**Chapter 3 Part 2: Incentives**

Before articulating possible improvements on the problems we have outlined in Chapter 2, we find it useful to respond to a popular criticism that often undermines the discussion on alternative platforms by arguing that they are unrealistic. Tufekci, in her aptly named article named *Yes, Big Platforms Could Change Their Business Models,* simulates this argument with the following lines:

There’s simply no plausible alternative, the platforms say. People will never pay to use platforms, we are told. Plus, dissidents and activists in the developing world rely on these free services to get their word out. How can we abandon them? And anyway, the platforms say, we can’t provide the fundamental features that our users value without all this data collection. It’s simply too late to change. (28)

This is not a straw-man argument either. Vaidhyanathan, concludes his analysis on a pessimistic note. Explaining that his critique of Facebook is mostly in vain, he says: "Facebook itself has no incentives to reform" (Antisocial Media, 17). Indeed, one of the theoretical underpinnings of techno-pessimism is that companies won't change simply because their customers demand it.

However, there in fact many scenarios in which a company would change precisely due to this reason. In an interview, Mark Zuckerberg summarizes the main reason as such:

I think one of the key principles is that we’re trying to run this company for the long term. And I think that people think that a lot of things that– if you were just trying to optimize the profits for next quarter or something like that, you might want to do things that people might like in the near term, but over the long term will come to resent. But if you actually care about [...] building the company for the long term, I think you’re just much more aligned [with customers] than people often think companies are. (23)

Of course, Vaidhyanathan or any techno-pessimist can point out that words are free. However, failing to respond to user demand is not. An example of radical change in business models that is relevant today is the rise of what is called "fast-casual" food, and the fast adaptation of the largest fast-food chains to join the trend. In the last couple of years, McDonald's removed problematic ingredients from its menu, such as certain artificial preservatives; Taco Bell made a claim to become one of the healthiest fast-food chains (29); and the whole industry reduced the average calories of a menu item by 12% in one year (30). The drastic changes, contrasted with earlier models that fast-food chains have incorporated, are hard to explain without considering the rise of a health-conscious customer base.

Numerous studies that are replicated frequently, including those from CMU and Stanford, showcase the significantly negative social and psychological effects of social media use as it is experienced today. (Dreyfus, *On the Internet*) It is not unreasonable to assume that a platform that allows its users' social lives to flourish as well as entertain them will more likely be adopted in the long run, and that the public perception will catch up eventually. The fast food industry, after decades of making food more chemically-developed, more tasty but unhealthy, finally went through this change as the tremendous increase in diabetes rates finally caught the public eye.

Today, existing social media platforms have already started to see this backlash from users and shareholders. Facebook ended a scandal-ridden 2018 with a 20% drop in its stock price, the lowest it has been in nearly two years (31). Therefore, an alternative design is not only realistic, but perhaps also reasonable. How a platform (or a new medium) started need not govern how it develops. As Tufekci reminds us, seatbelts became mandatory in the US many decades after cars were popularized and were an indispensable part of life, following much controversy that argued that it was unreasonable to demand that car manufacturers design all cars with this invariant.