



Living with Big Tech, Social Media & AI

Use of social media internationally & regulation

Tim Ewbank

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Week One: painted the social media landscape



Week Two: how social media became the digital junk food of our age

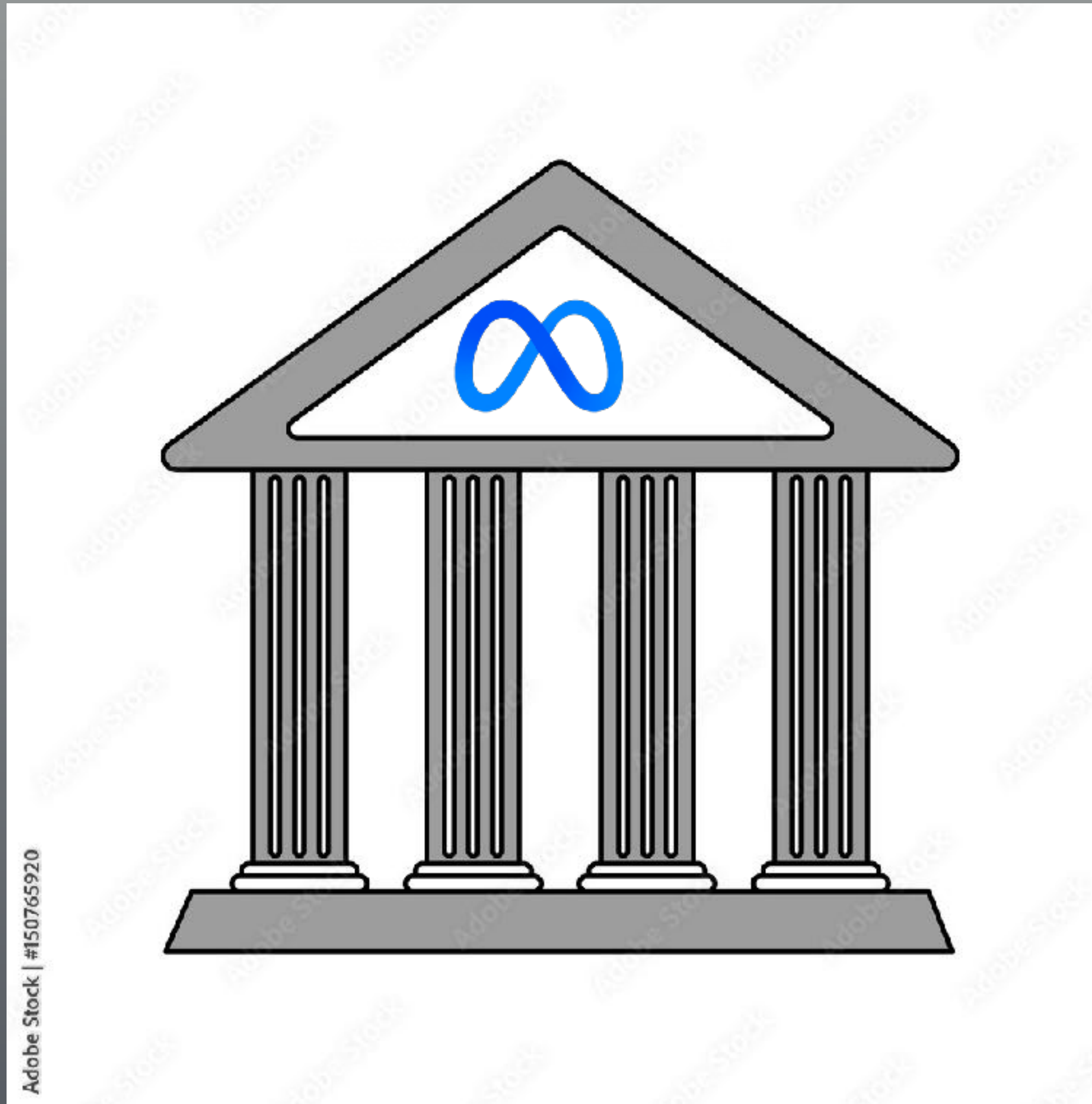
The four pillars of social media

Corporate ownership

Technology

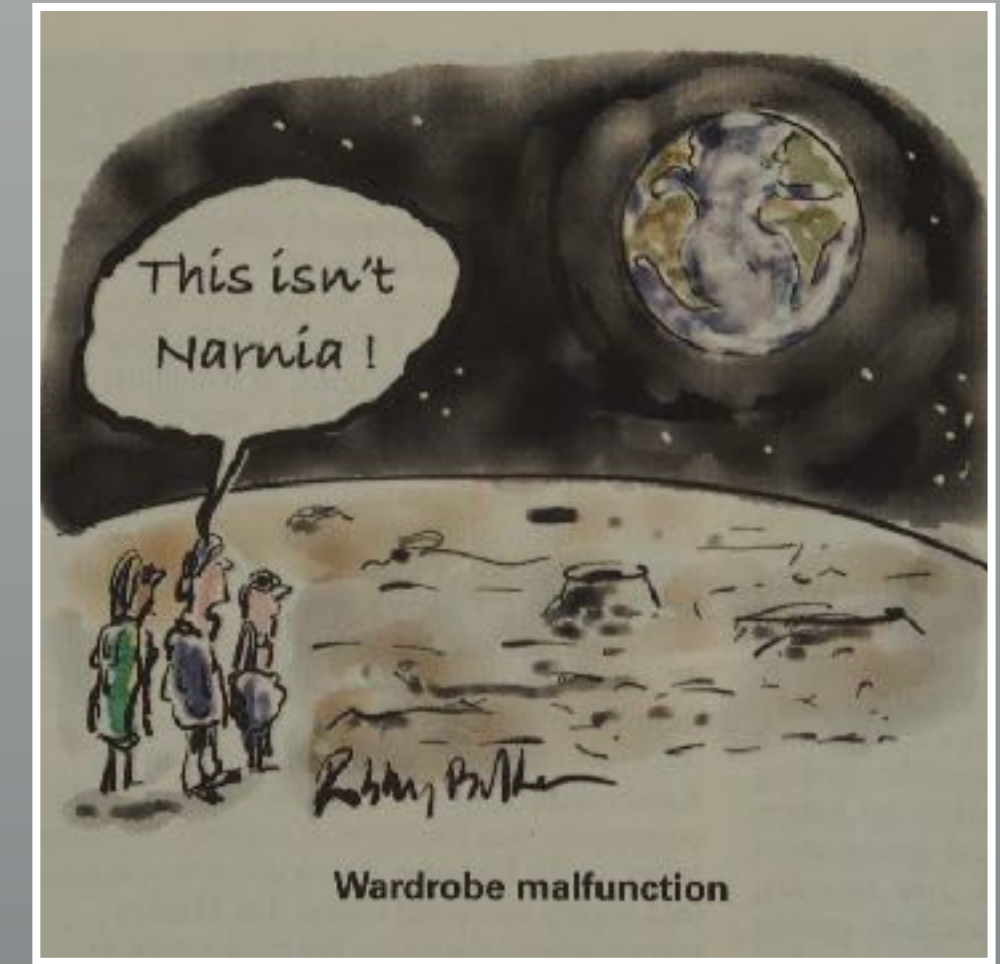
Business model

Regulation



Week 3: Impact of social media

Social media has accelerated an existing social trend



Some of the technical features of social media apps have had unexpected consequences

Mistrust of authority & lack of recognised authoritative sources fuels conspiracies

You can “find the world you seek” somewhere on social media

Weak regulation designed for the analogue age has not caught up

Nothing like the original utopian ideals

Week 4

Regulating Social Media

*“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”*

Examples of use of social media internationally



Maynmar 2016-17

Ugandan Elections 2021

Ukraine & Russia

China

Case study: Rohingya genocide in Myanmar 2016-17



Free Basic Facebook widely available

Social media used by Buddhists Nationalists to incite violence against Muslim minority

Despite multiple warnings Facebook took no action

Few content moderators, who spoke local languages

Example of “status threat “ violence

Case study: Uganda general election 2021



FB took down numerous fake accounts that ramped President Museveni
FB taken down for several days shortly before the election
President accused FB of “Western arrogance” “foreign companies do
not decide who is good or bad in Uganda”

The Russian invasion of Ukraine



Daily broadcasts
Generated massive donations
Documenting war crimes
Used facial recognition and SM
to inform Russian parents of deaths

Unable to control technically
Banned SM companies
Harsh legal penalties

Ukraine is making more effective use of social media

Case study: China's use of social media

Range of SM applications match US

Government realised potential for use in social control

Companies must provide info to government, on request

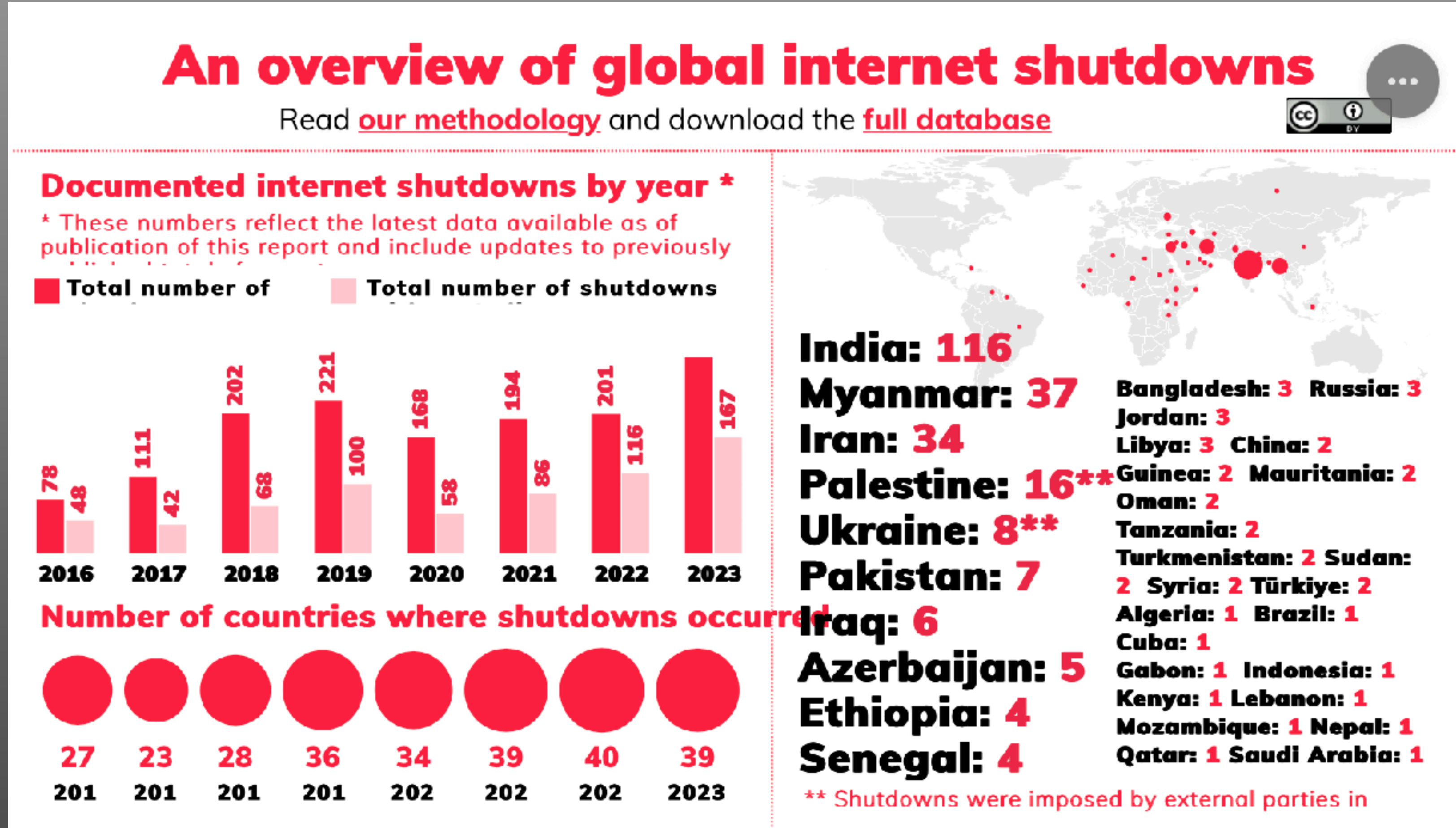
Means of allocating Social Credits

Control of celebrity influencers



Used as an instrument of social control

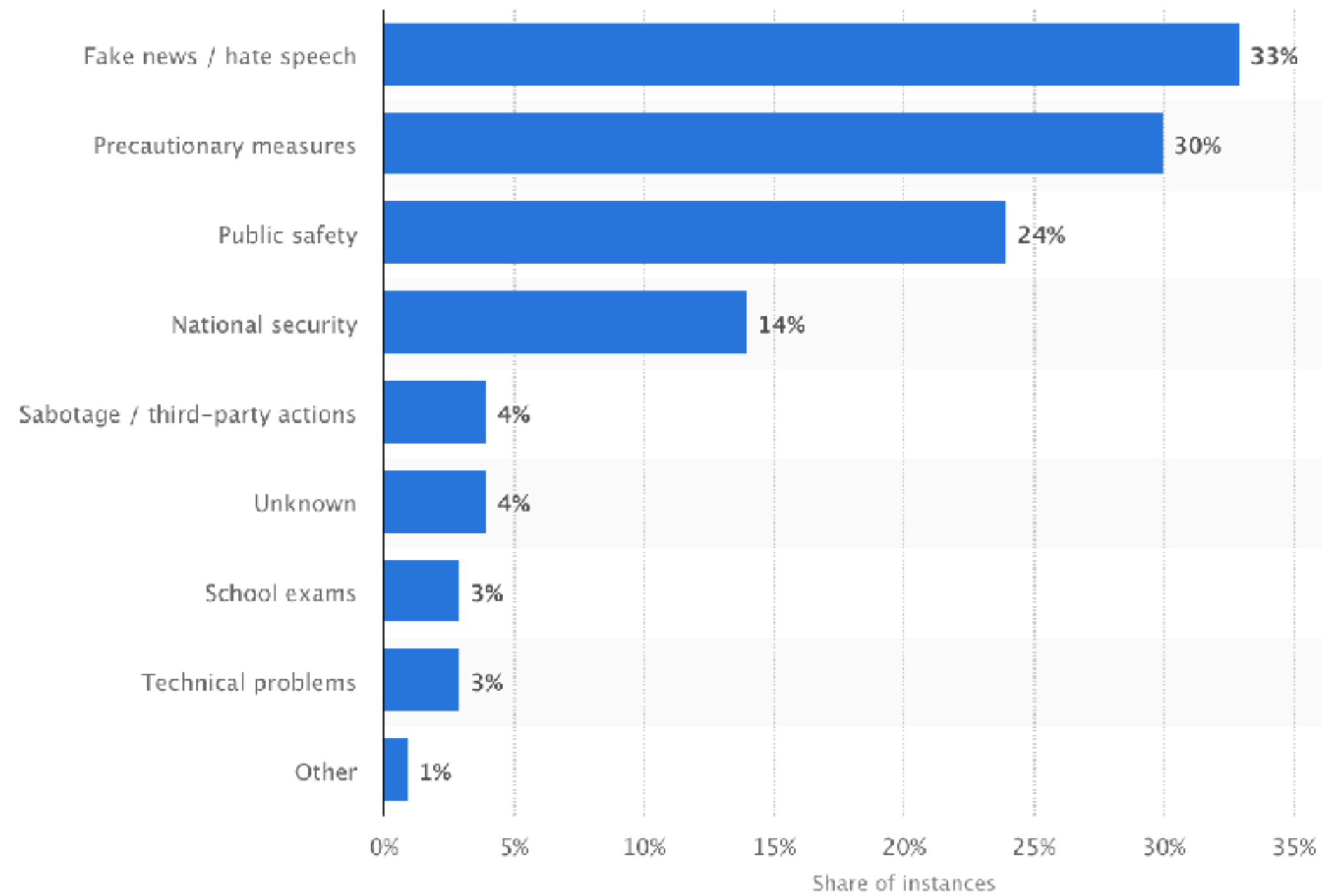
Global Internet shutdowns 2023



Source: AccessNow

Reasons for internet takedowns

Common official justifications used by governments worldwide in 2019



Where we are now



Companies have no commercial incentive to dial down,
only popular or regulatory pressure

Regulation (& regulators) designed for the analogue age

Populist politicians are unlikely to promote regulation

Social media accelerated existing political trends

But, public attitudes to social media are changing

Growing list of concerns about effects of social media & Big Tech

Data privacy

Opague moderation rules

Dis-information & hate speech

Use in organizing eg. Jan 6th 2020 in US & Southport in UK

Social harm, especially to women & girls

Market dominance by Big Tech firms

International jurisdictions have differing views on the importance of these issues

Two watershed moments in public perception of social media



Frances Haugen's testimony
Congress Oct 2021



Capitol riot, 6th January 2020

Frances Haugen Senate Committee testimony (4th October 2021)

Based on direct experience & FB research
objective is to keep users on their site
the more contentious the material the better
aware of Instagram harm doing to teenage girls
Foreign safety checks patchy
“profits before safety”



Was this Facebook's “big tobacco moment”?

Meta's response to growing concerns



Mark Zuckerberg addressing angry parents

Mark Zuckerberg has testified eight times before congress

Attempts at self-regulation:

- User bans following January 2021 Capitol insurrection

- Expanded content moderation rules & resources

- Creation of Meta Oversight Board

But, withdrew public CrowdTangle misinformation tracking tool

Growing realisation that self-regulation has been ineffective

Current ongoing cases against Meta

FTC case of having a monopoly of social media with Instagram & WhatsApp purchases

Advertising exaggeration class action

Accused of misleading the public about the risks of using social media and contributing to a mental health crisis among young people.

Claims:

- broke consumer protection laws by engaging in “deceptive” conduct.
- flouting its obligations under the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (1998), by collecting data on children under the age of 13

US Regulation of Social Media & Big Tech

Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA)

Brought forward in 2022

Imposes 'duty of care' on companies

Bipartisan support, but criticized by left & right

Meta has spent \$90M over last three years on lobbying
(have 1 lobbyist for every 8 members of Congress)

Passed by Senate but stalled in Congress since 2024

Opposed to any & all regulatory controls

Doing everything possible to slow roll any legislation

Trump Administration's attitude to tech industry has changed dynamics

Other ongoing US cases

FTC Anti-competitive behaviour

Alphabet found guilty of operating an illegal monopoly in internet search in US & Europe
Cases pending against Amazon, Meta & Apple

Online Safety

Dozen+ states are suing TikTok over impact on mental health among teenagers.

National Security

TikTok required to sell US subsidiary or face a ban. Negotiations to find a buyer ongoing.

Free Speech (1st Amendment rights)

Extent to which government can influence social media companies
Brought against Biden administration for attempting to limit Covid-19 mis-information
Supreme Court supported Biden on technicality

Social Media and the 2nd Trump Administration

Media & Big Tech bosses have been cowed & now “rewarded”

Advocate First Amendment rights to free speech over privacy

Social media companies have responded by reducing their moderation resources

No demonstrable interest in potential harms of social media to young people

KOSA stalled in Congress

No alternative federal regulation mooted

Vocally opposed European social media legislation

Claimed to be an attack on free speech

“Tax on American companies” threatened tariffs



Social Media & Big Tech financial performance since Inauguration (January 2025)

Amazon	3%
Alphabet	42%
Meta	28%
Apple	20%
Microsoft	23%

Corporate ethics v CEO's responsibility to shareholders?

EU Legislation

EU has lead the way in social media regulation

Digital Services Act (2022)

Addresses illegal content, transparent advertising and disinformation:

- disclosing to regulators how their algorithms work,
- providing users with explanations for content moderation decisions,
- implementing stricter controls on targeted advertising.

Penalties based on global revenues

Digital Markets Act (2022)

Main objective is to regulate the behaviour of "Big Tech" firms within the European Single Market.

Aims to increase competition in European digital markets by preventing large companies from abusing their market power and by allowing new players to enter the market.

Penalties based on global revenues

UK Legislation

Online Safety Act (2023)

6 yrs in the making; being implemented during 2024/25

Emphasis on protecting women & girls

Defines new categories of online offences

Puts onus on companies to protect & show how they are doing so

Distinguishes between obligations of larger & smaller SM companies

Penalties based on global revenues

Already calls for it to be updated eg “age gating” social media

Users' legal actions

“Shock jock” & conspiracy theorist, Alex Jones, ordered to pay over \$1billion in compensation to the families after claiming the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook school killings was a hoax



Rudi Giuliani & Sidney Powell are being sued by Smartmatic over claims that ballot machines were rigged in 2020 election

Dominion Voting Systems files defamation lawsuit against Fox News



In UK, Richard Hall was sued by victims over his claims the Manchester Arena attack was a hoax



Commons Select Committee on Science, Innovation & Technology Inquiry into Social media, Misinformation and Harmful Algorithms following Southport riots in 2024

Established five principles that are crucial for regulation of social media:

- 1) **Public safety:** Algorithmically accelerated misinformation is a danger that companies and government need to address
- 2) **Free and safe expression:** Neither government nor private companies should be arbiters of truth.
- 3) **Responsibility:** Users should be held liable for what they post online, but the platforms they post on are also responsible
- 4) **Control:** Users should have control over both their personal data and what they see online.
- 5) **Transparency:** The technology used by platform companies should be transparent and accessible to public authorities.

Where is all this regulation leading?



The next couple of years will be crucial in shaping social media:

- Amendment/repeal of S230 Communications Decency Act of 1996
- Enforcement of EU & UK legislation
- Introduction of *age gating*
- Possible break-up of big tech companies Meta, Google & Apple
- Challenge of regulating dissemination of misinformation

AI '*the coming storm*'?



Next week

AI as it affects social media,
Demo of what you can currently do
with AI for free