SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
Exploring the discursive construction of the *Facebook Manifesto*

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Abstract – The aim of the chapter is to investigate the rhetorical construction of the nearly 6,000-word message posted by Mark Zuckerberg in February 2017 to his personal profile on the social media he co-founded. The post is entitled *Building Global Community* and features an open letter addressed to all Facebook's users where he envisions the strategic role of the platform as the "social infrastructure" for civic participation. The document has been defined by many a "manifesto" as it is a public declaration of policy and aims, and its textual structure is more similar to that of political speech than to a status update on a social networking site. In order to analyze it, the paper adopts a critical multimodal approach – which is a perspective that merges critical discourse analysis and multimodality to study contemporary political discourses that are communicated not only through political speeches or news items and where argumentation is realized making use of language in combination with different kinds of semiotic resources. In particular, the paper explores how verbal and visual codes, together with the digital platform's affordances, are used to shape the image of Facebook as a socio-political space. Indeed, the post features a complex ideological and rhetorical construct that is articulated linguistically, digitally and multimodally, and that interweaves a cognitive theory of history, the Habermasian conceptualization of the public sphere and the notion of artificial intelligence in a frame that depicts the social medium as the enabler of participation for civically engaged global communities.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; Facebook; multimodality; social media discourse; US political discourse.

1. Introduction

In February 2017, the CEO of Facebook (henceforth, Fb), which is the world's most popular social networking site (Clement 2020), posted a nearly 6,000-word message to his personal profile on the social media he co-founded. The message was entitled "Building Global Community" (Zuckerberg 2017) and has been considered since its publication a

"manifesto" (Ahmed 2017), that is, a public declaration of policy and aims, like the ones issued before an election by a political party or candidate. In their work, Rider and Murakami Wood (2018, p. 640) explicitly define it a "political manifesto", and, more precisely:

> […] a coherent political […] statement about ubiquitous social media and the future of government in an era characterized, in terms of conventional nation-state politics, by a turn to authoritarianism.

The message detaches itself from the social media textual tradition in many aspects, from its length to the information layout and the signature. Indeed, the post is very long and, even if it does not make use of all the 63,206 characters granted as a limit to all Facebook's status updates since November 2011 (Protalinski 2011), it far exceeds the ideal length of an average update that is estimated in the range of 40-80 characters (Wong 2018). In the text, Zuckerberg envisions for the platform he created the critical and strategic role of the "social infrastructure" for the civically engaged global community of tomorrow.

The aim of the present paper is to analyze how verbal and visual codes together with digital affordances are used to frame the role of the platform as the future world "social infrastructure" and the relationship between the digital platform, its technical resources and the concept of civic participation. From a theoretical and methodological point of view, I adopt a critical multimodal perspective (van Leeuwen 2013, 2014), an approach that merges two fields of applied linguistics, critical discourse analysis and multimodality, in order to investigate discourses that are communicated "not only through political speeches and news items but through entertainment media [and that make use of] different kinds of semiotic resources" (Machin 2013, p. 347).

The critical multimodal discourse analysis of the *Facebook Manifesto* which is carried out in the present paper follows the model outlined by Machin and van Leeuwen (2016) for the social semiotic analysis of contemporary multimodal political discourse. These authors describe critical multimodal discourse investigation as a three-stage process that forms a "kind of loop [where] the investigation can begin at either end of the process" (Machin, van Leeuwen 2016, p. 251). The first stage starts from the verbal or, more broadly, the multimodal evidence that the text provides. The second stage focuses on meaning and involves interpretations that need to be argued for in terms of the provenance of the signs that are used, their meaning potential – that is the range of possible meanings – and the how that potential is actualized in the texts. The final stage features a socio-cultural reflection on the wider significance of the text in the context of society. Indeed, this type of analysis seeks to integrate a "knowledge of language and other

semiotic modes", a "knowledge of culture and history", and a "knowledge of sociological theory" to understand the role of multimodal discourse in social life (Machin, van Leeuwen 2016, p. 254).

In the present paper, I analyze Zuckerberg's message starting from a brief outline of the social media basic features that helps contextualize the investigation of the elements of the *Manifesto* which adhere to the generic tradition of status updates on Fb (that is a post on a profile's wall on the social networking site) as well as the elements which deviate from such constraints. Then, I concentrate on the analysis of the five sections of the *Manifesto* that constitute its body of the text. In line with Machin and van Leeuwen's model illustrated earlier in the section, the textual analysis is functional to explore the complex ideational construct of the message and aims at reflecting on the impact of the social medium on civic participation.

2. The main basic features of Facebook

The rise of social network sites (henceforth, SNSs) marked a change in the way online communities are organized: from communities of interests that were structured by topics or topical hierarchies (such as early public online communities like Usenet and public discussion forums) they became "personal (or 'egocentric') networks, with the individual at the center of their own community" (boyd, Ellison 2008, p. 219). Indeed, in the words of boyd and Ellison, "social network sites (SNSs)" – now more commonly described as "social media" – are "web-based services that allow individuals to, firstly, construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, then also articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and, finally, view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (boyd, Ellison 2008, p. 211). Originally, the main feature of such networks was not to "allow individuals to meet strangers, [it was] rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks", even if the label ''friends'' can be misleading, as the "connection does not necessarily mean friendship in the everyday vernacular sense, and the reasons people connect are varied" (boyd 2006). Indeed, according to danah boyd, SNSs are "networked publics" (boyd 2011, p. 39), that is, public groupings which are structured by the logic and reality of computer networks.

Originally, Facebook was founded as an exclusive community service for Harvard students and it was modelled on yearbooks, a type of book that is published annually by many American high schools and colleges to celebrate the past school year. The first version of the social network was created as a sort of substitute for the official electronic version of the yearbook or "facebook", that is the colloquial term used by students of some American universities to define the electronic directory with their photos and basic data

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(Carlson 2010). In these books, students are identified by means of their pictures and information, and each of them is usually given the same textual space: such a semiotic structure encodes the representation of a group of peers which, in the case of American Ivy League college students, constitutes a very elitist group. The Fb social media platform rhetorically reproduces a similar tenor structure, as signaled by the word "friends", the term chosen to identify registered users. In addition to this, people who decide to become members of the platform can create their own personal page ("profile"), where they can upload personal information and write comments and share messages with people who belong to their circle of friends (https://newsroom.fb.com/products).

From this basic description of the main original features of the social media, it is possible to grasp how the design of the digital tool combines the yearbook model with another textual model, the web genre of diary blogs that started circulating in the late nineties in the U.S. (McNeill 2005). Structurally, a weblog, or blog, can be defined as a "frequently modified webpage containing individual entries displayed in reverse chronological sequence" (Herring *et al.* 2004, p. 1) where, as a consequence, the most recent post appears to be the first. As argued by Puschmann (2013), even if blogs have aged and have been merging with newer forms of Computer-Mediated Communication, like status updates on social networking sites, "some linguistic properties of blogs are highly stable" and, more precisely, "the core cohesive element of a blog is time [since] blog entries are paradigmatically linked by chronology [that] acts as the governing organizational principle for information in blogs" (Puschmann 2013, p. 91). As regards personal encoding, Puschmann underlines that "with relatively few exceptions, a blog is a controlled discourse environment belonging to an individual and shaped largely by his or her personal tastes and needs; therefore, the needs a blog fulfills are more individually shaped than in most other genres of public expression" (Puschmann 2013, p. 98).

3. Elements of the *Manifesto* that recall the generic tradition of status updates

The elements in the post "Building Global Community", Zuckerberg (2017), that recall status updates in timelines are: the small profile image that features the informal image of the sender represented while smiling; the temporal marker ("February, 16, 2017") that evokes the reverse chronological order of blogs and the world icon which acknowledges that the privacy of the text has been selected as "public", that is anyone accessing the profile can see it (see Figure 1).
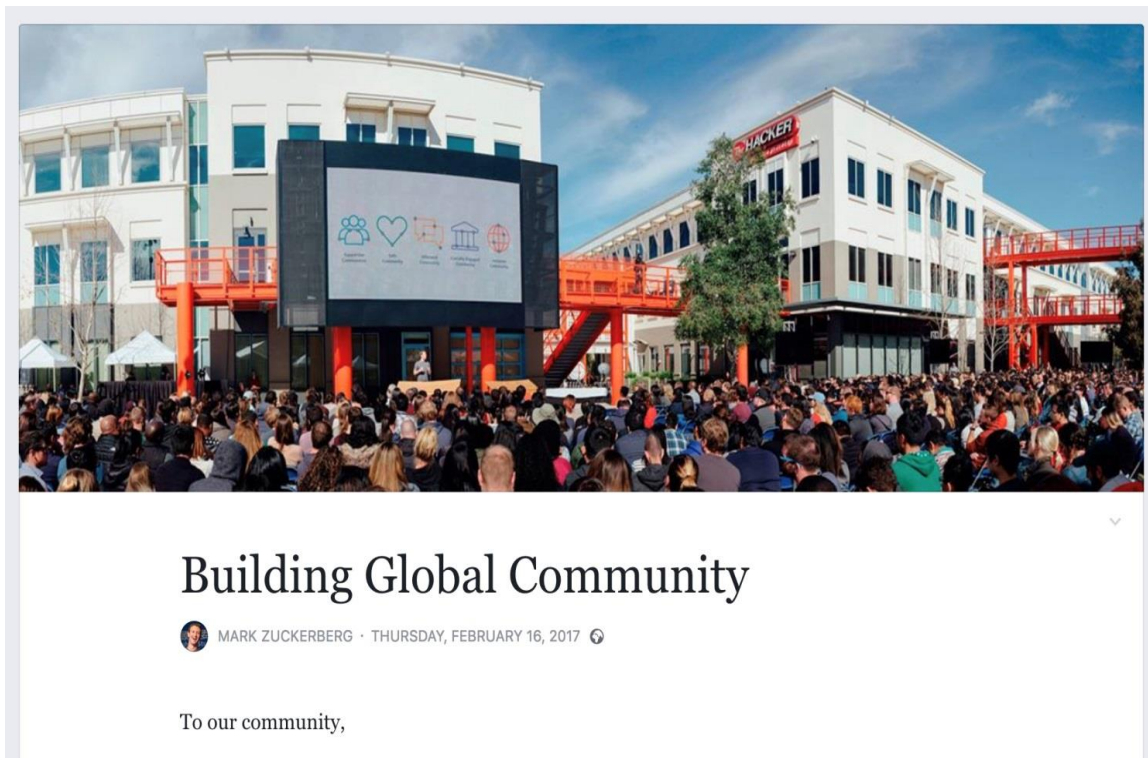
Figure 1
Facebook Manifesto's Image, first scroll of the webpage.[1]

The text also features an iconic component which is given 'salience' by the position in the layout that sets it in the first scroll of the page. The image is panoramic and unframed and features a representation of a speech given by Zuckerberg. It is possible to identify the physical context as the Facebook headquarters in Menlo Park thanks to the orange infrastructure that culminates in the vintage sign on the right stating "The Hacker Company" (Tsotsis 2012). More precisely, the place can be identified as the Hacker Square, the most important public space of the campus which is referred to as the "meeting place" of the Fb community in the press releases presenting the new buildings.[2]

To understand the symbolic and semantic value of the setting, it should be noted that the expression "meeting place or house" which is used to describe the square is the exact translation of the Hebrew *bet kneset* – synagogue – the place where the people meet and convene, and also that the expression "meeting house" was chosen by the English Puritans as an alternative for Church to identify the place of both the spiritual and the

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[1] See https://www.facebook.com/notes/mark-zuckerberg/building-globalcommunity/10154544292 806634 (11.10. 2019).
[2] See Fb's media gallery, https://newsroom.fb.com/media-gallery/menlo-park headquarters/hacker-square/ (12.04.2020).

political power of a community. Such a model has influenced extensively all digital discourse rhetoric in the Bay area, which Fred Turner defines as a "countercultural neo puritanism" (Turner 2018). In addition, the square is the place where the community meets to begin hackathons, "the nonstop jags of creative programming that are an institution not only at Facebook but all over Silicon Valley" (McCracken 2012). Such a function is highlighted by the word "hack" which has been paved in a mosaic of enormous tiles. From a grammatical standpoint, the term "hack" can be both a noun and the imperative form of the verb, thus featuring an exhortation to keep the hacker spirit alive and to foreground the so-called "hacker way", an ideological construct according to which libertarian-minded programmers change the world for the better through the crafting of smart lines of code without being constrained by established rules.

　　　Returning to the post, the image suggests a representation of Mark Zuckerberg while addressing Fb's internal community in their meeting place and, more precisely, while pronouncing the "Building Global Community" speech. Indeed, in the picture, the pictorial perspective assigns the screen a salient position due to its *central* position in the image. The five icons depicted on the screen (see Figure 2) are loaded with 'information value', that is to say they act as the nucleus of the information mainly conveyed through the verbal semiotic mode. Each icon, in fact, visualizes one of the five different sections of the speech, namely "supportive communities", "safe community", "informed community", "civically-engaged community" and "inclusive community", thus shaping its main ideational structure. Hence, the icons help create a logical relation between the visual and the verbal components of the message, acting as intersemiotic cohesive devices of correspondence (Liu, O'Halloran 2009, p. 385).

Figure 2
Facebook Manifesto's Icons.[3]

The icons are stylized and convey a conceptual representation of ideas (Kress, van Leeuwen 1996, p. 79). They also feature some small blue nodes that recall the visual representation of the structure of system networks, the model used for describing real networks which mathematicians have been developing since the 1960s and which translates the world into terms of

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[3] See https://www.facebook.com/notes/mrk-zuckerberg/building-global- community/
　　10154544292806634 (12.10.2019).

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nodes and links (Barabási 2011, p. 1). It is a visual representation which echoes boyd's definition of social media as communities structured by the logic and reality of computer networks (boyd 2011).

The picture of what we can assume is Fb's internal community gathered in the Hacker square for the public address, combined with the first line of the verbal component of the post "to our community" (see Figure 1), on the one side, clarify the semantic ambiguity of the possessive adjective, as it is intended to be a reference to the exclusive community there gathered. On the other side, the world icon mentioned above, which disambiguates the privacy status of the update as public, makes the internal and the global communities overlap, in what can be seen as a more formal, top-down institutional discourse. This is detached from the personal, leisure-centered, peer-to-peer register of the social network, as illustrated in the next section.

4. Elements of the *Manifesto* that depart from the generic tradition of status updates

As previously mentioned, the post is exceptionally lengthy compared to social media textual standards. It also features a highly rigid structure in terms of *dispositio*, with an introduction, a body of text comprising five sections, which work both as 'proposition' and 'confirmation', and a conclusion, with a summing up and emotional exhortation. At the layout level, 'compositional' meaning is constructed through the system of 'framing', and in particular by means of the framing device of lines. On the one hand, these appear to separate the different verbal sections and thus help define their distinct information value; on the other, they connect each icon with its related verbal counterpart within the multimodal text. The use of this framing device therefore facilitates the 'intersemiotic translation' of abstract iconic meaning into concrete verbal meaning.

Moreover, the line with all the five symbols in Figure 2 functions as the visual introduction to the conclusion of the message and, hypothetically, as a marker of its function of summing up the contents. Even if the image anchors the text to an oral presentation, as it depicts Zuckerberg addressing his audience, the post presents features of written language in terms of lexical density and nominalized processes. Information is also 'packaged' so as to highlight the informative components of the post, making use of bullet points which clarify the way it has been structured throughout the text and suggest a "systematic breakdown of things into core elements that can be coordinated as in a list" (Ledin, Machin 2015, p. 8). Fonts emphasized in bold suggest a preferred reading of the contents. Font is specifically used to make meaning (Bezemer, Kress 2008), through font size in the case of the five titles of the

different sections and through the 'font effect' of bold to emphasize both the important role played by Fb, and the different communities it contributes to building.

> […] Bringing us all together as a global community is a project bigger than any one organization or company, but Facebook can help contribute to answering these five important questions:
>
> • How do we help people build **supportive communities** that strengthen traditional institutions in a world where membership in these institutions is declining?
> • How do we help people build a **safe community** that prevents harm, helps during crises and rebuilds afterwards in a world where anyone across the world can affect us?
> • How do we help people build an **informed community** that exposes us to new ideas and builds common understanding in a world where every person has a voice?
> • How do we help people build a **civically-engaged community** in a world where participation in voting sometimes includes less than half our population?
> • How do we help people build an **inclusive community** that reflects our collective values and common humanity from local to global levels, spanning cultures, nations and regions in a world with few examples of global communities? […] (emphasis in the original)

These elements help balance the fact that, alongside the referential component of the post, namely the reality to which the message refers, its expressive nature is manifest, as the post aims primarily to express the thoughts and the beliefs of the sender and of the company he represents. Indeed, the text is also signed by the encoder with his first name. Such a signature is an unusual component of status updates, since the identity of the sender is generally expressed by the profile elements of the pre-given templates in Facebook posts (namely, first name, surname and profile image for individual persons). It also seems to be aimed at recalling the personal, peer-to-peer register of the social network, mentioned above. As regards the intended audience, the world icon, which can be found near the temporal marker of the Fb template in Figure 1, illustrates the privacy status set for the Newsfeed update as public: this means that – as mentioned above – "anyone on or off Facebook" can see it according to the platform privacy settings.[4]

In Figure 1, the signs that describe the intended audience are: the icon, the community gathered in the Hacker Square inside the Company Headquarters and the explicit recipients of the message that are specified in

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[4] See Fb's Basic Privacy Settings & Tools, https://www.facebook.com/help/325807937 506242 (12.04.2020).

the title and in the first line of the post "to our community". All these signs appear in the first scroll of computer/mobile screens, that is the most salient part of the layout of a message. However, these signs are a vehicle for a different message and play upon a semantic ambiguity which sees the intersection of three distinct (even if somehow overlapping) communities: people who work at Facebook, platform users and the entire world. The same ambiguity is reiterated at a verbal level in the use of personal pronouns and adjectives. Indeed, the first-person plural, "we" occurs 169 times, the adjective "our'" (together with derivate words) occurs 113 times and they are used to refer to the small group of the Facebook team. "We at Facebook", to the community of Facebook users or to the entire humanity. An example is given in the first lines of the post, which read:

> On <u>our</u> journey to connect the world, <u>we</u> often discuss products <u>we</u>'re building and updates on <u>our</u> business. Today <u>I</u> want to focus on the most important question of all: are <u>we</u> building the world <u>we</u> all want? […] (emphasis added).

Here, at first, the personal pronouns and adjectives are used to refer to the Facebook team, and help frame the company as a collective horizontal entity which is in line with the image of the community of hackers previously mentioned. The second part of the quotation features a semantic shift and the introduction of ambiguity, since – in the self-addressed question – we move from the reference to the restricted internal community of tools designers and producers to an inclusive "we" which seems to comprise both an example of *nosism*, as if it were a sort of editorial "we", with the global audience the message is addressed to. Such a strategy is repeated throughout the text, especially in the introduction and in the conclusion where the new role that the encoder envisions for the social media platform is explained and, given the circular structure of the text, repeated. Indeed, in the introduction Zuckerberg affirms:

> […] History is the story of how we've learned to come together in ever greater numbers – from tribes to cities to nations. At each step, we built social infrastructure like communities, media and governments to empower us to achieve things we couldn't on our own.
> Today we are close to taking our next step. Our greatest opportunities are now global – like spreading prosperity and freedom, promoting peace and understanding, lifting people out of poverty, and accelerating science. Our greatest challenges also need global responses – like ending terrorism, fighting climate change, and preventing pandemics. Progress now requires humanity coming together not just as cities or nations, but also as a global community. This is especially important right now. Facebook stands for bringing us closer together and building a global community. […] **In times like these, the most important thing we at Facebook can do is develop the**

> **social infrastructure to give people the power to build a global community that works for all of us.** […] (emphasis in the original)

The "next step" that Zuckerberg mentions is rhetorically constructed as both the new company aim, literally, the "next focus" ("our next focus will be developing the social infrastructure for community") of the company as illustrated in the new company mission, and as the 'natural' and 'logical' conclusion derived from the premises he gives in his version of philosophy of history. Indeed, he provides a comprehensive interpretation of the development of human history as a cognitive process and as a progressive linear process towards social infrastructures which are larger and more complex. In such a context, social networks are described as the final outcome of a historical process which is given truth-value by the syllogistic structure of the argumentation and by the verbal selection which expresses the highest level of modality (for example, "progress now requires humanity coming together […] as a global community"). Moreover, when Zuckerberg explains that "history is the story of how we've learned to come together in ever greater numbers – from tribes to cities to nations", his message features an intra-vocalized indirect endorsed quotation of the work of the Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari and, in particular, the theory of history reads as heavily informed by Harari's New York Time's bestseller book, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Human Kind* (2015 [2011]), which he had recommended in one of his earlier posts. Hahari's book aims at exploring the reasons why *Homo Sapiens* took over the earth in the framework of evolutionary biology according to which humans survived because they learned to cooperate in ever bigger communities.

The use of quotations, together with the heteroglossic references to authoritative sources, have the function of strengthening the force of the proposed argumentation. Zuckerberg exploits this rhetorical strategy several times in his speech, when, in the five sections that make up the body of the text, he cites "research" as the source of data and information on the basis of which the company has been adopting decisions so far, like in the examples quoted below.

> *Research shows* that some of the most obvious ideas, like showing people an article from the opposite perspective, actually deepen polarization by framing other perspectives as foreign./*Research suggests* the best solutions for improving discourse may come from getting to know each other as whole people instead of just opinions -- something Facebook may be uniquely suited to do./ *Research suggests* reading local news is directly correlated with local civic engagement (emphasis added).

He also exploits it when quoting the words of Abraham Lincoln in the concluding remarks of his post:

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> I am reminded of President Lincoln's remarks during the American Civil
> War: "We can succeed only by concert. It is not 'can any of us imagine
> better?' but, 'can we all do better?' The dogmas of the quiet past, are
> inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty,
> and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think
> anew, act anew".

The quotation of Founding Fathers' statements is a common feature in US
political discourse. In this case, President Lincoln's 1862 message to the
Congress before issuing the *Emancipation Proclamation* is used to underline
the exceptionality and novelty of the historical moment humanity is
witnessing by establishing a parallel with the American Civil War and, in
particular, with the executive order that changed the federal legal status of the
millions of enslaved African Americans who were living in the Southern
States. The quotation refers to a complex ideational-thematic bundle as it
comprises the idea that action is necessary, that action needs to be innovative
(thus partially resembling the basic tenets of hacker culture) and that such an
action aims at liberating people.

Returning to the role that the encoder envisions for the social media
platform, the company can contribute to such a defining moment by setting up
the new social infrastructure, which is portrayed as the final step in the
historical process that proceeds from tribes to the global community. The aim
of Facebook is thus presented as that of a facilitator that helps humankind in
the (inevitable) journey towards the realization of the first global community
and, to facilitate the process, Zuckerberg declares that he is committed to
promoting communities that are "supportive, safe, informed, civically-engaged
and inclusive". He goes on to specify the details of these five sections of the
body of the text, which I deal with in the next section. However, the strategy to
frame the arc of history as inevitable, "progress requires humanity coming
together not just as cities or nations, but also as a global community", in a way
almost resembles the Hegelian modern state and is external to the will of the
encoder. This detaches responsibility from the company, which only has the
role of making an (inescapable and positively valued) process easier by driving
its development from a technological standpoint.

At a verbal level, this is also marked by the abundance of mental
clauses in the introduction and in the conclusion, which shape the image of
the sender more as a SENSER than as a DOER: "many of us are reflecting"/ "we
learned"/ "I am reminded"/ "I hope". Moreover, the personal perspective of
the encoder expresses a high level of commitment, which is reinforced by a
lexico-semantic chain, "stand"/ "commit"/ "responsibility". The speaker is
obviously interested in negotiating intersubjective space for a social position
favorable to Facebook and the encoder expresses a stance toward Fb
commitment via the social values attributed to the path humanity at large is

destined towards, "we have made great leaps"/ "at each step we learned how […] to accomplish greater things". The solutions, the tools that the company are offering, are evaluated positively through the enabling capacities associated with them, and the company hopes they will be endorsed by its users, all the better by "global society at large". Zuckerberg concludes his remarks with a token of rhetoric-of-anti-rhetoric when he regards as a rare opportunity the fact to be sharing the above-mentioned path with Fb users, "It is an honor to be on this journey with you". He also acts as a people pleaser when he thanks the members of the social media community and, given the blurred boundaries of the identities of the recipients, discussed previously, the entire world that actively cooperates in the enfranchising mission of building a global community facilitated by Fb tools.

5. Values, social contracts and tools: an analysis of the five sections of the *Manifesto*

In the five sections of his speech, Zuckerberg illustrates the roadmap towards the creation of the social infrastructure for the global community, which is described many times as a "work in progress" and the concept is reinforced by the lexical selection of many progressive verbal forms, starting from the title: "building", "bringing", "reflecting". The five sections are introduced by the five self-addressed questions mentioned in Section 3, which are directly related to the different aims of the social infrastructure, that is to favor the creation of "supportive", "safe", "informed", "civically-engaged", "inclusive" communities. At a rhetorical level, the questions construct the identity of Fb as a helper, an enabler in a set of challenges which cannot be solved by a single social entity.

In the first section, entitled "Supportive Communities", a connection between civic participation and the use of social media is established. Indeed, this thematic formation represents a fundamental tile in the early stages of the digital utopia. It also recalls what Henry Jenkins affirmed in his famous blog post "'Geeking Out' for Democracy" (2009) regarding civic-engagement and digital platforms. His post starts from quoting Robert Putnam's narrative of cultural decline according to which television has to be blamed for eroding the strong social ties that the post-WWII generation created, where previously people gathered together in places like bowling alleys; we are guilty of creating a world where people spend more time in their homes and less time involved in communal activities. In Jenkins' view (2009), platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and *World of Warcraft* favor the reconstruction of the above-mentioned ties as they are "reconnecting home-based media with larger communities, bridging between our public and private lives [thus]

offer[ing] us a way to move from media consumption towards cultural participation". In Zuckerberg's words (2017), online communities can "strengthen existing physical communities by helping people come together on-line as well as off-line" and can combat the deterioration of the social fabric which has occurred since the 1970s. Social media are thus portrayed not as social networking sites to be used for private circles, but as platforms with a social purpose, as they can strengthen the "many mediating groups that bring us together and reinforce our values", (Zuckerberg 2017), and, as such, the very term "social" re-acquires its original semantic denotation.

The conceptualization of civic engagement seems to be in line with that of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, according to whom the "public sphere" is the domain of social life in which public opinion is formed and that, in principle, is open to all citizens. Private conversations can also give rise to a public sphere when people are free to deal with matters of general interest, as well as when citizens are free to assemble and express their opinions (Habermas 1989, p. 203). The public sphere is thus located in civil society and is "where people can discuss matters of mutual concern as peers, and learn about facts, events, and the opinions, interests, and perspectives of others in an atmosphere free of coercion and of inequalities that would incline individuals to acquiesce or be silent" (Fleming 2000, p. 304).

This involvement helps to develop individual autonomy and creates a politically relevant public opinion that can act as a limit to the power of the state. The central part of civil society comprises a "network of associations that institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres" (Habermas 1996, p. 367). The importance of civil society is deeply connected with the idea of democratization as, in Habermas's view, the members of society need to come together and discuss to reach a consensus where they construct the public sphere.

As already highlighted, by using SNSs, individuals seek to maintain and increase their social networks (boyd, Ellison 2008), while, to build stronger communities both online and offline, Zuckerberg highlights that individuals need to be engaged in groups that represent "meaningful social infrastructure in our lives". The role of Facebook in strengthening such supportive communities is a technical one as it features the implementation of a system that can suggest groups to Facebook users, as "most don't seek out groups on their own", together with the development of the new tools for groups admins, namely those who administer a group, which he would later present during the first Community Summit. The textual pattern of the entire section is a PROBLEM^SOLUTION one and the solution offered is technical, that is to develop digital tools that are "not for passive consumption but for strengthening social connections" and, thus, the fabric of society. The

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technicality of the solution is made less obscure and remote by a wide selection of examples where the personal experiences of many individuals are described in order to shorten the rhetorical distance with the audience and to portray the company and its CEO as caring and involved in the lives of Fb users.

The second section, "Safe Communities", features a similar PROBLEM^SOLUTION textual structure; however it shifts the focus from companies or organizations to national governments when it comes to the possibility to solve problems, as it affirms that "today's threats are increasingly global, but the infrastructure to protect us is not [as] no nation can solve them alone" (2017). According to Zuckerberg (2017) "humanity's current systems are insufficient to address these issues" and there is a "real opportunity to build global safety infrastructure […] building artificial intelligence". What is worth highlighting here is the reference to system thinking, that is the idea that "the material world can be thought of as an information system and modeled on computers" (Turner 2006, p. 15), which emerged in the US government-funded research laboratories of World War II and, in particular, "around the Radiation Laboratory at MIT". The same laboratories that saw the emergence of computing in the US and the related hacker culture. Indeed, system theory was the contact language of these interdisciplinary laboratories and stemmed out of Norbert Wiener's cybernetics. In his book, *The Human Use of Human Beings. Cybernetics and Society*, Wiener described cybernetics as a field focused on "the study of messages as a means of controlling machinery and society, the development of computing machines, certain reflections upon psychology and the nervous system and a tentative new theory of scientific method" (Wiener 1954 [1950], p. 15).

As Kevin Kelly explained (1998), out of cybernetics arose an "almost mystical understanding of the power of information and information systems" and the so-called "computational metaphor", that is the idea that "all materials and all processes are actually forms of computation". This is a corollary to the substantial homogeneity between machines and biological organisms which was postulated by Wiener and Bigelow in the WWII Rad Lab when "conceptualizing pilots and gunners as servomechanisms" (Turner 2006, p. 21). As Kelly highlights, (1998), such a metaphor is deeply intertwined with the development of Artificial Intelligence, not only because "biological reproduction and evolution were described by researchers in wholly computer-science terms [during] the first Artificial Life Conference in 1987", but because "biological things could be simulated by computers so well".

Returning to Zuckerberg's post, he seems to be adopting a stance similar to that of Wiener, who stated that society is a system and that "society can only be understood [and changed] through a study of the messages and the communication facilities which belong to it" (Wiener 1954 [1950], p. 16). Moreover, Wiener affirmed that "in the future, development of these

messages and communication facilities, messages between man and machines, between machine and man and between machine and machine, are destined to play an ever-increasing part" (Wiener 1954 [1950], p. 16). The systems implemented by Facebook to keep communities safe, such as the Safety Check, or the infrastructure for collective action, together with the AI researching systems that they are being developed to review online contents, have to be interpreted through the above-mentioned lens of the computational metaphor of cybernetic origin. As for the tenor structure of the section, Facebook crafts for itself the image of the helper that is willing to "serve the needs" of national governments that call on them to activate such safety nets in their countries. It is a social infrastructure which, according to the CEO, "the global community needs", and should not be activated on demand, but be made permanent ("over time, our community should be able to help during wars and ongoing issues that are not limited to a single event").

The third section, "Informed Community", is focused on the sharing of "new ideas" and "enough common understanding" as the prerequisite to the creation of meaningful communities. Here, the fundamental Fb mission of connecting people together is implicitly described as an enabler of the freedom of speech principle, one of the inalienable rights granted to the people in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and one of the rights granted by the first Amendment to the *US Constitution* ("giving everyone a voice has historically been a very positive force for public discourse"). At the same time, the role of Fb regarding the "two most discussed concerns [...] about diversity of viewpoints (filter bubbles) and accuracy of information (fake news)" is realized in an opaque way. Indeed, the implicit assumption appears to be that the mediating mechanism of information sharing is 'transparent' and almost natural, since only the act of connecting people who have ideas is mentioned, and not the Newsfeed algorithm. Fragmentation seems thus to be rhetorically constructed as one of the results of the positively connoted freedom of speech and sharing of ideas: "[giving everyone a voice] has also shown it may fragment our shared sense of reality". As O'Neil makes clear (2016), algorithms are marketed as true, scientific, objective facts and associated with mathematics; however, they are models, sets of instructions to solve problems step by step expressed in formal language, but chosen by those who have coded them.

The Newsfeed finds its roots in advertising-based business models and has been accused of tailoring information, foregrounding contents that could 'please' the audience as the users' behavior suggests. The mediating role of the platform seems thus to be disguised and the information patterns that occur are presented as the natural outcome of the intention of individual Facebook users more than the results of algorithms ("our community will identify which sources provide a complete range of perspectives so that

content will naturally surface more"). Regarding the "accuracy of information", Zuckerberg admits that there is "misinformation, even outright hoax content on Facebook" and that they are fighting it "carefully" since, on the one hand, the line between "hoaxes, satire and opinion" is not clear and since, in a "free society", it is important for people to have the power to share their opinion. They will thus, as a company, "focus less on banning misinformation" and more on "surfacing additional perspectives".

Such choices are discursively supported by a double reference to "research" as an authoritative source since high POSITIVE value is associated with research as the systematic study of materials and sources to establish facts and reach new conclusions. If these references are associated with a high technical value, the lack of specific details of the works he might want to refer to transforms them into rhetorical voices, rather than into authoritative and recognizable sources. It is a practice which would not be accepted in the scientific community someone discursively engages with.

The fourth section, ("Civically-Engaged Community", opens with an axiomatic structure which features the highest level of truth-value, both in terms of the strengthening of the idea of the necessity to engage in civic participation and in the kind of social infrastructures that "must be built". The ambiguity of the semantic extension of the term "social", which expresses the idea of belonging to societies, but that can also be related to social media, is here played upon by the selection of the passive form combined with the deletion of the agent. As for the types of social infrastructures that are necessary, Zuckerberg divides them into two broad categories, the first one "encourages engagement in existing political processes" – we are, then, dealing with a national dimension; the second one aims at "establishing a new process for citizens worldwide to participate in collective decision-making", and the focus is on "community governance" on a global scale. Semantic ambiguity is played on here, the notion of 'community, which can be a token of political language as well as a term of digital jargon.

It is possible to infer the implied value scale embedded in the classification if we intra-textually connect it with the historical framework that sets the ideational cornerstone of the entire text. Indeed, history is portrayed as a process that proceeds from tribes to the global community and, as a corollary, nation states are implicitly valued as outdated, as a heritage of the XIX century in the (inevitable) journey towards the creation of a supra-national entity. In such an ideational context, Facebook can offer a testimony on "how community governance can work at scale" since it is the "largest global community". In the rest of the text, examples are given of the tools that have already been established and used to support voting across the world and he also announces the creation of new tools that would be developed to strengthen "local civic engagement" and to "connect with representatives at all levels",

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since social media is "becoming the primary medium for civic communication in the 21st century" just as TV was in the 1960s.

One of the tools that was presented a few weeks after the publication of the post was the menu feature iconically named "Town Hall" that offers a "simple way for users to find and connect with their government representatives on a local, state and federal level" (Perez 2017). The advocacy was developed for US users and attempts to strengthen civic-participation and facilitate the dialogue between Fb users and legislators by helping users find and contact the elected representatives in their areas at both local, national and federal level (at least those who have a Fb account). A detailed analysis of the app is beyond the scope of the present paper; however, it is important to highlight that the name chosen for the tool reinforces the rhetorical construction of the social media as the place for the administration of government and that, in North America, the term "Town Hall" evokes the direct democratic rule that originated in colonial New England and that lies at the foundation of American constitutional history (Lutz 1980). At the same time, the use of the app ideationally maps a solitary activity onto a collective action when actually the practice lacks the collegiality the name itself recalls.

The last section, "Inclusive Community", focuses on the improving of guidelines for what is appropriate and inappropriate on Facebook, that is on the "Community Standards" which, as the video on the related Fb page states, "decide what and who should be removed" from the platform.[5] Indeed, Fb is described as a "community of people", not "just technology or media" and the values expressed in the Community Standards which every user accepts while creating a profile on the social media is portrayed as a sort of 'social contract'. This aims at reflecting the "cultural norms of the community", embodying the "leading principle" of sharing more. In this section, Zuckerberg also acknowledges the cultural shift that has occurred in the platform which, from a site for private connections, has turned into a "source of news and public discourse". At the same time, while advocating a global community and global standards, he also asserts the need to "evolve towards a system of more local governance", especially in places where different cultural norms, such as in Europe, the Middle East or Asia, are in place.

The kind of global government envisioned combines Artificial Intelligence and a "system of personal control" over users' experience. According to Zuckerberg, the "approach is to combine creating a large-scale democratic process to determine standards with AI to help enforce them". Such a "large scale democratic process" ensures that all the users could decide how they "would like to set the content policy for themselves", as in a

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[5] See Fb's Community Standards, https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards (12.04.2020).

"worldwide voting system". For "those who do not make a decision" the default will be established by the choices of the majority of people in the region, "like in a referendum". The parallelism created between the setting of the users' profile rules and the act of voting, together with the repeated use of political jargon, make the representation of Facebook as a socio-political space strong and reinforces the concept, here expressed, that Fb could be a model of "how collective decision-making may work" in the (inescapable) global community of tomorrow.

6. Concluding remarks

The aim of this chapter was to investigate the rhetorical construction of the "Building Global Community" message posted by Zuckerberg in February 2017, where he envisions the role of the platform as the future world "social infrastructure". Since its publication, the post has been considered a "manifesto" that is, a public declaration of policy and aims, and its textual structure appears to be more similar to a political declaration than to a status update on a social networking site. Indeed, the post far exceeds the ideal length of an average status update and features a highly rigid structure in terms of *dispositio*, with an introduction, body of the text that comprises five sections and even a signature. It also presents a high lexical density and information is 'packaged' to highlight the informative components making use of bullet points, while emphasis at the level of fonts suggests a preferred reading of the contents. The iconic component of the post, which is given salience from its position in the layout, represents Zuckerberg while publicly addressing an audience in the Facebook headquarters, thus framing the verbal component of the post as a public speech. It is a verbal component which, as described above, presents features in terms of informativity, nominal processes and layout that are typical of a written or, at least, a written-to-be-spoken text. The elements of the post that recall status updates in timelines belong to the Fb layout and are the small profile image of the sender, the temporal marker that evokes the reverse chronological order of blogs and the icon that displays the privacy that has been chosen for the post. The image of the sender shows Zuckerberg while smiling; such an informal register rhetorically reduces distance with the audience and is more in line with the genre of social media posts, while the world icon from the Fb layout acknowledges that the privacy of the text has been selected as "public". This choice makes the internal and the global communities overlap and helps shape the text as a formal, top-down programmatic discourse. Indeed, from the analysis, it has emerged that, at ideational level, the definition of the platform as the future world "social infrastructure" goes beyond the boundaries usually associated with social network sites as the tools that organize and make already existing off-line

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connections visible.

In more detail, in his message, Zuckerberg crafts for the social media the role of helper in the progressive linear development of human history towards larger and more complex social infrastructures (that is from tribes to the global community), and the accomplishment of the mission is strictly related to the creation, the spread and use of the technological tools produced by Facebook. At the same time, the text repeatedly plays on the ambiguity of the semantic extension of the term "social", which expresses the idea of belonging to societies, but which can also be related to social media. Indeed, social media are described as the enablers of the strengthening of the social fabric and, in particular, of that civic participation which has been central in Habermasian terms to the US socio-political experiment since its beginning.

In the last sections of the text, the above ambiguity is made clear via the rhetorical construction of the social media as the place for the administration of "community governance" on a global scale, which is described as a collective decision-making process aided by Artificial Intelligence. According to Zuckerberg, this process could function as a model for world nations since "Facebook is the largest global community" and "humanity's current systems are insufficient to address global issues". At the textual level, the mediating role of the platform seems to be disguised and the information patterns that occur are presented as the natural outcome of the intention of individual Facebook users more than the results of algorithms. It is a rhetorical representation which is in line with the conceptualization of algorithms as true, scientific, objective facts and associated with mathematics. However, algorithms are not only sets of instructions to solve problems chosen by those who have coded them (O'Neil 2016), but the recent data scandals have revealed that the relationships between social media platforms, users' data and civic participation are far less straightforward.

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