research on an even bigger platform, would provide more significant results that can lead to even more understanding of the current media landscape. Because of the somewhat limited amount of content that is being presented by LINDA.tv, there are less significant results to this research than I initially hoped for.

When keeping the focus on LINDA.tv, I would like to suggest to supplement this research with a discourse analysis of LINDA.tv. This way it can be mapped to what extend the different affordances that have been talked about in this research, are in line with the presented content and its intentions.

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