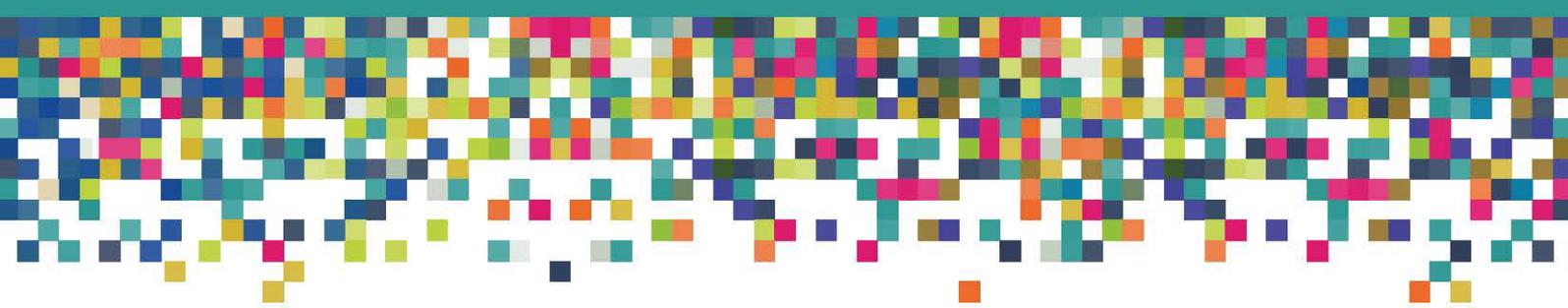




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‘GIVE PEOPLE THE POWER TO BUILD COMMUNITY AND BRING THE WORLD CLOSER TOGETHER’: ILLUSIONS OF A GLOBAL VILLAGE

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Meta Platforms’ Discursive
Construction of the Global Citizen

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ABSTRACT

This research assesses the discursive features of Meta Platforms presenting itself as a public sphere for global citizens, and constructing an identity of global citizenship for its user. Literature of globalization and media and communications is reviewed to gain an understanding of the concept of identity within these dynamics. Political economy literature of social media platforms is drawn on to conceive a conceptual framework to explore how the platform navigates its commercial pursuits alongside a responsibility to uphold public values and contribute to the collective welfare. A Critical Discourse Analysis of Meta's Earnings Calls is employed as the methodology to analyze the discursive power of the corporation in platform society. Discursive findings along themes of a vision of social progress and the future, a tension between global and local actors, and the privatization of the public sphere, imply how Meta contests public values of privacy, agency and equity with its agenda. These findings signify that the technology corporations facilitating 'global connectivity' and representing an imagined future of a global collective do so to naturalize the Big Tech hegemony platform capitalism entails.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most dominant companies in the world, Meta Platforms Inc. owns the social media Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp; spaces for interaction, where people connect and socialize, but also places of productivity where content and its visibility are generated, and arenas for commerce, where goods can be traded, exchanged, or marketed (van Dijck, 2012). As Big Tech social media platforms have emerged in the past decades, they have amassed prominent market capitalization and emerged as central social institutions (van Dijck et al., 2018), correspondingly we have embraced the notion that these platforms have become important spaces for conducting our social lives (Couldry, 2015).

The implications for social dynamics are elaborated by van Dijck et al. (2018: 165):

'Large states are starting to compete and cooperate with globally operating platforms in a political arena where nothing less than a new world order is at stake - a world order where individual users are a collection of data points and where communities are fluid, temporary and manipulable collections of individual users.'

This transformation underscores the importance of understanding the evolving role of platforms like Meta in shaping a global collective identity of the user, and navigating public values and economic interests in the contemporary global context.

Meta's mission stated on the company website is 'to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together.' (Meta, 2023). However, recent scholarship of Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) have put forward criticisms of the way that large capitalist corporations promote connectivity, or a "civic sphere" (e.g. van Dijck, 2012; van Dijck et al. 2018; Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Through this research, I hope to show how Morley and Robins' (1995) exploration of the interplay between identity and new media echoes urgently relevant in today's socio-political and media context. Their assertion that identity becomes detached from national spaces, and is aligned along more 'universal' values of global consumer culture, resonates with the way that, as highlighted by media scholar Bucher (2021), Meta represents itself as *somewhat of a world* and helping people connect all around the world: e.g. as dictated by Zuckerberg; 'helping people connect more, helping the whole world function better, not just one place or another' (Fridman, 2022). The question

arises whether the platform community can offer a shared identity that citizens can connect with, particularly amidst the yearning for a coherent symbolic identity during periods of local geopolitical and social upheaval.

The techno-commercially driven epistemic imaginaries and ideologies of platforms have received much critical research attention in recent years, regarding how powerful social media platforms like Meta potentially orient the way we understand connectivity (Bucher, 2021: 202) and communication.

This research thus investigates Meta's concept of:

'Us': the collectivity of everyday people, everywhere. Vague as it is, this claim grounds any number of specific rhetorics and judgements about what is happening, what is trending and so (by a self-accumulating logic) what matters: for government, society, business and for us.' (Couldry, 2015: 642).

Media communication inherently possesses a translocal nature (Couldry & Hepp, 2012: 96). In this sense, social media enable transnational connectivity, yet it also exists detached from or in-between local cultures. Consequently, the study seeks to identify what constitutes the standard or accepted norms within the global community of Meta users – essentially, the shared cultural conventions and values that shape this community.

Traditional sociology typically treats societies as being subordinate to states, wherein social order is by state order (ibid.). As Big Tech platforms act as a force that can transcend the sociopolitical system of the state and the cultural order of the nation (van Dijck et al., 2018), the question arises whether they communicate a form of nationalism for their digital community and what are its characteristics.

In the current landscape, a significant portion of the world has become accustomed to an infrastructural ecosystem primarily controlled by global private technology corporations (van Dijck et al., 2018). Facebook's transformation into Meta, a move that signifies the corporation's dedication to constructing another platform for social life Metaverse, underscores the urgency to research the fate of public values in the platform society.

In this context, Meta contributes to “global assemblages” of converging capital and technologies, exerting authority that can surpass that of states in providing public goods and services (ibid.). Hence, the terrain of global assemblages that Meta navigates that I seek to investigate centers on underlying tensions between private and public values. These dynamics have repercussions for the identity of the user, as it is conceptualized as a “global citizen”. My research will approach the concept of the global citizen, thus her “identity”; in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994: 15 in Jabareen, 2009: 50) sense, ‘every concept has components and is defined by them’.

I will approach this research topic by reviewing literature on how global media and communication are involved in the nexus of social, political and economic institutions and yield power in shaping social values. Through political economy literature, the shaping of public values by platforms is critically considered, in the context of technology-driven platform capitalism. Thus, I formulate a conceptual framework based on the literature review to approach the question of how Meta Platforms shapes the notion of a global citizen and the implicit values that underlie this vision of the future. To achieve this, the investigation will involve the collection of Quarterly Earnings Call Transcripts obtained directly from the Meta website. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis of Meta's communication patterns, the research will provide implications of the ways in which the company contributes to the construction of a normative concept of who holds importance in the globally interconnected digital era.

THEORETICAL CHAPTER

Globalization, Identity, and Communications Media: The Construction of a Global Citizen

The existing literature on media and communications technologies and the concept of and discourses attached to the identity of a global citizen has not yet been thoroughly explored in relation to the Metaverse.

Prior to the time of the widespread adaptation of social media and information and communications technologies (ICTs), in 1964 media scholar McLuhan posited that through media and communications developments, a new community would form via the virtual “global village” (McLuhan & Lapham, 2001). McLuhan's concept of the “global village” suggests that through global connectivity, facilitated by information and communication technology, individuals can transcend the social dynamics within their immediate surroundings. Hence, McLuhan argued people would gain a united global consciousness as media and communications developments act as ‘electronically induced technological extensions of our central nervous systems’ (Rogaway, 2011: 12). Transcending the proximate environment at micro, meso, and macro levels implied that the construction of identity could transpire from multilateral sources.

In *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*, Morley and Robins (1995) build on the relationship between new media and identity, using the concept of “nationless identity” to consider the potential detaching of identity from location and context. From the late 1990s onwards, media and communications scholarship began accepting the concept of the *colonization* of media and communication technologies within domestic spaces, ‘shaping cultural landscapes and mediating interpersonal relations - thus domestic hierarchies and moral values’ (Georgiou, 2001: 311). Hence, I situate my research as a case study of what values Meta puts forward in communicating a global habitus. Therefore, I aim to gain an understanding of the complex dynamics at play and contribute to the existing literature on the influence of media and communication technologies on the construction of shared meanings, values, and norms.

The theoretical complexity of studying the aforementioned specific effects of media and communication technologies lies in the ambiguous power platforms have over customary national institutions, echoing concerns that McLuhan predicted about virtual global communities ‘overhauling of our traditional political system’ (Rogaway, 2011: 12). As noted in Tussey (2014) Meta represents its global network as “a community”, as Zuckerberg in a 2011 post titled ‘Our Commitment to the Facebook Community’ states how Facebook allows people ‘to share and connect with people...in the world's biggest community online.’ (Zuckerberg, 2011 in Tussey, 2014: 385-410). After acquiring the digital social networks;

Instagram and WhatsApp and establishing the Metaverse, in 2023 the Facebook company vision from 2011 remains similar. Thus, Tussey (2014) critically evaluates how understanding Facebook as a “town square” conforms to the prescribed conditions of US law. Tussey’s (2014) study indicates how Facebook as a media and communications space possesses qualities that influence the social, however, disrupts older configurations of shared meanings, values, and norms, in Tussey’s (ibid.) case, legislation.

The acceleration of social media has led to the emergence of concepts such as the “mediatized global society” to describe how technology enables convergence of globally interconnected minds (van Ham, 2009: 150). Deibert (1997 in van Ham, 2009: 150) remarks how in this landscape that is evolving towards a ‘hyper-media’ one, notions of a mass identity and linear political boundaries, give way to multiple identities from non-territorial communities and overlapping social and political boundaries. In addition, van Ham’s (2009) account of the effects caused by this new order of media and communication for the individual is valuable in highlighting the enmeshed economic conditions.

Thus, the reconfiguration of time and space through media and communication is driven by late capitalism (Erni, 1996). Thereby, the means of communication through platforms is a marketplace with privately owned businesses, i.e. a capitalist space, wherein identity management also takes place. As such, van Ham’s (2009) delineation of the global and private media space implies that the global consumers of international media are essentially *consumers*, trading capital for a service from a business, taking place on a global scale.

According to van Ham (2009), there is a growing need for novel approaches by commercial and political entities to strategically portray themselves in the globalized World. This contextual turn prompts questions into how Meta, with significant political and commercial power, navigates to represent the global identity of its users, as it seeks to appeal to consumers using the platform. That is to say, what frame of reference in terms of values and identity can global users imagine for themselves?

Meta has significant symbolic power in creating legitimizing discourse on the construction of a global public, and the attached identity of its citizen. Couldry’s (2015) exploration of the dynamics between media, culture and society well explicates the interdependent relationship

that corporate brands have with society and social change. Couldry (ibid.:639) focuses on Stuart Hall's criticism of how the social influence of the television industry becomes blurred by the sense of TV as a 'window on the world' to consumers. Couldry (ibid.: 639) accounts:

'the complex institution of television in general and the ways in which what [Stuart Hall] calls 'the social idioms and practices' (p.104) of television collapse any awareness of television as a process of mediation and substitute for it a mythical sense of television as a 'window on the world'.

Social theorist Hall's deconstructive critique of media institutions is a relevant source for media studies today (Couldry, 2015: 643). In this sense, 'the social idioms and practices' (ibid.) of ICT corporations collapse any awareness of ICTs as corporations (performing external communications) and substitute for it *a way of connecting with people*. Ultimately, the model that the communications of corporations follow is related to the 'relations to government and other powerful institutions' (Couldry, 2015: 639) of the media in question. This line of thought demonstrates the power of elite institutions to contribute to the shaping of the narrative about the future users of Meta, and naturalize connectivity over platforms as argued by Couldry and Mejias (2019) in *The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism*.

As Couldry notes, Stuart Hall's work lends credence to the banal power of media in constructing 'collective values and attitudes' (Hall, 1975: 95 in Couldry, 2015: 639). Previously, Dencik's (2013) research article from the *Journal of Global Media and Communication* prompts a relevant question about whose global moral order is shaping our world and who is part of the global citizenry. Studying the media development of BBC World News and its understanding of globality, Dencik's (2013) findings indicate how the concept is shaped not only by culturally and institutionally informed assumptions but also by resources and dominant political rhetoric from powerful institutions. Hence, highlighting the significance of understanding the power structures that ultimately define current global politics and media. As such, Dencik's (2013) study signals urgency toward research on the implications of media developments on the perception of global politics, citizenship, and moral order. The power relations embedded within this process have been considered in light of platforms, namely Meta (Facebook) by Bucher (2021) and van Dijck et al. (2018).

As aforementioned, Meta i.e. Facebook has drawn comparisons between the platform and a nation in numerous public-facing advertising campaigns (Bucher, 2021). For instance, a Facebook advertisement 'The Things That Connect Us' from 2012 likens Facebook to 'a great nation' because it 'is something people build, so that they can have a place where they belong' (ibid.). In Bucher's review of Facebook's company rhetoric about collectivity, she identifies the social, economic and political forces behind discursive construction. Therefore, this study aims to understand the social forces involved in the construction of global citizenship in Meta's rhetoric.

Furthermore, Bucher (2021) suggests that Zuckerberg's efforts to portray Facebook are actually strategic moves aimed at aligning the company with its current objectives and aims. Hence, calling critical attention to what type of a user Meta imagines and 'whose interests such a Facebook-engineered world really serves.' (ibid: 56).

Scholars critical of platforms have put forward that values of connectivity for the public good are in conflict with the objectives of the corporate-private sphere in amassing capital at social costs (van Dijck, 2012). Therefore, this study fills the empirical gap in communications literature of the ICT notion of sharing and community formation and the implications for social norms, culpable of influencing wider norms around political participation.

Van Dijck et al. (2018) argues that platforms like Facebook increasingly position themselves as more than private entities in the digital ecosystem. Namely, Facebook presents itself as a social actor with responsibilities in creating public value similar to those of governments (van Dijck et al., 2018). For example, this dichotomy between public values and private interest is illustrated in Mark Zuckerberg's manifesto from February 2017 where he outlines 'his world view as a businessman-turned-statesman' van Dijck et al. (2018: 29), emphasizing Facebook's role in promoting global goals such as spreading prosperity, peace, and understanding, addressing poverty, science advancement, countering terrorism, and fighting climate change.

Facebook's self-portrayal as a 'social infrastructure' fostering a 'global community' is notable in the manifesto (ibid.). However, what stands out is the absence of any mention of other actors or institutions involved in this social vision (van Dijck et al., 2018). Traditional institutions, governments, and civil society groups are not acknowledged as participants in

shaping this envisioned global community. This portrayal by Facebook highlights its aspiration to be viewed as a significant player in driving public values on a global scale.

The inherent focus of platforms on expanding their presence in global markets and reaching users worldwide aligns with the platforms' primary interest in economic gain through scaling their operations (van Dijck et al., 2018). However, in doing so, platforms may overlook or even challenge local, national, and supranational levels of social organization (ibid.). As such, platforms prioritize achieving larger market shares and increasing profits over fostering genuine civic engagement or promoting public value through civic engagement and societal contributions. This focus on scaling and economic value takes precedence over considerations of how these platforms can contribute to the broader public good or effectively address local and national needs. Whilst indicating a preference for a massive global user base, this disregard for traditional social structures implicates a form of hegemonic cultural imperialism.

Taking a stance through critical political economy theory and cultural studies, in light of platform companies' extensive global reach, Jin (2013: 167 in Poell et al., 2019) introduced the concept of 'platform imperialism', contending that the rapid expansion of corporations such as Facebook and Google illustrate the perpetuation of American imperialism through the exploitation by digital platforms. This viewpoint is pertinent as it suggests the impact of platform businesses on global power dynamics.

Contingent is thence normative identity in the time of global media and communications development, as portrayed by a hegemonic American conglomerate, such as Meta, during current capitalism. As such, despite a political bias in their argument, as one of the earliest to address the relationship between normative identity in the time of transnational media and communications development, Morley and Robins (1995: 11) concerns provide a relevant paradigm of how social values are 'detached from the spaces of national culture, and are realigned 'on the basis of the more 'universal' principles of international consumer culture'' (Erni, 1996: 421-422).

Platform Capitalism

From the emergence of social platforms, tensions involving US-based platforms, governments, and local communities transnationally revolve around differing interests over the public

values at stake, the desired methods for safeguarding these values in societies, and the suitability of existing regulatory tools (van Dijck et al., 2018). However, before the implicated challenges over governance can be addressed, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the infrastructures of a platform, the factors contributing to the emergence of a platform society, and the underlying principles guiding its development (van Dijck et al., 2018).

In 2017, Srnicek conceptualized the rapidly expanding new form of capitalism in the global economy as 'platform capitalism' (Srnicek, 2017). Having amassed the largest user population of platforms, Srnicek (2017) identifies Facebook as an actor holding significant dominance in the current political-economic ecology. The new form of capitalism wherein platform corporations monetize and extract user data as a resource, platform corporations are driven by profit-making activities operating as economic entities within a capitalist system, rather than functioning as cultural or political actors driven by cultural values (ibid.). Therefore, political economy theory underpins the power relations of platforms, thus implying that the motivations behind Meta's narrative of global citizenship stem from its objectives as a profit-seeking oligopoly.

Social media platforms become socially and culturally relevant as driven by social values such as connectivity, acknowledgment and recognition (van Dijck, 2012). These intangible elements are transformed into capital value and incorporated into the business model of digital platforms (ibid.).

In the realm of contemporary media, the emerged techno-commercial structures bear a complexity and hierarchical organization surpassing that of traditional media systems (van Dijck, 2012). The development and growth of platforms then reflect an intricate interplay between technological advancements and commercial interests, meanwhile shaping the dynamics of information dissemination and being 'part of a power struggle to recalibrate communicative norms in the public sphere' (van Dijck, 2012:165).

Recent social sciences critics have pointed out that the way that Big Tech deploys its hegemony is through its rhetoric of connectivity (e.g. Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Bucher, 2015; Gillespie, 2010). Specifically targeting Facebook, Nakamura (2020) postulates that corporate rhetoric of virtual reality as a connective technology serves to counter the perception of

rapacious, capitalistic and self-interested Big Tech. Hence, a move for the industry to recondition the public discontent over data extraction and surveillance related to 'platform capitalism'.

The debates concerned with ethics and agency in regard to Big Tech highlight various social tensions in the context of the duality of private and public interests in the platform ecology that can affect how Meta constructs an identity of its user. The first tension exists between Big Tech platforms enabling a "democratic" and egalitarian space or naturalizing their hegemony (van Dijck et al., 2018; van Dijck & Poell, 2015). Political economy critics tend towards a view of an intensifying power imbalance between user control and corporate power through data exploitation (van Dijck, 2012). Conversely, Zuckerberg has represented Facebook as a force for democracy, in its mission to build a global community (Bucher, 2021), echoing early assumptions of communications technology forming an international media community, functioning in a democratic way (Morley & Robins, 1995). For the identity of the user, there exists a theoretically and empirically unresolved contradictory dynamic between the threat posed by the power of social platforms for the democratic nature of public space and the recognition of the affordances for citizens and public institutions to shape the new frontier of the platform society (van Dijck & Poell, 2015).

Additional tensions exist between locality and globality, which unfold into conflicts between corporate-owned ICTs and public values not attached to market value, such as those pertaining to citizenship (van Dijck et al., 2018). In recent years, the Big Five US-based tech giants have effectively extended their platform services into other regions like Europe, Africa, and Asia. In Western European nations, confrontations have arisen between these American platforms and governmental authorities wherein at the core of the discord are the power of platforms and normative common public values (van Dijck et al., 2018). Contradictorily, a localized event, such as nationbound policies, may undermine social values and ICT platforms can provide transcendence.

The relation between "globalized" new media and public values is further complicated by the influence of market opportunity as opposed to being driven by affiliation to a national identity (Morley & Robins, 1995). Morley and Robins (1995) claim that commercial interest and the pursuit of global markets provides a set of homogenized common values, which form one's

identity. In the context of Big Tech platforms, where Meta may mediate a common ground identity for users to relate to, questions that arise are what values are replaced as a citizen and user in the Metaverse. Hence, what type of identity that users may envision for themselves within this context of the new world order? As such, providing critical examination of the assumptions made by Meta, concerning the imagination of a global identity.

The platform ideology, referred to as 'the myth of us' by Couldry (Couldry & van Dijck, 2015), accompanies a profound shift in the relationship between society and media institutions. This belief forms the foundation for the notion that the platforms are the new gathering spaces where 'we' come together. Entangled in this ideology are influences of neoliberal models of market-based agency, which emphasize individual empowerment within the market system, as well as the search for novel forms of popular politics in an era of declining trust in traditional political institutions (Couldry & van Dijck, 2015). As posited by van Dijck, Poell and Waal (2018: 163) Meta alike 'dominant platform ecosystems is firmly entrenched in its own ideological-political system'. The authors advocate that ideologies with libertarian principles that espouse values like individualism are conducive with Big Tech's political and economic hegemony. Echoing political economy theory, Bucher (2021:28) concludes that Facebook is built on values aligning with techno-libertarian ideologies emphasizing communalism and hacking, which have naturalized the company's culture of rapid scaling and embracing experimentation, despite leading to disruptions. However, these arguments in platform studies are not harnessed with robust evidence albeit providing a theoretical framework. The merits of political economy theory for platform studies are in emphasizing the objectives of technology corporations to establish monopolies in markets and wield substantial social influence, thereby possessing authority in validating discourses. This raises the question of which public values and ideologies are conveyed, exercised, and perpetuated in discourses by those in control of platform corporations. With the launch and vision of the immersive Metaverse, critical study of Meta as the largest ICT corporation and what is implied in its vision for the social is highly urgent.

While recent critical takes of ICTs have bourgeoned timely literature on how platforms attempt to justify their creation of a digital network to reap capital, what appears neglected is the relationship between global platform media and identity.

The Construction of Identity Through Discourse

The theory from platform studies implies that as identity construction operates within the constraints of culture (Fairclough, 1993), Meta puts forward an identity of someone who is able to connect, because of the globalized capitalist social context. The power of the private sector i.e. platform corporations in shaping values is explicated in a Venn diagram of the private sector, state, civil society by van Dijck et al. (2018). Social and societal imaginaries of the future are increasingly under the control of technology companies, and in that respect also assume the role of public institutions in governing future reality through their narratives, technologies, and business model (Mager & Katzenbach, 2021).

In the context of the Metaverse and its detachment from national boundaries, the communicated vision of Meta is pivotal in shaping identity. At stake in the communicated vision of Meta are the implications for identity. The Metaverse functions as a social establishment, essentially in its words, a distinct 'world,' that operates independently of national boundaries, prompting an inquiry into the connection between the broader global identity assumed as a Meta user and our individual national identities. Furthermore, as drawing from critical platform media studies e.g. van Dijck et al. (2018) and culture and media scholars Morley and Robins (1995), Meta's communications seem to aim at supplanting values that may be associated with or restricted by national identities.

In the chapter *Critical discourse analysis and citizenship: Researching citizenship*, Fairclough (2010: 412) conceives of "citizenship... as an ongoing communicative achievement" (Bora et al., 2001: 3)', noting that empirical research into the discursive construction is focused on 'particularly how concepts of citizenship are deployed in 'the dynamics of social positioning' (Bora and Hausendorf 2000: 1)'.

Banal nationalism, a concept introduced by Billig (1995 in Szulc, 2017), pertains to the understated, automatic, and unremarked reproductions of individual nations and the global community as a collection of nations. The concept of banal nationalism recognizes the struggle among different groups vying to represent the nation, and present their perspective as the unified voice of the entire nation (Billig, 1995: 71 in Szulc, 2017). Morley and Robins (1995) draw on Castoriadis (1990: 29 in Morley & Robins, 1995: 22), posing that the construction of

identity involves the differentiation of oneself from an Other: ‘the incapacity to constitute oneself as oneself without excluding the other – and the apparent inability to exclude the other without devaluing them’. In this sense, it is imperative to explore what values, and who are excluded in the discourses about “global” citizenship by Meta.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From the literature, I have developed a conceptual framework that underpins this empirical research. Political economy studies not only substantiate our understanding that platforms justify their business model of data extraction with an ideology of global connectivity (Couldry & Mejias, 2019), but also underscore the objective of technology corporations to attain market monopolies and social influence, gaining authority in endorsing socio-technical imaginaries (Mager & Katzenbach, 2021). As platform studies have added to the scholarship of global media and communications, the hegemony of Western systems of knowledge and power takes place within an intersection of markets, governance and powerful data infrastructures.

These theoretical conclusions imply that while navigating this social environment, hegemonic platforms legitimize a narrative of global citizenship. Building upon and drawing from Billig’s (1995) established account of the media practice of ‘banal nationalism’, my empirical study aims to qualitatively assess the practice of what I call “banal *transnationalism*”, from a commercial ICT as opposed to a nation. This concept functions to explicate the nexus of social values, economic power, political power and social influence at play in Meta’s vision. I aim to gain a nuanced understanding of how discursive practices, infused with power dynamics, perpetuate and legitimize Meta’s ideologies.

In van Dijck et al. 's (2018) account, platforms and their relationship to public values should be investigated within their distinct context. The launch of the Metaverse indicates a current need to understand the underlying values and ideologies guiding the vision of Meta (Bucher, 2021: 33) that exist among critics of global ICTs. My study of Meta provides an empirical study into whether libertarian values such as individualism are embedded into its imagined identity of a global citizen, working to consolidate Big Tech’s powerful political position as has been postulated in previous literature. At the same time, this study contributes to understanding

the concept of a global citizen through media technology development, which has historically been deliberated in communications scholarship.

From the literature reviewed thus far, I have formulated research questions to answer in my study:

RQ: How is the concept and identity of a global citizen constructed in Meta Platforms' communications?

SQ1: What values are attributed to global collective identity by Meta?

SQ2: What are the implications suggested by the constructed perspective?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this section, I present a comprehensive overview of the methodologies and resources employed in this study to address the research questions delineated.

Methodological Justification

To effectively examine the interconnectedness between discourse, social actors, and social dynamics, I employ the research method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). Previously, CDA has aptly been used to investigate the role of language in the present restructuring and global expansion of capitalism (ibid.). By utilizing CDA, researchers can gain valuable insights into the impact of neoliberal discourse on the transformations, expansion and upholding of capitalism in the contemporary world (ibid.).

While discourse is shaped by power dynamics, through acknowledging discourse as an element along with social events and social practices, Critical Discourse Analysis provides valuable insights into how discourse actively contributes to the establishment and subsistence of social power dynamics (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). As emphasized by Fairclough (1993: 12), discourse holds a central position in molding 'social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief'. Employing CDA thus enables us to explore the process whereby language and discourse actively play a role in shaping and constructing social realities and

identities (Chouliaraki, 2008). For analysis of the social imaginary of the Metaverse reality and the Meta Platforms user broadly, CDA is particularly appropriate.

Discourse functions as 'a constitutive component of the social' (Chouliaraki, 2008: 1), and discursive identity construction also operates within the constraints of culture. Thus, considering the discursive practice dimension and the social dimension of discourse via CDA methodology can allude to the existing theory in the literature review wherein platforms put forward an identity of someone who connects, due to the social context. Moreover, CDA will allow for a nuanced understanding of the nexus of economic interests and public values and the impact for the social context.

In a Foucauldian sense, discourse can be understood as the use of resources to create meaning and meaning-making laden with values comes from a position of power (Chouliaraki, 2008). Amid the tensions between the role of the local and global in identity construction, this will allow me to focus on how the concept of a global citizen, as a part of the global community, is given meaning and what are the values attached to the concept.

"Global village" theories carry an assumption that the media and communications technology spaces for global citizens will be for public deliberation, i.e. "democratic" communication. The values from the CDA around the global citizen identity should imply whether Meta's platform can cultivate this imaginary. Fairclough posits the functions of the three-dimensional CDA framework:

'if one's concern is with the social values associated with texts and their elements, and more generally with the social significance of texts, description needs to be complemented with interpretation and explanation.' (Fairclough, 2013b: 118).

CDA is an appropriate research approach because it centers on examining language use in connection with invisible elements of ideology, social structures and power relations (Fairclough, 2013a; Fairclough, 2013b). Meta Platforms Inc. operates within modern social structures; of a platform business model, and private and public interests (van Dijck et al. 2018). According to Bucher (2021), understanding Facebook as an infrastructure highlights the profound worldwide social, political, and cultural implications of the platform. This is underscored by its deep integration into everyday life (Bucher, 2021). Hence, CDA is

particularly useful in critiquing the normative discourse produced by Meta and investigating 'banal transnationalism', as discourse is considered in relation to social forces.

Prior to conducting this research, I conducted a pilot study using 3 extracts of 300 words (+/- 10%) obtained from the same sample corpus to assess the feasibility and validity of the chosen research methodology.

Analytical Framework

CDA will be used systematically along Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework (Appendix II) to analyze the textual, discursive, and social dimensions of the text.

1. Text dimension:

The textual dimension entails examining linguistic elements, including vocabulary choice, verb tenses, collocations, and rhetorical techniques (Fairclough, 1992).

2. Discursive dimension:

The discursive level takes into account the practices of the production and interpretation of the text. Analysis on this level focuses on the connection between these discursive practices and the text, answering which discursive practices are being used, including questions of interdiscursivity. The analytical lens of the discursive dimension serves as connecting the text (1) and social (3) dimensions (Fairclough, 1993). As such, both the processes of text production and interpretation are shaped by social context, while at the same time, the production process itself also influences the resulting text.

3. Social dimension:

Discourse has constitutive functions, thereby the discourse is a piece of social practice (Fairclough, 1993: 136). The social dimension of CDA expands on the interaction between the text and the conditions and context of institutional and social structures. This level will identify the social dynamics, such as power and domination, in reference to the text and the social effects of discourse (ibid.).

While these dimensions of textual analysis are complementary and intersect, the analysis through the textual and discursive dimensions helps shed light on how identity is constructed and structured within the text. The social dimension allows us to investigate the potential impacts on social organization and communities that the identity construction concerns.

Sampling

The data sample for analysis is composed of Meta Platforms Inc.'s quarterly earnings call transcripts from 2021 (Appendix I), which are publicly accessible from the Meta website. As a publicly traded company, Meta Platforms Inc. communicates its financial performance to shareholders, analysts, and the public through earnings call conferences. These calls, habitually held quarterly, reflect the future visions of the company, offering a resource of CEO Mark Zuckerberg and the top management of Meta Platform Inc.'s discursive construction of a global citizenship identity and values attached. Zuckerberg himself remarks on the October 2021 earnings call that the nascent Metaverse 'is not an investment that is going to be profitable for us anytime in the near future.' (Appendix I. 2), implying that the discourse centers around the ideological vision as opposed to the presentation of financial results.

In examining the relationship between platforms and society, earnings calls hold considerable relevance as they serve as a reference point for secondary mass media outlets reporting on the company outlook. Therefore, they bear an impact on the social dimension, and contribute to discourses that will be perpetuated. Furthermore, the societal implications of earnings calls is apparent in how market investors react to the reports. These calls for research by Couldry highlight the relevance of earnings calls for my analysis of Meta:

'Today, we must make sense of emerging spaces of social life which depend on digital platforms (platforms for so-called social media), the beneficiaries that are the focus of corporate investment on a scale which mass media institutions never received!' (Couldry, 2015: 637).

Although earnings calls are a valuable resource for findings about the social value of companies, scholarly attention remains comparatively deficient. This study endeavors to address this gap by subjecting Meta's earnings calls to an examination through the lens of critical discourse analysis, thereby elucidating the latent principles underpinning the technological oligopoly's vision.

The samples of earnings calls are selected through a purposive sampling strategy, for the purposes of reflecting the juncture of the transition of Facebook to Meta in July 2021, set forth on the Q2 2021 Earnings Call. The quarterly released Q2, Q3 and Q4 Earnings Call Transcripts (Appendix I), from the time period between July 2021 and February 2022, each within a range of 20-24 pages of text, are used as data for analysis.

Ethical Considerations and Methodological Limitations

Although social identities can be seen as structural effects of the social dimension in CDA (Fairclough, 2013b), the findings about the identity in this study are one-dimensional, from the corporate side. Based on CDA alone, it is not credible to draw conclusions about Meta's role in the construction of this identity, specifically about how this social identity is assimilated or adopted by people.

While I postulate that Meta's top management's earnings call discourses are perpetuated in secondary media outlets and Meta's communications directly to the general public, a CDA approach with an emphasis on users could concentrate on strategic communications designed directly for the public. Interviews and surveys could be conducted to gain insights into how Meta accomplishes the manifestation of the social identity for users.

The ethics and reflexivity considered in this study regard mitigating my positionality as the researcher. As critical discourse analysis is a critique of societal structures and power relations, a moral standing by the researcher is inherent to the methodology. CDA is a way of presenting an understanding of the text, and hence involves the social positioning, knowledge and values of the interpreter (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). While the previous knowledge that affects my interpretation of the text remains a valid form of analysis, during interpretation I practice self-reflexivity by being conscious of the cultural, political, social, and ideological roots from which my reading emerges. The limitations of my positionality are mitigated by conducting the analysis along the instructions for Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework and the presentation of findings is underpinned by extant theory.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The following findings provide a concise overview and presentation of the primary discursive elements extracted. They present the interpretation and conclusions drawn from the three dimensions, addressing the research questions.

Authorizing a Technology-driven Future

While not directly interacting with the public, the way that the top management configures social relations on the platform has implications for the social identity of the imagined user (Fairclough, 1992). The identity functions of discourse are implied, constructing the autonomy of the user while positioning Meta in power when future imaginaries are presented. Firstly, the textual dimension, as it sheds light on how topics under analysis are structured (Fairclough, 1992), seems to imply a power asymmetry in the control over the future. This separation is expressed in the sentence; 'you can see the future we're working towards' (Appendix I. 1), where Zuckerberg makes a separation using subject pronouns between the public; 'you', and the corporation in 'the future we're working towards'. Further, in Q4 Zuckerberg's tone narrates a vision of the future with an asymmetric balance of agency: 'This is what people want. They enjoy the product. We're going to -- so we're just going to roll it out as quickly and as well as we can.' (Appendix I. 3). Analysis focusing on the textual dimension could imply that the repetitive assertions of the platform user in third person at the beginning of the sentence relatively position Meta in authority. Zuckerberg's assertions encapsulate the impotent position of user autonomy as sophisticated algorithms and data analysis by Meta have the potential to influence user actions or beliefs. In 'we're just going to roll it out' (Appendix I. 3) Zuckerberg's tone remains straight-forward, naturalizing the technology corporation's narrative of progress that connotes rapid technological development due to significant market competition of the Big Five.

Meta's technologically deterministic vision of social progress is illustrated, as technologically-centered discourse is associated with the word 'progress' in the sampled texts. The rhetoric in Appendix I. 1 implies how the inanimate and neutral technology of AI is accorded power over development:

GIVE PEOPLE THE POWER TO BUILD COMMUNITY AND BRING THE WORLD TOGETHER

'I do think that the progress that's being made at the fundamental levels with AI is driving a lot of progress and is one of the important macro effects that we're seeing.', *'I think that the core AI platform is just an important part of the progress that we're seeing overall.'* (Appendix I. 1).

Arguably, this discourse compromises human agency and the role of humans in social change. When referring to their work on virtual reality and augmented reality in: 'But I think you'll see all of those pieces start to get built out and start to mature a bit over the next few years.' (Appendix I. 2), Zuckerberg uses personification with 'mature' to attribute human characteristics to the abstract idea of technology, further strengthening the vision of technology as a driver of social progress in comparison to people. Furthermore, the statement 'Advances in AI enable a lot of the experiences that I've talked about so far –' (Appendix I. 2) underscores the idea of technology as a driving force shaping human interactions and engagements. This sentiment is reinforced by the declaration 'We became a mobile-first experience. And then we grew a whole family of apps that serve billions of people.' (Appendix I. 2). The juxtaposition of 'experience' with 'mobile-first' seamlessly integrates technology as an extension of human interaction, underlining the fusion between technological innovation and human engagement. Moreover, the idiom 'family of apps' encapsulates a blend of social connotations with technological lexicon, signifying Meta's endeavor to interweave technology with social connectivity in a symbiotic manner.

The technique of homogenizing human qualities, i.e. 'natural and engaging', with technological innovation, i.e. 'mobile networks' is used in Appendix. I. 3: 'And now that mobile networks are starting to get -- gotten really good, video is really becoming the primary thing, and it is a lot more natural and engaging.' (Appendix. I. 3). This rhetoric works to prime the introduction of the ideology of naturalizing virtual reality as the 'next step':

'This is partially, by the way, why I think that an even more immersive format around virtual reality and augmented reality is going to be the kind of next step after video and why we're so invested there.' (Appendix. I. 3).

Meta justifies its vision of technology-centered progress with the intention of bringing people closer together:

GIVE PEOPLE THE POWER TO BUILD COMMUNITY AND BRING THE WORLD TOGETHER

'And there is so much more to build. Even with all the tools we have today, we still can't feel like we're right there together with the people we care about when we're physically apart.' (Appendix I. 2).

However, notable is how the discourse is structured wherein Meta can enable building infrastructures that connect people. Meta puts forward an idea of the metaverse as an altruistic entity for public values, as it negates its priorities of increasing profits:

'So on the next 1 to 3 years, I mean, I almost -- wouldn't focus on the sort of business outcomes there quite as much as I would just -- the products and infrastructure that we're putting in place.' (Appendix I. 2).

Moreover, in the Q4 earnings call a vision of progress is proposed:

'you're also going to be able to access the worlds from your Facebook or Instagram apps as well, and probably more over time. This will enable us to build even richer social experiences where you can connect with friends in the metaverse whether they're in VR or not.' (Appendix I. 3).

This pursuit of enhanced social experiences conceals a broader technological and commercial vision of progress linked to the formation of a digital network that facilitates data exchange to collect and exchange data among each other, and it aligns with the strategic logic of expanding platform profits through network effects.

As such, the discourse reinforcing a technologically-driven narrative of the future serves the political and economic interests of Meta. In accordance with the social dimension, the values characteristic of a technologically centered development put forward are aligned with the techno-libertarian values of Silicon Valley (Bucher, 2021). As seen in Meta's projections of social progress and the future, the concept of the globally connected citizen is thus used to veil the financial incentives of the Big Tech corporation.

Mediating the Tension Between the Global and Local

A tension in the distribution of power between the global and local arises when platforms mediate common public values and the pursuit of global connectivity, as theorized by Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal (2018). In instances where local national regulation for the protection of public values restricts platform expansion, Meta performs discursive attempts to navigate the situation. Zuckerberg removes the platform from a sense of locality in 'we can't just focus on building great experiences -- we also need to make sure we're helping to build ecosystems

so millions of other people can participate in the upside and opportunity of what we're all creating. There will need to be new protocols and standard' (Appendix I. 1). 'New protocols and standard' for Meta circumvents the challenges that local governance poses. In a similar manner as the platform is referred to as an ecosystem, evoking a context of a distinct geographical area, the use of the term 'creative economy' (Appendix I. 1;2;3) on the platform implies a detachment from local economies. Crucially, when the creator economy is discussed, the Metaverse is referred to as 'in the new world' (Appendix I. 1), and directly the process of separating is made explicit in the sentence: 'enabling a whole different economy around [the creator economy]' (Appendix I. 2). Users i.e. 'creators' monetizing the content that they have created is worded as 'make a living' (Appendix I. 1), connoting a replacement for earning wages in a local context.

The rhetoric 'help businesses grow even more on our platforms' and 'world class services at every layer of commerce' (Appendix I. 1) works to ideologically move the economy on to Meta, strengthening its role in society. In 'create more native commerce experiences across our apps.' (ibid.) the word choice 'native' as it is embedded in the sentence about commerce implies how Meta steers the users away from local contexts, while acting as an economically authoritative entity and a powerful body of social organization.

When addressing conflicts over the platform's impact for social order, namely of how the algorithm encourages us to identify with more extreme views because they are labelable by the algorithm (Katz, 2020), Zuckerberg attributes responsibility to the local:

'I also think that any honest account should be clear that these issues aren't primarily about social media. That means that no matter what Facebook does, we're never going to solve them on our own. For example, polarization started rising in the US before I was born. At the same time, independent research shows that many countries around the world have flat or declining polarization, despite similar social media use there to in the US. We see this pattern repeat with other issues as well' (Appendix I. 2).

Zuckerberg attempts to downplay the repercussions for the social resulting from the platform's commercial objectives in global expansion: 'Facebook started in a dorm room and grew into a global website' (ibid.). Analysis through the textual dimension of the sample highlights how with the use of passive verb in explaining the platform's expansion, Zuckerberg removes himself from accountability.

Meta contends for its role as a significant actor amongst local problems, providing an infrastructure for societal functions. With the use of its commerce function Marketplace, Meta mediates supply chain disruption which is happening locally: 'Marketplace is already at scale and lots of people rely on it, especially now with supply chain issues that make it harder to get new products.' (Appendix I. 2).

Meta's discourse navigating the tension between local governance and the platform dynamics serves as a conspicuous indication of the company's primary focus on accumulating profits. In responding to the local political context, regarding European regulations that curtail data accessibility, Meta's imperative is to continue data extraction by any means possible:

'With Apple's iOS changes and new regulation in Europe, there's a clear trend where less data is available to deliver personalized ads. But people still want to see relevant ads, and businesses still want to reach the right customers. So we're rebuilding a lot of our ads infrastructure so we can continue to grow and deliver high-quality personalized ads.' (Appendix I. 3).

Amidst rising calls for privacy protection from the local context, it is implied that the suppression of citizen privacy lies at the core of Meta's business model (Srnicek, 2017). This tendency involves constantly pressing against the limits of what is socially and legally acceptable in terms of data collection. As Meta is confronted with discord over people's privacy, Meta's approach to the human rights at stake is to address people as consumers. Srnicek (ibid.) contends that platform capitalism disregards social and legal norms by collecting personal information until retracting in the face of public protest. Thus, the discourse exemplifies Meta's overarching strategy, highlighting a pattern of prioritizing profit generation over privacy concerns and revealing a business approach that is geared toward trespassing boundaries, as set by territorial regulators, rather than safeguarding user privacy. This finding could imply that social values of global citizenship presided by Meta is largely subordinated to its neoliberal pursuit of maximizing financial gains and influence, potentially undermining the principles of autonomy and ethical responsibility that could be expected of the global digital ecosystem.

Another finding from the tension between globality and local contexts is how Meta further detaches itself from the local. However, Meta's notion of being global can be construed as

rather operating under capitalist values. This is exemplary of the logic where Meta ‘seeks to provide future visions of a better world to guide and legitimize their own digital technologies’ (Mager & Katzenbach, 2021: 229). Meta’s intentions expressed in: ‘we are retooling our teams to make serving young adults their north star, rather than optimizing for the larger number of older people’ (Appendix I. 2), arguably connoting individualistic values, serving as an opposite to traditional Eastern Confucian values of obligation to those elder on a macro and meso level. As van Dijck et al. (2018) propose, the technology company elects to construct a future vision of society independent of other social infrastructures, as the discourse shifts power away from other producers of discourses (Fairclough, 1992). This entails consolidating the authority in constructing the collective global identity.

When referring to territorial regions, an issue arises regarding the shared values of the community, and whether Meta is connecting regions through commodification, as Morley and Robins (1995) suggest.

‘we’re seeing MAU [Monthly Active Users] and DAU [Daily Active Users] in the U.S. and Canada, sort of bounce around as sort of expected...’, ‘And then if you look at the Rest of World, we’ve seen some headwinds there, kind of a little bit unique in the quarter in areas like India...’ (Appendix I. 3).

Given that Meta holds a ‘high level of penetration’ (Appendix I. 3) in Canada and North America, their performance in the region is sensibly interpreted as ‘as sort of expected’, however, the stark juxtaposition with the ‘Rest of World’ collocated with the word choice ‘unique’ conceivably otherizes and orientalizes the foreign region. The region given the name ‘Rest of World’ is not explicitly defined, and arguably seems to connote a distinction of the non-advanced capitalist countries.

In this sense, Jin’s (2013: 167 in Poell et al., 2019) ‘platform imperialism’ as a new form of Western imperialism through the hegemony of platforms, underlies Meta’s discourse. In addressing the issue of AI and hate speech, AI is kept neutral in its potential harms for society and approved of as Anglophone-centric:

‘there’s a lot of cultural nuance in this where you want to be able to make sure you understand the innuendos in all those languages and that you want to make sure that people can say -- can denounce racism, right?’ (Appendix I. 2).

Therefore, as the effectiveness of AI is limited in addressing hate speech in non-Anglophone contexts, arguably a dominance of US norms in Meta's vision is implicated. The implications of the prioritization of techno-commercial objectives in navigating the tension between globality and local contexts are in alignment with José van Dijck's (2018: 27) critique: 'In the American (or Anglo-Saxon) market model, corporations ally with consumers to embrace free market principles and to minimize government interference, while civil society interests are negligible.'

Private Interests and Public Values

The dialectic of social responsibility and organizational legitimacy as a private enterprise is defended by Zuckerberg, by portraying Meta not merely as a manufacturer of commodities, but more so as an entity integrated into societal frameworks: 'But bringing this vision to life isn't just about building one glasses product. There's a whole ecosystem.' (Appendix I. 2). The perspective of the platform as an all-encompassing world, with the term 'ecosystem', connotes interaction between living organisms, made distinct from a means of commerce with 'But bringing this vision to life isn't just about building one glasses product.' (ibid.). Hence, as noted by van Dijck (2018), the merging of established institutional structures with platforms is the driving force behind the entanglement of public values within platform society. This occurs as infrastructural platforms progressively infiltrate existing societal arrangements, as the portrayal as an ecosystem implies (ibid.).

To bring 'this vision to life', Zuckerberg pronounces a logic wherein the platform enables social life by producing as many commodified products as possible. This logic of maximization of profit generation is evident when shedding light on Meta's use of the content on the platform:

'And because we have a mix of content in the feeds from all different types, we're only going to show Reels or recommend them if we feel like there's high-quality content to show as there's more high-quality content, we show more of it.' (Appendix I. 3).

Arguably, the word choice in 'high-quality content' veils 'monetizable content'. On the earnings call, Zuckerberg projects that with the so-called high-quality content: 'we think that there's a potential for a tremendous amount of overall engagement growth' (ibid.). As

'engagement' is referred to in a commodified sense, a logic of transitioning the space from social connectivity to a marketplace is further implied.

Interactions of both social and economic nature largely occur within a globally interconnected digital infrastructure (van Dijck, 2018), thus, at stake is that communication becomes characterized by economics and assimilated into the domain of the commodity market. The colonization of discourse by commodity promotion is hidden under the rhetoric of 'connect' in 'Third, business messaging. Our focus is on helping businesses and consumers connect.' (Appendix I. 3). Further, in 'We're continuing to invest in new tools to make it easier for people to get help and make purchases right from a chat.' (Appendix I. 3). The concept of communication is thus technologically-oriented with vocabulary such as 'chat' and 'tools', and is commodified, with the end-goal of making a purchase. In the instance of the colonization of discourse by marketization, the dialectical relationship between social change and discourse is reflected in the discursive practices of Meta (Fairclough, 1993). As noted by Fairclough (1993), appropriating users as consumers in the context of communication has repercussions for their identity, and sense of agency.

Neoliberal language is used when users are referred to as 'creators' (Appendix I. 1), obscuring that they are conceived of as creators of economic value. Moreover, the vocabulary of: 'creator economy' and 'we're investing \$1 billion in creators' (Appendix I. 1) attributes a commercial approach towards people. Therefore, the notion that creators on the platform can 'express themselves' (Appendix I. 1) ties self-expression to monetary gain. How public values are compromised in the operation of the platform is highlighted in:

'We're very focused on making it easy for anyone to create video, and then for those videos to be viewed across all of our different services, starting with Facebook and Instagram first' (ibid.).

The sentence begins with democratic sentiment, however, the idea is then turned into a neoliberal one, implying that Meta's focus on 'making it easy for anyone to create video' is conducted under monetary incentive, making use of the attention economy: 'viewed across all of our different services'. Moreover, the platform as providing a 'diversity of products for people to discover and interact with' (Appendix I. 1) emulates a logic of continuous innovation driven by the relentless capitalist pursuit of profit, aiming to provide the abundant

array of choices that post-industrial consumers require to construct their identity. Along with the sociology of Bauman, modern society offers the freedom of choice in consumption as a system of self-assertion (Davis & Bauman, 2008). The consumer market then provides the freedom of choice and, simultaneously, a heightened reliance on this very market, as the market is equated as a locus of autonomous freedom (ibid.). Meta as a site of consumption is global, therefore the freedom of choice is exponential. Meta's conception of the common good (van Dijck, 2018) for civil society inherently supports capitalism, which maintains Big Tech hegemony and their ideas of societal value.

The future with Meta's platform Metaverse is envisioned as: '*[The Metaverse is]* going to unlock a massively larger creative economy of both digital and physical goods than what exists today' (Appendix I. 2), further enforcing the market-oriented ideology of the communicative space. Therefore, the platformization of social life reinforced by Meta bears implications for public values such as insecure platformized labor (van Dijck, 2018), normalizing conspicuous consumption and participation in consumption as a form of identity construction.

The user's identity is entangled in a complex and unresolved interplay between the potential threat that social platforms pose to the democratic essence of public space, and the forms of authority that citizens are given via platforms (van Dijck & Poell, 2015). For civic participation, the Meta leadership expresses democratic and globalized ideals: 'I'm optimistic that creators will get more opportunities to do the work they want, and that's going to lead to people hearing lots of new voices across our different services.' (Appendix I. 1). The reference to 'ecosystems' also includes a vision of democratic and collective contribution, e.g. Meta is envisioned as 'helping to build ecosystems so millions of other people can participate in the upside and opportunity of what we're all creating.' (Appendix I. 1). The creation of public value for *both* users and society obscures the distinction between for-profit and nonprofit (Gillespie, 2010). Thus, politically framing the service of the platform as a public virtue to navigate demands of policy and financial and cultural demands (ibid.: 348).

The vision of the Metaverse as democratic in:

'In order for the Metaverse to fulfill its potential, we believe that it should be built in a way that is open for everyone to participate. I expect this is going to create a lot of value for many companies' (Appendix I. 1)

is in alignment with political economy arguments that the virtual community is created under profit-seeking objectives.

An uncertainty between private and public space is evident as the notion of 'community' is used in a context of the 'creators' who monetize their presence, and in a context for belonging and connecting socially. In the expressions: 'Billions of people use our services because we build the best tools to stay connected to the people you care about, to find communities that matter to you' (Appendix I. 2) and 'we're committed to helping people continue to build vibrant communities' (Appendix I. 1), the discourse of 'vibrant communities' veils the "costs of connectivity" as conceptualized by Couldry and Mejias (2019) pertaining to the hidden implications to human autonomy when interacting on social platforms. The Meta platforms benefit from the network effects (Srnicsek, 2017), i.e. increasing amount of data from social engagement to use as a capital resource. On the other hand, the notion of 'community' is used in a commodified context when stating how video 'gives creators a way to build community and engage with their followers' (Appendix I. 1). Furthermore, the commodified context of community: 'people to find their communities and help personalize recommendations to help connect people with the people who are going to be interested in their content.' (Appendix I. 1) implies a fragmented digital public sphere, naturalizing an algorithmic method of finding 'community'. Yet, the algorithmic logic of platforms has raised concerns about algorithmic classification and its implications for social discrimination in the forms of racism and sexism (e.g. Bucher, 2012; Katz, 2020). Therefore, Meta strategically uses normative ideas of connectivity, communication and technology to legitimize corporate action (Mager & Katzenbach, 2021).

A blurred sense of a private and public space is implied with Meta's vision of 'social' virtual reality:

'This is our social VR world-building experience that we recently opened to people in the US and Canada. And we've seen a number of talented creators build worlds like a recording studio where producers collaborate or a relaxing space to meditate.' (Appendix I. 3).

In the same sentence, 'creators' is used in an economic sense with 'recording studio where producers collaborate' and complicated with non-commodified activity: 'relaxing space to

meditate'. Another way that the distinction between public and private space is blurred in the vision of the Metaverse is with the fusion between commerce and social behaviour:

'We released new features like ratings, reviews and community replies to product questions, and significantly improved Checkout stability. We brought Shops to Groups, and we started testing Live Shopping for creators – an early glimpse of the immersive shopping experiences that will be possible in the metaverse.' (ibid.).

When interrogated about the evolution of social interaction on the platform and sharing, Zuckerberg uses cautious language which implies a strategy to limit admitting the telos of commodifying communication:

'But I think overall, you're right, that the balance of content that people see in Feeds is shifting a little bit more towards stuff that isn't coming from their friends, which you may discuss with your friends, but it is kind of shifting towards more public content.' (Appendix I. 3).

The transformation from sharing amongst friends to being exposed to 'more public content' goes against forming a universal community, as people are exposed to content that will gain virality or is commodifiable. Behind the empowering rhetoric of user participation, platform societies are growing less transparent as social and economic mechanisms are concealed within algorithms, business models, and data use that remain beyond the reach of democratic oversight (Pasquale, 2015). On a micro level, the role that Meta constructs for its global user is individualized from social structures. However, a novel agency for users is not implied and rather an uneven share of resources is reinforced by the neoliberal ideology.

When discussing personalized ads, Meta's Chief Operating Officer Sandberg designates the process of data extraction and analysis, converted to commodity as 'the basic things'. This discourse accustoms the use of personal information as capital:

'So while we continue to get those that were all the way on the adoption curve to learn and adapt to these changes, there are also advertisers out there that aren't doing even the basic things yet that we can continue to work on and improve their performance.' (Appendix I. 3).

For the construction of the collective user identity, the discourse about personalization implies a rather fragmented public sphere, which results in driving profits through greater personalization. When discussing commerce in Appendix I. 1.: 'Personalized' and 'and have it delivered to your doorstep.' are used in the same sentence, exemplifying how

personalization is connected to intensifying the commodification of the medium. In Meta's efforts 'To build the next era of personalized experiences' the higher management highlights that a 'webpage that's not personalized or not optimized or where you have to re-enter your payment information. That's not a good experience for people' (ibid.). By expressing that to 're-enter your payment information' is vaguely 'not a good experience for people', the discourse obscures that platform users are reminded of the sense of a commercial space.

This rhetoric of 'personalization' effectively disguises a logic of fragmentation that is further exacerbated by algorithms and bears consequences for social identity. As this ideology of the digital infrastructure contradicts notions of a shared identity or community, the characteristic attributed to a user of Meta is of individualization. The way that global identity is constructed is by detaching the Meta ecosystem from existing local structures and offering a vision of the future where connectivity and participation is heightened. However, the imbalance between public values and private values constructs the identity along neoliberal logic, where ultimately the user's agency and autonomy are under the authority of the corporation. These findings reflect the implication that Meta, not bound to regulations and not accountable to regulatory authorities, seems poised to wield substantial influence over our lives. With the undermined autonomy in a space where public and private are obscured, this influence is likely to be wielded in ways that are challenging to counteract.

CONCLUSION

Through a critical discourse analysis of Meta's Earnings Calls during the introduction of Meta's platform Metaverse, distinctive textual and semantic patterns are found. These themes work to shape an understanding of the identity of its user and future imaginaries of social life, aligning in a manner that supports the commercial incentives of the Big Tech corporation. Fairclough's (1993) textual, discursive and social levels of CDA revealed intricate contradictions between public values and private ownership in Meta's construction of global citizenship. CDA as a critique of the way that discourse and ideology constructs social relations and reinforces power relations, revealed how the autonomy of a global citizen through the Meta platform is compromised with a vision of progress valorizing techno-libertarian values. The representations of an imagined future of a global village are set forth

to naturalize a culture of what platform capitalism entails. The commodified textual and discursive characteristics, namely individualization, observed support the thesis that the public values for the community fostered by Meta, imply that in the detachment from local socio-cultural infrastructures, users are connected via a capitalist consumer culture (Morley & Robins, 1995).

While the findings and interpretation in this study support existent theory by scholars of globalized media and communications technologies, a study using a larger sample of data could investigate in depth what national actors are derailed of political, economic and social power in the expansion of data-driven high-tech companies (van Dijck, 2018). The political economy aspects of literature on platforms are justified by the findings of this study that imply how private interests undermine the promotion of public values envisioned in globalized media and communications and declared in the platform's external communications. The findings of this study suggest how digital connectivity exploits its pledge for connectivity and interactivity to strategically advance its capitalistic objectives. Additionally, the contribution of this study to the theoretical literature in the field is the findings indicating how this culture is normalized by those driving the Meta corporation. The analysis of the discourse of the new platform Metaverse also serves to offer a vision of progress where data extraction is normalized, corroborating Couldry and Mejias (2019) and implying that the space of communication is commodified, giving credence to van Dijck, Poell and de Waal's (2018) arguments that platforms upset the societal balance between private and public values.

As discourse of high-level management in the private sector is frequently shrouded in opacity, this analysis of earnings calls has offered a revelation and a thorough examination of the construction of the global citizen and how a form of banal transnationalism is exercised. Further research that focuses on the experience of citizens could involve conducting interviews and surveys based on using the Meta platforms.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Sample texts

1. Facebook, Inc. (FB) (2021, July 28) Second Quarter 2021 Results Conference Call

https://s21.q4cdn.com/399680738/files/doc_financials/2021/q2/FB-Q2-2021-Earnings-Call-Transcript.pdf [Last consulted 17 August 2023]

2. Facebook, Inc. (FB) (2021, October 25) Third Quarter 2021 Results Conference Call

https://s21.q4cdn.com/399680738/files/doc_financials/2021/q3/FB-Q3-2021-Earnings-Call-Transcript.pdf [Last consulted 17 August 2023]

3. Meta Platforms, Inc. (FB) (2022, February 2) Fourth Quarter 2021 Results Conference Call

https://s21.q4cdn.com/399680738/files/doc_financials/2021/q4/Meta-Q4-2021-Earnings-Call-Transcript.pdf [Last consulted 17 August 2023].

APPENDIX B: Methodological framework

Q2: Yellow

Q3: Green

Q4: Blue

Dimension	
Textual	<p>Distinction between you and the corporation. “This is what people want. They enjoy the product. We're going to -- so we're just going to roll it out as quickly and as well as we can.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetitive assertions of the user in third person • Informal tone in the narrative of progress, naturalizing the rapid technological progress due to Big Five market competition “we're just going to roll it out” • “that this is certainly not the first time that we've gone through a major format evolution.” <p>“Advances in AI enable a lot of the experiences that I’ve talked about so far”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology as driving human experience
Discursive	<p>Discussing “the notion of the ‘spirit of capitalism’” Fairclough (2010) emphasises the ideology behind the capitalist system where “wage-earners have lost ownership of the fruits of their labour”, as subordinates for capitalists, who attract others into their insatiable process of accumulation. Contributing to the social practice of capitalism and the ideology, Meta speaks of “creators” (Appendix I. 1,2,3), distorting the notion of authoritarian chiefs in work and providing a space for creativity albeit commodified.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “creator economy”: detachment from local economies • - metaverse as “in the new world” • - “enabling a whole different economy around [the creator economy]” • - “ help businesses grow even more on our platforms”, “world class services at every layer of commerce” • “create more native commerce experiences across our apps.” word choice: Native • - “In order for the metaverse to fulfill its potential, we believe that it should be built in a way that is <u>open for everyone to participate</u>. I expect this is going to create <u>a lot of value for many companies</u>” in alignment with the (political economy) arguments that the virtual community is created under profit-seeking objectives • - “people to find their communities and help personalize recommendations to help connect people with the people who are going to be interested in their content.” this implies a fragmented digital sphere, naturalizing algorithms to find “community”, yet there have been concerns about algorithmic classification • - “we're committed to helping people continue to build vibrant communities” the costs of connectivity, network effects
Social	<p>Vision of “progress” is illustrated: “I do think that the progress that's being made at the fundamental levels with AI is driving a lot of progress and is one of the important macro effects that we're seeing.”, “I think that the core AI platform is just an important part of the progress that we're seeing overall.”</p> <p>“The most popular apps on Quest are social, which fits our original thesis here that virtual reality will be a social platform and that's why we're so focused on building it”</p>

	<p>Local & global tension: attribution of responsibility to local</p> <p>"I also think that any honest account should be clear that these issues aren't primarily about social media. That means that no matter what Facebook does, we're never going to solve them on our own. For example, polarization started rising in the US before I was born. At the same time, independent research shows that many countries around the world have flat or declining polarization, despite similar social media use there to in the US. We see this pattern repeat with other issues as well"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tension is implied when this is enclosed between collocations of the platform's global scale. "Facebook started in a dorm room and grew into a global website".• The textual dimension of the text highlights how with the use of passive verb, Zuckerberg removes himself from the culprit position
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