

# Facebook App: design evaluation

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Facebook is a social networking service in which users can connect with friends, share photos, life moments, or any content from the internet. The application contains all the essentials from the web interface and additionally allows users to upload pictures directly from your phone.

## 1 Logging in on the application

When starting the Facebook app for the first time, a login screen will appear. The purpose of Facebook is sharing your personal experiences and creating your own page, so an account creation is absolutely necessary. Since Microsoft introduced this concept with the launch of Windows 10, the Facebook app also allows you to log in with a 4-digit code, making this process less tiresome for the user.

## 2 First visual impression

The Facebook app is characterized by its balanced color palette; the designers used as less as possible but as much as needed colours for being functional. Within a balanced colour palette, colours should not clash or traumatize any retinas. Facebook has chosen for a simple combination of gray as background, white as outstanding element and one signature color: blue. Letters are the same tone of gray as the background, or black when clickable. It is clear that gray is meant to function as a separation between elements, since this areas never include any content. This way of separating is called “using negative space”. Negative space should never include content and therefore serve as a clear distinction between important elements. This avoids that the app becomes a unorganized and unclear collection of text and images.

The signature colour is a characteristic tone of blue, which is used in all their applications and the logo. By using this tone of blue since the beginning - everyone knows what you mean by “Facebook blue” – they have made themselves recognisable. Being the only colour, it adds Facebook-specific headers and accents to the app, without creating a too colourful surrounding. The logo includes all of this clear simplicity by adopting

the colour palette and using a consistent font. The company could have chosen for a small image or icon, but chose to pick the first letter of their name. The reason could be very simple; no other large company uses the combination of this tone of blue and the font the “F” is written in (known on the internet as “Facebook letter faces”).

Many companies (like ToDoist or Shuttle Player) adapted their app to the current wave of “material design”. This makes an app visually attractive and a modern look may cause a better first impression. However, by not choosing to go with this flow, Facebook conserves its recognisability. With over 30 million downloads in the app store, they can afford not to adapt to (temporary) app fashion.

### 3 Functionality vs. Appearance

How is simplicity of visual design in balance with completeness of functionality? Facebook has a lot of different functionalities. There are many options and many settings to tweak. However, beginning users do not need these additional functionalities and are therefore not bothered by their existence. These are hidden within the hamburger menu (see section 4 for a more detailed description). Though on first sight, there seems to be quite a lot of information on the screen, it’s clear what the function of every element is. The emphasis of the application lies on functionality, which makes it a *clean* app. This is achieved by avoiding an *excess of graphics*. Graphic design should be used with moderation, and preferably only when functional. There are a few ways that they use graphics such that they aid the user in understanding the app, instead of only taking up valuable space.

#### 3.1 Traditional elements

*Traditional elements* match with the ones that the context of the app prescribes. An example is that the elements should fit well in the style that is normally used within the given operating system. For android, one can notice a few things that don’t correspond to what users normally see. For example, the “hamburger menu” (three stripes standing for “settings”) is on the right side of the application (instead of left). Facebook could have chosen to make the app more android-ish by putting the settings on the left side. Apart from that, there are no important discrepancies between the app and the context of its platform (see section 2 for comment on the non-material design).

#### 3.2 Abstractions rather than metaphors

A *metaphor*, in this case, is like a butler, walking in on your screen while bringing your email on a silver plate (the “incredimail butler”). These are objects from the real world, of which developers think that they help users. Nowadays that everyone knows what an email is, people prefer to use abstractions. Abstractions can be seen as simplified

representations of the real world. Facebook uses a lot of abstractions, but not all attempts are quite as successful. The paper note as representation for received messages is a clear abstraction and a often used traditional element. Being traditional, means that the users are used to this abstractions or can easily deduce their meaning.

Aut then: the globe appears. A person that doesn't know anything about Facebook, can guess that the note might stand for messages and the two persons have something to do with connected people. The globe, however, could mean anything. Find friends, read the global news, share your location or learn about geography. In a sense, notifications could be interpreted as global news (from "all your friends"), but something like an explanation mark would be more appropriate for representing a notification. Also, when navigating through the settings, one wonders why the designers decided to use a box as the pictogram for games. There would be more logical possibilities, such as a classic game controller.

Features such as "sharing" a post are difficult to explain by means of an icon. This may be one of the reasons that facebook included labels alongside some icons. In this way, users will not have to be afraid of accidentally clicking on a scary button, or missing out on the sharing experience due to incomplete information.

## 4 Hierarchy of elements

Without an excess of graphics, the app becomes clear for the user. As explained before, every element becomes justifiable. All the elements serve some functional purpose for the product, and therefore have their own role associated with them.

For the most part, the interaction between these roles is well-defined. Most actions are one or two clicks away and don't require changing to a different activity. This means that the app has a *meaningful hierarchy of elements* that doesn't get the user lost. However, when the hamburger menu is accessed, the overwhelming amount of possibilities appear. This menu contains every detail that is not shown in the main activities. Examples are an overview of all the upcoming events, the groups the user is in and a lot of settings. Within this menu, a few inconsistencies and confusing elements can be found.

To begin with, the icon with two persons in appears to be used for three different functions. In the always present header, the user can see all his pending friend requests and some suggestions of people he may know. In the hamburger menu, the icon is first used for accessing a list of the user's friends, and, after scrolling for a while, for finding new friends. Although these may seem different actions, these two actually link to the same activity, but to different tabs. These two buttons in the menu are unnecessary and could have easily been merged to one.

After scrolling down, the "help and settings" section appears, in which there are twelve sorts of links with some very meaningless labels, such as "privacy shortcuts" and "mo-

bile data". Why can the privacy shortcuts (which are simply "privacy settings") not be included in the "account settings"? When clicking on mobile data, Facebook invites the user to download one of their apps, to gain more insight in his overall mobile data usage. This does not have anything to do with Facebook and was added to advertise one of their own products in a non-obvious way.

Finally, a remark on the design, why is the layout of the facebook-inherent icons so different to the one of the group icons? For more consistency, the designers could choose to make the style of the group icons more minimalistic.

## **5 Conclusion**

Altogether, the Facebook company has created a decent app. There could be some improvements regarding the settings menu, but overall, the app provides a pleasant user experience