**Chapter 4: Conclusion**

Throughout history, the main medium of mass communication of the day has been held to scrutiny, be it the newspaper, the radio, the television, or the "global village". It is famously known that Socrates was against writing, because the medium would provide "not truth, but only the semblance of truth" (42). Yet, tools of communication continued to develop, and although some critique has remained constant, most media was questioned and challenged according to its particular features, and its unique situatedness in a specific time and space.

Today, social media is uncontestably one of the most popular forms of mass communication. As expected, thinkers challenge every aspect of the medium, and some find no significant redeeming qualities in it. There are different forms this argument takes. In the field of political science, Vaidhyanathan's *Antisocial Media* claims that the problem with Facebook "is Facebook", and finds no way out of the irreparable damage it claims Facebook has caused, except for the closing down of the platform. In philosophy, Dreyfus suggests that the nihilism Internet has successfully harbored can only be avoided if one turns off the monitor and finds a particular hobby or cause that will guide their human endeavors. In sociology, Tufekci likens the ad-based platform to AI-powered dystopias. These thinkers are not radicals of a generally-moderate group; they are the authors of some of the most well-articulated and sound critique social media faces today. Thus, even if we do not accept these critiques as fact, we must admit that they are insightful problematizations that need to be reformed.

However, the techno-pessimism that we tend to slip into especially when we are highlighting the most problematic aspects of social media is not only an unproductive approach to pave the way forward, but also misdirected. The medium of social media does not require that content be categorized by posts of a certain format, distributed in a specific algorithm, or accessed through a particular interface. These are decisions that creators of today's platforms have made; decisions that they continue to make on a daily basis. At its genesis, Facebook did not have a timeline, and the home page only displayed activity the user herself was involved in. Instagram only established "stories" in 2016, after a completely separate platform was built around the idea. Twitter famously started with a 140-character limit, which was doubled as it became obvious that users built ad hoc solutions to get over the limit, such as numbering their posts so that they are read as a single piece. Some of these changes may seem trivial to the reader, but the point is that social media platforms are not constants we have to either accept or reject from the outset; they are subject to change and influence through incentives.

Accordingly, we move through some of the central critique of social media and attempt to rescue the medium by pinpointing the design decisions that giver rise to the specific criticism that generally targets social media. To assure the legitimacy of our claims, we suggest alternative design decisions that would have yielded a different platform that ameliorates the criticism. Thinkers' critique often uses Facebook while implying the other social media platforms, so our work follows this methodology as well.

We begin with Sherry Turkle's concept of the "life-mix", which describes how we live in the physical and the online worlds simultaneously without a systematic way to keep the two separated when we need to. To detect the real recipient of this claim, we pinpoint the main gate between the physical world and the online world as the red alert notification. We investigate Facebook's notification settings and display the lack of a set of settings for users who need more separation between the two worlds. By recommending a richer set of options, we claim that the mere fact that social media works with notifications does not create the "life-mix", but the lack of ability of the user to configure the settings does. We respond to two hypothetical arguments. The first suggests that if the settings are there but difficult to access, it should not matter. We respond by exhibiting Thaler's "nudge theory" of behavioral economics and highlighting the significance of ease of use in human decision making. The second suggests that there is a trade-off between flexibility and usability, displayed through Hick's law. We respond by acknowledging the trade-off, and applying the lessons of the discipline of human-computer interaction, we recommend higher-order categories of notification settings, such as "permissive", "conservative", and "power user".

Later, we turn to Siva Vaidhyanathan's concerns with the invariant structure of Facebook posts, such as getting a whirlwind of discontinuous information that one cannot make sense of in general, and "falling for" ads and especially political ads that may present themselves as native content or even news. On a similar note, Hubert Dreyfus' re-interpretation of Kierkegaard suggests that social media trivializes serious content, thus "levelling" all information on the same plane. Finally, we re-interpret Sartre's concept of the gaze of the Other to give context to the non-personalized objectification users may feel, evidenced by the ad hoc solutions they build such as the phenomenon of "Finstas".

We give further evidence to each of these claims that display the legitimate target of these claims to be a set of design choices, such as the invariant post structure, the infinite scroll feed, and the lack of ability to easily categorize content. In return, we claim that existing platforms already have ways of dealing with these challenges. Specifically, we give examples of platforms such as Reddit and Tumblr, which allow for variance between different types of content, and posting on different communities which have a highly varied set of norms and rules. We anticipate pushback against the argument that radical content is as serious of a problem as we have taken it to be. In response, we evidence the attraction sensational content receives not only on social media but on media in general, and the exacerbation of the problem through the non-linear exposure it gets due to the network effect.

Then, we consider Tufekci's criticism against curation algorithms together with Vaidhyanathan's claim that in Facebook, radical posts get more attention. Once again, we investigate the claims and display their legitimacy, meanwhile emphasizing that optimization algorithms do not have a singular form that any social media platform must adapt; they are subject to change and reform. In particular, we combat the understanding that optimization algorithms are naturally the way they are so there are no technical solutions to this issue. In return, we discuss what it means for a cost function to optimize a set of parameters and underline the human-made design choices that makes the cost function. We also provide empirical evidence of YouTube making active efforts to create more complex cost functions. Finally, responding to the claim that "fairer" algorithms rarely provide a path forward, we first justify the claim through evidence from computer science and behavioral psychology, and then respond by suggesting a less intrusive approach of providing the users with local explanations and counterfactual results. Thus, we provide a way for users to have more power over their use of the platforms without committing the platforms to unrealistic or even contradicting ideals of fairness.

Finally, we also challenge the counter argument some techno-pessimists have made that platforms have no incentive to change. We discuss the possible customer bases for social media platforms and show that it is a reasonable assumption to make that platforms should view both users and advertisers as their customers. Then, we exemplify the ability of public demand to create a change in an entire industry by considering studies that investigate the last decade of the fast food industry. Reminding the readers of the vast change the public opinion successfully created on this industry, we suggest that user demand could have a similar effect on the social media industry, given that we direct our attention to particular design choices, rather than the intrinsic nature of social media. Though it require more effort from thinkers, users and platforms alike, we must continuously imagine new ways of architecting these online worlds so that we are not despaired by the self-crippling notion that an entire medium is detrimental to the fabric of society. Instead, through small but persistent revisions of social media that have been humbly outlined in this thesis, we can create a healthier tool for mass communication, and perhaps we may even reestablish the now-trivialized ideal of global interconnectedness.