Discourse of Enticement:
How Facebook Solicits Users

ELLA LILLQVIST

University of Helsinki

ella.lillqvist@helsinki.fi

ANU A. HARJU

University of Helsinki

anu.a.harju@helsinki.fi

Abstract

With much contemporary discussion on social media and the ethics and transparency of the way they operate, this article examines the discursive processes of user engagement as Baudrillardian solicitation. The concept of solicitation allows us to conceptualize social media use as a transactional process whereby the user is enticed by a promise of a 'Gift' and thus lured into using a service or a product. Simultaneously, the very act of participation implicates the user, albeit unwittingly, in the sanctioning and legitimizing of the operational logic behind social media. Adopting a CDS perspective, we explore the ways in which Facebook entices users through discursive processes of solicitation. We analyse, making use of corpus linguistic tools, both Facebook corporate communication and user reactions. Our findings show that the user is enticed by foregrounding the value of participation for the user and promising four types of Gift: protection, freedom of expression, personal connection, and a general altruism on the part of the corporation. Thus, this study sheds light on how users are enticed discursively by the social media company and the ways in which they either accept the discourse or resist it.

Key words: *critical discourse studies, corpus analysis, Facebook, Baudrillard, solicitation*

1. Introduction

In the last fifteen years, particularly in the industrialized Western world, social media have become deeply ingrained in our everyday experience (e.g. Lovink 2011). Today, these services can be seen as a new 'layer' through which people organize their lives; however, this layer is anything but a neutral utility, instead, it has been argued that it is thoroughly ideological (van Dijck 2013). We tend to take social media for granted and rarely stop to think of the business logic of these corporations or the implications for us as users of their platforms. Social media corporations make profit for their owners by

providing a service that consumers use but do not pay for. However, as the saying goes, there are no free lunches; therefore, some researchers have recently started to analyse how exactly the revenue model of these companies is organised, what it is that the users actually 'exchange' using the service for, and what the implications of this are for the users and society (e.g. Fuchs 2010, 2014a, 2014b; Kang and McAllister 2011). These scholars argue that social media corporations commodify the users (economic value is assigned to their social relations and communication, e.g. Appadurai 1986; Prodnik 2014) and that this leads to negative consequences for the users (Kang and McAllister 2011; Na 2015).

Arguably, such commodification of social media users happens in three notable ways: first, by selling users' (passively produced) data, such as personal information and browsing history; second, by selling their attention to advertisers, thus rendering users into 'audience commodity' (Smythe 1977, 1994; Kang and McAllister 2011); and third, by exploiting users' more active actions of producing content to the site (text, images, video) as a type of free labour (Comor 2011; Fuchs 2010, 2014a, 2014b). By using the product and by agreeing to the terms and conditions of the platform, users at the same time sanction and legitimize the modus operandi of the social media corporations. If social media is problematic in terms of, for example, privacy, why do people still use it? This is the question we address in this study.

To explore this issue, we approach *social media use* as *an ongoing transaction* that takes place between social media platforms and their users. In particular, we focus on discourses of enticement employed by social media corporations to attract and draw in users. In order to do this, we conceptualize the discursive process of user engagement by drawing on Baudrillard (1998 [1970]), more specifically the concepts of *Gift* (rather than an economic transaction), or *solicitation* and *legitimation-by-participation* of a given state-of-affairs. This paper thus explores how this on-going transaction is discursively constructed by presenting the service as social rather than economic, and as socially relevant as well as non-monetary (i.e. free of charge), thereby laying the ground for the commodification of users.

In our empirical study, we take a critical discourse studies (CDS) perspective (e.g. Fairclough 2003; van Dijk 2014; Wodak and Meyer 2015) and set out to explore the discourse that contributes to the engagement of social media users. Critical discourse studies has traditionally focused on tackling issues of unbalanced power relations and various forms of inequalities, media power and media discourse, as well as power and ideology in discourses across fields (van Dijk 2001, 2014). Yet, while the fields and contexts of study are diverse, with media being one of the enduring points of interest, the intersection of social media and corporate interests as an object of study is still relatively scarce in the field of CDS (however, see e.g. Thurlow 2013, Kelsey and Bennett 2014, Lillqvist et al. 2016). At the same time, media studies in its approach to and analyses of contemporary media-related social issues, the Internet studies field in particular, has likewise largely ignored the CDS perspective. In this article, then, we bring media and Internet studies into dialogue with a CDS approach, aiming to shed more light on corporate power in social media, specifically the engagement of social media users through discursive processes of solicitation.

In our analysis, we use a corpus-assisted approach to discourse analysis. We thus combine corpus linguistic tools (e.g. Baker 2006; McEnery et al. 2006; Partington et al. 2013) with qualitative discourse analysis using Baudrillard's (1998 [1970]) concepts as analytical lenses with which to explore the user-platform dynamics from a discursive perspective. Our corpus contains discussion relating to Facebook's 'Community Standards'; in particular, we compare the corporate communication of Facebook with reactions from and commentary of the platform users. We examine, then, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, how participation and social media use are framed, that is, which meanings are 'preferred' (Hall 2001 [1980]) in the corporate communication of Facebook. The user commentary relative to the corporate communication offers insights into the many ways that users understand and respond to said communication and the service itself. Thus, by looking at both the corporate communication and the user commentary around the subject matter, we are able to recover tensions between different understandings (see also Lovink 2011) concerning the relation between Facebook and its users, the different understandings of the service and the contract that holds between the parties. This article thus contributes to an increased understanding of corporate power in social media and the discourses of user engagement and participation in the social media context, while also shedding light on the discursive dimension of the economic power of social media corporations.

The article is organized as follows: first, we present the theoretical background related to social media and the perspective of solicitation. Second, we describe our data and methods. Finally, we present the findings, before concluding the article with a discussion.

2. Social Media and Solicitation

In addition to being part of a larger media ecology (Jensen 2011), social media can also be viewed as an evolving techno-social construct where platform affordances and user practices become mutually constitutive (van Dijck 2013). Yet, social media can also be viewed as a unique setting for social construction (e.g. Markham 2017): as part of the Internet, social media caters to the discursive construction of our shared social reality. Indeed, the new sociality instigated and facilitated by social media has drawn a lot of discussion. Papacharissi (2015), for example, wants to draw attention to the term 'social' in social media, pointing out how this can be seen as implying other media are less social, or even asocial, whereas Baym (2015) has brought up the issue of such terminology in effect blurring the underlying economic rationale of social media corporations. This is because it draws attention to what people *do* with social media, that is, forming and maintaining of social relationships, rather than highlighting what social media *are*, that is, economic enterprises engaged in the capitalist mode of production. In addition, some concerns have been raised as regards to new media producing new norms on how to be social, with social media seeking to establish 'a new normative order for online socializing and communication' (van Dijck 2013: 65) as the platforms shape sociality, re-defining what it means to connect, share, or to befriend, or even how and what to be (e.g. Harju and Huovinen 2015). Thus, social media can be seen as promoting a 'particular type of sociability - networked sociability'

(Papacharissi 2011: 317). Others (e.g. Miller et al. 2016) see social media sociality in the wider context of media ecology and view it, due to its embeddedness, as 'scalable sociality' that adds new layers to existing social life.

In today's social media context, the terms 'audience' or 'consumer' are inadequate as they allocate users the role of more or less passive receivers, when on the contrary, social media users are active participants and producers of content. Social media users are thus often referred to as 'prosumers', simultaneously both producers and consumers (e.g. Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010; Fuchs 2014b). In the early 2000s, many web idealists also claimed that with the 'participatory culture' brought on by social media, media consumers now had unprecedented power relative to producers (Bruns 2008; Jenkins 2006), or that social media expanded the public sphere (see e.g. van Dijck 2012 for critical analysis of Facebook in this regard). However, commercial social media corporations soon appropriated this participatory culture, nurturing an image of collectivity and user-generated content while 'commodifying' the users (see e.g. Fuchs 2014a, 2014b). In fact, it is useful to see social media more as another development in an evolving history of media, as a part of a natural continuum of different media rather than a revolutionary new force (Gitelman 2008). This allows us to see the age-old dilemmas still persisting in the new digital context despite the glorified reputation of social media as participatory culture. These include the problematic producer-consumer relationship (even more pertinent an issue in the digital age), the revenue model based on advertising, and the normative nature of media content and how it shapes and organises our social lives, our sense of self and our understanding of the social world (Couldry 2003, 2012).

We argue that Baudrillard's notion of *solicitation* (1998 [1970]) is apt at explaining the nature of social media participation and the interlinked corporate exploitation of users. An intense critic of the consumer society as well as the media industry, Baudrillard saw consumption as a system of exchange of signs and symbolic meaning(s) instead of a mere economic exchange relation and commodity acquisition. For him, consumption extended beyond purchase. He discussed the system of consumption, and advertising in particular, as 'apparatuses of solicitude' that are designed 'both *to care for and to satisfy*, on the one hand, and surreptitiously *to gain by enticement* and abduction on the other hand' (Baudrillard 1998 [1970]: 168, emphasis added). In Baudrillard's thinking, consumers are constantly *solicited* with the idea of the 'Gift', on the one hand, and engagement (and commitment) to consumption, on the other hand. The Gift is forever 'serving as an alibi for the real conditioning which is that of [the consumer's] 'solicitation' or entreaty' (Baudrillard 1998 [1970]: 168). That is to say, the apparent Gift functions as enticement, but can also be seen as a form of manipulation and control. Baudrillard goes on to claim that in advertising, consumers are solicited to vote in 'favour of a certain code of values and implicitly to sanction it' (ibid.). Similarly, Smythe (1977) also incorporated the idea of the Gift, 'an inducement', in his formulation of how media content works to entice and recruit audience members, as well as maintain their loyalty.

In the social media context, similarly, while the user is solicited by enticement and the promise of the Gift, such as free participation, she is at the same time also entreated to sanction the operational logic of social media corporations that is based on commodification of its users, carried out by the very act of her participation. Thus, as users end up consuming the media that entices and commodifies them, they simultaneously, if perhaps unwittingly, accept their own commodification.

3. Data and Methods

In this study, the research questions we seek to address are as follows: first, what kinds of discourse does Facebook employ in its corporate communication to solicit users, and second, how are these discursive baits negotiated by the users. To answer these questions, we analyse, making use of corpus linguistic tools and qualitative discourse analysis, both Facebook's corporate communication and user reactions.

3.1 Data

The empirical data of this study comprises communication by Facebook regarding their Community Standards together with users' discussions relating to these. Although the Community Standards are constantly revised and therefore continually undergoing change, we focus here on the revision dated March, 2015. The Community Standards outline what can and cannot be done, said, shared or posted on the social media site. They stipulate the overall code of conduct of the site, as well as grant Facebook the authority and permission to control, manage and discipline users by way of controlling (for example, by removing) their content. In order to use the social media platform, then, users must agree to and accept these rules and regulations. Facebook Community Standards have at various points raised discussion concerning the relations between Facebook and its users and the roles and rights of each party, making this a good place to start analysing the discursive processes Facebook and its users engage in.

Table 1 lists the documents included in our corpus. What is noteworthy here is that user comments to a post by Mark Zuckerberg on Facebook constitute the biggest part of the corpus with approximately 4,000 comments and over 100,000 words. Following Lovink (2011), we believe that user commentary provides a useful source of what we call alternative meanings as compared to the texts authored by the company. As Lovink (2011: 55) notes, what distinguishes comments from the source text is that comments refer to the 'unfinished nature' of the text they are directed at. Thus comments that 'circulate around the static, inflexible source text' can be seen as 'oral, informal, fast, fluid' (ibid.) and in effect co-constitute the text, rather than act as an added or separate element. Thus, exploring user comments in conjunction with the company texts related to the Community Standards reveals the differences and similarities between what is communicated in the corporate communication and the various and divergent understandings of the users.

Name	Abbreviation	Type	Word tokens
Community Standards	CS	Corporate communication	2,052
Explaining our Community Standards	ECS	Corporate communication	1,048
Letter from Bickert Osofsky	B&O	Corporate communication	447
Zuckerberg's Facebook post	Z_FB	Corporate communication	1,390
Comments to Zuckerberg's post	Z_FB_com	User comments	115,615
The Guardian article	TG	Newspaper article	624
Comments to The Guardian article	TG_com	User comments	1,848
NYTimes article	NYT	Newspaper article	1,134
Comments to NYTimes article	NYT_com	User comments	6,634
Total			**130,792**

Table 1. List of data

In addition to the corporate communication and discussion on Facebook, we have included in the data texts from newspapers (The Guardian, New York Times) and the users commentaries to these. This was done in order to make the corpus more diverse and to further explore how the Community Standards are understood as these issues are discussed outside the platform.

3.2 Corpus Analysis

Corpus analysis, or corpus linguistics, is a research method within linguistics that involves computer-assisted analysis of large quantities of texts encompassed in *corpora* — machine-readable collections of authentic texts (e.g. Baker 2006; McEnery et al. 2006; Partington et al. 2013). Corpus analysis can be used for many kinds of linguistics research, including discourse studies (Baker 2006; Baker et al. 2008; Mautner 2009). There are two main types of corpora: large, balanced corpora that are designed to be representative of a specific form of language (such as American written language from 1960 to 1990), and the smaller, specialized corpora that represent a smaller set of language, such as a specific genre, topic or case (McEnery et al. 2006: 5; Baker 2006: 26-27). As this is a case study, our corpus is of the latter kind. The data included in the corpus of this study are listed in table 1 above.

Although corpus analysis is often thought of as a quantitative method (Baker 2006: 47), it does of course allow combining both quantitative and qualitative analyses (Mautner 2009: 123); usually it is sensible and even necessary to do so. The quantitative tools enable looking at the *frequencies* of words in the

whole of the corpus, or in some parts of it, as well as calculating so called *keywords* that are a way of comparing word frequencies in two separate corpora in order to establish which words are unusually frequent or infrequent in one of them. Keyword lists incorporate a measure of statistical saliency, whereas a frequency list only provides the absolute frequency of words (Baker 2006: 125). For the purposes of such comparisons, many large (multi-million, or today even multi-billion word) corpora are available, for example the British National Corpus (BNC), which consists of a 100 million word collection of samples of both written and spoken language. Other common corpus linguistic tools include measures of statistically significant *collocates*, namely words that tend to occur close to each other, and *clusters*, groups of words that repeatedly occur in a specific order. Finally, *concordances* are search results that display, with their immediate context, all instances of a search term as found in the corpus. These concordance lines (which can be further expanded) can subsequently be subjected to qualitative analyses, as was done in this study.

In this study, we used AntConc, version 3.4.4w, a freeware corpus analysis tool developed by Laurence Anthony at Waseda University, Japan (Anthony 2014). First, we checked plain word frequencies (using a 'stop word list' to exclude most common grammatical words and some technical words that recur in the online discussions, such as 'reply' or 'edited') for all the sub-corpora and compared the most common content words in them to give us an initial understanding for the topics discussed in the corpus, as well as to conduct a preliminary comparison between different parts of the corpus. Second, we then ran a comparison with the frequencies of the BNC written and spoken sub-corpora (also spoken because online discussions often contain many similarities to actual spoken discussions) in order to generate keywords (*log-likelihood* was used as statistical measure, see Gómez 2013), and again conducted a comparison of our sub-corpora. Third, we started to examine in more detail some of the relevant common words identified this way by analysing their collocates (*mutual information* was used to calculate collocates, see Stubbs 1995), clusters and concordances. In addition, we used the LancsBox GraphColl tool for visualizing and exploring networks of collocates (Brezina et al. 2015). Visualization of collocation networks brings the benefit of allowing us to examine the interrelatedness of lexical items in non-linear terms and beyond the first level of collocations. Concordances were then analysed qualitatively focusing particularly on preferred and alternative meanings (Hall 2001 [1980]) and examined through the analytical lenses of solicitation and legitimation-by-participation (Baudrillard 1998 [1970]).

4. Findings

In this section, we first present our findings based on the analysis of the data using corpus tools, which allowed us to gain a general understanding of the material; we will then illustrate the key aspects of Facebook corporate communication and finally elaborate on user reactions recovered from the commentary around the changes to the Community Standards. Analysing both the corporate communication and user commentary allows us to examine the tensions between what is explicitly communicated (preferred meanings; Hall

2001 [1980]) and how, based on the users' reactions, the users interpret the corporate communication either in line with the preferred meanings or resisting them through alternative meanings (what Hall called *negotiated* or *oppositional* meanings).

4.1 Bird's Eye View of the Corpus

We began the analysis with a simple quantitative examination of the texts in our corpus. The 20 most frequent words in the different sources included in the corpus are reported in table 2 below (all data was treated as lower case and common grammatical words were filtered out). In table 2, we have first listed Facebook's corporate communication in the first four columns (see table 1 for explanation of sources). We have then listed the user commentary to Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook post (Z_FB_com), as well as the newspaper articles followed by their user commentary (TG_com and NYT_com). In what follows, we italicize words and extracts from the data, except when presented as a separate block quote.

Examining the frequency lists, we notice that, unsurprisingly, many words are related to the general topic of Facebook, for example *mark, facebook, reply*. In fact, almost all instances of *mark* refer to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and they are common only in the comments to his Facebook post, where people often either address him directly or otherwise mention him. The more specific topic of Community Standards is naturally also visible in the list of most common words: *community, standards, policies, guidelines, rules*. A keyword analysis confirms the salience of many of the most frequent words; the topic of Facebook appears at the top of keywords—*facebook, mark, zuckerberg, fb, likes, posts*. Some keywords are connected to the context more generally, for example *internet, people, pages*, whereas others are more specifically related to the topic of community standards: *community, standards, account,* etc.

Several of the most frequent words turn out to be related to the power of Facebook to make decisions over what is allowed on the site, for example *remove, allowed, banned, control, allow* and *restrict*. There are also several words that refer specifically to things that are or should be removed: for example, one theme relates to *nudity* (also *sexual*, and in keywords *pornography* and *porn*). In The Guardian article, *breastfeeding* also comes up. *Harassment* seems to be another theme (*threats, violence, criminal, abuse* and *hate* [collocate: *speech*]*,* and in keywords *bullying*). Additionally, the word *fake* (clusters: *fake account(s), fake profile(s), fake id(s)*) also points to something that should be banned or removed.

The corpus analysis also gives several clues as to what is promoted by or desirable on Facebook. Many of the most frequent words relate to civil liberties, particularly free speech: *voice* (collocates: *giving, people*), *free* (collocates: *expression, speech, internet*), *speech* (collocates: *hate, freedom, free*), *expression* (collocates: *freedom, free*) and *amendment* (cluster: *first amendment*). The words *government* (cluster: *government requests)* and *laws* also seem to be connected with this theme, as well as perhaps *world, global, countries* and *diversity*. Keywords also include *freedom, speech,* and *voice,* suggesting that this is indeed a topic that comes up unusually often in

our corpus. Another theme seems to be related to human connection, as *connect, connected* and *sharing* are also keywords.

	CS	ECS	B&O	Z_FB	Z_FB_com	TG	TG_com	NYT	NYT_com
1	people	content	people	people	mark	content	facebook	facebook	reply
2	content	standards	facebook	voice	facebook	facebook	content	people	facebook
3	facebook	requests	community	share	people	hate	speech	said	recommend
4	sexual	community	things	world	zuckerberg	speech	fb	content	people
5	remove	people	world	community	thank	people	site	company	fb
6	share	government	content	government	world	policies	rules	government	page
7	public	report	share	internet	page	guidelines	allowed	post	banned
8	community	facebook	environment	content	fb	organisations	hate	rules	account
9	information	countries	like	blocked	good	social	art	bickert	new
10	threats	global	policies	expression	great	activity	bcarey	information	community
11	violence	speech	safe	access	thanks	allow	free	report	like
12	allow	country	balance	better	internet	breastfeeding	people	service	post
13	help	hate	behavior	countries	pages	criminal	abuse	allow	just
14	images	information	control	country	just	figures	allow	blocked	nudity
15	self	law	create	facebook	know	nudity	amendment	images	time
16	work	local	diversity	giving	make	policy	gender	ms	users
17	activity	share	global	governments	think	post	harassment	requests	comment
18	injury	data	insights	laws	work	remove	jonathan	updated	comments
19	speech	governments	make	like	community	restrict	just	users	day
20	use	policies	place	make	want	share	make	violent	know

Table 2. Most frequent words by sub-corpora

The most frequent words also include positive evaluative words: *good, great* and *safe*. These same words come up in the keywords, which, in addition, include *awesome* and *love*. *Thank* and *thanks* (Z_FB_com) are frequent

words (and also keywords) that also contain positive evaluation. It is perhaps noteworthy that negative evaluative words do not appear at the top of these lists (except for *hate* which appears mostly in the cluster *hate speech*). One keyword that might be related to criticism, and therefore deserves closer attention, is *solve* (collocate: *problem*).

Next, we will take a closer look at both the corporate communication and the user reactions.

4.2 Corporate Communication of Facebook

In the corporate communication produced by Facebook and the preferred meanings therein, we identified four main themes. These themes all present specific ways in which the company seemingly offers a Gift to the users: it enables the user to express herself, to connect with others, but also, to do so safely. Furthermore, the company depicts itself generally as an altruistic benefactor at the service of the user. Below we will illustrate each point with extracts from the data.

Again, keywords produced in comparison to the BNC give a good initial understanding of the characteristic themes discussed in the company texts (keyword rankings are presented in parenthesis). The word *safe* (29) gives a hint of Facebook's rationale behind the actions that terms such as *remove* (8), *restrict* (14), and *prohibit* (19) refer to. Keywords that point to the things that users should be protected from include *sexual* (9), *bullying* (15), *threats* (16), *hate* (18), and *harassment* (30). These construct a **Gift of protection**, something the company grants the users. In addition, salient words include *voice* (10) and *speech* (17), which point to a **Gift of freedom of expression**, to which *governments*, *government*, and *laws* are also connected. Finally, words like *share* (5), *sharing* (24), and *connect* (24) refer to a **Gift of personal connection**, enhancing a dimension of social life the platform is built on.

Extract 1 below shows how protection is constructed in the text and how *safe* is related to issues such as *violence* and *bullying*:

> Extract 1.
> Our Community Standards aim to find the right balance between giving people a place to express themselves and promoting a welcoming and **safe** environment for everyone. As you can imagine, striking the right balance is a tough job that we approach by focusing on a few key principles:
> * Keeping you **safe**. We have zero tolerance for any behavior that puts people in danger, whether someone is organizing or advocating real-world *violence* or *bullying* other people. (B&O)

This example also demonstrates how Facebook creates a rhetorical contradiction between freedom of expression and protection, suggesting that compromises are needed. There is thus an implicit disclaimer that freedom of speech may not in all cases be possible, but rather that it is the company that ultimately makes the decision on what is and is not acceptable.

In extract 2 from the Facebook post by Mark Zuckerberg, we see particularly clearly the Gifts of freedom of expression (italics), personal connection (bolded) and altruism (underlined). These are all enforced with extensive

repetition, a rhetorical device in its own right that serves to emphasise the core message.

> Extract 2.
> Our mission is to give people the power to **share** and to make the world more open and **connected**. We exist to give you a voice to **share** what matters to you -- from photos of your **family** to *opinions about the world*. We believe the better you can **share** and **connect**, the more progress society will make. **Relationships** grow stronger, more jobs and businesses are created and *governments* better reflect people's values.
> As difficult questions arise about the limits of what people can **share**, we have a single guiding principle: We want to give the most *voice* to the most people.
> (Z_FB)

The Gift of freedom of expression refers to public discourse that incorporates freedom of expression and democratic participation, and allows people to *voice* their *opinions* and effect *progress in society*. As for the Gift of personal connection, it is largely premised on the ideas of social life, of connectivity that you get from Facebook, namely, social belonging and the possibility for emotional sharing (*share, connect, family, relationships*). Furthermore, the choices of verbs (particularly *share* and *connect*) frequently used by Facebook in their communication, including this post describe activities that fall in the social realm of human activity that social media foster.

In addition, in terms of perceived intimacy, there is something to be said about the post coming directly from Zuckerberg. This serves to make corporate communication appear as personal communication, thereby reducing the social and perhaps also the ideological distance between the users and Zuckerberg as a representative of the corporation. This is a discursive strategy commonly used in corporate communication on social media (see e.g. Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen 2014; Lillqvist et al. 2016).

Extract 2 also highlights the company as a benefactor. This might be described as a supporting process of producing a **Gift of altruism** (underlined), which is a prominent theme both in this post and in Facebook's corporate communication more generally. In terms of linguistic choices, we find the polarised use of pronouns, namely referring to the company as *us/we* and the user as *you* (see also Fairclough 2003: 149). While *we* is present in the text, Zuckerberg heavily emphasizes *you*, creating a dynamic where Facebook is presented as a benefactor and a provider of what the users need and want: the individual user, addressed as *you*, is represented as the recipient of something that Facebook *gives* to *you*. If fact, *give* and *giving* appear as collocates for *voice* and *you*, and the somewhat unusual sounding *more voice* and *most voice* (as in extract 2) are clusters for *voice* (see Figure 1 for an illustration of the collocation network for *voice*, *give*, *you* and *our*). Thus, the social roles established in the text position Facebook as the one with the power and, more importantly, the will to provide and to cater to the needs of the users, and users as recipients of these benevolent Gifts. The use of the pronouns *you* and *us* furthermore add to the constructed intimacy between these parties.
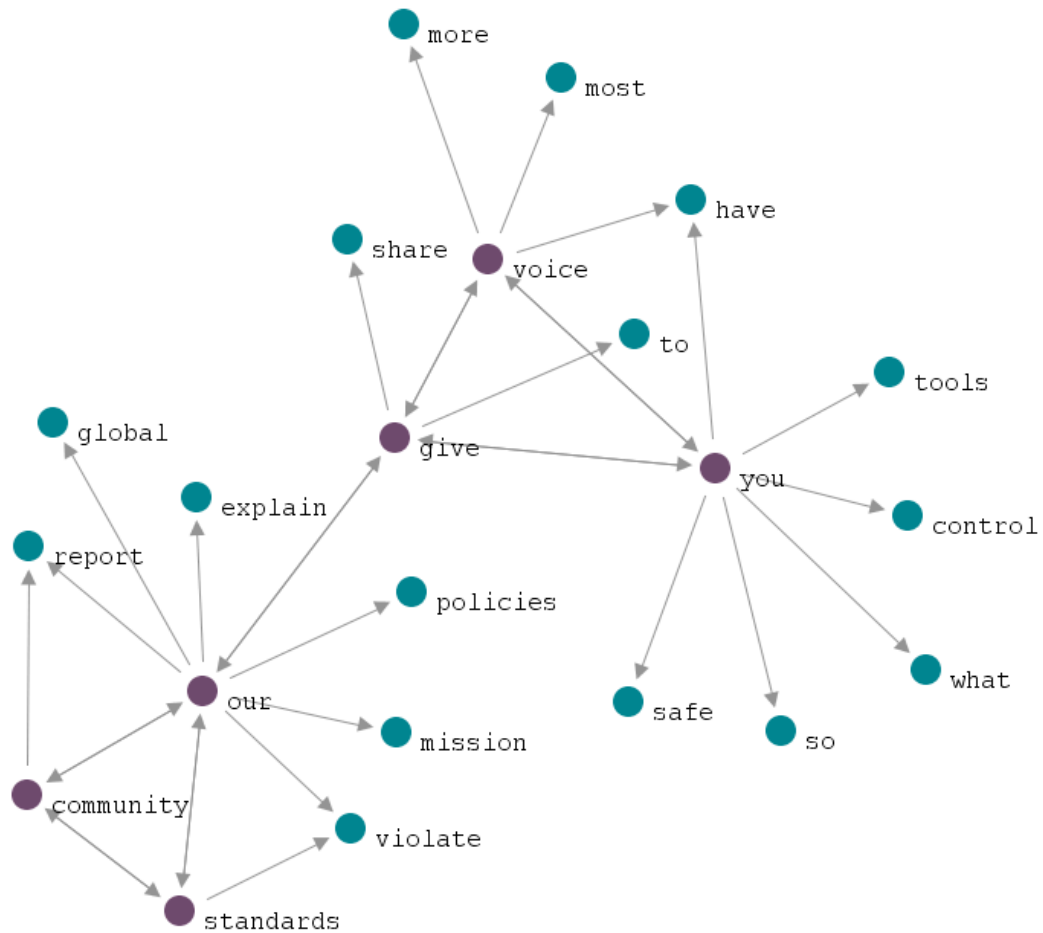
Figure 1. Illustration of a collocation network for *voice*, *give*, *you* and *our*, done using the LancsBox GraphColl tool (Brezina et al. 2015)

These findings suggest that Facebook corporate communication favours certain kind of communication, that is, communication that actively seeks to solicit the users by foregrounding socially relevant aspects of using the service. All these preferred meanings foreground the service as a Gift that users are given; the corporate communication of Facebook thus serves to move the interpretative process away from any economic dimension of participation or any possible negative effects the participation can have on users, or indeed anything that might show the social media company in a negative light. Solicitation, then, as a discursive process of user engagement, masquerades as care while embedded in this is the silent demand for social sanction.

4.3 User Reactions

We also examined user reactions to Facebook's corporate communication regarding the changes to the Community Standards. In order to analyse that which is left out by the company, we looked into the tensions between the preferred meanings of the company, as present in their explicit communication, and the alternative understandings that the users bring up in their commentary and criticism. We will next discuss each in turn.

4.3.1 Preferred meanings

Often, users echo more or less explicitly the preferred meanings communicated by Facebook and thereby convey acceptance of the rules of the site, willingness to obey the framework laid out in the Community Standards, as well as ultimately legitimation-by-participation.

We can also observe different nuances regarding the acceptance of the rules, regulations, and the general message of the company. Some users accept the situation at face value. This seems to be very common, one sign being that the words *thank* (6) and *thanks* (8) rank high in the keywords (and also in frequencies) for reaction texts, and several positive evaluative words also appear in the list of top 100 keywords: *great* (31), *good* (46), *awesome* (66), and *love* (82). In these texts, many common proper names and other words related to Facebook discussions in general appear in the keywords; for this reason we analysed slightly more keywords in this case.

> Extract 3.
> Well said Mark. **Thanks** for all the work you do. (Z_FB_com)

Some of the *thanks* are used in the sense of 'thanks in advance', but many appear in contexts such as the one in Extract 3, thanking for the work that Facebook is doing. *Mark*, *Zuckerberg* and *Facebook* are also collocates for *thank* and *thanks*. In addition, it is evident in the comments that some respond to Zuckerberg more as a person than in his capacity as a company representative, for example, by showing sympathy for his difficult task.

> Extract 4.
> It's **great** that you are *more than a business*, but a vehicle for changing the way the world and people *connect*. (Z_FB_com)

Extract 4 shows one example of how *great* was used, and it also exemplifies unconditional acceptance of the idea of a Gift of personal connection—*connect* (63) and *connected* (88) were also keywords in the reaction texts—as well as the Gift of corporate altruism, as Facebook is described as *more than a business*, as doing something good for 'all of us'. Many of the keywords related to the Gift of freedom of expression appear also in the reaction texts: *freedom* (38), *speech* (50), *free* (61), and *voice* (76). In extract 5 below, we see again acceptance of these preferred meanings regarding expression and altruism:

> Extract 5.
> You're really leading the way in innovation, clarity, and **freedom of expression** compared to the rest of the world's largest tech companies. Please do not allow any NSA (or any other Orwellian type government agencies) backdoors into our private information. We the people *stand with* you against any oppression of liberty and connectivity. (Z_FB_com)

Here, Facebook is also viewed as a benefactor that provides us with the possibility of free expression, and as able to protect us from wicked forces that aim to invade our privacy. How Facebook itself breaches issues of privacy also come up in the more critical comments, which we will discuss next.

4.3.2 Alternative meanings

Alternative meanings present the other side of the coin, presenting divergent understandings of the same corporate communication. There is critique of the rules and of their enforcement, but also of the general behaviour of Facebook as an economic and social actor more generally. The criticism spans privacy issues, freedom of expression, and greed.

Many examples of the way Facebook enforces its rules are found in the context of occurrences of the keywords *solve* (65) and *problem* (94), which collocate with each other. These often question whether pornography is sufficiently censored or whether sufficient action is taken against bullying, hate speech, or for example identity theft. Some instances have to do with problems related to Facebook's functionalities, thus not all of them are related to the Community Standards. Some people seem to be desperately trying to contact Zuckerberg about whatever problem they are struggling with through commenting to this post. The words *plz* (33) and *please* appear in similar contexts, sometimes pointing to criticism, as seen in Extract 6:

> Extract 6.
> Mark Zuckerberg bro **please** try to **solve** our privacy issue.....
> #Facebook is not like #ello.....
> #Ello is also free but there is no ads and moreover that #ello don't sell our info
> (Z_FB_com)

In this comment, a real world example of a social media platform that clearly differs from Facebook (i.e. Ello) offers an alternative that allows questioning the preferred meanings provided by Facebook and the platform's operations. As in the following extract, a link between economic gain (here verbalised as *greed*) and privacy issues is sometimes made by the critical voices that are concerned that safety as understood in the corporate communication does not in fact relate to privacy and data security, but more to the platform censoring sensitive or offensive material.

> Extract 7.
> how can we talk freely when *greedy* Facebook asks us to provide true identification, despite our safety? *Shame on you* Mark, selling people info is your **"great"** damn move (Z_FB_com)

Extract 7 features an instance of the word *great* in ironic use and shows, again, that sometimes the economic dimension of the user-platform relationship is in fact recognized by users. Here, the description of Facebook as *greedy* and reference to *shame* bring alternative meanings illustrative of moral disapproval and opposing the preferred meaning of altruism. We would argue that the moral sanctioning of the platform operations is an important goal of the discourses of enticement: this is because organizations seen as lacking in moral conduct and ethics lack legitimacy, and thus, through the process of solicitation the company indeed seeks legitimation-by-participation.

We see from the user comments that not all users accept the preferred meanings of Facebook's corporate communication; the alternative meaning of greed, for one, indicates that some users are in fact aware of the

commodification they are subjected to. Some ambivalence regarding the enforcement of the Community Standards also exists which serves to undermine the platform owner's authority and trustworthiness: with incoherent 'policing' of the site, the users perceive that censorship by the platform in fact functions to silence and prohibit some voices while sanctioning others, even if in contradiction with the rules set by the platform. Thus, the Gift of freedom of expression is not delivered in the way promised in the discursive process of soliciting the users.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, our aim has been to extend the understanding of the power of social media corporations, specifically in terms of discourse. We have combined media and Internet studies with a CDS approach and examined the discursive processes that enable the engagement of users by social media corporations. We have done this by empirically examining the corporate communication of Facebook and the related user reactions and commentary, focusing on the discourses of enticement that we, inspired by Baudrillard (1998 [1970]), have called *solicitation*.

We have argued that the notion of solicitation aptly describes aspects of the operational logic of social media corporations and their discourse; Facebook engages in solicitation of its users in order to achieve user engagement, continued participation, and legitimation-by-participation. The multi-layered discursive process of solicitation entails enticing users by presenting social media as an offering, a 'Gift'. Our analysis showed that Facebook, explicit in its communication, promises four types of Gift, namely *protection* (security from bullying and harassment on the site)*, freedom of expression*, *personal connection*, as well as general *altruism* of the company. Facebook no doubt shapes sociality (see e.g. van Dijck 2012), yet to what extent the social media platform actually promotes equal participation or gives 'most voice to the most people' remains questionable, and will in any case be highly tied to the wider issues of the political economy of the Internet (van Dijck 2013; Fuchs 2014a, Fuchs 2014b). However, the company does present itself as an idealized benefactor and highlights the value of the platform for the user in terms of social life and belonging. All this is offered 'for free', but what the company never explicitly mentions is that the users' data and content may be sold and used to make a profit (see also e.g. Fuchs 2014a, 2014b; Lovink 2011), compromising their expectation concerning privacy, freedom, and rights to their data—solicitation always comes with a 'dark side' (Baudrillard 1998 [1970]). As some scholars have argued, in the social media context users become a commodity and a form of unpaid labour (e.g. Fuchs 2010, 2014a, 2014b; Kang and McAllister 2011; Na 2015).

Furthermore, according to the notion of solicitation, when users accept being engaged and participate on the platform, they also engage in the more implicit act of sanctioning and legitimating of the business model. However, we did find from user comments some critique of Facebook's operations, for example in terms of what users see as greed. In addition to greed, privacy issues were topical among the more critical users. Some also criticised the lack of enforcement of the rules and regulations that the social media corporation

itself lays down, for example, insufficient removal of offensive or violent content, or of content that contains hate speech or content that can otherwise be conceived as violating the Community Standards. Here, the problem, as described by the users, is that Gift is not delivered as promised.

The revenue acquisition of (social) media that is predicated on user engagement is, as already noted by Dallas Smythe (1977) in conjunction with television and 'audience commodity', dependent on the willing entering into such transactional relationship, of sanctioning it and, eventually, continuing in the participation of the strange relation where the user is simultaneously the product and a producer. The critical issues with such business models relate to transparency and informed consent: most social media users do not see themselves as workers or 'free labour', nor do they usually conceive of themselves and their data as commodities. They may thus fail to see the connection of their online participation and the revenue model, with their time and data being exchanged for advertising revenue garnered by social media corporations. Unavoidably, then, when such extraction and exchange of personal data takes place on a massive scale, privacy and harm become topical issues that merit further analysis from users and scholars alike.

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