

“Who could possibly be against this?” – Mark Zuckerberg’s framing of
connectivity in the context of Free Basics

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<p>This thesis studies Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg’s discourse on connectivity in the context of Free Basics. As a specific focus, this paper looks at a Facebook connectivity initiative called Internet.org. The initiative was launched in 2013 and it aims at connecting all of the world’s population to the internet. As a part of Internet.org, Facebook developed a smartphone application called Free Basics. As mobile data can be costly in many less developed countries, Free Basics provides free internet access to a limited number of websites. These usually include categories such as Facebook, news sites, job listings, weather and health information. As of 2018, the application was active in over fifty countries around Asia, Africa and Latin America.</p> <p>The method used for analysing the data set is framing analysis. The data, which consists of 54 text documents published between 2013 and 2018, is collected from a single source, an American database called The Zuckerberg Files. This thesis finds that Zuckerberg frames connectivity and Free Basics in three different ways. The first frame, Free Basics as altruistic philanthropy, shows how Zuckerberg focuses on downplaying any possible business benefits that Facebook might have from Free Basics. He stresses the charitable nature of the connectivity initiative and claims that Facebook simply acts on the deep belief for their mission: connecting everyone in the world. The only possible economic profit, according to Zuckerberg, could be for the partnering telecommunications companies.</p> <p>The second frame, Free Basics for universal benefits, displays Facebook’s global outlook on the connectivity issue. In this discourse, Zuckerberg imagines Free Basics as an all-encompassing solution for the five billion people who are currently unconnected. He also argues for universal benefits from increased connectivity by referring to the “global knowledge economy”, where even the already connected people can gain from the new ideas that can now be shared through the internet. The third and last frame, Free Basics accelerating development, looks at Zuckerberg’s statements on how Free Basics can help people in developing countries improve their lives. In comparison to the second frame, here Zuckerberg uses individual people’s stories to give examples on all the areas Free Basics can be helpful in. These stories tie into themes of development, such as health and education, and Zuckerberg frames Free Basics and connectivity as simple, first-step fixes to a variety of issues.</p> <p>In conclusion, the results of this study seem to be in line with the previous studies on Zuckerberg’s discourse. Many elements discussed in the literature also occurred in my data: Facebook’s desire to appear neutral, the debate on net neutrality as well as the giant technology companies and their profound belief in technological determinism in development have been widely discussed earlier. By critically studying Zuckerberg’s argumentation, we gain a better understanding of the company’s actions and motives. This research is valuable because it uses a unique data set to provide an outlook to the way in which Zuckerberg frames Free Basics, as well as connectivity in general.</p>		
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1. Introduction

By giving people access to the tools, knowledge and opportunities of the internet, we can give a voice to the voiceless and power to the powerless.

– Mark Zuckerberg, 2015

In 2013, Facebook’s founder and chief executive officer (CEO) Mark Zuckerberg first introduced his vision for closing the digital divide. He wrote a lengthy manifesto on the biggest issues in connectivity, and a year later, Facebook (together with several business partners in the field) launched Internet.org. Internet.org served as an umbrella term for various philanthropic connectivity initiatives lead by Facebook. The key initiative, which is also the focus of this thesis, is Free Basics. Free Basics is a smartphone application providing its users with access to a limited collection of websites, free of charge.

This thesis aims to analyse Facebook’s initiative to connect the world – more specifically, it analyses Mark Zuckerberg’s speech on Free Basics. In 2018, Facebook confirmed Free Basics was active in fifty countries (Hatmaker, 2018). Despite its global popularity, the application has not always been received positively. When attempting to launch the service in 2015 in India, Facebook’s intentions were disputed by local technology experts and net neutrality activists. Critics of the initiative argued that the application would provide a walled garden of internet, with websites and content curated by Facebook (Prasad, 2018). Facebook and Zuckerberg responded by arguing that for the unconnected and unprivileged, some internet is always better than none. This conflict and argumentation both for and against it are looked at more closely both in the literature as well as the analysis.

What exactly is Free Basics, then? The concept of zero-rating (accessing internet without paying) is explained in detail in the literature, but here are the basics of Free Basics: it is a smartphone application allowing its user to access a simple version of Facebook. In addition to Facebook, it hosts a limited collection of for example news sites, weather, health or job information – helping expecting mothers to find pregnancy information, or offering small business owners tips on how to run a company (Solon, 2017). The application is provided in collaboration with local phone service providers and is mainly available in developing countries in Asia, Africa and South America (ibid.). Free Basics

is fuelled by Facebook's and Mark Zuckerberg's ambitious visions for "connecting the whole world" as a way to fight poverty and contribute to economic growth.

In general, Zuckerberg's problematization of the connectivity issue seems to be threefold, as he divides the challenges under three main categories: availability, affordability, and awareness (MZ 1, 2013).¹ These are, according to Zuckerberg's understanding, the biggest reasons people around the world do not have internet access. The first one, availability, is an issue for people living in such remote or rural areas that internet connections are hard to establish or maintain technologically (MZ 1, 2013). Some of Facebook's connectivity initiatives such as Aquila (a solar-powered unmanned plane beaming down internet with lasers) aim to create innovative solutions to these issues, but these initiatives are usually not the main focus in Zuckerberg's discourse.

The next two categories, affordability and awareness, are key in analysing Zuckerberg's argumentation for Free Basics. Affordability, quite simply, is about the high cost of data that prevents many people from using the internet even when they have smartphones and live in areas where connections are available. Finally, awareness is about having access to both a smartphone and data, but not understanding what the internet can provide. According to Zuckerberg, some people might not see why it would be worthwhile to pay for data (MZ 1, 2013). It is from this three-layered backdrop that Zuckerberg promotes and advocates his connectivity gospel. The Free Basics mobile application seems to be offered as a partial solution to both of the latter categories: affordability and awareness. The aim of this thesis is to analyse and interpret the ways in which Zuckerberg talks about connectivity in the context of Free Basics, hence my research question:

RQ: How does Mark Zuckerberg frame Free Basics?

My interest in this area originally developed while working on my bachelor's thesis, where I compared Facebook's actions with traditional, state-oriented foreign policy. I believe that a large technology corporation providing internet infrastructure in less developed areas – while promoting it as philanthropy rather than business – is a phenomenon worth exploring. A considerable amount of research has been carried out on the users of Facebook's platforms, but there is also importance in studying the

¹ For ease of reading, sources from The Zuckerberg Files database will be referenced with a simplified form of "MZ x, year" and can be found as a separate list in the bibliography.

company and the key figures running it. Hoffmann, Proferes and Zimmer (2016) note that in comparison to the users, “the discursive work of social media companies and their prominent figureheads has received comparatively less scholarly attention” (p. 201).

The value of this thesis is that it provides an additional, critical outlook on the actions of one of the world’s largest technology corporations. When I began my bachelor’s thesis research in early 2017, Facebook already exerted considerable influence around the world. However, it was not until 2018 when the Cambridge Analytica scandal exploded into a full extent and caused perhaps the biggest crisis for Facebook yet (Wong, 2019). This, together with the company’s other revealed leaks demonstrate the need for close examination of all of Facebook’s actions. With a continued focus on for example hate speech and terrorism on their platforms, Facebook’s projects like Internet.org are left with considerably less media attention. I believe that the corporation’s own actions are worth of scrutiny, too – not just the phenomena that Facebook’s social media platforms enable.

Furthermore, the usefulness of studying specifically Mark Zuckerberg’s public speech connects to the growing importance of global business leaders. In his study on transnational elite communication, Markus Ojala (2017) suggests that

... the very absence of a central locus of power in world society creates the need for the explicit articulation of a common project and coordination of interests within the elite. Thus, the transnational elite’s political project can also be conceived of as an attempt to create a way of integrating power on a global scale. (p. 120)

What Zuckerberg communicates not only displays Facebook’s values as a company but can also become significant in the political arena. Being the CEO of Facebook is undoubtedly a position of power: issues Zuckerberg promotes from his position make valid topics for research. With a background in computer science, Zuckerberg seems genuinely excited and convinced of internet’s magic in helping and empowering people. However, it is important to keep in mind that in this study the views by Zuckerberg are all argued in public sphere – after all, we cannot truly know what his personal, private opinions on these matters are. As Ojala (2017) suggests, even if public comments would

not reflect the speakers “true personal views”, it does not mean that the “discourse itself does not participate in the reproduction of collective perceptions and beliefs” (p. 149).

This thesis proceeds as follows: first, relevant literature on Facebook and other giant technology corporations will be discussed. Research on capitalism’s relationship to philanthropy as well as the global issues in connectivity will also be examined. Next, the method section will present and justify the processes of data collection and analysis. I have chosen to analyze Mark Zuckerberg’s discourse using framing analysis, which allows me to study how he frames Free Basics and the benefits of connectivity. The collected data consists of 54 text documents compiled from a database called The Zuckerberg Files. After discussing the methods, the analysis section of this study will provide insight into the ways in which Zuckerberg portrays Free Basics. With the help of illustrative quotes, this section presents three frames used by the Facebook CEO in his argumentation for global, all-inclusive connectivity. Finally, conclusions, discussion and suggestions for further research will be offered.

2. The growing power of technology giants

This literature review will be divided into three parts: to begin with, the first section will situate the topic within a larger framework, looking at literature on the increasing power of large technology corporations. Secondly, corporate philanthrocapitalism and questions of responsibility will be discussed. Lastly, the articles studied go into more detail with technology companies in development, and in particular, Facebook's Free Basics. The articles discussed in this section work to establish the theoretical framework for this study, as well as revealing the research gap my thesis aims to fill.

2.1 Neutral platforms or political actors?

With over 2.2 billion active monthly users, the need for studying Facebook's actions is clear (Reyes, 2019). In 2017, *The Economist* put it simply: "The world's most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data" (*The Economist*, 2017). The global reach of for example the GAFSA companies (Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple) is ever growing. These internet-based companies create an unusual puzzle for the study of modern-day corporate power: setting up manufacturing sites, training skilled factory workers or dealing with import taxes does not affect online service providers in a traditional way. For example, with both Google and Facebook, user data forms the core of their profit-making. Most products offered by them (for example Facebook, WhatsApp or Gmail) are completely free for the user – making the user their product. A simple definition of this logic is described by van Dijck, Poell and de Waal (2018): "[Platform operators] are interested in generating user data and extracting monetary value out of online connections" (p. 24).

Facebook's influence is extensive. Political, business, communication, computer or journalism studies are all valid starting points for research on Facebook. Srnicek (2017) argues that by viewing giant technology corporations (such as Google, Facebook or Twitter) primarily as economic actors in a capitalist system helps us to learn more about them. Instead of framing these platforms as political or "cultural actors defined by the values of the Californian ideology" (p. 3), Srnicek (2017) notes that capitalism's constant demands for profit and new markets help us understand the behaviour and growth of, say, Facebook or Google. Although Srnicek's viewpoint is valuable, I believe the analysis of Facebook as a capitalist economic actor does not reduce the importance of a

political analysis. To a large extent, money means power: economic and political factors will always exist in an interplay.

Along the same economic lines, Fuchs (2012) takes a very critical approach to Facebook's profit-making logic. He argues that in the capitalist system privacy, especially in the financial sense, is something that protects corporations and wealthy citizens from accountability. Fuchs claims that capitalist privacy hides wealth gaps and makes tax evasion easier. With Facebook, privacy then becomes a question of abuse by corporations: Fuchs argues the company takes privacy away from its users and turns it into profit. Along the lines of Marxist political economy, the paper also claims that Facebook users are "infinitely exploited" as they are not paid for content creation. Although there are many issues with Facebook's profit-making, it is arguable whether occasionally sharing cat videos or posting holiday pictures is labour per se (see e.g. Srnicek, 2017, p. 56). Fuchs (2012) concludes that if Zuckerberg was not actually concerned with profit (as stated by himself and Kevin Colleran, the company's advertising sales executive), he could very well turn Facebook into a non-commercial platform (p. 155). In his conclusion, Fuchs hints at a socialist strategy for turning the internet into a public service.

Although Facebook is not showing signs of non-commerciality, its discourse occasionally flirts with a public service identity. Studying the self-defining discourse used by social media providers, Gillespie (2010) goes into detail with a specific focus on YouTube and their use of the word "platform". The author notes that "platform" has emerged as a popular term for describing "the online services of content intermediaries", used both by the companies themselves, as well as users and media (Gillespie, 2010, p. 348). He argues that by defining an online service as a "platform", one "fits neatly with the egalitarian and populist appeal to ordinary users and grassroots creativity, offering all of us a 'raised, level surface'" (Gillespie, 2010, p. 358) Gillespie, much like van Dijck et al. (2018), suggests that using the term is beneficial for downplaying liability for the content posted on the site: it allows YouTube to claim impartiality in cases of controversial material. Gillespie (2010) concludes by stating that despite their efforts of branding themselves as neutral, YouTube (and other similar services) are indeed much closer to traditional media than they are willing to admit (p. 359).

In studying how Mark Zuckerberg defines Facebook and its users, the work by Hoffmann et al. (2016) comes rather close to this thesis. The researchers conduct a discourse analysis using The Zuckerberg Files, an archive of Zuckerberg's public statements also used in the data collection for this study. Their data consists of 145 files downloaded from the database, including text, speech and video transcripts. Hoffmann et al. (2016) argue for the significance of studying technology corporations and the discourse produced by them as they are "in a position to leverage the power and reach of mass media to promote particular views of a technology" (p. 201). The paper finds a notable shift in Zuckerberg's discourse between 2004 and 2014: in the early years of Facebook, Zuckerberg refuses to call the site a "social network" but rather sees it as a utility tool of searching for people's information (Hoffmann et al., 2016, p.204). Already in 2008, however, he uses the term "infrastructure" when referring to the company (ibid.).

Similarly, Rider and Murakami Wood (2019) refer to the discourse analysis by Hoffmann et al. (2016) in their article. It focuses on the 6000-word "Facebook Manifesto" published by Mark Zuckerberg in 2017. In this open letter titled "Building Global Community", Zuckerberg extensively shares his visions for the platform – namely, how to make the world and its communities a better, safer and more inclusive place through Facebook. According to Rider and Murakami Wood, Facebook is also successful in portraying connectivity as a natural part of humanity – Zuckerberg seems to claim that humans have a deep, innate need to connect with one another. Naturally, Facebook and other online networks are presented as the most straightforward way to do this, giving people tools for "the ultimate manifestation of human agency" (Rider and Murakami Wood, 2019, p. 647).

Rider and Murakami Wood (2019) argue that in describing Facebook as "social infrastructure" and a "global community", Zuckerberg distances it from any competitors: it is simply too large to compete with. In people's minds, Facebook is soon becoming the equivalent for Internet, and as the paper points out, Free Basics is a prime example of that. In general, Rider and Murakami Wood (2019) point out that the manifesto focuses on aspects where Facebook can provide support or extensions to existing infrastructures: "[thus] the tension that emerges here is between making Facebook visible as public, social infrastructure and invisible as a profit-seeking corporation" (p. 646). The paper also refers to Gillespie's (2010) understanding of these platforms' self-descriptions as more of a facilitator rather than a curator. It seems clear from the research in this field

that the platforms, including Facebook, have indeed understood their discursive power, and are using it to continuously undermine their own accountability.

Writing about a different platform with a similar approach, Vaidhyanathan (2011) analyses Google's increasing power and global role. He argues that with social or ethical questions, the technocratic approach taken by the engineers at Google creates a false image of Google as a "neutral tool" instead of an actor and a stakeholder itself. Similar argumentation can be recognized in Facebook's statements some years back – for surprisingly long, Zuckerberg argued that Facebook is independent, helpless even, in front of the actions, campaigns or ideologies taking place on the platform. There have been questions of whether even Zuckerberg himself has fully understood the size, power and extent Facebook (both as a platform and corporation) has grown into (see e.g. Read, 2017).

In a similar vein, van Dijck et al. (2018) illustrate the unwillingness of large platforms to take responsibility over what they have created. The authors note how often platforms like Facebook or Uber are eager to see themselves as "neutral" facilitators simply enabling the connections between users – creating public value – instead of acknowledging the importance of economic value guiding their actions and shaping the platforms (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 23). In true neoliberal spirit, often the discourse put forth by these platform corporations is around the freedom, services and enabled connections created for the user, seeing things like market regulation as secondary. The freedom generated from using these services is also very strongly visible in Zuckerberg's comments on Free Basics: the farmer able to grow better crops or the expecting mother able to find health information and support her child are both appealing examples of liberation through platformization (see e.g. MZ 9, 2015).

In short, these giant corporations are constantly growing both their influence and user base, while being reluctant to acknowledge the responsibility that comes with their power and size. The research discussed above agrees on the significance of self-definition and how it is often used by platforms to make them seem neutral.

2.2 Philanthrocapitalism and questions of responsibility

While the section above looked at technology corporations and their increasing global power, this chapter will go into more detail regarding expansion into new markets. Most of the discussion on social media platforms revolves around Western societies – for instance, European data protection laws or US elections have been intensely debated in media. As discussed previously, user data forms the core of these corporations' profit-making. In many places throughout the African, Asian and Latin American continents online access (and with that, social media use) is becoming more and more common. This of course means new, untapped market potential for companies like Facebook, which exist in the global capitalist system and are constantly looking for new ways to create monetary value for their shareholders.

It is important to notice that the power of these technology corporations is very US centric. Writing about the geopolitics of these giant platforms, van Dijck et al. (2018) point out that the Big Five companies (Google, Facebook, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft) all originate from the US, and the only considerable counterbalance comes from China, in the form of government-controlled services like Alibaba, JD.com or Baidu (p. 26). This is especially interesting from a global politics viewpoint: are these platforms and the values embedded in them just another example of American soft power?

In Asia, India has been of particular interest to Facebook and Free Basics. Aouragh and Chakravartty (2016) note one of the reasons Facebook seems so keen about India: with 241 million users in 2017, the country had the largest Facebook user base in the world. Yet, that number is less than 20 per cent of the total population, meaning that there is still ample potential for Facebook's growth. Additionally, Aouragh and Chakravartty point out that the digital interest is far from being one-sided. India's prime minister Narendra Modi paid a thorough visit to Silicon Valley in 2015, meeting with technology executives such as Tesla's Elon Musk, Apple's Tim Cook as well as Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg (Al Jazeera, 2015). Together with being active on social media, Modi has pushed for a more digital India and initiated efforts to end the digital divide in his country. Aouragh and Chakravartty (2016) argue that Modi's visit to Silicon Valley "clearly represents the US imprint on 21st century technology as both a matter of hard-material power (control, taxation and ownership of the telecom and the Internet

infrastructures) and of soft-corporate power (political control and ownership of the governing bodies both domestically and internationally)” (p. 565).

The question here is not only about market expansion beyond the US or European borders – it also ties into a discussion on philanthropy and international development. In development, owning and collecting data can be seen as a crucial resource. The power shifts in development are analysed by Taylor and Broeders (2015) who study the changes taking place in development power dynamics due to datafication. They argue that instead of the state – a traditional collector of statistics – power in development is now shifting to actors who hold the most (big) data. Perhaps unsurprisingly, increasingly often this is large technology corporations. Taylor and Broeders argue that data collection is essentially political, as only a handful of actors have the resources to collect and analyse big data to the extent that for example Facebook can. Finally, they criticise the framing of e.g. poverty, illiteracy or disease as “engineering” or “data” problems, arguing that these grand challenges are also questions of politics and governance (Taylor and Broeders, 2015, p. 234).

Together with new market possibilities in less developed areas, companies like Facebook are also seeing an opportunity for charity-based projects. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming increasingly important for businesses, and Facebook’s connectivity initiatives could indeed be studied through a CSR lens, too. McWilliams, Siegel and Wright (2006) define corporate social responsibility as “situations where the firm goes beyond compliance and engages in actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law” (p. 1). In practice, the Internet.org initiative can be seen as a CSR measure. Interestingly, McWilliams et al. (2006) describe these actions as “appearing to” further some social good – guaranteed outcomes are not necessarily required from CSR, as companies engage in the projects voluntarily.

Along the lines of CSR, Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, introduced the term “creative capitalism” in arguing for market forces that would deliver benefits for both the rich and the poor (Elliott, 2008). This is also where philanthrocapitalism comes in: Thorup (2013) defines it as the idea that “capitalism is or can be charitable in and of itself” (p. 556). Along the words of Bill Gates, he argues that philanthrocapitalism, much

like corporate social responsibility, is a fully integrated “sub-form of a new creative capitalism” (Thorup, 2013, p. 557).

Thorup sees corporate charities not only as efforts for increasing competitiveness, but also as identity-defining actions: the goal for companies is no longer to do good, but to inherently be good. He sees similarities between large corporations and billionaires or ultra-rich celebrities, where being extremely well-off comes with an assumed responsibility to share/redistribute their wealth and use it for common good. Thorup (2013) also talks about the motives behind doing good: “Personal commitment (real or simulated) is the new entry point of the giver just as empowerment is the new supposed exit point of the recipient” (p. 559).

Similarly, Edwards (2009) looks at philanthrocapitalism in the context of international development and offers arguments both for and against the phenomenon. He notes that the core of philanthrocapitalism is its efficiency in comparison to traditional development: by “privileging the market as a superior mechanism for generating [...] change”, results will be better and more sustainable (p. 36). This is a common argument for private actors in development: less bureaucracy allows for faster decisions and action. Like Thorup (2013) puts it: “People in need are just like customers: Identify the need and satisfy it” (p. 564). This in a sense is actually one of the strengths of private money in charity, Edwards (2009) argues.

At the same time, Edwards (2009) makes a compelling point in noting that even though small-scale success stories are well achievable through “creative capitalism”, expanding these successes to the social and political institutions of a given country is more difficult (p. 38). In other words: building a well-functioning state that remains stable in the international system requires much more than providing people with free internet access. Additionally, Bishop and Green (2015) note how philanthrocapitalism often can be criticised as a “product of an unjust economic system, or a public relations attempt to put lipstick on a (capitalist) pig” (p. 541). Although it would be unreasonable to assume that the issues with capitalism could be whitewashed away with charity projects, private money philanthropy can have its advantages as well.

2.3 Technology companies in international development

The possibilities enabled by the internet have not been equally divided between nations. Already in 1999, the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan called for bridging the digital divide. Annan argued that “being cut off from basic telecommunications is a hardship” nearly as acute as lacking food, water or shelter (in Ali, 2011, p. 191) – and this was already the time before smartphones or social media. Twenty years later, the global digital divide is still exemplified in e.g. the fact that less than third of the population in Africa has access to broadband connectivity (World Bank, 2019). For comparison, the number for broadband households in the European Union was over 96 percent in 2018 (European Commission, 2019).

Large technology companies clearly realize this divide. For them, it means that new markets can be more challenging to enter, as internet access, mobile device ownership or for example data pricing can differ greatly from the usual market regions. Like discussed in the sections above, one possible solution to the divide is to ease people’s access through a corporate philanthropy project. With Free Basics, Facebook claims to be doing it for the common good – according to Zuckerberg, internet access belongs to everyone; besides, it should also increase economic growth and lift people out of poverty (MZ 1, 2013).

Facebook is not the only technology corporation engaging in development. Google is another large-scale example of ambitious missions to connect all of the world’s population. With a project called Loon, Google’s parent company Alphabet aims to bring internet to “billions” of people currently lacking it (Loon, 2019). By designing balloons that function as cell towers while flying 20 kilometres above earth, Loon wishes to “extend connectivity to underserved communities around the world” (ibid.). To a large extent, the rhetoric used by Loon is similar to Free Basics.

In a similar vein, Smart, Donner and Graham (2016) study the spatial discourses on connectivity, focusing especially on development and how new technologies are “imagined to alter lived geographies” (p. 1). They note how internet is often dubbed as the “death of distance”, and categorise the studied discourses under three themes: Global Village, Shrinking Distance, and Digital Augmentation (Smart et al., 2016). The first two include views where internet access and connectivity are capable of making distance and

geography almost completely irrelevant: anything and everything seems to be possible for the connected actor. Within the Digital Augmentation category, however, connectivity is seen as only one of the obstacles that need to be tackled in development (ibid.).

Amongst their data, Smart et al. also briefly look at Facebook's Internet.org discourse on connectivity. They note that the initiative puts forward a message of "global knowledge economy" which will eventually grow to help everyone – if we can just connect the whole world. Smart et al. (2016) also note Google's Project Loon and the similar ideas expressed with that project: both Facebook and Google picture connectivity as a (key) enabler. The authors also analyse connectivity start-ups' argumentation, noting a more modest vision for internet access' transformative power. To sum up: giant actors such as Facebook or Google present connectivity as one of the "major challenges of our time", whereas local start-ups and other organizations have a more focused approach – an approach that also believes in the benefits of affordable internet access, without thinking that connectivity will eliminate poverty and eventually save the world.

However, the claims made by Facebook, Google, or other technology giants are not always as simple as they seem. Firstly, the "almighty power" of internet access is a contested concept. Secondly, not all recipients in these project countries are welcoming the solutions with open arms (see e.g. Pahwa, 2015 and Iwuoha, 2016). In their paper, Friederici, Ojanperä and Graham (2017) analyse the discourse on connectivity in connection to development. The authors study a variety of corporations, international organisations and governments to look at how Internet and "connecting the unconnected" are often presented as simple, effective and transformative solutions to development issues. Friederici et al. (2017) find that only three out of twenty analysed documents (by seven African governments and thirteen companies/organisations) cite academic, peer-reviewed studies to support their claims on connectivity's positive economic effects (p. 15). Economic growth and lifting people out of poverty through internet access are surely possible, but often seem to be accepted as evident facts rather than research-based results.

Leaning on these evident facts on internet's benefits, technology companies keep pushing for connectivity solutions. One of these solutions, also used in Free Basics, is zero-rating data. Zero-rating means that an internet service provider (ISP) "applies a price of zero to the data traffic associated with a particular application or class of

applications” (BEREC, n.d.). The Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) notes that the legality of the practice depends on the situation, as net neutrality principles state that all internet traffic should be equal (meaning ISPs are prohibited from blocking, speeding up or slowing down some traffic over others).

With a specific focus on developing countries, Taylor (2016) studies the role of zero-rating plans. She notes that although the debate in India exploded into two opposing sides, several other low- or middle-income countries continue to use zero-rating “without too much fuss” (Taylor, 2016, p. 79). Taylor compares the limited internet access issues to other “leapfrogging visions” commonly seen in development: some argue that instead of having extensive road networks, delivering goods with drones could be a solution. However, in the case of e.g. a medical emergency, the road network is vital for getting to a hospital. Similarly, Taylor (2016) argues that handing people mobile phones and giving them access to selected websites does not solve the bigger, structural problems of connectivity.

One of the problems with the digital divide and internet continues to be language: in 2015, 82 percent of the world’s websites were in only ten languages (Young, 2015). Majority of them are in English, and even when other major languages such as Chinese, Spanish or French are also well represented, it might not be enough. As Taylor (2016) notes: “Wikipedia might be available in 281 languages, but the African continent has at least 2,000” (p. 80). This is not to mention the regional differences in relevant content – finding information about job opportunities, health services or for example local news in one’s native language could be equally important as having free mobile data.

Secondly, Taylor (2016) also argues that zero-rating services may come dangerously close to a type of censorship, noting that those “who really need free internet services are often unable to pay to go beyond them” (p. 80). The pricing of data is perhaps even more pressing than the language issue: in the poorest countries, mobile broadband connection can cost 20 times as much as in the higher income countries.

Despite the possibility for free internet access through zero-rating applications, Facebook’s connectivity initiatives have also been met with opposition. Civil society movements in for example India have expressed concerns over Free Basics being

harmful to net neutrality. Prasad (2018) analyses the success of a grassroots movement, Save the Internet (STI) against Facebook's Free Basics in India. As mentioned, Facebook's attempts to expand the free app into India in 2015 were not welcomed with solely gratitude. Prasad describes how the juxtaposition between STI and the telecom operators enabling Free Basics began in the early stages of the app's launch in India.

Opponents of the app argued for net neutrality, meaning that all websites should be equally and freely available to all users. The Cellular Operators Association of India responded with the argument of wanting to create more inclusive internet access for the country – much along the lines of Facebook's own reasoning, where little internet is always better than no internet (Prasad, 2018). This debate is especially interesting in the Indian context: as noted earlier, the large number of Facebook users are only a minor proportion of India's total population. In this unique setting, it is no wonder that the voices for and against are both active.

To a large extent, Mukerjee's (2016) commentary follows along the lines of Prasad's paper. He begins by defining net neutrality and moves on to analyse Facebook's growth together with the importance of the Indian market. Mukerjee (2016) sums up the concern of the net neutrality activists in regards to Free Basics, when he argues that with the company as a gatekeeper for selecting the accessible sites, "the unknowing poor of the developing countries would [therefore] be led into an Internet which was governed solely by Facebook" (p. 358).

Mukerjee (2016) then describes the intense campaigning from both sides: STI mobilized for one million emails to be sent to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), arguing for the importance of net neutrality. Facebook fought back in various ways: for instance, by letting its Free Basics users to send a one-click, pre-drafted support email to TRAI (Mukerjee, 2016). Other measures included a *Times of India* op-ed by Zuckerberg, roadside billboards as well as full-page advertisements in Indian newspapers – efforts that were estimated to have cost around \$44 million dollars (Smiley, 2016). Jiby Kattakayam, an Indian journalist, calls Facebook's motives into question:

Crores [tens of millions] were spent on newspaper advertisements for Free Basics; a surprising campaign, considering that Free Basics was dressed up as philanthropy. (Kattakayam, 2018)

Indeed, the intensity with which Facebook defended the initiative could trigger cynicism. However, the time and the millions spent on defending Free Basics did not bear fruit for Facebook. After a year of rigorous campaigning by both Facebook and its opponents, in February 2016 TRAI banned Indian service providers from charging “discriminatory tariffs”, and thus ruled against Free Basics (Calamur, 2016). Naturally, this was a major blow for Facebook, and the arguments that were made in defence of Free Basics are analysed later in this thesis.

All in all, the literature discussed in this section provides a strong entry point for this thesis. Although Facebook’s and Zuckerberg’s discourse have been previously studied from different viewpoints, the gap for my study on Free Basics still exists. In general, much of the research is similar in the way it sees technology companies with increasing power and not enough responsibility. However, corporate social responsibility is lifting its head, and Facebook’s Internet.org initiative could well be categorized as CSR. Additionally, some papers have looked at the Free Basics application and the grassroots movements opposing it. Next, the question to be answered is not so much about Facebook’s motives for expanding Free Basics, but more about the reoccurring themes in Zuckerberg’s Free Basics discourse. Analysing these themes will provide us with an understanding of how Zuckerberg himself sees, or wants the world to see, the Internet.org project.

3. Methods

In this chapter, I will present my methodology and explain the process of data collection, together with describing the key features of The Zuckerberg Files database used for this work. This thesis is a qualitative study of Mark Zuckerberg's speech on connectivity in the context of Free Basics, and the method I have chosen to utilize is framing analysis. I believe framing analysis is a suitable method for this study, as I will look at what kinds of meanings Mark Zuckerberg gives to connectivity in his framing of Free Basics. Below I will introduce my data collection process, after which the data analysis will be described in more detail.

3.1 Doing qualitative research: Benefits of framing analysis

The method in this thesis belongs to the family of qualitative research methodology. As Susanna Priest (2010) puts it, qualitative methods are “designed to explore and assess things that cannot easily be summarized numerically” (p. 6). Priest (2010) maintains that as the use of language and symbols is a key characteristic of human social life, many interesting aspects of our societies would go unnoticed if they could only be studied quantitatively. This is also the case in my research: I could, of course, calculate the number of times Mark Zuckerberg mentions connectivity terms, or count how many of his public statements talk about bringing internet to developing countries. While these numbers might be interesting, I believe it is equally important to look at *how* and *why* Zuckerberg discusses connectivity the way he does. For this purpose, framing analysis is the qualitative method employed in this thesis.

Framing analysis is a commonly used method in social sciences, especially in fields such as media, communication or political studies. Originally introduced by Ervin Goffman in 1974, framing analysis is based on fundamentally similar epistemological assumptions as discourse and content analysis. However, framing analysis serves a slightly different purpose (Lindekilde, 2014). Lindekilde (2014) argues that while discourse analysis is useful for analysing concepts, their creation and connections to a society from a wider perspective, framing analysis focuses on how particular actors frame particular issues. This further supports the suitability for this study, as my analysis is focused on a single actor, Mark Zuckerberg.

Additionally, Entman (1993) argues that frames are helpful in analysing how communicated texts exercise power. He states that frames also define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements, and finally, suggest remedies. Entman suggests that all these functions could sometimes be found in a single sentence, even though not all four are not always included. Essentially, he maintains that framing works by highlighting and drawing attention to “particular aspects of the reality described” (Entman, 1993, p. 54).

Frames create certain focal points in our society – they define what is shown or emphasized, and what is left out (Entman, 1993). This method has been traditionally used to study news media, as newspapers’ editorial staff and journalists make daily decisions on what topics – and from what perspective – to write about. Additionally, it can be used to study discourse by powerful individuals. For instance, Kuypers, Cooper and Althouse (2008) use framing analysis to study President Bush’s speech after 9/11 on war on terror, and compare it to the news reporting of that same speech. Sikanku (2013) has used framing analysis to look at President Obama’s African identity construction in his speeches and writings.

It could be argued that framing is a way to exercise power. The question of power is also central in Zuckerberg’s case: as the executive of the world’s largest social media platform, how he sees connectivity and Facebook’s role as a provider of connectivity is meaningful. As Nicholas Proferes explains, public statements by corporate leaders are often strategic, and that “the language used by these influential creators of technology has an impact on how we understand that technology” (in Hoffmann, 2016). In addition, Zuckerberg has met several high-profile political leaders (usually in developing countries) in order to promote connectivity as an essential building block of basic infrastructure – thus, his visions of the internet could affect a country’s digital policymaking (see e.g. Wintour, 2011). Looking at Zuckerberg’s argumentation on connectivity paints a picture of what Facebook, in a way, lobbies for. It is also beneficial in showing Facebook’s commercial interests outside Europe and the US.

For this study, framing analysis will be useful in answering a “how” question, allowing for a dissecting analysis of the different ways Zuckerberg talks about connectivity and the Internet.org project. How does he frame the biggest issues in connectivity, and what kinds of solutions does he offer?

3.2 Data collection

The data for this thesis has been collected from a single source, a database called The Zuckerberg Files.² The database is run by the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, and curated by Michael Zimmer, an American internet and data ethics scholar. This database aims to collect all of Mark Zuckerberg's public statements, posts and videos ever published online into a unified collection. Access to the database is free, but downloading documents requires login details which are usually requested by (and given to) journalists or researchers working on topics related to Facebook or Mark Zuckerberg. I received my logins already in 2016, while working on my bachelor's thesis, which discussed Facebook's increasing global political power.

The administrators of The Zuckerberg Files argue that maintaining this type of collection is important, because

By gaining a better understanding of how Facebook's founder and CEO conceives of his own company's role in the policy and ethical debates surrounding social networking, we will be better suited to critically engage in a dialogue on privacy and Facebook, inform design and policy recommendations, and increase user awareness and literacy. (The Zuckerberg Files, n.d.)

This argument also supports my choice of data: analysing specifically Zuckerberg's discourse on Internet.org can help to understand how Facebook views its role with regard to connectivity infrastructure in developing countries. To the general public, Zuckerberg remains as one of the most, if not the only, well-known face(s) of Facebook, and using his comments as an illustration of Facebook's vision is well justified.

The Zuckerberg Files host a collection of transcripts beginning from 2004. Each year, the number of documents increases, and the database currently includes roughly 950 documents from 2004 to 2019 (the latest document is from June 2019 – there is some delay due to limited resources in the transcribing team). The database is divided into two subcategories: Transcripts and Video. Each category includes several pages of links with document names or headlines, such as “Mark Zuckerberg interview with George

² www.zuckerbergfiles.org

Stephanopoulos about 2020 election”, together with the document date. These links then direct the user to a summary page of the document, which includes the document type, publication date, source, source URL, a brief abstract as well as a recommended citation. The summary page also includes a link to a separate PDF file with the actual transcript.

For this thesis, I have focused on the text transcripts found in the database – no original video or audio has been included in the data collection. The PDF documents were collected manually, by going through the 950 document headlines and selecting 54 most relevant documents for the analysis. The documents’ lengths vary: most are less than a page (Facebook posts), with a few longer texts ranging from six to twenty pages (interviews or Zuckerberg’s blog-style posts). I initially selected documents with simply “Internet.org” or “Free Basics” in the document name.

In the second phase, I also collected documents with headings referring to “connectivity”, and for example certain countries important for Internet.org, such as India or Indonesia. With this logic, a document called “Zuckerberg Q&A with India’s Prime Minister Modi” would be included, whereas “Zuckerberg Q&A with President Obama” would not. Free Basics is currently available in over 60 countries (Solon, 2017), which are primarily located in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Although connectivity could occasionally be mentioned by Zuckerberg with Western leaders, too, I have chosen to leave those documents out. Similarly, documents with headings relating to, for instance, elections, journalism, coding, Facebook’s other apps or Zuckerberg’s family life have been excluded.

Even though the collection has been done manually, and not all 950 documents have been read, I am positive that my collection of documents is a representative sample of Mark Zuckerberg’s public comments on connectivity in the context of Free Basics. As mentioned before, many of the documents in the archive are Zuckerberg’s own Facebook posts, usually less than a page long. This means that much of the document’s content can be easily summarized in the heading.

3.3 Types of data

My data includes 54 documents (approximately 60 pages of text), consisting of transcribed interviews, public talks as well as Zuckerberg’s original Facebook posts. The time span for my data collection is between 2013 and 2018. In the table below, data distribution over the years is shown:

Year	Number of related Facebook posts	Number of other documents
2013	-	2
2014	6	3
2015	21	6
2016	10	1
2017	3	1
2018	-	1
Total	40	14

Table 1: Document distribution between 2013 and 2018.

Internet.org was launched during the summer and autumn of 2013, which makes a logical starting point for data collection. As Table 1 above illustrates, most documents date to either 2015 or 2016. The other end of the span, 2018, comes primarily from the lack of data from 2018 onwards – Internet.org or Free Basics are not mentioned by Zuckerberg anymore. The focus in Zuckerberg’s public statements changed drastically since the Cambridge Analytica scandal unfolded, and his statements from 2018 onwards often discuss topics like elections, democracy, data privacy or for example fake news. It seems as the issue of privacy is simply too urgent for the company’s CEO to be promoting developing world connectivity efforts.

Despite this, Facebook’s connectivity initiatives are still active, and in 2018 the company in fact launched a new website called “Facebook Connectivity”. It seems to be more active than the Internet.org site, or the listed projects Facebook page, which currently include no news or press updates after 2017 (Internet.org by Facebook, 2017).

My data set includes a variety of different documents. Below is a table showing the distribution of different types of documents:

Document type	Number of documents
Facebook post	40
Interview	5
Newspaper op-ed	3
Blog post	1
Speech	4
Video transcript	1
Total	54

Table 2: Number of different document types.

The largest share of my collected data are Zuckerberg’s own Facebook posts (40 texts) with their lengths ranging from as little as three sentences to being almost a page-long. The second most common type of text is interviews: some include question and answer sessions with the event audience or journalists, whereas others are simply between Zuckerberg and the interviewer. The blog post (for lack of a better word) is a ten-page idea paper, titled “Is Connectivity a Human Right?”. It was published by Mark Zuckerberg on his profile as a separate PDF file in 2013, and it actually serves as the starting point for the whole Internet.org initiative.

In addition, my data set includes four speeches given by Zuckerberg: one in New Delhi, India, where Facebook held an Internet.org summit in 2014, only a year after the project was launched. The three other speeches are Zuckerberg’s keynotes from Facebook’s F8 developer conferences, where the company introduces its next products to a wide audience of developers and the press.

Lastly, the newspaper opinion pieces are an interesting addition to the data set. The two first ones, published in 2014 (in *Wall Street Journal*) and in 2015 (in *New York Times*) promote the Internet.org initiative and the importance of connectivity in general. The last one, from late 2015 (in *Times of India*) takes an assertive approach to the critique Free Basics faced in the Indian context. The video transcript from 2015 belongs to the same

category of Zuckerberg defending the initiative against criticism. All in all, the data proved to be highly interesting, filled with a variety of different statements on connectivity issues by Zuckerberg.

3.4 Data analysis and ethical considerations

Like stated in the earlier sections, my data will be analysed with the help of a framing analysis. The aim of this thesis is to point out what frames characterise Mark Zuckerberg's vision on connectivity in connection to Free Basics. In this study, I aim to recognise and categorize the most commonly used frames in Zuckerberg's speech. These are exemplified with the help of illustrative quotes. The first step in my analysis is to thoroughly read through all the 54 texts several times. Secondly, I will collect relevant quotes: I am equally interested in the arguments and stories that are repeated throughout the data, as well as unique statements that are only mentioned once. Thirdly, I will focus on the most predominant themes in Zuckerberg's speech: these themes will then be categorised into frames and supported with relevant quotes.

In analysing this material, I have mainly focused on the body of the text, as most headings in The Zuckerberg Files database are given to the texts by the research team and not by Zuckerberg himself. Additionally, I have decided to exclude photos or videos in my study, as collecting, storing and analysing them would have required somewhat more effort. I believe my chosen data set is a suitably sized collection for the purposes of this thesis – even if analysing, for instance, the videos of Free Basics users on Internet.org's YouTube page would be a highly interesting topic for another paper.

The reliability of this study is based on many factors: the data collection, ethics and privacy questions. Much of the discussion on social media and data collection ethics is based on the user: collecting data from various individual users presents questions on anonymity and informed consent. As this study focuses solely on Mark Zuckerberg and his posts, the challenges mentioned above are not relevant: it is fair to assume that Zuckerberg's posts are meant to reach worldwide audiences in the first place.

I believe using The Zuckerberg Files as my database adds to the credibility of the data collection, as it provides an organized and academically curated set of documents. By manually searching for Zuckerberg's posts and other texts I might have missed some

important information or struggled to find relevant data. By going through all 950 document names in the database, I can trust that the material I have collected should include almost all public statements made by Zuckerberg regarding this topic.

All in all, in order to ensure the credibility of this research, I have tried to make the data collection and analysis processes as transparent and systematic as possible: describing the data collection process in great detail and including plenty of excerpts from the studied material help to lay the basis for my analysis and conclusions.

4. Connecting the unconnected: Framing Free Basics

In this section, I will present the results of my study. As presented in the earlier sections, my research question was the following:

RQ: How does Mark Zuckerberg frame Free Basics?

After thoroughly analysing the 54 documents in my data set, I have categorized Mark Zuckerberg's remarks under three frames. The frames are as follows:

1. Free Basics as altruistic philanthropy
2. Free Basics for universal benefits
3. Free Basics accelerating development

The first frame, altruistic philanthropy, shows how Zuckerberg focuses on downplaying any possible business benefits that Facebook might have from Free Basics. He stresses the charitable nature of the connectivity initiative and claims that Facebook simply acts on the deep belief for their mission: connecting everyone in the world. The only possible economic profit, according to Zuckerberg, could be for the partnering telecommunications companies. These companies provide their customers with free internet access through Free Basics and are expected to gain new paying customers after the application makes them realize the internet's benefits.

The second frame, called universal benefits, displays Facebook's global outlook on the connectivity issue. In this discourse, Zuckerberg imagines Free Basics as an all-encompassing solution for the five billion people who are currently unconnected. He also argues for universal benefits from increased connectivity by referring to the "global knowledge economy", where even the already connected people can gain from the new ideas that can now be shared through the internet.

The third and last frame, accelerating development, looks at Zuckerberg's statements on how Free Basics can help people in developing countries improve their lives. In comparison to the second frame, here Zuckerberg uses individual people's stories to give examples on all the areas Free Basics can be helpful in. These stories tie into themes of development, such as health and education, and it is interesting to see how Zuckerberg frames Free Basics and connectivity as simple, first-step fixes to a variety of issues. The

following chapters will proceed with analysing, interpreting and illustrating the frames listed above.

Lastly, I will shortly review the descriptions for the different terms used in the analysis. These two terms may be used interchangeably at times, as they both stem from a similar ideology of Facebook wanting to connect people. Here are the differences between Internet.org and Free Basics:

Internet.org: An umbrella term for all of Facebook’s connectivity projects between 2013 and 2017. Internet.org included a variety of other measures, such as setting up Wi-Fi hotspots or building satellite and drone technology for internet access. As discussed above, the initiative under the Internet.org name does not seem to be active anymore, and was replaced with a website called Facebook Connectivity in 2018.

Free Basics: One subcategory of the Internet.org initiative. Free Basics is a smartphone application by Facebook and a number of local partners, which offers its users a selection of websites to be used without paying for data. It includes sites like Facebook together with job, health or weather-related content. As of 2020, Free Basics is still active.

4.1 Free Basics as altruistic philanthropy

Perhaps the biggest critique directed at Facebook’s connectivity initiative is the doubt over its charitable dimension (Solon, 2017). Facebook is, above all else, a corporation that is supposed to make profit – it is thus sensible for people to assume that Free Basics is another strategic business move. Much like any other diplomatic CEO out there, Zuckerberg does not admit to money or profit being the reason Facebook started the initiative. He keeps referring to his company’s mission, “connecting the world”, and repeatedly puts any profit-making suggestions aside. One of his main arguments in arguing against these critics is the geographical division of people’s disposable income:

If we just focused on making money, the first billion people that we’ve connected have way more money than the rest of the next six billion combined. It’s not fair, but it’s the way it is. (MZ 2, 2013)

Using the vast global economic inequalities as his reasoning, Zuckerberg moves Facebook away from any money-related motives. With this logic however, his argument

seems somehow flawed: Facebook users (rich or poor) do not pay for the service. Like stated in the literature discussed earlier, Facebook makes profit from collecting data and selling it to advertisers. From the advertisers' perspective, the bigger the audience, the better. From Facebook's perspective, the more data they have, the better (Srnicek, 2017, p. 56). Even if also the advertisers in the first billion people may be wealthier, and thus bring Facebook more profit, it would be bizarre to assume no advertiser would be interested in the potential emerging markets Free Basics is trying to reach.

Moreover, Zuckerberg also seems to be acting out of good ethics:

... most folks who are pushing for net neutrality have access to the internet already. [...] I mean, we need to mobilize on the internet to push for this stuff, but the people who are not yet on the internet can't sign an online petition pushing for increased access to the internet. (MZ 9, 2015)

I think we all have a moral responsibility to look out for people who do not have the internet. (MZ 9, 2015)

In the first quote, Zuckerberg acknowledges the importance of internet civil society movements (such as net neutrality activism), but almost immediately after notes that the "unconnected" cannot mobilise and support causes online. Even though philanthropy is often expected from billionaires and increasingly from large corporations, (Bishop and Green, 2015), by saying "we all", Zuckerberg could also refer to the people in developed countries who are already connected and able to work towards this cause. Quite simply, Zuckerberg's motives seem to come down to what he thinks "is right":

Giving 4 billion people some free internet access is the right thing to do. Helping people find jobs and lifting them out of poverty is the right thing to do. (MZ 7, 2015)

It almost sounds like a form of the white man's burden, where Zuckerberg as the Facebook CEO (and consequently, a billionaire) feels an obligation towards helping the unprivileged parts of the world. Bishop and Green (2015) suggest that some people are never satisfied with billionaire philanthropy, as the entire creation of such wealthy people through capitalism is greatly problematic in the first place. The critique directed towards Facebook's initiatives will be discussed later within this section.

The only mention of Zuckerberg admitting the possibility of Facebook gaining something from its initiative is in an interview with Bloomberg:

Now over the long term I do think that it could be good for our company as well if you look at it in a 10, 20, 30 year time horizon because a lot of these countries and economies will develop and over time they will be important. But most people who are running businesses don't make investments for 30 years down the line in terms of products they are going to be building. (MZ 8, 2015)

This quote is the one and only time in this data set Zuckerberg vocalises the possible long-term benefit for Facebook: not very directly, though, as he is still using the word “could”, as a conditional form of something that might (or might not) happen later in the future. Moreover, Zuckerberg's next sentence immediately downplays the importance of these possible new markets by implying that from a business perspective, looking thirty years ahead is usually not of interest for many companies. What is also noteworthy is that this sentence came up in an interview situation, where Zuckerberg was repeatedly questioned about his company's motives for launching Internet.org – his written texts or speeches never include a mention of Facebook's commercial interests.

On the whole, there are two sides to Zuckerberg's economic framing of Free Basics: one is the philanthropic nature of Facebook's actions together with denying any self-interested business. The other side, interestingly enough, allows the word “profitable” in its dictionary. Zuckerberg admits that the telecommunications companies Facebook partners with to deliver Free Basics are the ones pursuing at least *some* profit from the service:

What we're trying to do is build success cases [...] for not only getting more people on the Internet, but also profitable for the operators. (MZ 5, 2014)

They [Free Basics users] get on the internet. And then within about a month, about half of the people who have tried our Free Basics, now realise why the internet is so great and why they want to use it, and then they become full paying customers of the full internet. (MZ 9, 2015)

The logic behind Free Basics is to offer a limited collection of websites for free – accessing further, outside-the-app content will open a pop-up window on the user's

screen, stating that they are leaving the Free Basics app and that standard data charges apply. According to Zuckerberg, giving people limited internet access helps them realize the benefits of (complete) internet, which again makes them willing to pay for regular data. More paying customers for the telecommunication companies help “fund the development of the internet”, at least in Zuckerberg’s mind (MZ 5, 2014).

This approach is somewhat problematic in terms of the bigger picture. Like listed in the introduction of this thesis, Zuckerberg divides the issues in connectivity into three categories: availability, affordability and awareness. Free Basics seems to completely disregard the affordability aspect of the discussion, as it counts on people becoming paying customers once they realise what the internet can offer them. Taylor’s (2016) study on zero-rating data lists some of the most expensive countries for data, and notes that mobile broadband can cost “20 times as much in the world’s poorest countries as it does in higher income ones” (p. 81).

Similarly, Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) also presents compelling statistics showcasing mobile prepaid data prices from 2017: in many African countries, the price of purchasing a mobile data plan (1GB per month) can be between 5 to 15 percent of the average monthly income.³ According to A4AI, the affordable target is “1 for 2”, meaning that 1 gigabyte of data is available for less than two percent of the gross national income (A4AI, 2018). In light of these numbers, it becomes even more difficult to imagine Free Basics opening up a future of possibilities to its users. If people are expected to spend as much as 150 dollars of their 1,000-dollar income on accessing content beyond the application, perhaps it is not the most sustainable option for closing the digital divide.

Facebook has indeed faced criticism on its Free Basics logic, and this critique motivated Zuckerberg to defend the initiative even more passionately. A clear turning point in Zuckerberg’s argumentation for the goodwill of Facebook’s actions took place in 2015 in the context of India. As discussed by Prasad (2018) and Mukerjee (2016), Free Basics was being opposed by a growing number of net neutrality activists, many of whom worked as developers, coders, or journalists focusing on technology policy. They

³ Including countries where Free Basics has been launched, such as Cote d’Ivoire, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania.
(<https://info.internet.org/en/story/where-weve-launched/>, not dated)

claimed that the application creates a “walled garden” of only Facebook-approved websites and by doing so, violates the principles of net neutrality (Prasad, 2018, p. 420).

These accusations lead to Zuckerberg having to use his leverage to defend the initiative. As a part of Facebook’s counteraction, Zuckerberg wrote an opinion piece published in one of the largest newspapers in the country, *Times of India*. For instance, he pointed out the lack of advertising in the application:

Critics of free basic internet services should remember that everything we’re doing is about serving people like Ganesh [a farmer using the application]. This isn’t about Facebook’s commercial interests – there aren’t even any ads in the version of Facebook in Free Basics. If people lose access to free basic services they will simply lose access to the opportunities offered by the internet today. (MZ 11, 2015)

In the quote above, Zuckerberg continues insisting that the initiative is not about “Facebook’s commercial interests”: a common argument found throughout the data set. He positions Facebook as an actor who simply cares about the Indian people – people like Ganesh, the farmer who improved his life by using Free Basics (see page 37 for more detailed analysis). By referring to “free basic services” twice instead of Free Basics, Zuckerberg seems to unselfishly argue in defence of all zero-rating services that help people connect – not just the one by Facebook.

In general, the tone of the quotes from this opinion piece differ quite notably from the rest of the data set. At times Zuckerberg seems somewhat more defensive or even annoyed at the critique directed towards the Free Basics application:

Instead of wanting to give people access to some basic internet services for free, critics of the program continue to spread false claims – even if that means leaving behind a billion people. (MZ 11, 2015)

If we accept that everyone deserves access to the internet, then we must surely support free basic internet services. That’s why more than 30 countries have recognized Free Basics as a program consistent with net neutrality and good for consumers. Who could possibly be against this? (MZ 11, 2015)

By simplifying the workings of the app, Zuckerberg disregards his opponents' comments regarding net neutrality as misleading and draws a connection between the critique and "leaving behind a billion people". He goes as far as publicly wondering, "who could possibly be against this?", making it sound like supporting the initiative is the only sensible thing to do. By mentioning how over thirty countries have accepted the application as a positive project, Zuckerberg juxtapositions them against "rebellious" India.

Interestingly, Zuckerberg also makes a minor concession in his opinion piece in mentioning that the initiative's developers have indeed listened to, and acted on the feedback they have received:

We've heard legitimate concerns in the past, and we've quickly addressed those.
(MZ 11, 2015)

By using the word "legitimate" he implies that the company is surely ready to listen to improvement suggestions: as long as they are sensible and in line with Facebook's original vision of Free Basics. This could imply that to Zuckerberg, the concerns of the net neutrality activists are somehow unreasonable. Furthermore, "quickly" addressing the legitimate feedback further reinforces Facebook's willingness to engage in dialogue with its users, but only if the users do not get overtly critical.

In sum, the first frame deals with the issue of Facebook's motives for Internet.org. Zuckerberg's argumentation is framed around Facebook's "neutral" position in-between the Free Basics users and the partnering telecommunication companies. In this symbiosis, the users receive free internet access and learn first-hand about the advantages of connectivity, whereas the telecommunication partners gain new paying customers who can eventually "help fund the internet". Facebook remains in the position of an "altruistic" facilitator, and much like van Dijck et al. (2018) argue, Facebook emphasizes the *public* value over the *economic* value of its actions (p. 23). When the altruistic nature of the initiative is questioned, Zuckerberg responds to his critics by acting as a "spokesperson" for the unconnected, concerned for their well-being.

4.2 Free Basics for universal benefits

While the first frame looked at Facebook's seemingly charitable foundations for starting the Internet.org initiative, the second frame then focuses on its benefits from a universal viewpoint. Here Zuckerberg argues that connecting people will benefit, essentially, all humanity. The ideas presented by him are often twofold: first, the unconnected will have a chance to learn and better participate in the society. Second, the rest of the world will also gain from having new input in what Zuckerberg calls "the global knowledge economy" (MZ 1, 2013).

Smart et al. (2016) have studied the discourses in different connectivity initiatives. They found that the internet is often imagined as a global community, a dualistic space where people are "exclusively in or out" (p. 4). Facebook indeed approaches the issue of connectivity from a global perspective. The arguments put forth are beginning to sound increasingly geopolitical, as Zuckerberg wishes to spread the word on connectivity around the world. It is by now clear that the Facebook CEO prioritizes internet access very highly:

Connecting everyone is one of the fundamental challenges of our generation. (MZ 3, 2014)

For almost ten years, Facebook has been on a mission to make the world more open and connected. For us, that means the entire world – not just the richest, most developed countries. [...] As we started thinking about connecting the next 5 billion people, we realized something important: the vast majority of people in the world don't have any access to the internet. (MZ 1, 2013)

The dualistic space suggested by Smart et al. (2016) can be seen here: according to Facebook, five billion people are "out" of that online space. The global outlook on five billion people also ties into Facebook increasingly referring to itself as a social infrastructure instead of a platform. While it may seem like "infrastructure" is a superior term to "platform", this does not necessarily mean that Facebook is assuming greater responsibility for its role in society. For instance, Rider and Murakami Wood (2019) argue that the term "social infrastructure" works much like the term "platform", highlighting neutrality and public service-like benefits: Facebook can be seen as a "public good" (p. 644). Facebook has extensively spread throughout the world as the

largest social media platform, and self-identifying as social infrastructure is a deliberate shift away from a public corporate identity.

This infrastructural approach is also present in the way Zuckerberg addresses universal internet access. By talking about the whole world's unconnected measured in billions, Zuckerberg positions himself globally, almost as a world leader hoping to fix this issue for the entire planet. Without using the term digital divide, Zuckerberg implies that Facebook wishes to push for global equality when it comes to internet access:

There is just this deep belief here at Facebook that technology needs to serve everyone. Connectivity can't just be a privilege for people in the richest countries. (MZ 8, 2015)

At this stage, he takes no specific position in the geography of the unconnected – his perspective on the issue is truly all-inclusive. He is letting us know that he is aware of, and hoping to change, the global inequalities existing at the moment. Even if connectivity currently is a privilege for the rich, Facebook is here to change that. One question rising from this viewpoint is whether Zuckerberg is offering global solutions to local problems. His discourse rarely accounts for country-specific challenges in connectivity. Taylor (2016) makes a strong point in arguing that the infrastructural issues in developing countries will not disappear with zero-rating data. She notes that “by arguing for a universal right to the Internet, we turn the Internet into something universal, decontextualized, and apolitical, whereas in fact it's precisely the opposite” (p. 82).

Similarly, the issues resulting from lack of context are also discussed by Smart et al. (2016) when they note that contextual discussion often “reveals a messier, more complex picture of social change; where extending connectivity infrastructure alone is rarely enough to fundamentally change social and economic disadvantage of the poorest populations” (p. 8). The authors seem to sum up the potential complications of Free Basics. In Zuckerberg's promotion of the initiative, connectivity is *the* silver bullet needed by the world's five billion unconnected people. Throughout the data set, very little attention is directed to the fundamental challenges with other development issues.

Zuckerberg has also had to respond to questions on development priorities. In this particular quote, he was asked about whether in parts of India nutritious food or sanitation might be needed more than the internet:

I'm never going to say that Internet is more important than food or clean water. I really think people need both to be in a modern society, but I, I really think that we're much better suited to help out in providing the Internet to people than clean water. That's just not the company that we are. (MZ 5, 2014)

Interestingly, instead of prioritizing food or water infrastructures, Zuckerberg equates these two: *both* clean water and internet are needed in a modern society, as if both of them are the ultimate necessities for a good life. Here Zuckerberg acknowledges that internet is indeed not the only focus in development. However, he rarely addresses critics who point out that perhaps internet should not be the key priority in lifting people out of poverty: he has chosen his gospel and continues to passionately promote connectivity and the Internet.org initiative. In a similar statement, Zuckerberg brings up the global economy:

I mean people need to be healthy and to have internet as a back bone to connect them to the whole global economy. The internet creates jobs. It actually is one of the things that facilitates health. (MZ 8, 2015)

Once again, Zuckerberg equates health and internet. Here it remains unclear whether it is the internet or jobs that facilitate health, but Zuckerberg's mention of the economy is an important one. This is one of the several examples of Facebook's belief of connectivity reducing poverty. The formula seems rather simple: by having better internet access, people are also able to have "better access" to the global economy. By being more integrated in the global economy, poverty will decrease. This approach is similar to the one analyzed below with the third and final frame.

The examples above are not the only instances of the internet being connected to well-being. Talking about life's vital necessities, here Zuckerberg compares Free Basics to an emergency number:

Anyone can call 911 to get medical attention or report a crime even if you haven't paid for a phone plan. In the future, everyone should have access to basic internet services as well, even if they haven't paid for a data plan. (MZ 3, 2014)

He uses the 911 reference several times in the data, framing connectivity as a lifeline. This comparison creates a sense of urgency when it comes to internet access. In

Zuckerberg's argumentation, reading the news or logging into Facebook should be equally important and accessible as calling for help in a medical emergency. The infrastructural approach is also present in the 911 metaphor: Facebook likens itself to a public service. States are responsible for providing emergency services; with Free Basics, Facebook aspires to be responsible for essential connectivity services.

Another interesting aspect in Zuckerberg's grand visions is that they sometimes extend beyond the planet. This quote shows him talking about satellite technology for bringing internet to remote areas:

As a part of our Internet.org efforts to connect the world, we're partnering with Eutelsat to launch a satellite into orbit that will connect millions of people. [...] Connectivity changes lives and communities. We're going to keep working to connect the entire world – even if that means looking beyond our planet.” (MZ 12, 2015)

Here, not even the sky is the limit for Facebook's dedication to connect the world. Launching satellites is yet another way for “changing lives and communities”. This quote once again shows the scope of the project's imagination, displaying the ever-growing aspirations of Facebook. Rather than focusing on the variety of issues that come with current connectivity infrastructure, Facebook instead chooses to “dream big”, much like many other technology companies with the ultimate Silicon Valley mindset. When hoping to overcome possible hinderances for internet access, it almost seems more natural for a technology company to look to space rather than, say, internet policy for a fix.

In a curious contrast to his space discourse, Zuckerberg also masters the art of downplaying Facebook's power when needed. As discussed earlier, Facebook is often rather reluctant to acknowledge the influence and responsibility they have in today's world. In contrast to Zuckerberg visioning internet access for billions, he also occasionally gives little weight to Facebook's capabilities in making progress:

So connecting the world is not something that any one company can do by itself. We have to work together with developers and entrepreneurs and businesses, and leaders and governments to deliver all these services ... (MZ 4, 2014)

I mean, we're just this one company, right, so we can't create connectivity around the world by ourselves ... (MZ 5, 2014)

In these quotes, Zuckerberg acknowledges the fact that no matter how extensive Internet.org's success would be, it would still not be enough to connect the entire world. He uses this rhetoric especially when discussing his meetings with high-profile politicians. In the latter quote, Zuckerberg explains his motives behind meeting India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and positions Facebook as any other company, wishing to *help* governments and countries to connect. He states that his goals for meeting with Modi are simply about "learning and hearing what we can do to help" (MZ 5, 2014). It is as if Zuckerberg downplays Facebook's power in some political contexts, while assuming a global leadership position in others.

Finally, in order to sell his ideas in the developed world, Zuckerberg is able to argue how the (already) connected are also deprived of knowledge when everyone is not online:

We are all being robbed of the creativity and potential of the two-thirds of the world not yet online. Tomorrow, if we succeed, the Internet will truly represent everyone. (MZ 3, 2014)

A popular Tumblr quote going around the internet wonders "what if the cure to cancer was trapped inside the mind of someone who can't afford an education", and it seems like Zuckerberg's quote here stems from a similar mindset. Being robbed of the "creativity and potential" of most of the world's population is a convincing image, making its reader wonder about everything they might be missing out on. It is a part of Zuckerberg's more eloquent arguments for increased connectivity, often referred to as "global knowledge economy". He compares the situation to a traditionally zero-sum resource economy, explaining that two people cannot both own the same piece of field or forest. With knowledge, however, there are no such limitations: if one person knows something, it does not stop someone else from knowing it, too. In Zuckerberg's visions, increased knowledge leads to "better ideas, products and services", and these will then simply lead to people living better lives (MZ 1, 2013).

The issue with the Free Basics application is that apart from Facebook posts, it hardly allows its users to generate internet content – not to mention allowing its users to e.g. learn how to code. Taylor (2016) distinguishes between generative and non-generative

uses of the internet, noting that the non-generative use leads to passive consumption of content while being surveilled by the platform (p. 80). The Free Basics functions often promoted by Zuckerberg such as news, weather, job or health information are not necessarily the best path to innovation. In general, it seems as Zuckerberg's speeches promote the endless benefits of the complete internet, although in reality, the services offered through Facebook's initiatives are nothing but baby steps in the complete internet's direction.

4.3 Free Basics accelerating development

In the last frame, Zuckerberg sees internet access as an almighty power, capable of improving people's lives in various areas such as employment, health and education. This is common for technology leaders, argue Taylor and Broeders (2015): they tend to look at the world through their engineering lenses, framing various issues as "technological" or "data" problems. This could, however, lead to ignorance on historical or political perspectives, Taylor and Broeders claim (p. 234).

With Free Basics accelerating development, Zuckerberg argues for the initiative's advantages largely from a development viewpoint, and shares persuasive stories of individual users benefiting from using the app. One example is Aasif the soybean farmer:

This is Aasif Mujawar, a soybean farmer from rural Maharashtra, India. He has two daughters, and says he makes better parenting decisions by accessing expert advice through the BabyCenter app for free through Internet.org. (MZ 13, 2015)

Aasif and I talked about what the internet means to him and how it helps solve the greatest challenges he has faced as a father. I'm about to be a father soon myself, so I appreciate how he just wants to provide the best education and health for his daughters. (MZ 13, 2015)

Using personal stories and people's names Zuckerberg moves away from the bigger picture of "connectivity helps people find jobs", and instead zooms in to a level that makes it easier for people to relate to these experiences of internet being beneficial. In the second quote, Zuckerberg again connects a "great challenge" and the internet being a solution to that. Aasif's story is also exceptional in the sense that Zuckerberg associates

himself to this Indian farmer, as if they are both just fathers in a similar situation, trying to figure out how to be a good father. It seems as if both Aasif and Mark can find advantages from using the internet – it is universally beneficial for people around the world.

In the quote below, Zuckerberg tells yet another story of a farmer improving his life with Free Basics:

Ganesh struggled with traditional farming methods in a region plagued by droughts, but last year he started using Free Basics – accessing services like AccuWeather, which helped him work better through the monsoon season [...] By using Free Basics, Ganesh has doubled his crop yield, eradicated insect infestations and even invested in new crops and livestock. (MZ 14, 2015)

Here, the problem of droughts and monsoons is tackled with the help of a weather forecast: it is almost like natural phenomena, amongst so many other things, can be fought with internet access. The success brought to Ganesh by the application seems abundant; words like “doubled”, “eradicated” and finally, “invested” are all rather powerful measures of improvement. Even though farming is a commonly used example in Zuckerberg’s speech, he also shares stories of different kind of successes:

An expectant mother using the internet to learn about information about her pregnancy and how to care for her child. An elderly man who used to have to walk a far distance to go to a local library, now could find and download the books that he wanted to read online. A student who is studying for exams could use Wikipedia to save time and money, getting the information that she needed to study. (MZ 4, 2014)

In this quote, the internet is good for everything. From replacing libraries and study materials to teaching mothers how to raise their children, there is simply no area of life where the internet could not be helpful. Also, not having to walk to a faraway library is a prime example of the shrinking distance internet is often seen to bring. Whilst it would be naïve to claim that internet has not been a fundamentally transformative power of the 21st century, the same transformative power of Free Basics can be disputed. It is important to keep in mind the extent of the application: it is, in no way, the complete,

open and endless internet. It thus seems exaggerated to claim profound advances only within this one application.

Additionally, Zuckerberg often portrays the Free Basics users living a simple life, with examples relating to very basic elements of human wellbeing, such as farming, health or education. This also helps Zuckerberg to argue for the application's harmlessness against its doubtful critics:

You know, if you have a student who is getting free access to the internet to be able to do her homework and she wouldn't have access otherwise, who's going to hurt there? [...] If there's a fisherman in a village, who now has some free access to the internet to help sell some of his fish and provide for his family, no one gets hurt by that. Right? (MZ 9, 2015)

In Zuckerberg's discourse, these imagined user groups are often not building websites or innovating scientific breakthroughs: instead, they are farming soybeans or selling fish. Offering them "some free internet access" is portrayed as a move of innocent goodwill – not as a potential profit move by a giant corporation. In this persuasive statement, Zuckerberg condenses the functions of Free Basics to helping Ganesh "better tend his crops", wondering how Ganesh's farming could, in any way, be bad for the internet (or net neutrality):

What reason is there for denying people free access to vital services for communication, education, healthcare, employment, farming and women's rights? How does Ganesh being able to better tend his crops hurt the internet? (MZ 11, 2015)

Here Zuckerberg sounds almost sentimental: *everything* the application is, it is *for the people*. Contrary to his (few) other statements, where profits for telecom companies or Facebook are also briefly mentioned, this text highlights the importance of the app to only Ganesh and a billion other Indians. It is persuasive in its argumentation: by talking about vital services, Zuckerberg once again frames connectivity as a lifeline. Smart et al. (2016) are able to point to the problem in Zuckerberg's argumentation: "the notion that providing connectivity can deliver instant gains makes the idea difficult to challenge; if connectivity is universally beneficial then who could argue with attempts to extend it?" (p. 9).

Zuckerberg's response to the concerns over net neutrality and people's equal access to the full-extent internet seem almost naïve: he does not show serious concern for this issue, but rather, brushes it off with the simple idea of no one being harmed. Instead of admitting that Free Basics does not give access to the full internet, Zuckerberg seems to fall back on the idea of it being "good enough" – in his mind, some is always better than none. Here we see the said approach again:

We have collections of free basic books. They're called libraries. They don't contain every book, but they still provide a world of good. We have free basic healthcare. Public hospitals don't offer every treatment, but they still save lives. (MZ 11, 2015)

Zuckerberg equates the limited website collection of Free Basics to a library – in his mind, both are equally valuable, even if they are not perfect. He puts aside the fact that with regular internet, it is indeed more possible for a person to access (almost) every single website in existence. Hosting *all* physical books in a single library is a somewhat strange point for comparison. One could also imagine a library with 3,000 books next to a library with 50 books – would the latter still "provide a world of good"?

Taylor (2016) talks about the "good enough" approach in her article and notes that a similar mentality exists also elsewhere in development: instead of doctors and hospitals, poor regions are presumed to settle for nurses and basic health clinics. "Good enough" means not striving for "the best", and it also applies to the entertainment aspect of internet. Zuckerberg has been quoted saying that offering data-demanding services like video streaming or even displaying photographs would not be cost-effective. He argues for the high cost of operating internet infrastructures:

I mean, the operators collectively spend billions, hundreds of billions of dollars on this infrastructure and you can't just provide the whole internet for free. (MZ 9, 2015)

This ends up making the services on Free Basics indeed very basic, with its content being mainly text-based. This is another strong argument from the opposing side: people using the application cannot access the full internet with, say, Netflix, YouTube and funny animal pictures. Instead, they have a simplified text version of Facebook, a weather forecast and access to HIV information. This of course raises additional questions of the

quality of this philanthropic internet service – how great is internet with no photos or videos, actually?

The selection of websites available in Free Basics has indeed been questioned (Solon, 2017). Some critics argue that including a simple version of Facebook is the primary goal of the application, and that Facebook views access to sites about jobs, health and weather as something secondary. Framing communication as a “core” interest for the people in developing countries, Zuckerberg justifies the inclusion of Facebook in Free Basics:

Besides communicating through phone calls and text messages, which you can already do with any phone, connecting with the people around you through a social network is a basic human behaviour. It’s not a surprise that people intuitively want this even if they don’t understand what data is. (MZ 1, 2013)

If you go to a lot of developing countries and you ask people what data service they want to use the most [besides phone and SMS], the first thing that a lot of people want is Facebook, right, because communication is so core, right? (MZ 5, 2014)

Here he presents Facebook as a synonym for communication, as if no other platforms or applications would give people the same opportunity to connect. Zuckerberg sees social network use as “basic human behaviour” and claims that people naturally want to join one, even when basic elements of the internet (such as data) are not clear to them. Rider and Murakami Wood refer to Couldry (2015) who discusses the social media myth, one that guides us into thinking that “our gatherings on social media platforms are a natural form of expressive collectivity” (in Rider and Murakami Wood, 2019, p. 647). The authors argue that this myth is by large part created by the online platform providers.

Zuckerberg, too, participates in this discourse, and regularly frames communication – or being connected – as the “ultimate manifestation of human agency” (Rider and Murakami Wood, 2019, p. 647). Including Facebook in Free Basics is simply a question of supply and demand: it is about treating the users as customers and giving them what they “intuitively” want. All in all, within the last frame of Free Basics accelerating development, Zuckerberg visions Free Basics as a simple solution for connecting the unconnected, and sees possibilities for improving lives in areas such as education, working or health.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This thesis has studied Mark Zuckerberg's discourse on connectivity in developing countries in the context of Free Basics. Free Basics is a part of the Internet.org connectivity initiative started by Facebook, and its main purpose is to give internet access to as many people as possible. The smartphone application studied in this paper allows its users to access a variety of websites without paying for data, which can be extremely costly in less developed or remote areas. The application's freely accessible sites often include things like news, weather, health information, job announcements – and of course, Facebook.

In the sections above, I have studied how Zuckerberg talks about connectivity and how he frames Free Basics – and with it, the problems and solutions connected to having internet access. My research question was “How does Mark Zuckerberg frame Free Basics?”, and my analysis was based on a set of 54 documents dated between 2013 and 2018, all collected from an US university-run database called The Zuckerberg Files. With the help of framing analysis, I studied the data set thoroughly and developed three key frames that can be used to categorize and better understand Zuckerberg's arguments.

The first frame, called “Free Basics as altruistic philanthropy” shows Zuckerberg repeatedly claiming that Facebook has not launched Internet.org for economic gain. He stresses the fact that from a business perspective, Facebook would be better off with focusing on the rich, developed countries where the company already exists. In general, Facebook's stated mission is to “give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together” (Facebook Investor Relations, 2019). Naturally, it is difficult to imagine any company's mission statement saying their sole purpose is to maximise profit, but in Facebook's case the creation of public, not economic, value is emphasized.

In connection to philanthrocapitalism, Edwards (2009) notes how private money can be preferred over traditional state or NGO-funded measures for its efficiency. It seems that this is the mentality behind Facebook's initiative as well. Giving out complete internet for free is not seen as affordable, sensible or sustainable. Instead, handing out free samples of the full product is Facebook's preferred method of luring in new customers – for both their platform as well as the telecommunication companies.

Within the “altruistic philanthropy” frame, Zuckerberg repeatedly imagines the increased number of customers for the local service providers as “funders for developing the internet” (MZ 1, 2013). Zuckerberg’s visions of Free Basics users becoming full-paying customers of the internet are not strongly supported with research. For instance, Taylor (2016) has argued that zero-rating data is often used by people who truly cannot otherwise afford to pay for it. She also suggests that zero-rating is not simply about making internet access affordable: “Zero-rating is more than free data: it’s a way to build long-term knowledge of markets, and to capture them as they mature” (Taylor, 2016, p. 83). In essence, this frame has indicated that Free Basics is another application with which Facebook positions itself as a “neutral” facilitator, much like for example Gillespie (2010) and van Dijck et al. (2018) have previously in other contexts argued.

The second frame is called “Free Basics for universal benefits”. In these quotes, Zuckerberg frames connectivity as the greatest challenge of our generation, all from a very global perspective. He rarely focuses on country-specific challenges, but rather accepts internet access and its benefits as universally good and needed. Both Smart et al. (2016) and Taylor (2016) have noted that the lack of contextual discussion turns the internet into something apolitical: large-scale social change does not stem from increased connectivity alone.

In this frame, Zuckerberg also argues for Free Basics through a 911 emergency number metaphor. He suggests that much like a free call to an emergency number, some basic internet services should be available without a charge. Facebook has been describing itself as a “social infrastructure”, and like Rider and Murakami Wood (2019) argue, this is done in an attempt to appear neutral and public service-like. The comparison of Free Basics and 911 is a prime example of this: much like a public actor, Facebook wants to ensure basic services to everyone.

Within the second frame, it was also noted that Facebook’s visions for connectivity are not always limited to our planet. Zuckerberg suggests launching satellites to space for improved internet access in remote areas, and for some, this may sound somewhat adventurous. However, Bishop and Green (2015) make an important note about the Silicon Valley mindset, when they argue that the “willingness to try something risky” is often seen as “crucial ingredient of creating a successful Next Big Thing” (p. 545).

Lastly, the third frame, “Free Basics accelerating development” shows how Zuckerberg frames internet access, and Free Basics in particular, as a means to improve people’s quality of life. By using individual level user narratives such as “Ganesh the Indian farmer”, Zuckerberg connects internet access, and Free Basics, to people living better lives. As Thorup (2013) has suggested, “empowerment is the new supposed exit point of the recipient” in philanthropy (p. 559) – Zuckerberg’s stories of Indian farmers doubling their crops are a great example of this empowerment.

Throughout Zuckerberg’s framing of Free Basics accelerating development, traces of technological determinism can be seen. Technological determinism is the assumption that technology evolves independently from society and that it drives social change (Cherlet, 2014). These assumptions made by Facebook and Zuckerberg are also in line with the work by Taylor and Broeders (2015), who study the increasing role of technology companies in international development. To a certain extent, the benefits of internet are actual. However, it is important to keep in mind that no matter what Zuckerberg claims Free Basics to be, access to Wikipedia will not replace a successful education system, nor will access to health information medicate or cure a person with HIV.

Finally, throughout the data, Zuckerberg has acted as the “voice of the voiceless” (MZ 15, 2015). When Free Basics has been criticized on the grounds of net neutrality, Zuckerberg has pitted the unconnected people’s benefits against ideological beliefs and “intellectual purity” (MZ 7, 2015). He has repeatedly argued that for the unconnected, some internet access is always better than none. As discussed in the introduction, we cannot truly know what Zuckerberg’s personal opinions on this issue are. What has not been considered in the midst of all critique, however, is that he may well be a millennial billionaire genuinely worried about global issues such as connectivity, wishing to use his and Facebook’s wealth and power to improve things. While it is important to critically study the actions by large technology corporations, the world is not black and white. Facebook should not be deemed as a devil nor a saint – some of its actions may simply be more controversial than others.

All in all, the results of this study seem to be in line with the previous studies on Zuckerberg’s discourse. Many elements discussed in the literature review also occurred in my data: Facebook’s desire to appear neutral, the debate on net neutrality as well as

the giant technology companies and their profound belief in technological determinism in development have been widely researched earlier.

The significance of this thesis lies in the specific focus on Zuckerberg and Free Basics. The need to critically study any major platform provider is undoubtedly clear: Facebook has already been researched from a wide variety of perspectives. The ongoing discussions on the way these companies affect for example politics, privacy and economies highlight the need for continuous scrutiny and increased awareness. As stated in the methods section of this thesis, analysing the Facebook CEO's speech helps us gain a stronger perception of what he imagines Facebook to be. By critically studying Zuckerberg's argumentation, we gain a better understanding of the company's actions and motives. This research is valuable because it uses a unique data set to provide an outlook to the way in which Zuckerberg frames Free Basics, as well as connectivity in general.

There are two major limitations in this study that could be addressed in future research. Firstly, the data set could be expanded, as this thesis used a rather narrow data set in only analysing Mark Zuckerberg's understanding of Free Basics. As explained in detail below, Free Basics could also be studied through other material, such as pictures, videos and texts published on the initiative's social media pages.

Secondly, as was mentioned earlier in this thesis, Facebook's connectivity efforts have changed quite notably after the time span for this study, 2013–2018. The Internet.org website nor the project's Facebook page have been updated after March 2017 (Internet.org by Facebook, 2017), and Free Basics is now listed as a subcategory on a completely new website, Facebook Connectivity.⁴ These changes show the development of Facebook both as a company as well as a philanthrocapitalist actor: old initiatives are replaced with new innovation.

Finally, I believe that the possibilities for further research on this topic are extensive. Future studies could include, for instance, Facebook's communication on connectivity in its entirety: press releases, the new Connectivity website, as well as other Facebook executives and employees' statements on this topic. Additionally, including photo or video material to the analysis could provide interesting viewpoints to how the users of

⁴ <https://connectivity.fb.com>

the application are portrayed and represented by Facebook. For example, the Internet.org YouTube channel hosts 59 videos from 2013 to 2017, mainly showcasing the individual app users and their stories in short, one-minute videos (Internet.org on Youtube, n.d.). A thorough analysis of these videos would certainly add to the study of Facebook's understanding and portrayal of the power of connectivity.

In addition, what is sometimes missing from the entire connectivity debate – and also from this thesis – is the voice of the unconnected users: how they feel about the limited number of available websites in zero-rating data, and whether they would prefer to have some access over none. In the Indian context, the critical voices of the local technology scene were enough to halt Free Basics in the country. The application's opponents, however, were mainly people who are already online and know enough about the internet in order to defend net neutrality. As Zuckerberg noted, the people without internet access cannot sign online petitions for or against these initiatives (MZ 9, 2015).

Lastly, I see potential in comparative studies including other connectivity projects, such as Google's Project Loon. Comparing two similar initiatives by different companies could provide interesting insights into the discourse and ideology these technology giants are advocating. Including other major players from the Silicon Valley context is essential, as Facebook is by no means the only powerful platform provider that needs to be critically examined. Building internet infrastructure should not be in the hands of the same corporations that profit from it. An old proverb says that fire is a good servant but a bad master – the very same could be said about Facebook.

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