



Living with Big Tech, Social Media & AI

Tim Ewbank

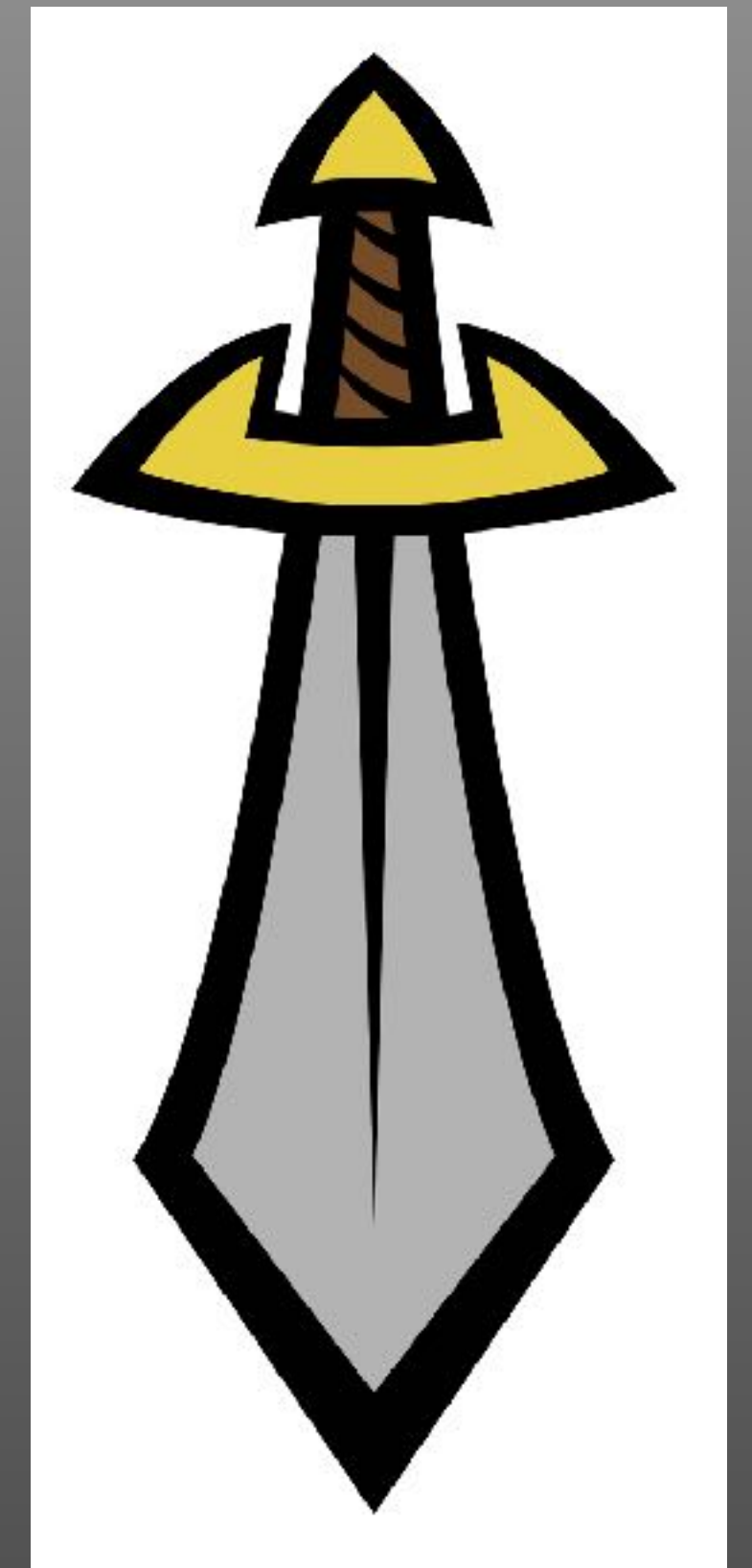
Autumn 2025

My social media experience



- A YouTube
- A WhatsApp
- B Facebook
- B Instagram
- B Pinterest
- B LinkedIn
- C Threads
- C TikTok
- D Truth Social

X/Twitter (cancelled in March 2024)



My personal view


Objectives of course

- Describe the current global state of social media
- Understand how social media came to be what it is today
- Discuss issues raised by social media usage
- Be aware of current social media regulation
- Explore the fast changing world of AI

Structure of the course

*“To know where we’re going,
we have to know where we are.
To know that, we have to know
where we came from & how we
got here”*

Week 1



Weeks 5 and 6 (5th & 12th November) will be exclusively on AI

Our six sessions

8th October	painting the social media landscape
15th October	how social media became the digital junk food of our age
22nd October	the impact of social media on society
29th October	regulating Social Media
5th November	what you can do with AI today
12th November	AI industry overview and current issues

Rules of engagement



Please be willing to share your experiences and questions

Handling of questions

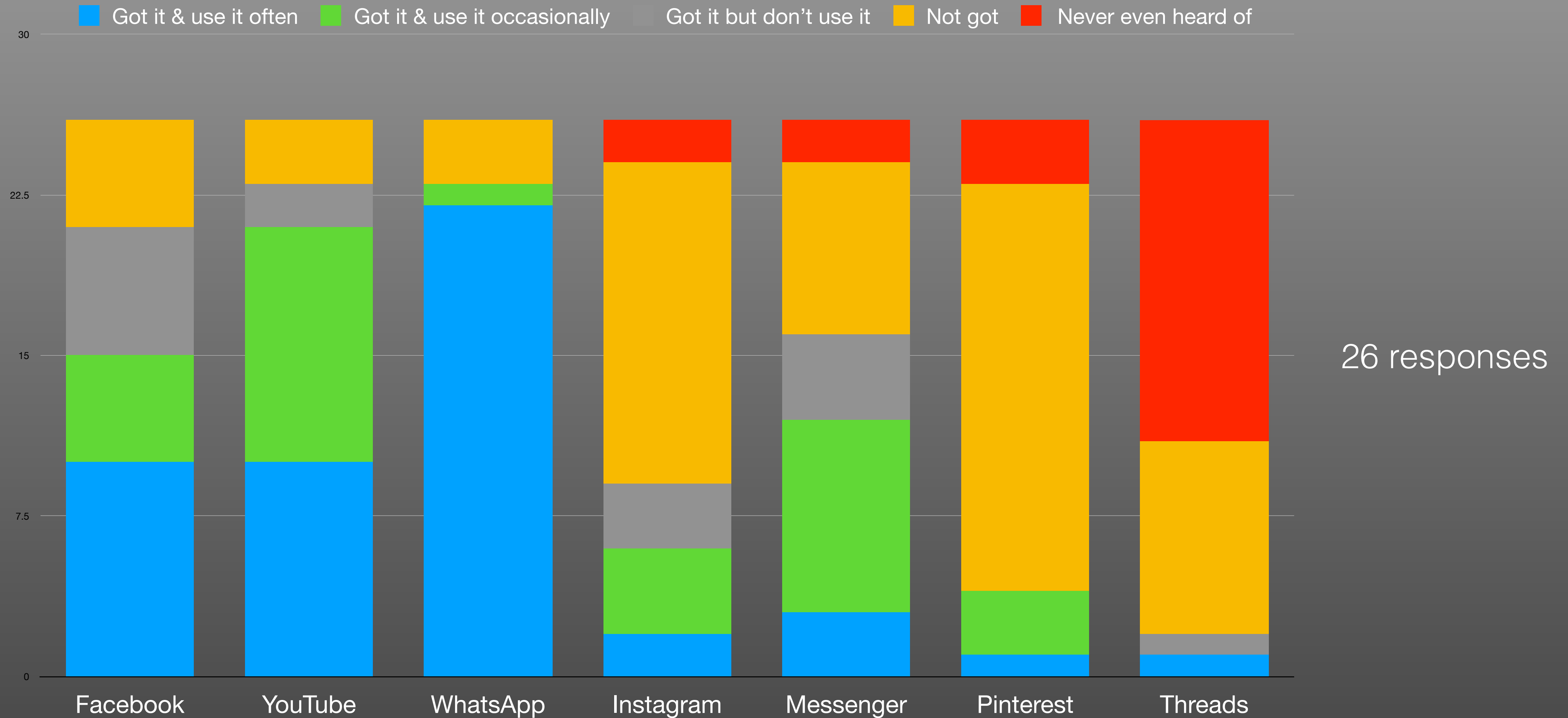
Bear with me, as the story is every changing, so expect some flexibility in schedule

Slides will be loaded onto my website

Feedback is welcome whenever

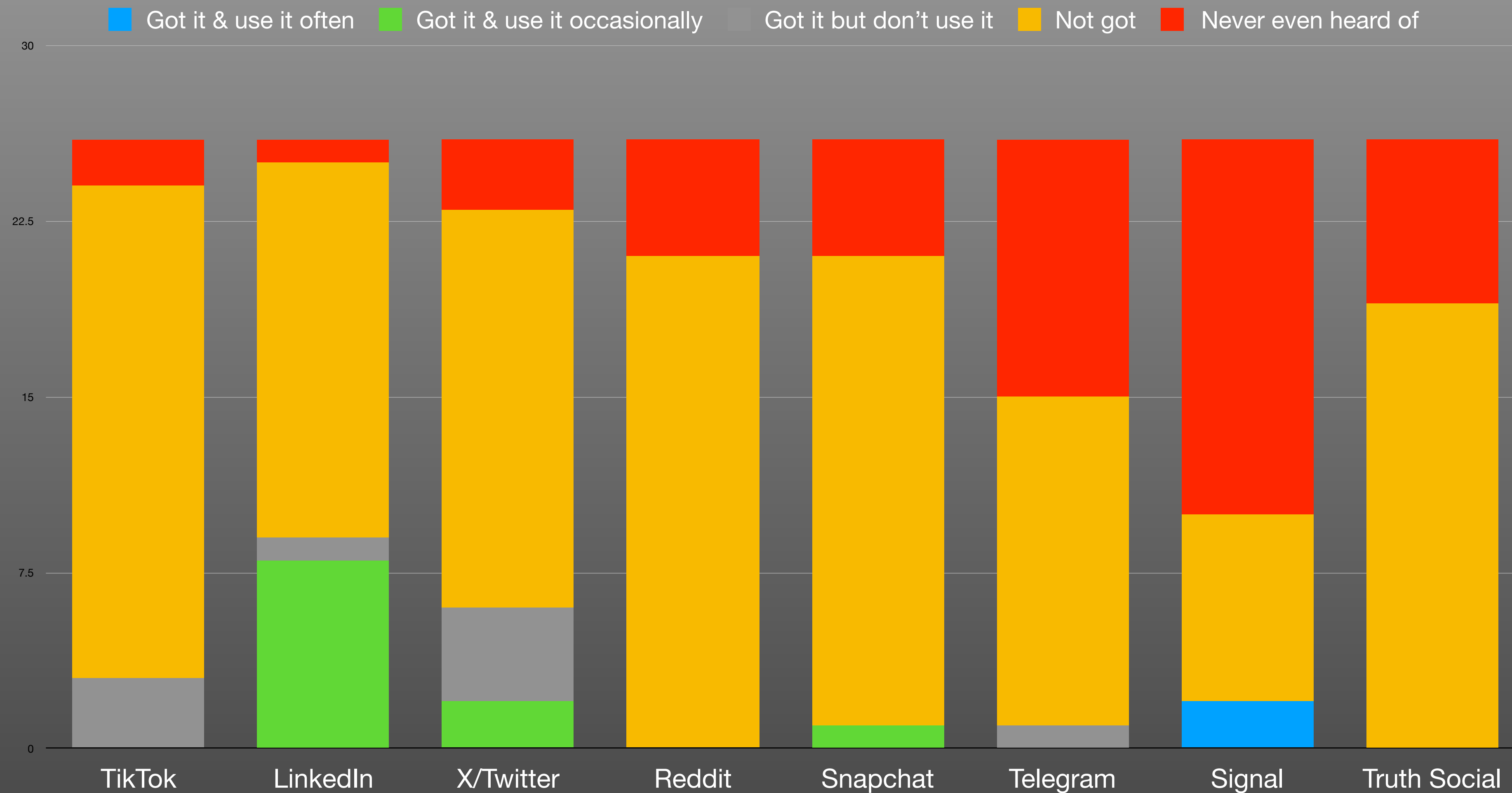
Our social media experience

most used



Our social media experience

least used



What I'm going to be doing today is paint the social media landscape



Created by DALL-E from prompt “an artist painting a landscape”

What does social media actually do?

Social networking	(Facebook, WhatsApp, Reddit, WeChat, Signal, Telegram, Truth Social)
Instant messaging & microblogs	(x/Twitter, Threads, Messenger, SnapChat, Weibo, Tumblr)
Video sharing	(YouTube, Vimeo)
Video microblogs	(TikTok, Shorts, Reels)
Photo sharing	(Instagram, Flickr, Photobucket)
Social bookmarking	(Pinterest, Delicious)
Business networks	(LinkedIn)
Collaboration	(Slack, Yammer, GitHub)
Online gaming	(Fortnite, World of Warcraft)
Virtual Worlds	(Second Life, Metaverse)

Everyday uses of social media



Skegness War memorial



Hiker saved by FB msg



Malala Yousafzai



Balearics floods Sept 2025

Live streaming of consequential events



Kabul airport August 2021

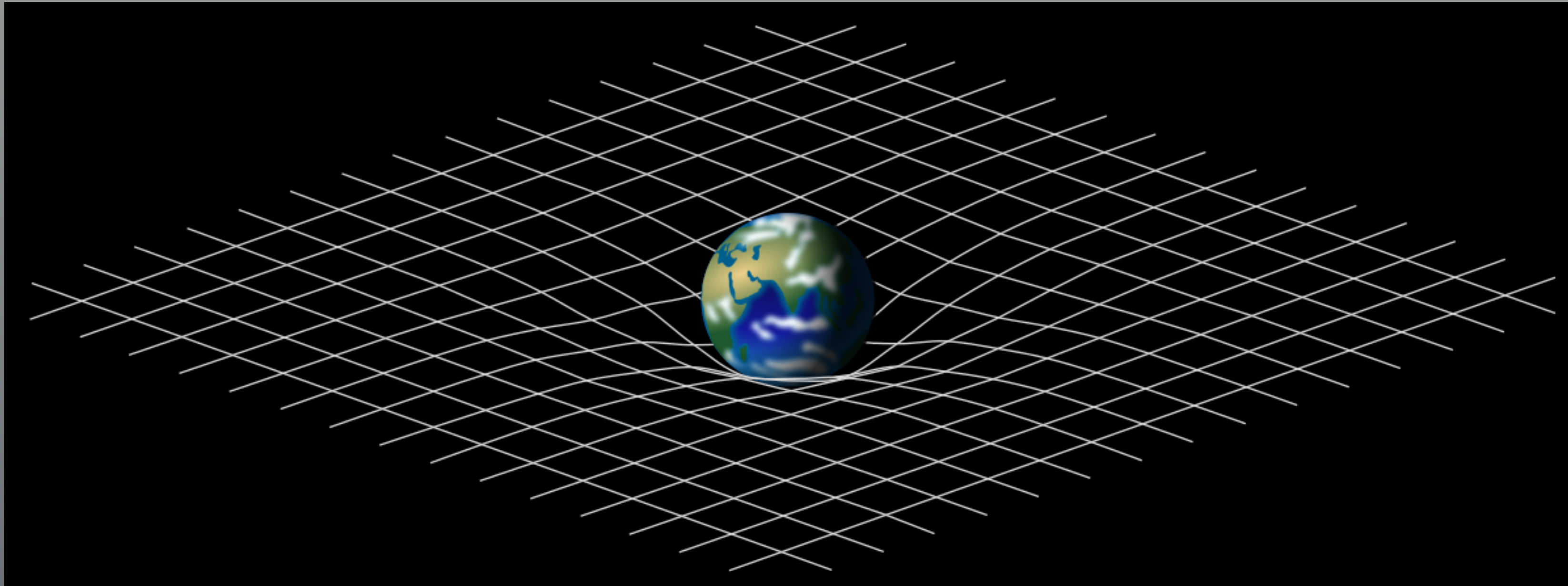


Capitol riot, January 2021



Murder of George Floyd
#BLM

Social media warps space & time



Anything on the planet is visible in realtime
Immediacy effect

Growth of Conspiracy Theories



Disappearance of Nicola Bulley
January 2023



Q Anon



Donald Trump & Jeffrey Epstein

“You will find the world you seek” somewhere on the internet

Recent example of the impact of social media



Three girls killed in knife attack at Taylor Swift themed dance party
29th July 2024 in Southport, Lancashire

Lead to riots in dozen cities, looting & multiple arrests

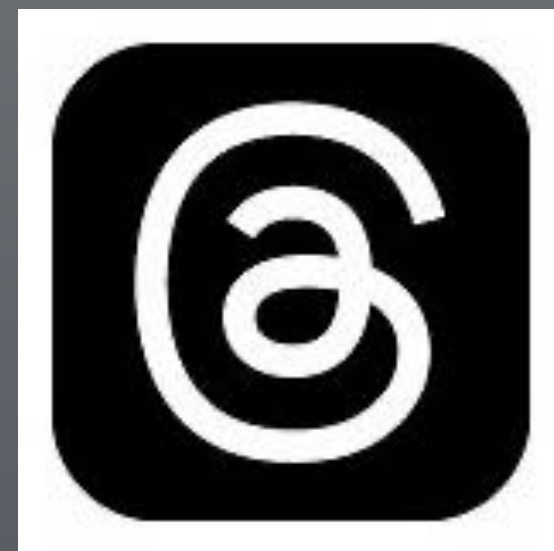
Personalised advertising

The data that social media companies collect on us is sold
Advertisers can micro-target groups or individuals with personalised adverts



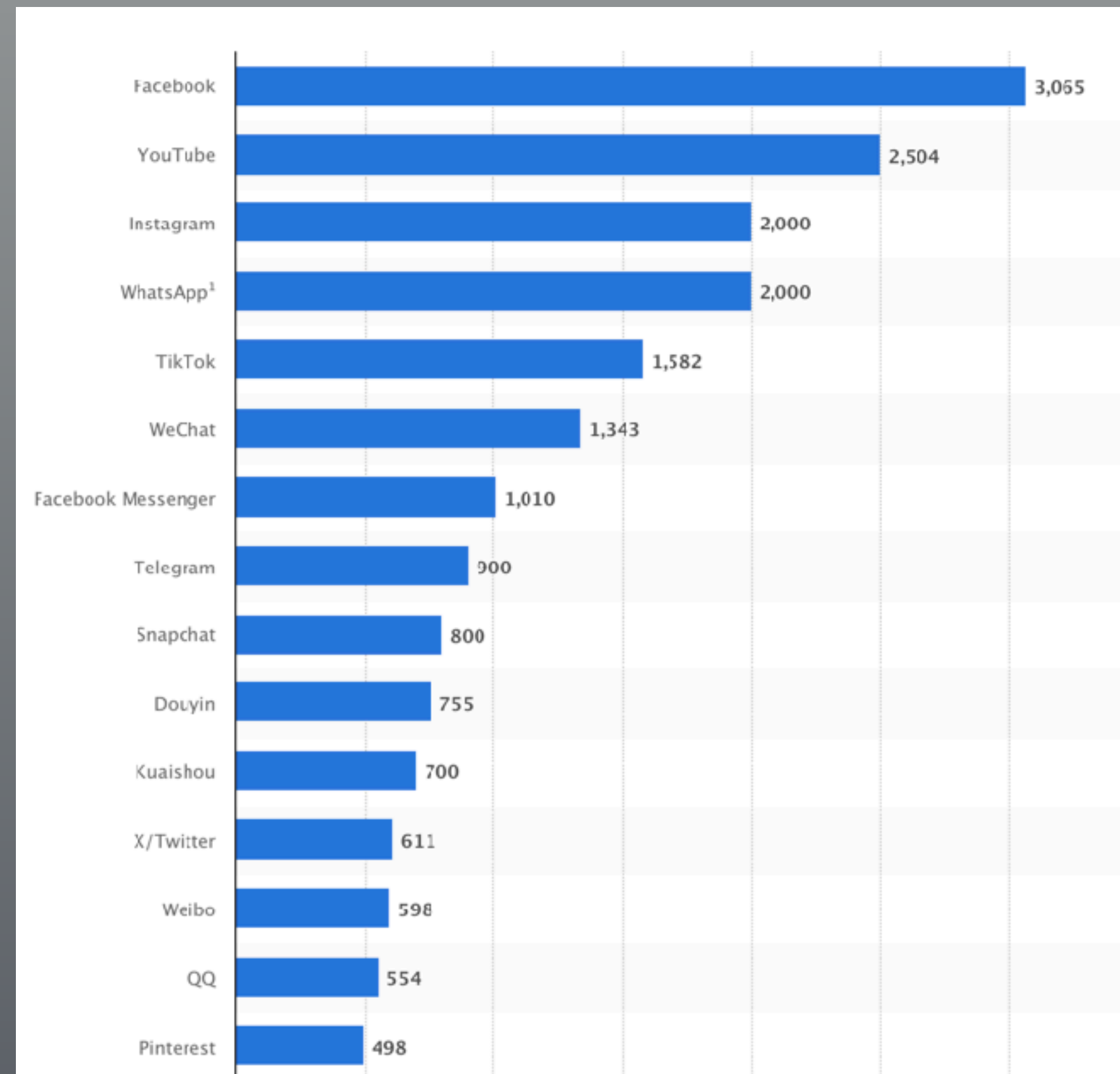
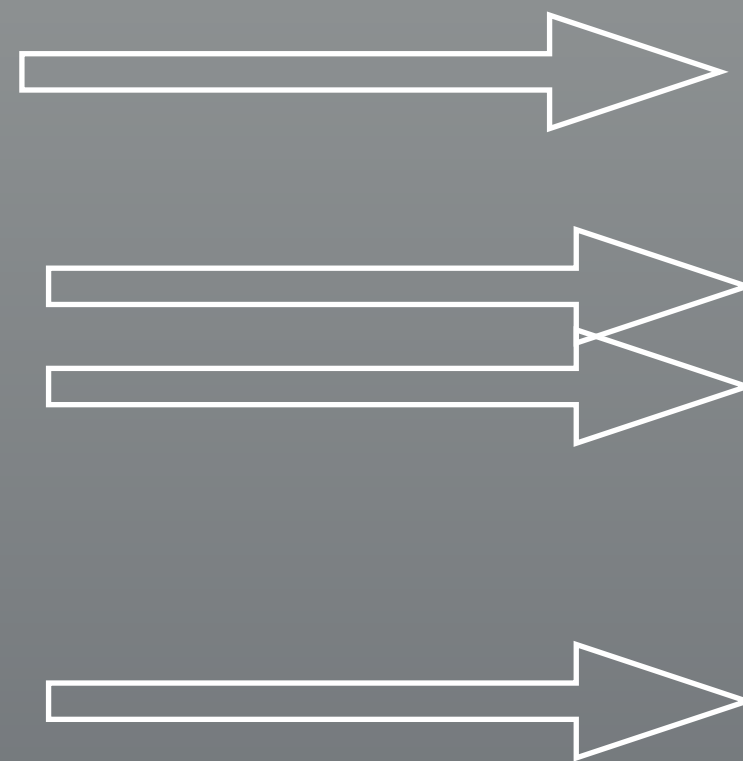
Sample adverts from one of my recent web searches

Who are the main players in social media?



Numbers of users of social media

Numbers of global users, April 2024



Meta owns 4 of 7 largest social media sites by usage
3+ bns user/ month globally

Source: Statistica



Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp & Messenger

Threads & Marketplace (embedded in FB)
Metaverse (abandoned)

Forecast 2025 revenues predicted to be \$180-190bns, mostly from advertising



Mark Zuckerberg



Sheryl Sandberg



Nick Clegg



Big Tech

aka The Magnificent Seven





2025 revenues forecast to be \$390- 420 bns

90%+ of internet search market

76% revenues are from advertising



In 2024 found guilty of operating an illegal monopoly in internet search in US & Europe

Social Media and the Trump Administration 2024

Prior to the election was threatening break-ups and regulation

Since the election, social media & Big Tech bosses have been cowed

Advocates First Amendment rights to free speech over privacy

Shows no interest in potentials harms to young people

Vocally opposed European social media legislation



Summary of *where we are*



Optional *homework* assignment

Analyse the adverts that get served up to you via social media
Can you work out how they are linked to you?

Age appropriate
Internet searches
Purchase history
Your phone activity
Household appliances

Bonus challenge:

Use Alexa or Siri to search for something completely new.
See if/how long before you see a related advert

Additional material

Slides from each talk will be on my website:

<https://www.zimbushboy.online/social-media>

Other materials on the website, references to:

- Books & articles

- Podcasts

- YouTube (inc TED Talks) & NetFlix

- Novels

- Charities, Non-profits & Think Tanks

Wikipedia has a lot about social media & AI with numerous links

The materials lists will be updated, as & when I find additional sources

Additional material on Social Media - books



M Fisher (2022) *The Chaos Machine (how social media rewired our minds)*

S Frenkel & C Kang (2021) *The Ugly Truth* (inside Facebook)

K Swisher (2024) *Burn Book*

R. McNamee, *Zucked*

I Lucas (2021) *Digital Gangsters*



Hannah Fry (2018) *Hello World*

Soshana Zuboff (2018) *Surveillance Capital*

E Persily & J Tucker (eds) (2021) *Social Media and Democracy* (CUP)

K Taylor (2023) *The Little Black Book of Social Media*, Byline Books



S Galloway (2017) *The Four* (The hidden DNA of Amazon, Apple, Facebook & Google)

R Forroohar (2019) *Don't be Evil, the case against big tech*

Additional material - podcasts & newsletters

Podcasts



Pivot “all things business & tech”; weekly from US; several recent pods on impact of AI

BBC *The Gatekeepers* Broad brush look at development of social media

BBC *Helen Lewis has left the chat* About instant messaging - WhatsApps, Telegram, Replika

BBC *The Coming Storm* (series 1 & 2) Growth of conspiracy theories in US

Marianna Spring {BBC disinformation & social media correspondent} “*Why do you hate me?*”

Newsletters & Articles

Casey Newton *Platformer* weekly free tech newsletter, by email (free or subscription)

<https://tosdr.org/> what social media companies know about you



Additional material - YouTube & Netflix & TED talks

YouTube & Netflix



The Great Hack (Cambridge Analytics expose)

The Social Dilemma

Coded Bias (facial recognition)

60 Minutes interview with Frances Haugen

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onq_zWSkzv4

Surveillance capitalism and democracy, Soshana Zuboff

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJ0josfRzp4>

TED Talks



Facebook's role in Brexit — and the threat to democracy Carole Cadwalladr

Additional material

Fiction

John Boyne (2022) *The Echo Chamber*

Charities, Non-profits & Think Tanks

Molly Rose Foundation <https://mollyrosefoundation.org>

Centre for Countering Digital Hate <https://counterhate.com>

Papyrus <https://www.papyrus-uk.org>

Smartphone Free Childhood <https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk>

Digital Rights Archive <https://centrefordigitalrights.org>

Mothers Against Media Addiction <https://www.joinmama.org>

Global witness <https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/digital-threats/>

Advisory Bodies & Regulation

Meta Oversight Board

<https://www.oversightboard.com/>

Data Protection Act 2018

<https://www.gov.uk/data-protection>

Online Safety Act 2023 (UK)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/online-safety-act-explainer/online-safety-act-explainer>

Digital Market Act 2022 (EU)

<https://digital-markets-act.ec.europa.eu/>

Digital Services Act 2022 (EU)

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act_en

Commons Select Committee

Science, Innovation & Technology Committee

<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8641/social-media-misinformation-and-harmful-algorithms/>

Next Week

where we came from & how we got here

It all started so optimistically

the story of what actually happened



How did social media become the digital junk food of our age?