

**A war between worlds:
Facebook reacting to the Time Well Spent movement in a platform capitalism
era**



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ABSTRACT

This master thesis aims to investigate Facebook's reaction to the Time Well Spent (TWS) initiative, started by Tristan Harris.¹ Harris has criticized how companies like Facebook have attention capturing affordances, causing users to spend lots of time on Facebook. The research investigates the question: 'In what ways does Facebook construct time well spent in a way it fits with its current revenue model?' The corpus consists of one text by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg on how Facebook aims to address time well spent, and an interface analysis on the proposed interface solutions. Sriniek has coined the term platform capitalism to demonstrate how platforms' business models are dependant on the amount of time users spent within the interface.²

This conflicts with the TWS critique, since Harris is criticizing the attention capturing affordances within platforms like Facebook. Therefore, the confrontation between Facebook reacting to the TWS initiative and their proposed interface solutions will be studied. This will be done to illustrate in what ways Facebook uses discourse to rephrase time well spent and proposes interface solutions which still serve their business model and therefore still contain attention capturing affordances. Ultimately, this thesis will provide insight in the ways platforms still maintain their utopian view on how platforms make culture more participatory, user-centered and collaborative.³

Keywords: TWS initiative, time well spent, attention economy, platform capitalism, platform society.

¹ "The problem," Center for Humane Technology, Accessed December 5, 2018, <http://humanetech.com/problem#team>.

² Nick Sriniek, *Platform capitalism* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 22-47, <http://pombo.free.fr/sriniek17.pdf>.

³ José van Dijck, *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Tristan Harris, whose job title at Google was ‘design ethicist’, left the company to focus on a new non-profit initiative, which he called Time Well Spent (TWS).⁴ Harris argued he saw Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Google were caught in a battle for attention.⁵ Therefore, he observed that the companies were forced to use persuasive techniques to hold the user’s attention. Moreover, according to Harris the capturing of attention is not always good for a user’s well-being and therefore the companies are not neutral facilitators of their services. One illustrative example is how Facebook fragments the communities through personalization.

The goal of TWS is to reverse what Harris calls the ‘digital attention crisis’, in which companies use manipulation techniques within their interfaces to capture users’ attention.⁶ Since then, Harris has emerged as a vocal critic of Facebook, and has even appeared on NBC to call the company “a living, breathing crime scene.”⁷ This phenomenon, in which companies desire their user’s attention, has not escaped the academics and has been named the ‘attention economy’ by Michael Goldhaber. According to him, the attention economy is an economy in which companies battle for users’ attention in order to make profit.⁸ Within this thesis, the ways Facebook addresses the attention economy within the context of time well spent will be researched.

As has been discussed before, Harris argues companies like Facebook are not neutral facilitators of their service.⁹ The reason for this can be found within the infrastructure of the company. Namely: Facebook is a platform. According to Jose Van Dijck, Thomas Poell and Martijn De Waal, a platform is a technological, economic and social cultural infrastructure that facilitates and organizes online social and economic traffic between users and providers.¹⁰ Harris argued that companies were forced to hold the user’s attention in order to make revenue. Christian Fuchs academically researched the importance of user’s attention for platforms, and

⁴ “Home,” Center for Humane Technology, Accessed December 5, 2018, <http://humanetech.com/problem#team>.

⁵ “The problem,” Center for Humane Technology, Accessed December 5, 2018, <http://humanetech.com/problem#team>.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ “Exclusive: Facebook is election ‘crime scene,’ tech insider says,” NBC News, Accessed January 5, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/facebook-is-election-crime-scene-former-tech-exec-says-1138161219503>.

⁸ Michael H. Goldhaber, “The attention economy and the net,” *First Monday* 2, no. 4 (1997).

⁹ Center for Humane Technology, “The problem.”

¹⁰ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 11.

states that platforms' revenue models are the primary concern of a company.¹¹ Nick Srnicek calls this phenomenon platform capitalism, and argues that there are different business models platforms use.¹² Facebook's business model is based on advertising. Thus, Facebook generates incomes off the selling of user's views of advertisements. Therefore, Facebook needs the time of their users.

Van Dijck et al. have examined the ways in which Facebook makes profit from advertising by using platform mechanisms.¹³ First, they use datafication, in which they collect the user's data, such as their interests for instance. Second, commodification transforms this data into economic value. This is done by selling the users' interests to advertising companies, so advertisers can create advertisements to target the users with those specific interests. And last, there is the notion of mechanism selection, which refers to the way a platform automatically selects content through algorithms. In addition, it refers to the ways users select what content provide relevant information. Therefore, the more time a user spends on the platform, the more data is collected and commodified. Thus, in terms of the attention economy, these platform mechanisms are the core of Facebook's business and have to be protected by the platform in order to generate profit. In the theoretical framework these platform mechanisms will be discussed more in detail.

With the TWS initiative, Harris critiques Facebook's business model and the way they capture the user's attention.¹⁴ Therefore, the TWS movement—and thus the criticism Harris has expressed—go against the platform mechanisms Facebook's business model relies on. Therefore, I argue it is unlikely that Facebook will cut their incomes by backing down on their platform mechanisms.

¹¹ Christian Fuchs, *Social media: A critical introduction* (London: Sage, 2017), https://books.google.nl/books?hl=en&lr=&id=m3oEDgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=fuchs+critical+introduction&ots=pW5k-y0EcD&sig=B2p_73mc6U9wwH_vD9Z8zWCIXic#v=onepage&q=fuchs%20critical%20introduction&f=false.###

¹² Nick Srnicek, *Platform capitalism* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 22-47, <http://pombo.free.fr/srnicek17.pdf>.

¹³ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 37-58.

¹⁴ Center for Humane Technology, "The problem."

One of the ways Facebook addresses the TWS critique is through discourse.¹⁵ This thesis examines a Facebook-post written by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg (appendix 6.1). A further explanation of this corpus can be found in the method section (chapter 3). According to James Paul Gee—who has written numerous books on discourse analysis during his academic career—discourses influence the ‘language in use’.¹⁶ Gee describes this as “it is the study of language at use in the world, not just to say things, but to do things.”¹⁷ Therefore, in order to have a stake in the language in use, I argue it is important for Facebook to contribute in the discourse surrounding time well spent. Furthermore, if Facebook does not participate in creating the language in use, TWS’ discourse will critique the business model of Facebook. And since Fuchs argues that the business model are a platform’s primary concern, it is an unlikely strategy for Facebook to adjust their business model.¹⁸

Therefore I argue Facebook has to find a way to adjust the language in use to an understanding that still serves the platform mechanisms. This is crucial to Facebook since if the language in use critiques Facebook’s business model, the users might start using the platform less. This has negative consequences for the business model as well, since less time will be spent on the platform and, consequently, Facebook can sell fewer advertisements.¹⁹

Facebook’s CEO Mark Zuckerberg has written about Facebook’s proposed solutions for Time Well Spent in a post on his personal Facebook wall.²⁰ While it is expected that Facebook uses language in Facebook’s favour due to their business model, it is interesting to examine in which ways Facebook constructs the discourse because it can change the language in use surrounding time well spent. Considering the ways Facebook is influencing the language in use and the norms surrounding time well spent, and therefore protects their business model, this analysis will provide insights into how platforms always put their business model first.²¹ For

¹⁵ Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook, last modified January 12, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104413015393571>.

¹⁶ James Paul Gee, *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit* (UK: Routledge, 2010), 9.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Christian Fuchs, *Social media: A critical introduction* (London: Sage, 2017), https://books.google.nl/books?hl=en&lr=&id=m3oEDgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=fuchs+critical+introduction&ots=pW5k-y0EcD&sig=B2p_73mc6U9wwH_vD9Z8zWCIXic#v=onepage&q=fuchs%20critical%20introduction&f=false.###

¹⁹ Nick Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 28-32.

²⁰ Zuckerberg.

²¹ Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 22-47.

example, Zuckerberg starts his post by emphasizing the need for a better ‘time spent’ on Facebook.²² With this choice of words, it appears that Facebook has another definition for time well spent than Harris and the authors of the attention economy, since Harris and Goldhaber emphasize that TWS means spending less time on platforms.²³

In addition to Zuckerberg addressing time well spent on his personal Facebook wall, Facebook has also proposed interface solutions within their Newsroom.²⁴ A description of the whole corpus of the interface that will be studied can be found in the Method section. We have already seen that Facebook is not willing to change their business model, and that it therefore is unlikely that they will stop battling for the users attention. Thus, the question is to what extent Facebook’s proposed solutions offer a chance for users to escape the attention-demanding interface of Facebook. To research this, the *Discursive Interface Analysis* by Mel Stanfill will be used amongst other sources, which will be elaborated in the method.²⁵ According to Stanfill, a norm of use within an interface is constructed by the possibilities of action within the interface, which are called affordances.²⁶ Affordances will be discussed in the theoretical framework.

The new affordances that Facebook proposes are placed several clicks away from the News Feed, making it unlikely that these will become affordances that users will regularly use. The added affordances include a bar chart that measures a user’s time spent on Facebook daily, the option to change the content on the News Feed to seeing more from friends, family and pages a user can select, an affordance to add more friends, an affordance to set a daily reminder of how much time is spent and the possibility to change the notifications a user receives. The daily reminder might play an important role in changing the norm of use. However, when the reminder is sent, the affordance that is foregrounded is the one regarding deleting the notification. Therefore, creating a new norm of use of deleting this notification from the first time it pops up.

²² Zuckerberg.

²³ - Center for Humane Technology, “The problem.”

- Michael H. Goldhaber, "The attention economy and the net."

²⁴ “New Tools to Manage Your Time on Facebook and Instagram,” Newsroom, Facebook, Accessed on February 16, 2019, <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/08/manage-your-time/>.

²⁵ Mel Stanfill, “The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design,” *New media & society*, 17(7) (2015): 1059-1074.

²⁶ - Akrich, "The de-description of technical objects," 207-209.

- Ian Hutchby, "Technologies, texts and affordances," 441-456.

Within the interface analysis, the potential change in norm of use through these added affordances will therefore be researched.

The way that Facebook determines an ideal use and enables users to disobey this ideal use has been addressed by Madeleine Akrich. She describes the process of scripting and de-scripting, in which the interface contains a script that, through affordances, demonstrates the ideal use.²⁷ De-scripting is the process of deviating from this ideal use, towards where the user does not use the interface in the way the script requests. Akrich her work is based on the ‘Actor Network Theory’, and therefore provides insights into the power relation between different actors. This thesis will examine the power relation between Facebook and their users by using the concepts of scripting and de-scripting.²⁸ For example, in which way the affordance of adding a notification when a certain amount of time has passed on Facebook can change the norm of use of Facebook.

According to Van Dijck, platforms have arisen from the early idealistic spirit of Web 2.0.²⁹ Web 2.0 has been described as the shift from channels with networked communication, to being interactive, two-way streets for networked sociality. Van Dijck therefore argues that the promise of Web 2.0 was to make culture more participatory, user-centered and collaborative.³⁰ An illustrative case for this utopian view of Web 2.0 was the 2006 cover of Time magazine, in which ‘You’ was presented as person of the year, reinforcing the idea of the potential of connecting users.³¹ The argument for choosing You was: “the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes.”³² Again, the participatory, user-centered and collaborative view of platforms are emphasized.

²⁷ Madeleine Akrich, "The de-description of technical objects," in *Shaping Technology / Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. Bijker & Law (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), 205-207.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ José van Dijck, *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ “You — Yes, You — Are TIME's Person of the Year,” Time, accessed on March 23, 2019, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>.

³² Ibidem.

The Platform Society, among others, discusses that this utopian view is not what the world had expected from it with the start of Web 2.0.³³ Nonetheless, today's social media companies still seem eager to align this utopian view with their corporate ethos.³⁴ In other words, platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Google still communicate this utopian view. However as mentioned above, the business model of platforms comes first. This thesis will illustrate this tension by using the TWS case study, in which Facebook deals with critique on their business model. It is expected that the findings will show that Facebook's view is still very utopian. How Facebook addresses the TWS critique will be investigated with the use of two methods. First, Zuckerberg's discursive construction about how Facebook is going to address Time Well Spent will be studied.³⁵ Second, an affordance analysis of the interface will be used to determine the (changes within) norms of use in the interface with the added features.³⁶ Moreover, the concept of de-scripting will be used to research the ways for users to 'escape' these norms of use created by Facebook.

Thus, in this thesis I will study how Facebook's proposes solutions to address time well spent. To investigate this, the research question will be 'in what ways does Facebook construct time well spent in a way it fits with its current revenue model?' This will be split up in the following sub-questions, namely: 'what is the discursive construction in Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook post on his wall regarding time well spent,' 'in what ways does the script within the News Feed of Facebook capture attention and therefore relate to their platform mechanisms?' and 'in what ways does the script within *Your time on Facebook* capture attention and therefore relate to their platform mechanisms?'

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As mentioned beforehand, one of the ways Facebook is reacting to the TWS initiative is through a post on Zuckerberg's personal Facebook wall. Moreover, it has been established that it is important for Facebook to adjust the meaning of the TWS initiative to something that fits their

³³ - Nick Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 22-47.

- Michael H. Goldhaber, "The attention economy and the net."

³⁴ Nick Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 22-47.

³⁵ Norman Fairclough, *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (Routledge, 2013), 223-347.

³⁶ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1059-1074.

business model as well, since this is where all Facebook's incomes come from.³⁷ The TWS initiative critiques attention capturing mechanisms, but these cannot be removed from the interface since Facebook's business model relies on them.³⁸ Therefore, it is necessary for Facebook to fit the meaning of time well spent in their business model.

In order to answer the beforementioned research question, the discursive construction of Zuckerberg's text will be researched. Foucault argues that the way the discourse is constructed can influence the knowledge and meaning of the subject within society.³⁹ Thus, the discursive construction by Facebook has an influence on the meaning and knowledge surrounding time well spent. The first part of this framework will investigate the ways in which discourse can have an influence on the knowledge and meaning of time well spent.

2.1 Discourse as a normalizing power

According to Foucault, one of the ways power can be exercised is through discourse.⁴⁰ Foucault sees discourse as a normalizing power, in which power does not get exercised as an instrument of coercion, but where a norm is formulated by accepted forms of knowledge. Thus, discourse has the ability to produce meaning and knowledge. According to him, discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak".⁴¹ Therefore, Facebook's blog contributes to the formation of the subject that they speak about: time well spent.

As mentioned above, Foucault sees discourse as a normalizing power, which is a power that determines what society sees as normal.⁴² This normalizing power constructs the subject's view of the world and of themselves. Therefore, it shapes the subject's beliefs, desires and decisions. At the same time, it gives them the idea that these beliefs, desires and decisions are theirs. For Facebook, this normalizing power in their discourse can be used as a method to adjust meaning and knowledge about what time well spent is in order to maintain their business model. Foucault will help to provide insights into the ways Facebook's discursive construction can

³⁷ Nick Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 22-47.

³⁸ - Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 37-58.
- Nick Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 22-47.

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *The history of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), 89.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Ibidem.

function as a normalizing power within the meaning and shaping of time well spent.⁴³ Through this understanding of the function of discourse within shaping meaning, the power of normalization could be researched in detail.

Additionally, Foucault argues that the most powerful form of normalizing power is the use of scientific research.⁴⁴ That is, according to him the incorporation of science into a discourse leads the subject to believe the claim that has been made. Zuckerberg uses science in his text in multiple ways, such as using the words experts, universities and research. As it is important for Facebook to adjust the norm of time well spent, it is therefore apparent that Zuckerberg aims to reach this adjustment through this text. The ways in which Zuckerberg uses discursive constructions to adjust the meaning of time well spent will be further explained in the method.

The goal of the TWS initiative is to reverse the, as Harris calls it, ‘digital attention crisis’, where companies use manipulation techniques to capture users’ attention.⁴⁵ As mentioned before, the reason that platforms capture users’ attention is because their business model is dependent on the amount of time that is spent on the platform.⁴⁶ Goldhaber has described this dependence on attention as the attention economy.⁴⁷ He describes it as follows: “By the Attention Economy, then, I mean a system that revolves primarily around paying, receiving, and seeking what is most intrinsically limited and not replaceable by anything else, namely the attention of other human beings.”⁴⁸

To summarize, Goldhaber describes the attention of a human being in this economy as a scarce resource because it is limited.⁴⁹ A limitation for Facebook can therefore be the amount of time that is available in a day, or other attention capturing activities such as work or school. This scarcity of attention means this is not only a commodity but also a form of capital. Srnicek elaborates on this by coining the term ‘platform capitalism’, to point out the fact that platforms like Facebook make money off of the attention of users.⁵⁰ Srnicek argues that there are several

⁴³ Foucault, *The history of Sexuality*, 89.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 71-75.

⁴⁵ Center for Humane Technology, “The problem.”

⁴⁶ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 37-58.

⁴⁷ Goldhaber, “The attention economy and the net.”

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 22-32.

business models for platforms, which are advertising platforms, cloud platforms, industrial platforms, product platforms and lean platforms.⁵¹ Facebook relies on a business model of the collection and selling of data, which makes Facebook an advertising platform.⁵² The basic principle of an advertising platform is that in order to earn money, advertisements need to be shown to the users of the platform. Therefore, Facebook needs their users' attention in order to show as much ads as possible to make money.

According to Srnicek, Facebook has become almost completely dependent on advertising and he illustrates this by looking at Facebook's revenues of 2016.⁵³ He argues that in 2016's first quarter, 96.6 percent of Facebook's revenues came from advertisers. Since this is almost all of Facebook's incomes, the amount of time spent on the platform is crucial to their revenue. Hence, the importance of maintaining and protecting the time spent in order to generate enough revenue to keep existing.

2.2 Platforms and their mechanisms

Van Dijck et al. define a platform as a technological, economic and social cultural infrastructure that facilitates and organizes online social and economic traffic between users and providers.⁵⁴ The work of Van Dijck et al. will be used to understand the ways in which Facebook generates revenue through the platform.⁵⁵ Moreover, according to Fuchs, platforms are not neutral facilitators and there is a revenue model that comes first.⁵⁶ The revenue model of platforms such as Facebook, is supported by platform mechanisms.⁵⁷ The mechanisms in these platforms convert activity (and therefore attention) into money. Van Dijck et al. have described how the platform mechanisms datafication, commodification and selection work. In order to be able to answer the research question and sub-questions, it is necessary to understand the mechanisms so Zuckerberg's text and the way in which interface solutions relate to the business model can be comprehended.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 29.

⁵⁴ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 11.

⁵⁵ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 11.

⁵⁶ Fuchs, *Social media: A critical introduction*.

⁵⁷ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 37-58

The first platform mechanism datafication means that user activity is tracked.⁵⁸ The tracking and combining of this data enables Facebook to gather a profile of the Facebook user. Additionally, the tracing, quantifying and interpreting of this data enables Facebook to predict how the platform will be used. Furthermore, this data is the starting point for the platform mechanism commodification as well. That is, the way platforms convert objects, actions and ideas into economic value.⁵⁹ Above it was mentioned that the platform mechanism datafication enables user activity tracking. In addition, commodification literally means making economic goods. Therefore, by turning space (for advertisers) in the interface of Facebook, content or interactions into data, Facebook can market this data.

Moreover, in order for Facebook to gather data, a user has to spend time on the platform, create content or interact with the interface.⁶⁰ So eventually, the time a user spends is commodified by gathering data about the user's interests which can then be used to sell advertisement space on the platform. The importance of this mechanism has already been stressed by Scrniked, as he argues that almost all revenues of Facebook originate in the selling of advertisements.⁶¹

Finally, the platform mechanism selection means that platforms select certain content to steer communication on the platform.⁶² Platforms use algorithms as an automatic selection to personalize a user's experience. Ultimately, this mechanism revolves around economic value as well, by selecting content that will keep users longer on the platform. voorbeeld.

This thesis will use these definitions of the platform mechanisms to investigate the ways the discursive constructions and proposed interface solutions relate to Facebook's business model. First observations show that Facebook wants to revolve a solution around the workings of these mechanisms. For example in Zuckerberg's text, the first thing he says is that he wants to make sure time spent on Facebook is time well spent. In this, Zuckerberg emphasizes that Facebook needs to show less public content (advertisements) on the News Feeds in his discursive construction, recognising that this is problematic.

⁵⁸ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 37-58

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 28-32.

⁶² Ibidem.

2.3 Scripting through the affordances of the interface

As has been discussed by Van Dijck et al., platforms have to steer the user into certain behavior in order to make profit through their mechanisms.⁶³ Madeleine Akrich argues that the role of design in an interface is the way to steer a user.⁶⁴ According to her, designers define elements that have different possibilities, motives or political preferences. The majority of the work of these designers inscribes this vision on the world in the technical content of the object. When this vision is inscribed, in this case in Facebook, this results into a script.

The script can be seen as a framework of action in which the user is persuaded to undertake certain actions.⁶⁵ As has been discussed earlier, the Facebook business model relies on the amount of attention given to the platform. Therefore, I argue that this script has an ideal use of spending as much time as possible on Facebook. According to Stanfill, this script becomes a normative claim about what users should do when they use the interface.⁶⁶ When this normative claim is not followed by the users, this is called de-scripting.⁶⁷ The de-scripting of an interface is not easy for users since the interface is not designed to use this type of script. Nonetheless, it is not exceptional that this happens. De-scripting is possible when the affordances of the interface allow the user to take another path than the script.

Ian Hutchby uses the concept of affordances to provide insight into how a company like Facebook wants an interface to be used.⁶⁸ He defines affordances as the possibilities of action within an interface. He argues that not all artefacts are equally open to the same number of interpretations since the affordance “constraints the ways in which they can be possibly written or read.”⁶⁹ Hutchby argues that even though action possibilities are integral for the technology, the affordances are still open to interpretation and therefore enable users to use them in multiple ways.

⁶³ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 37-58

⁶⁴ Akrich, "The de-description of technical objects," 207-209.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1059-1060.

⁶⁷ Akrich, "The de-description of technical objects," 207-209.

⁶⁸ Hutchby, "Technologies, texts and affordances," 441-456.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, 447.

Hutchby's concept of affordances has similarities with the work of James J. Gibson, and refers to him: "For Gibson, humans, along with animals, insects, birds, and fishes, orient to objects in their world...in terms of what he called their affordances: the possibilities that they offer for action."⁷⁰ Since the affordances within platforms can change the script of use in the interface, changes within the interface can change the ideal use of the platform.⁷¹ This can lead to a different spending of time on the platform by the user.⁷² I view this possibility of de-scripting as a 'mistake' made by Facebook, since this is not the use they inscribed.

3. METHOD

As mentioned previously, it was necessary to make use of mixed methods in order to answer the research question. At first, a discourse analysis was carried out on the text "Bringing people closer together" (appendix 6.1). The theoretical framework has shown that it would be unlikely for Facebook to decrease the time spent on the platform since Facebook's incomes fully rely on this. Therefore, this part functions as a lens for the ways in which Facebook constructs a discourse for time well spent. Foucault will help to provide insights into the ways Facebook's discursive construction can function as a normalizing power within the meaning and shaping of time well spent.⁷³ Through this understanding of the function of discourse within shaping meaning, the power of normalization could be researched in detail.

Secondly, the discursive interface analysis functioned as an investigation of the solutions that Facebook proposed when reacting to the TWS initiative. Stanfill's method helped with the gathering and structuring of data from the interface.⁷⁴ The theoretical reflection played the most important part in this part of the analysis, as it allowed to examine in which ways Facebook is or is not changing the norm of TWS within their interface. Moreover, in order to examine the agency between the platform and the user within the usage of Facebook, the ways users can de-script the path of least resistance was investigated as well.

⁷⁰ Hutchby, "Technologies, texts and affordances," 447.

⁷¹ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1061.

⁷² Goldhaber, "The attention economy and the net."

⁷³ Michel Foucault, *The history of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 89.

⁷⁴ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1059-1074.

The corpus of this thesis consisted of several data sources. The first was Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook post on his own wall (Appendix 1). This source was used to carry out the discourse analysis to investigate how this use of language influences the shaping of the meaning of time well spent. Second, the section your time on Facebook will be used to investigate the influence of this proposed interface solution for the path of least resistance and therefore the script within the interface. The script of the path of least resistance can be found on Facebook's News Feed. Within this thesis the Facebook application was studied, since the website did not incorporate the your time on Facebook section. Finally, the potential of de-scripting this path was investigated in order to find any way to differ from the script made by Facebook.

3.1 Studying Zuckerberg's discourse

To operationalize this understanding of discourse, the work of James Paul Gee was used.⁷⁵ He offers several tools that can be used to carry out a discourse analysis. He emphasizes the need for appropriation to the researchers' own subject and interests since discourse analysis is not a method that can be generalized.

Therefore, I used Gee's toolkit as a starting point for gaining insight into the discursive construction of Facebook's blog. The aim of this part of the analysis was to investigate the discursive construction of this normalizing power, and therefore the potential of the shaping of certain beliefs.⁷⁶ First findings were likely to show that this discursive construction is in favor of Facebook's business model, since the platform is not able to exist without its incomes.⁷⁷ As mentioned earlier, Facebook relies on incomes derived from attention. An explanation for Facebook's motivation to construct their language in a certain way can be found within Gee's argument:

We want our listeners to build such pictures in their heads because we want to do things in the world and we need other people to think and act in certain ways in order to get them done. We use language to build and destroy things in the world,

⁷⁵ James Paul Gee, *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit* (UK: Routledge, 2010), 4-8.

⁷⁶ Foucault, *The history of Sexuality*, 89.

⁷⁷ Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 28-32.

things like our academic discipline, our church membership, our ethnic affiliation, or our marriage.⁷⁸

Therefore, Facebook can, by the use of a certain discursive construction, build things in the world. It would be beneficial for their business model if they would be able to successfully build a definition of time well spend that fits their demands and business model.

Thus, the tools that were used in this research all focused on this ability of the language to do things, in this case to adjust the definition of time well spent. The tools were used and appropriated to figure which knowledge and meaning Facebook discursively aims to connect to time well spent. As already described in the introduction, time well spent is currently a societal debate carried out by Harris.⁷⁹ This will be treated as the context of the discourse. Gee describes context as:

Context includes the physical setting in which the communication takes place and everything in it; the bodies, eye gaze, gestures, and movements of those present; all that has previously been said and done by those involved in the communication; any shared knowledge those involved have, including cultural knowledge, that is, knowledge of their own shared culture and any other cultures that may be relevant in the context.⁸⁰

In this thesis, the language was studied within the context of TWS and the attention economy. The tools that were used were the Intonation Tool (#5), The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool (#7), Integration Tool (#10) and Significance Building Tool (#14).⁸¹ These were used to research the ways in which Facebook tries to phrase time well spent to their own liking. This was how they were appropriated to the questions this thesis asks as well. Gee operationalizes these tools as seeing discourse as something that is closely tied to grammar.⁸² Below, every tool that was used will be elaborated.

⁷⁸ Gee, *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit*, 84.

⁷⁹ Center for Humane Technology, "The problem."

⁸⁰ Gee, *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit*, 6.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 22-92.

⁸² *Ibidem*, 4.

The Intonation tool can be used to study how the intonation contours can contribute to the meaning of an utterance.⁸³ With this tool, I looked at the idea units that are used and on which units the focus is placed within the sentences. This tool helped to determine which parts of the TWS initiative and the attention economy are made salient and foregrounded to determine the shaping of the meaning of time well spent by Facebook. Since Facebook's users might already know some information about the TWS initiative, Zuckerberg cannot ignore that in his text. However, they can try to phrase it in a way that some information seems less important than other parts of information.

The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool looks at the grammar to figure the way language tries to do something instead of just informing.⁸⁴ According to Gee, language is used to carry out different sorts of actions, of which informing is just one type of action. The tool helped to determine which normative claim the language tries to make as a normative power, as Foucault explained it.⁸⁵ Finally, this helps to understand in which ways Facebook is trying to save their incomes.

The Integration Tool investigates what is left out and included in the arguments that are used.⁸⁶ This tool gave room to investigate what was left out of the critique of the TWS initiative and on the attention economy in Facebook's post. This is important because time is form of capital for Facebook and they can use the TWS initiative to adjust the current definition. Through normalizing power within discourse, things can be adjusted and form a new norm.

The significance tool can be used to study whether significance is built up or lessened.⁸⁷ It enables the researcher to study what information is foregrounded and backgrounded through the construction of a sentence. The present study used this tool to help determine which parts of TWS and the attention economy are foregrounded and are therefore made more important by the normative power.

⁸³ Gee, *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit*, 22-29.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, 43-45.

⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *The history of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 89.

⁸⁶ Gee, *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit*, 55-62.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 92-94.

By using these tools, it was possible to determine in which ways Facebook tries to address the TWS initiative, but at the same time phrases time well spent in a way that they can maintain their business incomes.

3.2 Interface analysis

The second part of the analysis was an investigation of how Facebook incorporated a script of use within the interface and in which ways it led to less time spent. In addition, this analysis investigated the ways in which the user is able to de-script the interface by using it in a way to spend less time on the platform as well.

Following Facebook's construction of their discourse, a discursive interface analysis on the proposed solutions was carried out.⁸⁸ This method enabled the researcher to investigate the affordances (action possibilities) and their influence on the norms of use within the interface. It mainly served as a way of collecting data in order to be able to critically reflect on the affordances found in the interface by using the theories of Van Dijck, Goldhaber and Akrich.⁸⁹ This was made possible by the distinction of functional, sensory and cognitive affordances. Through these affordances, it was possible to view the path of least resistance: the News Feed.⁹⁰ During the analysis, it has appeared that the your time on Facebook feature does not exist for the desktop version of Facebook. Therefore, this thesis will investigate Facebook's application.

Thus, in order for platforms to steer the users into the path of least resistance, platforms make use of affordances.⁹¹ This concept is defined as the action possibilities that an interface consists of.⁹² Stanfill distinguishes multiple affordances that an interface can hold. First, she describes the functional affordances.⁹³ As the name says, these are pure functional as they entail what a user can or cannot do within the interface. For example, the affordance of a like button but not having incorporated a dislike button. The second affordances are sensory affordances,

⁸⁸ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1059-1061.

⁸⁹ - Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 37-58.
- Akrich, "The de-description of technical objects," 207-209.
- Goldhaber, "The attention economy and the net."

⁹⁰ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1059-1061.

⁹¹ Ibidem, 1062-1064.

⁹² Hutchby, "Technologies, texts and affordances," 441-456.

⁹³ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1066-1067.

which she describes as the affordances that catch attention by, for example, the use of color or the use of notifications. Finally, there are cognitive affordances woven into the interface which let the user choose an action, by instance by the label of a button.

The different levels of affordances enabled me to make a statement about how Facebook's proposed solutions are placed within the interface, and if they did it in a way that the norm of use changes. In addition, this lens enabled me, as a researcher, to discover the assumptions built into the interfaces of Facebook and thus to provide insight into what is regarded as normative or 'correct' by Facebook. There can be a critical reflection on the way the norms of use (have not) changed and in what way the solution is or is not a productive answer to the TWS critique. Moreover, it offered a set of data to analyze the way the platform mechanisms are still serving the attention economy. If the norms of use still steer the user into spending more time on the platform, the platform mechanisms are still able to capture enough data in order to earn money.

Thus, with this method of a critical reflection of the proposed interface solution, it was possible to look at the norms of use (script) and the ways users can choose a different path (de-scripting).⁹⁴ This gave insight into how Facebook reacts to the TWS initiative and how the proposed solution by Facebook can be an answer to the TWS initiative.

4. ANALYSIS

The discursive constructions of Zuckerberg's wall post were researched in order to understand how Zuckerberg's language is possibly exercising a normative power on the definition of time well spent within society. It is expected that Facebook will not change their whole business model based on the platform mechanisms and the attention economy, since without it Facebook does not make enough revenue.⁹⁵ Therefore, this assumption will be accepted and shall not be discussed in full detail. The main focus will lie on how Facebook avoids TWS's critique of the capturing of attention.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Akrich, "The de-description of technical objects," 207-209.

⁹⁵ Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 28-32.

⁹⁶ Center for Humane Technology, "The problem."

Gee emphasizes that it is important to look into the context of the discourse before starting the analysis.⁹⁷ In the theoretical framework, it could be seen that time well spent relates to the concept of the attention economy.⁹⁸ This is where the current discussion is situated within the public and academic debate. Additionally, the article Zuckerberg posted on his personal Facebook wall has several important contextual details as well that are worth mentioning. First, Zuckerberg's posting of a personal goal on his wall is not something new, as he has done this since 2009. Every goal, up until 2018, regarded something of him personally, for example wear a tie every day, or learn to speak Mandarin. What is notable is that in the year 2018, although Zuckerberg releasing another personal goal was not new, this was the first time his goal was related to Facebook. This context will be used to reflect on how Zuckerberg approaches time well spent.

I argue Facebook will not adjust their business model to something that does not rely on attention and that they will work their way around the platform mechanisms as defined by Van Dijck et al.⁹⁹ Since the TWS movement is a societal issue, the business value is at stake for Facebook. If they do not get the definition right for TWS, Facebook will lose income.

4.1 The discursive construction of Zuckerberg's Facebook post

Within this part of the analysis the discursive constructions from Zuckerberg's personal Facebook wall will be studied. Several tools will guide this analysis, which are aimed at the discovering of the way Zuckerberg phrases time well spent and uses normative power to rephrase time well spent. The sentences are numbered from one to twelve in which Zuckerberg starts a new line or alinea. The focus will be on the way Zuckerberg phrases time well spent, and the way this serves Facebook's business model and therefore the attention economy. Through this focus it is possible to investigate the ways in which Facebook avoids the TWS critique Harris expressed about attention capturing.¹⁰⁰ The complete text Zuckerberg posted on his wall can be found in appendix 1.

⁹⁷ Gee, *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit*, 6.

⁹⁸ Goldhaber, "The attention economy and the net."

⁹⁹ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 37-58.

¹⁰⁰ Center for Humane Technology, "The problem."

1. **One of our big focus areas for 2018 is making sure the time we all spend on Facebook is time well spent.**

Zuckerberg directly addresses time well spent in his first sentence with the exact same words as the TWS initiative, namely: time well spent. Except, he presents the definition differently than the TWS critique on the attention economy. Gee has argued this can be studied through the integration tool.¹⁰¹ To be specific, he integrates that time well spent is the time spent “on Facebook”. Whereas, the attention economy criticizes this time on a platform and critiques the attention demanding affordances within their interfaces.¹⁰² However as discussed before, Facebook’s business model relies on the amount of time spent on the platform, so it would be unlikely for Facebook to reduce the time spent. This first sentence confirms this argumentation through the integration of ‘time on Facebook’.

Gee argued the researcher can use the intonation tool to look at what is emphasized within a sentence.¹⁰³ The intonation within this sentence does not emphasize the ‘on Facebook’ part. Zuckerberg presents time well spent through his language as being possible on Facebook as background information and discursively constructs this information as something that is given. On the contrary, better time spent on Facebook goes against the TWS critique of the attention economy, in which time should be spent outside the platform. However, Zuckerberg uses the extensibility of the definition of time well spent here. As a result, it does not match with the TWS critique on the attention economy. In the second alinea of his text below, Zuckerberg uses an paragraph to create sympathy by emphasizing that Facebook has always had good intentions.

2. **We built Facebook to help people stay connected and bring us closer together with the people that matter to us. That's why we've always put friends and family at the core of the experience. Research shows that strengthening our relationships improves our well-being and happiness.**

¹⁰¹ Gee, *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit*, 55-62.

¹⁰² Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 28-32.

¹⁰³ Gee, *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit*, 22-29.

The intonation in “That’s why we’ve always put friends and family at the core of the experience” suggests this information is a given. Zuckerberg also integrates the argument that the “strengthening of our relationships improves our well-being and happiness.” However, he does not present this information as given as he derives this argument from research, which is an important form of normative power according to Foucault.¹⁰⁴ With the integration of the words “research shows”, Zuckerberg is able to perform this power through the language he uses. However, the integration tool shows that not all possible arguments of time well spend are being incorporated within Zuckerberg’s text. For example, the negative effects on which the attention economy focusses do not get any attention in this part of the text. Additionally, the time spent outside of Facebook does not get incorporated into Zuckerberg’s argumentation. In the third part of the text Zuckerberg is trying to do something with his language.

3. But recently we've gotten feedback from our community that public content -- posts from businesses, brands and media -- is crowding out the personal moments that lead us to connect more with each other.

Zuckerberg is showing that Facebook acts on their user’s feedback from the community. Through the use of this language, Zuckerberg gives a justification for the ways Facebook wants to address time well spent within the platform. However, he only uses their feedback regarding the News Feed. Zuckerberg uses this part to emphasize and rephrase time well spend to being about personal moments and connecting with others. These two understandings of time well spent are foregrounded and therefore are made more significant through the use of this language. At first glance, it seems Zuckerberg is proposing a good solution, but this solution will still capture attention of their users and serves the platform mechanism selection.

¹⁰⁴ Foucault, *The history of Sexuality*, 71-75.

4. It's easy to understand how we got here. Video and other public content have exploded on Facebook in the past couple of years. Since there's more public content than posts from your friends and family, the balance of what's in News Feed has shifted away from the most important thing Facebook can do -- help us connect with each other.

Zuckerberg uses a specific construction of language here in order to convince his readers that he has already found the solution, namely: less public content. His intonation suggests that he already knows where it went wrong, and the balance on the News Feed shifted from content from friends and family to public content. He presents this information as a given in order to convince the reader of his argument. Zuckerberg uses this to show that Facebook knows how to solve the TWS critique, I argue in order to avoid public speculation about if this is the right solution or not. Through the use of this discursive construction, Zuckerberg aims to be seen as the expert on this issue. Moreover, Zuckerberg argues that the focus in their News Feed has to be on friends and family and not on public content. He emphasizes that Facebook is able to make people connect with each other and sees this information as a given, while there is no explanation incorporated as to why this is the case.

5. We feel a responsibility to make sure our services aren't just fun to use, but also good for people's well-being. So we've studied this trend carefully by looking at the academic research and doing our own research with leading experts at universities.

Zuckerberg foregrounds and emphasizes that Facebook wants to make sure that Facebook is good for people's well-being. As we have seen research is an important form of normative power according to Foucault.¹⁰⁵ He approaches the information that Facebook is fun as a given and uses scientific research as a normative power to point to the fact that Facebook can be good for people's well-being. Zuckerberg does this by foregrounding positive effects of the use of Facebook, and by not integrating the negative effects of spending time on Facebook (TWS critique).

¹⁰⁵ Foucault, *The history of Sexuality*, 71-75.

6. The research shows that when we use social media to connect with people we care about, it can be good for our well-being. We can feel more connected and less lonely, and that correlates with long term measures of happiness and health. On the other hand, passively reading articles or watching videos -- even if they're entertaining or informative -- may not be as good.

In this paragraph, Zuckerberg first makes use of scientific research again, in order to exercise Foucault's concept of normative power.¹⁰⁶ He is foregrounding the research that explains that social media and the ability to connect with people they care about can be good for users well-being. Zuckerberg makes the information that Facebook is able to connect people with each other as given, yet again. Moreover, the use of the word 'correlates' has a scientific connotation and complies to the normative claim of time well spent being possible on Facebook. Zuckerberg sheds a light on a negative side of time well spent, but does not link it to the TWS critique of Facebook hijacking users' attention. He is foregrounding the information on the type of content and backgrounding the information on how it keeps users attention.

7. Based on this, we're making a major change to how we build Facebook. I'm changing the goal I give our product teams from focusing on helping you find relevant content to helping you have more meaningful social interactions.

In this paragraph Zuckerberg makes use of specific intonations multiple times. Zuckerberg lays his intonation on words like "major change" and "changing the goal." This also adds to the significance of this part of the text, in which these words are foregrounded. In addition, this is where Zuckerberg makes time well spent a personal issue. He starts referring to the changes with "I" instead of "we", which implies a change in intonation.

He assumes that the most important part of time well spent on Facebook is for users to have more "meaningful social interactions." This emphasizes how big the changes are in order to gain trust from the community and make them believe that Facebook will do something about

¹⁰⁶ Foucault, *The history of Sexuality*, 89.

this issue, since it has become a societal issue. This also helps to guide the definition of time well spent to time spent on Facebook. Facebook's definition does not address that the amount of time spent is too much, and therefore doesn't address the TWS critique.¹⁰⁷

8. We started making changes in this direction last year, but it will take months for this new focus to make its way through all our products. The first changes you'll see will be in News Feed, where you can expect to see more from your friends, family and groups.

In this paragraph, Zuckerberg goes on with emphasizing on how big their changes will be. By using words such as “it will take months” and “new focus”, Zuckerberg fills in this emphasis by suggesting it is a turning point for the company. He now presents the information that seeing more from friends, family and groups is better as a given and therefore a good foundation of Facebook's new focus. The reason why it is presented as a given, is so it can help avoid public discussion.

9. As we roll this out, you'll see less public content like posts from businesses, brands, and media. And the public content you see more will be held to the same standard -- it should encourage meaningful interactions between people.

In this part, Zuckerberg is again addressing the new standard which is emphasized as being good: it encourages “meaningful interactions between people”. Again, he assumes that this is what time well spent on Facebook is. Also, he assumes that Facebook is able to make meaningful interactions between people happen.

¹⁰⁷ Center for Humane Technology, “The problem.”

10. For example, there are many tight-knit communities around TV shows and sports teams. We've seen people interact way more around live videos than regular ones. Some news helps start conversations on important issues. But too often today, watching video, reading news or getting a page update is just a passive experience.

In this part, Zuckerberg tries to empower his argument by illustrating it with a relatable example.

11. Now, I want to be clear: by making these changes, I expect the time people spend on Facebook and some measures of engagement will go down. But I also expect the time you do spend on Facebook will be more valuable. And if we do the right thing, I believe that will be good for our community and our business over the long term too.

In this part the language is constructed in a way to gain sympathy. Zuckerberg addresses the business model issue after mentioning their community. And therefore, foregrounds and emphasizes the community and backgrounds their own business model. However, the text shows no strategies that will harm their business model.

12. At its best, Facebook has always been about personal connections. By focusing on bringing people closer together -- whether it's with family and friends, or around important moments in the world -- we can help make sure that Facebook is time well spent.

Finally, Zuckerberg emphasizes that Facebook has been, at one point, a platform that was about personal connections. He presents this information as a given as there is no supporting argument. Through this sentence, he aims to show that the intention of Facebook has always been good. Zuckerberg also blames an external factor and not Facebook for this problem through emphasizing "Facebook was always about" within his intonation. Furthermore, Zuckerberg emphasizes that Facebook knows how to help to make sure time is well spent. This suggests that Facebook has the solution in their hands. He integrates friends, family and the most important moments in the world into his final definition of time well spent.

Thus, in what ways does Zuckerberg define time well spent and how does this comply to the way platforms demand attention for their business model? The descriptive words surrounding time well spent within the text of Zuckerberg were eighteen times positive traits of time well spent and twice negative traits. As we have seen, the positive traits were foregrounded by scientific research or were assuming some information as a given. The main categories Zuckerberg used to phrase time well spent in his text were about closer connections, people, and health. The only bad traits that were mentioned included passive reading and passive experience, without any argumentation of why this is the case.

So, in his text, Zuckerberg rephrases time well spent by foregrounding positive research and by not integrating the TWS critique. Zuckerberg therefore uses a normative power through the uses of several discursive constructions in order to adjust time well spent from time spent outside of Facebook to time spent on Facebook. In sum, Zuckerberg has remained positive about time well spent on Facebook and has not discussed the attention capturing interface features. In the next part of the analysis, the proposed interface solutions will be researched in order to investigate the ways Facebook addresses time well spent through their interface.

4.2 Interface analysis

Zuckerberg has emphasized within his discursive construction that Facebook will perform major changes within Facebook, and strengthens this argument by suggesting it is a turning point for the company. Zuckerberg has not discussed time well spent in terms of the interface solutions, but he did discuss the goals of the new focus that Facebook has. As discussed before, this focus is about personal connections, bringing people closer together, well-being and no passive reading and watching.

We have seen that Zuckerberg claims to expect the time on Facebook will go down by the changes. In order to analyze this, the path of least resistance will be researched first. Akrich argued this path reflects the intended use an interface is designed for.¹⁰⁸ Therefore this part of the analysis provides insight into the ways the interface holds attention capturing affordances or not.

¹⁰⁸ Akrich, "The de-scription of technical objects," 207-209.

Second, the proposed interface solution called *your time on Facebook* will be analyzed, to examine in which ways this can have an influence on the time spent on Facebook.

4.2.1 *The path of least resistance*

In order to give an answer to the sub-question ‘in what ways does the script within the News Feed of Facebook capture attention and therefore relate to their platform mechanisms?’ this part of the analysis will look at the current path of least resistance within the Facebook application. The analysis will give an indication of the affordances that are scripted within Facebook’s interface that the TWS initiative critiques.

As discussed earlier, Facebook’s business model gains revenue from users spending time on the platform, serving the platform mechanisms.¹⁰⁹ In relation to this, TWS’s main critique on the attention economy is that platforms like Facebook hijack users’ minds in order for them to spend more time on the platform. The first affordance that makes it harder for users to notice that they are spending a lot of time, is that there are no visual hints or interruptions of the time that is spent on the News Feed. Stanfill argued functional affordances demonstrate what users are ought to do.¹¹⁰ There are several attention capturing mechanisms in this path of least resistance.

Within the scrolling of the News Feed, the action of reloading new content gets carried out automatically. This causes that the sensory and cognitive affordances are not presented to the user. Stanfill argued these two affordances help the user to choose an action, but now there is no affordance the user has to choose.¹¹¹ Facebook chooses for the user here. Therefore, the resistance in this path is brought to a low level. These affordances therefore automatically capture and keep the users attention within the path of least resistance.

Furthermore, the videos on the News Feed play automatically. Therefore, the video is a sensory affordance automatically becoming a cognitive affordance, these are carried out automatically as well. The video demands the users’ attention by automatically playing it. There is no choice of watching the video (or the first seconds) for the user. Akrich argued a script is a framework of action in which the user is persuaded to undertake certain actions.¹¹² Since the

¹⁰⁹ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 37-58.

¹¹⁰ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1066-1067.

¹¹¹ Ibidem, 1068-1069.

¹¹² Akrich, "The de-scription of technical objects," 207-209.

actions of watching the video are taken automatically by Facebook, the user is persuaded into watching the video. This causes the user to spend this time on the platform, fueling the platform mechanisms datafication and commodification with personal data and exposure to advertisements.¹¹³

In addition, Van Dijck et al. have shown that content on platforms is personally tailored by the platform mechanism selection.¹¹⁴ This personal selection can be seen as an persuasive cognitive affordance within the script. Since Stanfill has argued cognitive affordances let users choose an action, the personal content persuades users to read it or click on it.¹¹⁵ Akrich has argued scripts are a framework of action in which a user is persuaded to undertake certain action.¹¹⁶ The selection makes the content more relevant and the cognitive affordance is therefore more likely to appeal to the user. Since this script invites the user to spend more time as well, the platform mechanisms datafication and commodification are also addressed.¹¹⁷

Moreover, notifications are shown in the top bar and attract more attention than other interface features because of the use of the color red. Therefore this is a sensory affordance.¹¹⁸ Some notifications also are shown outside of the application on the user's smartphone and can trigger them to open Facebook. This is a persuasive sensory affordance.

Thus, vital affordances to pursue the path of least resistance get removed and are performed by Facebook to persuade users into further following the path of least resistance. This path is never ending due to the infinite scroll that is incorporated into the News Feed. However, Facebook proposed different interface solutions to these problems. The next part of the analysis will research in which ways these affordances are able to change the script within the News Feed.

¹¹³ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 37-58.

¹¹⁴ Ibidem, 50-56.

¹¹⁵ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1068-1069.

¹¹⁶ Akrich, "The de-description of technical objects," 207-209.

¹¹⁷ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 39-50.

¹¹⁸ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1064-1066.

4.2.2 The norms about time well spent within the interface

As we have seen in the previous part of the analysis, Facebook has still interwoven different attention capturing affordances within the path of least resistance. This part of the analysis delves into the ways in which Facebook proposed interface solutions for time well spent. The interface will be researched in order to see what possible new norm of use is generated regarding time well spent.

4.2.3 Making use of normative power

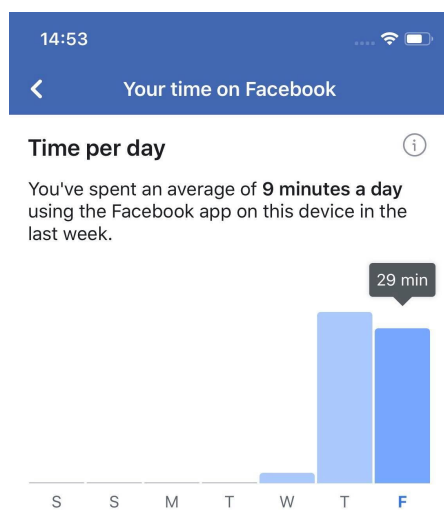


Figure 1. Bar chart.

In the top part of the screen of *your time on Facebook*, a bar chart shows the user how many time one spends on Facebook a day (figure 1). In a summarizing text above the average a day is also shown.

Foucault has described the way society sees scientific research as an important normative claim.¹¹⁹ The cognitive affordance, in which users make sense of presented information, can be accounted of seeing this element as something scientific.¹²⁰ Therefore, the bar chart can be seen as a normative form of power. To investigate the interpretations and the behavior it affords, the element has to be studied more in depth.

4.2.4 The script of misinterpretations

If we look at the discursive construction within Zuckerberg's text, we have seen in the first part of the analysis that Facebook avoids offering a solution that reduces the time spent on the platform. As mentioned beforehand, the reason for this is Facebook's business model which relies on how much time is spent on the platform.¹²¹ Since the bar chart shows how much time a user spends on Facebook, it has the potential of informing users on how well they spend their

¹¹⁹ Foucault, *The history of Sexuality*, 89.

¹²⁰ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1068-1069.

¹²¹ Srnicek, *Platform capitalism*, 28-32.

time (and if it is possibly too much). However, through a deeper analysis it appears that this does not necessarily mean that the user will be able to interpret this data accordingly. That is due to the fact that Facebook stops at offering information and does not offer sensory and cognitive affordances to interpret this data correctly. This will be demonstrated in the next part of the analysis.

The title of this page is your time on Facebook. As has been shown in the discourse analysis, the foregrounding of time on Facebook instead time off of Facebook influences the norm surrounding time well spent. According to Stanfill, interfaces have the potential of normalizing certain use as well.¹²² At this point within the interface, time well spent has not explicitly been mentioned. However, the first elements that are shown are informing about the time a user spends per day.

That the bar chart merely holds sensory affordances causes problems within the interpretation of the bar chart. The bar chart relies on sensory affordances, since it is a visualization of the user's behavior. Users have to interpret this data into a meaningful whole. However, important cognitive affordances are missing that would cause the users to interpret the data accordingly.¹²³ The first cognitive affordance that is missing is an y-axis. This absence causes that there is no norm on how much time spent on Facebook is good or bad.

Additionally, no colors are used as a cognitive affordance to indicate how much time is good or bad. Moreover, Facebook measures time daily. Hence, the bar chart itself suggests a cognitive affordance of that time should be evenly distributed throughout the week. As a result, irregularities are presented as bad, since the bar chart just presents the differentiation per day. Thus, the bar chart lacks cognitive affordances in order to present the user with apprehensive insights about time well spent.

In sum, the bar chart seems to give users information about their time spent on Facebook at first. Therefore, it seemed to closely tie to the TWS critique of the attention economy.¹²⁴ But, as discussed before, for Facebook to offer a solution relating to the attention economy critique would cause issues for Facebook's business model. Therefore, this is an unlikely path for

¹²² Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1060.

¹²³ Ibidem, 1068-1069.

¹²⁴ Center for Humane Technology, "The problem."

Facebook to follow. As we have seen from the platform mechanisms datafication and commodification, the collection of data is dependent on how much time is spent on platforms.¹²⁵ Thus, Facebook needs this data in order to sell it and therefore earn money. If Facebook informs its users about the time they spend on the platform, it might make users aware of the fact that they are spending too much time on Facebook. This has negative consequences for the platform mechanisms and therefore Facebook's incomes.

4.2.5 Towards offering solutions

Through the section *Manage your time* below the bar chart, Facebook makes several normative claims through different functional and cognitive affordances about how time on Facebook can be well spent. Within *Manage your time* the norm of use can be extracted by the selection of what the user is able to edit and what not.

The first affordance Facebook offers to the user is to alter settings in the News Feed, but only the functional affordances Facebook selects. The first functional affordance that Facebook offers here is to see more pictures, videos and messages of 'people that matter', and by accepting and adding more friends. 'People that matter' functions as a trigger for the cognitive affordance, and through this persuasion produces the script to do use this affordance. According to Stanfill, this framework of action is a normative claim about the ideal use of the interface.¹²⁶

Moreover, 'people that matter' was also a discursive construction Zuckerberg used in his personal Facebook-post, and thereby offered new language in use for time well spent. This is also a productive way of serving the business model, since the platform mechanism selection is performed by the user as well through this cognitive affordance.¹²⁷ The selection of content gets

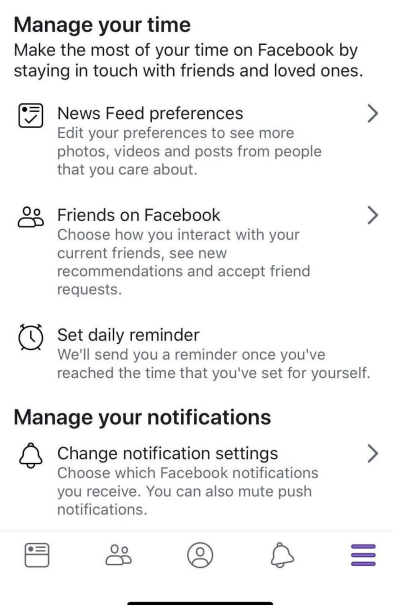


Figure 2. Manage your time.

¹²⁵ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 39-50.

¹²⁶ Stanfill, "The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design," 1062-1064.

¹²⁷ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 50-56.

mostly done by an algorithm that calculates what a user wants to see, but these settings help to make it more personal and results in users seeing more posts from family and friends. As already has been discussed, this helps to increase the relevance of the content to the user which then leads to more time spent on Facebook. This eventually leads to a bigger income for Facebook since this data can be commodified and sold to advertisers.

Additionally, Facebook offers the user a functional affordance that does have a potential to de-script the script of spending as much time on the News Feed as possible. The functional affordance that enables the user to set a daily reminder could disrupt the path of least resistance while the user is using the News Feed by offering functional, sensory and cognitive affordances through a pop-up (figure 3). The pop-up that is added offers the user a sensory affordance as a reminder. In combination with the bar chart (figure 1), and the mean that is given by Facebook above this chart, a user can determine a maximum amount of time he or she wants to spend on the platform. This offers the user a possibility to de-script the path of least resistance.

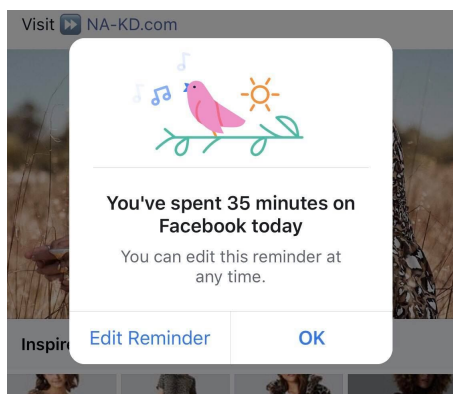


Figure 3. Pop-up notification.

However, while this notification appears, Facebook foregrounds the functional affordance to edit the notification (figure 2). In addition, the text is a cognitive affordance, aimed at informing the user that the reminder can be edited at any time. This framework of affordances offers the script to persuade the user into adjusting the notification rather than exiting Facebook. Thus, when the user clicks on the functional affordance ‘edit notification’, the affordance ‘delete notification’ gets foregrounded (figure 4). Therefore,

the norm of deleting this notification right away is constructed.

Furthermore, when a user clicks the functional affordance ‘ok’ the app doesn’t close, the user lands within the script with attention capturing affordances again. This means the user didn’t escape the script yet and can be captured by the attention capturing affordances again. However, this notification can function as an cognitive affordance as well, in which the user decides to shut down the application. Therefore it is a possibility for the user to de-script.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Akrich, "The de-scription of technical objects," 207-209.

When the user decides to exit Facebook, this affects all revenue generating platform mechanisms through less time spend on the platform.¹²⁹

Finally, Facebook offers the users an affordance to manage the notification settings (figure 2). The functional affordance that is on top of this screen is to enable or disable push-notifications. The push-notification is a sensory affordance that appears within the notifications on a smartphone, outside of Facebook. By the use of a cognitive affordance a user can be triggered to be persuaded back to Facebook to view what the notification is for. The functional affordance enables users to remove all notifications Facebook, removing the sensory and cognitive affordances that persuade the user to start using Facebook. While this does not persuade the user onto the platform anymore, it still does not touch upon the path of least resistance, the News Feed.

Thus, Facebook does address some good points, but the affordances are not visible from the News Feed. In addition, the majority of the added affordances aren't incorporated into the script and therefore don't illustrate the intended use. Zuckerberg said there would be major changes to how Facebook was built, but the attention capturing affordances within the News Feed are not removed. The affordances that are added are several clicks away from the News Feed, placing it outside the path of least resistance.¹³⁰

In addition, the functional affordance of the reminder how much time a user has spent has a potential of de-scripting the script. However, the sensory and cognitive affordances generate a new script which persuades the user into deleting the notification. Thus, Facebook offers potentially time reducing functional affordances, but uses sensory and cognitive affordances as a framework to persuade the users back into the attention capturing News Feed.

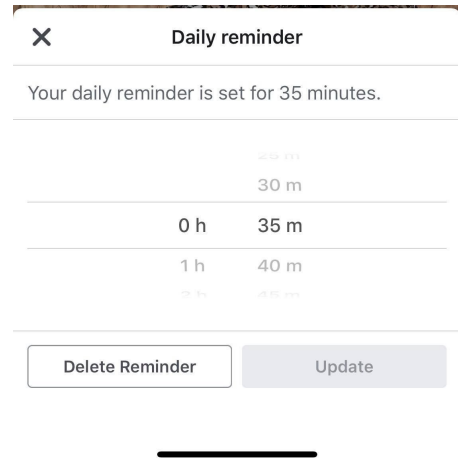


Figure 4. Edit notification.

¹²⁹ Van Dijck, Poell en De Waal, *De platformsamenleving: Strijd om publieke waarden in een online wereld*, 37-58.

¹³⁰ Akrich, "The de-description of technical objects," 207-209.

4. CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to gain an answer to the question ‘in what ways does Facebook construct time well spent in a way it fits with its current revenue model?’ In order to do so, there have been formulated several sub-questions.

The first question that this thesis aimed to answer is ‘what is the discursive construction in Mark Zuckerberg’s Facebook post on his wall regarding time well spent.’ Throughout the analysis there have been collected several answers. The discursive construction Zuckerberg used within his Facebook post on his personal wall constructed time well spent through several normative claims through scientific research and the presentation of information as given.

Since Foucault argued scientific research is a power of normalization, the positive traits of time well spent on Facebook were emphasized.¹³¹ These included closer connections, people, and health. The only bad traits that were mentioned included passive reading and passive experience, without any argumentation of why this is the case. Therefore discursive construction of time well spent on Facebook can through the power of normalization be seen as bringing people closer together and better health.

Since this thesis has shown that Facebook cannot let people spent less time on the platform due to their business model, the following sub-question was formulated: ‘In what ways does the script within the News Feed of Facebook capture attention and therefore relate to their platform mechanisms?’ It has been shown that the News Feed has several attention capturing affordances, which are caused by Facebook themselves. Since Facebook carries out the cognitive affordances themselves, one can argue the user has no choice unless pursuing this path of least resistance.

Also the third question investigates how Facebook addresses time well spent within their interface: ‘In what ways does the script within *Your time on Facebook* capture attention and therefore relate to their platform mechanisms?’ It was also within this part of the interface that the sensory and cognitive affordances were absent at the moments a user needed them to interpret the presented information and affordances. Also some overlap was seen with the discourse analysis. Zuckerberg said “I expect people’s time on Facebook to go down,” but since

¹³¹ Foucault, *The history of Sexuality*, 89.

the affordances now better serve the platform mechanism selection, this is not going to be the case.

The functional affordance of setting a notification when one has spent a determined amount of time on Facebook has potential to de-script the attention capturing script of the News Feed. However, within the notification the sensory affordance that attracts most attention is to edit this notification and eventually delete it. Therefore, Facebook had inscribed an ideal use of removing this notification and therefore removing the chance to de-script within the News Feed.

As discussed before, according to Van Dijck, platforms have arisen from the early idealistic spirit of Web 2.0.¹³² Web 2.0 has been described as the shift from channels with networked communication, to being interactive, two-way streets for networked sociality. Van Dijck therefore argues that the promise of Web 2.0 was to make culture more participatory, user-centered and collaborative.¹³³ However, Fuchs has argued the business model of platforms has priority over their users.¹³⁴ Also within the analysis of this case, it has appeared that Facebook still does not work in the interest of the users but in the interest of the revenue model.

This thesis has served as an illustration how platforms like Facebook deal with criticism on their foundation: their business model. In this case, Facebook got criticized for their attention capturing mechanisms, but has carefully constructed a discourse and proposed interface solutions that seemed to reduce time. After a deeper analysis it has appeared that Facebook still maintains the attention capturing script. Furthermore, the your time on Facebook interface feature is placed three clicks away from the News Feed. Since this sensory affordance is not noticeable within the path of least resistance (the News Feed), this new feature regarding time well spent can be seen as an alibi for Facebook to show their users they address the TWS critique.

This alibi is used since Facebook has to address this issue considering they need their users and their time for their business model. Facebook shows they have interest in their users, but that is only since Facebook has no revenue without them. So, how much it seemed in the discourse analysis that this issue was close to Zuckerberg's heart, Facebook is not changing

¹³² Van Dijck, *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*, 11.

¹³³ Ibidem.

¹³⁴ Fuchs, *Social media: A critical introduction*.

elements that harm their business model. The users are the fuel which platform companies cannot exist without it.

A limitation of discourse analysis is that it does not research what people think or believe. It is merely a content analysis. However, it does provide understanding of the ways actors construct an argument. In this case it has illustrated how Zuckerberg has presented some information as self-evident and true. In addition, the discursive interface analysis by Stanfill cannot be used to investigate the experience of the user and how the interface will actually be used. It is purely what use the interface affords. However, this method does enable the researcher to focus on the intention of the producer of the interface. Within the context of this thesis the method helped to investigate the intended use of the interface by Facebook, in order to gain an answer on how Facebook addresses the TWS critique.

To investigate what the definition of time well spent is within a certain group future research could use interviews or questionnaires to determine what this group has constructed as a definition. Furthermore, since it was not possible to determine the actual behaviour of users within the Facebook interface through the discursive interface analysis, this can be researched with the use of user testing. Moreover, this research has focussed on how users are persuaded to spent time on Facebook, but Harris has also expressed critique on how the battle for attention between companies are affecting mental health, children, social relationships and democracy.¹³⁵ Future research could focus on how these attention capturing mechanisms cause implications within these subjects.

¹³⁵ Center for Humane Technology, “The problem.”

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5.2 Media

Figure 1. "Bar chart." Facebook. Screenshot on 4 April, 2019.

Figure 2. "Manage your time." Facebook. Screenshot on 4 April, 2019.

Figure 3. "Pop-up notification." Facebook. Screenshot on 4 April, 2019.

Figure 4. "Edit notification." Facebook. Screenshot on 4 April, 2019.

6. APPENDIX

6.1. Zuckerberg's post on his Facebook wall

One of our big focus areas for 2018 is making sure the time we all spend on Facebook is time well spent.

We built Facebook to help people stay connected and bring us closer together with the people that matter to us. That's why we've always put friends and family at the core of the experience. Research shows that strengthening our relationships improves our well-being and happiness.

But recently we've gotten feedback from our community that public content -- posts from businesses, brands and media -- is crowding out the personal moments that lead us to connect more with each other.

It's easy to understand how we got here. Video and other public content have exploded on Facebook in the past couple of years. Since there's more public content than posts from your friends and family, the balance of what's in News Feed has shifted away from the most important thing Facebook can do -- help us connect with each other.

We feel a responsibility to make sure our services aren't just fun to use, but also good for people's well-being. So we've studied this trend carefully by looking at the academic research and doing our own research with leading experts at universities.

The research shows that when we use social media to connect with people we care about, it can be good for our well-being. We can feel more connected and less lonely, and that correlates with long term measures of happiness and health. On the other hand, passively reading articles or watching videos -- even if they're entertaining or informative -- may not be as good.

Based on this, we're making a major change to how we build Facebook. I'm changing the goal I give our product teams from focusing on helping you find relevant content to helping you have more meaningful social interactions.

We started making changes in this direction last year, but it will take months for this new focus to make its way through all our products. The first changes you'll see will be in News Feed, where you can expect to see more from your friends, family and groups.

As we roll this out, you'll see less public content like posts from businesses, brands, and media. And the public content you see more will be held to the same standard -- it should encourage meaningful interactions between people.

For example, there are many tight-knit communities around TV shows and sports teams. We've seen people interact way more around live videos than regular ones. Some news helps start conversations on important issues. But too often today, watching video, reading news or getting a page update is just a passive experience.

Now, I want to be clear: by making these changes, I expect the time people spend on Facebook and some measures of engagement will go down. But I also expect the time you do spend on Facebook will be more valuable. And if we do the right thing, I believe that will be good for our community and our business over the long term too.

At its best, Facebook has always been about personal connections. By focusing on bringing people closer together -- whether it's with family and friends, or around important moments in the world -- we can help make sure that Facebook is time well spent.