



Living with Big Tech, Social Media & AI

Impact of Social Media

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Autumn 2024

How did you get on with your homework?







Looking at the adverts that are served up to you & work out the adwords used to influence page rankings



Bonus challenge:

Download everything Facebook knows about you

Current trends in micro-blogging usage

Company	No. Active users/month	User Trend	Comments
	550 m		Elon Musk has 230m followers
	275 m		Threads is owned by Meta
	< 100 m		

Several mainstream sources no longer post on X/Twitter
Changes to X/Twitter ToS
Users have a dilemma about leaving

Week 3 Impact of 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”*

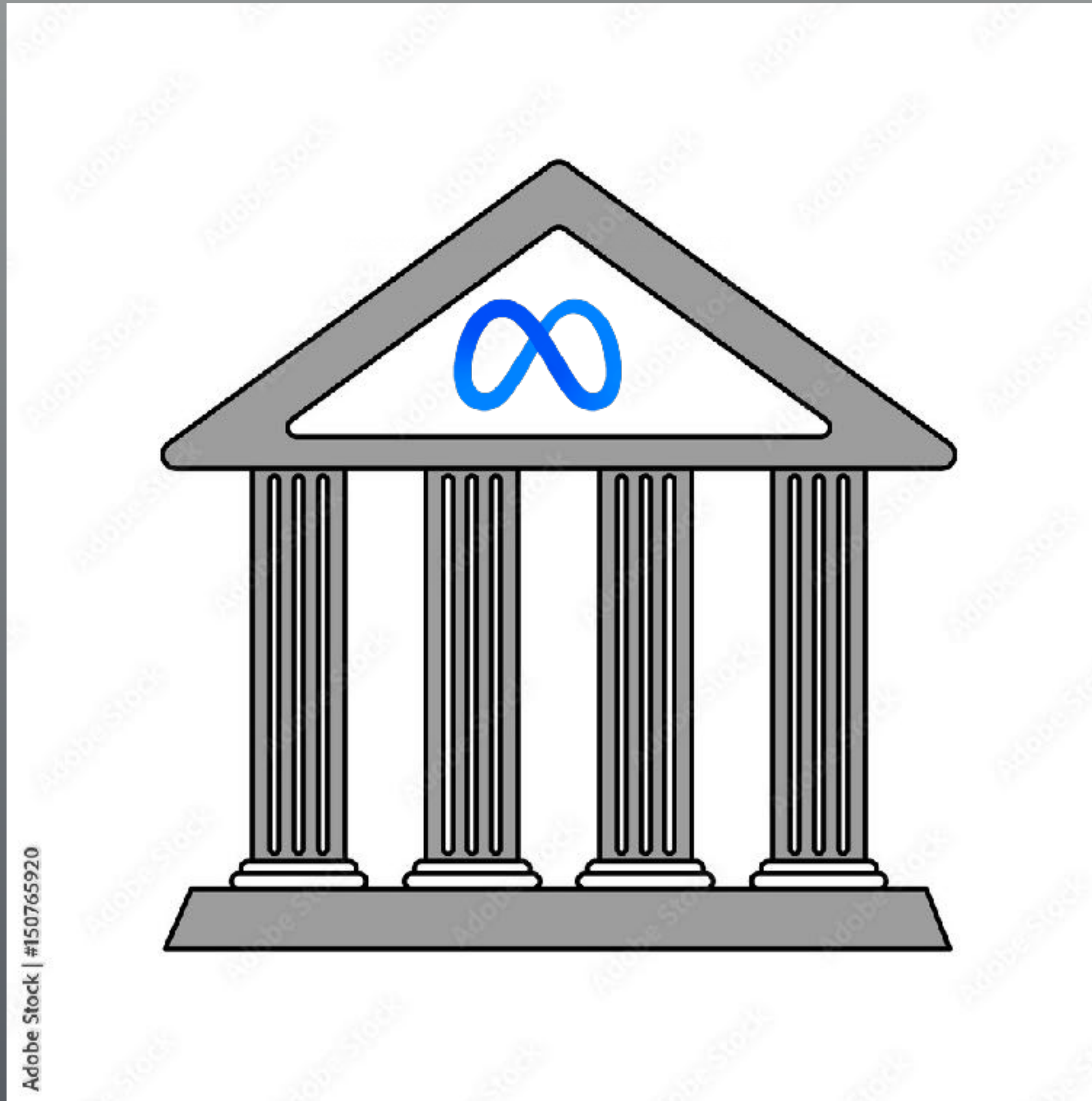
How we got here
The four pillars of social media

Corporate ownership

Business model

Technology

Regulation



Impact of Social Media

Enables global connectivity

Profound effect on local news sources

Enables spread of mis- & dis-information

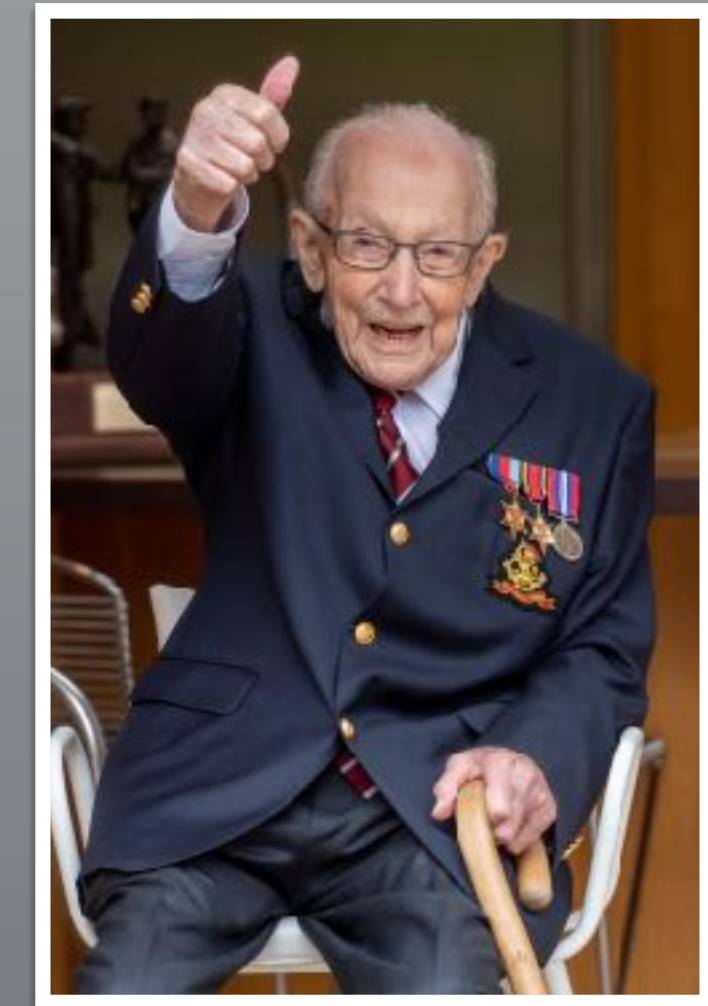
Growth of conspiracy theories

Disproportionately affects young people

Conduct of democracy

Social media is inherently neutral,
its use determines its impact

A globally connected world



Captain Tom



Hiker saved by FB msg



Skegness War memorial



Flash floods in Valencia

Recent tragedy in Southport July 2024



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

In the immediate aftermath disinformation spread rapidly



Posted on X Twitter hours after attack
Retweeted by leading far-right activists



Social media was used to generate & rapidly spread disinformation

Worst riots in UK for a decade in the week following stabbings

Southport

Liverpool

Belfast

Manchester

Sunderland

Nottingham

Hull

Stoke-on-Trent

Bolton

Rotherham

Tamworth

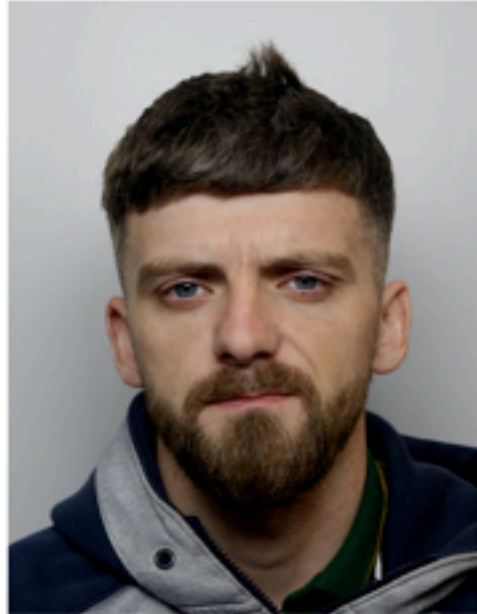
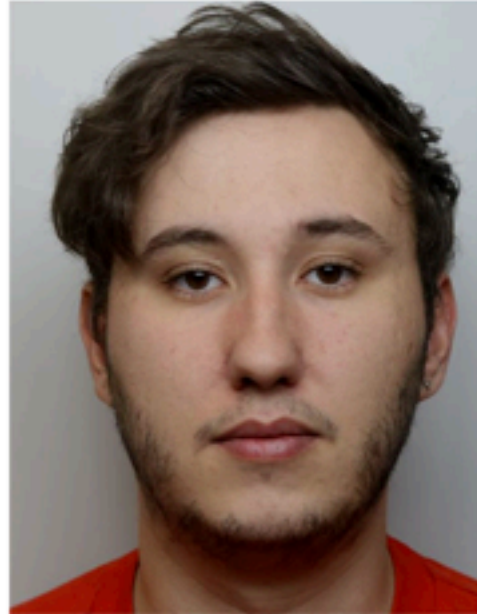



Attacks on Asian shops, asylum seeker hotels
Looting, destruction of property & attacks on police

Swift police & judicial response

1,000+ arrests
470 prosecutions
300+ jail sentences
Ongoing arrests & prosecutions

Social media being used to identify those involved

 <p>Jordan Parlour 28 years old</p> <p>Incident location: Online</p> <p>Convicted of: • Publishing written material intended to stir racial hatred</p> <p>Sentenced to: • <u>20 months in prison</u></p>	 <p>Tyler Kay 26 years old</p> <p>Incident location: Online</p> <p>Convicted of: • Inciting racial hatred online</p> <p>Sentenced to: • <u>Three years and two months in prison</u></p>	 <p>Dimitrie Stoica 25 years old</p> <p>Incident location: Online</p>
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Woman, 53, jailed over 'blow the mosque up' Facebook post after Southport riots

'Keyboard warrior' Julie Sweeney sentenced to 15 months on busy day for rioting cases in England's courts



© At Chester crown court, Julie Sweeney pleaded guilty to sending a communication to convey a threat of death or serious harm. Photograph: Cheshire Constabulary/PA

Several sentenced for online offences

Impact on traditional media

Social media has decimated print news by capturing advertising revenues

Digital world:

“if it offends it trends”



Print & broadcast world:

“if it bleeds it leads”

No obligation on social media companies to fact check users' posts



Fewer recognised sources of independent news

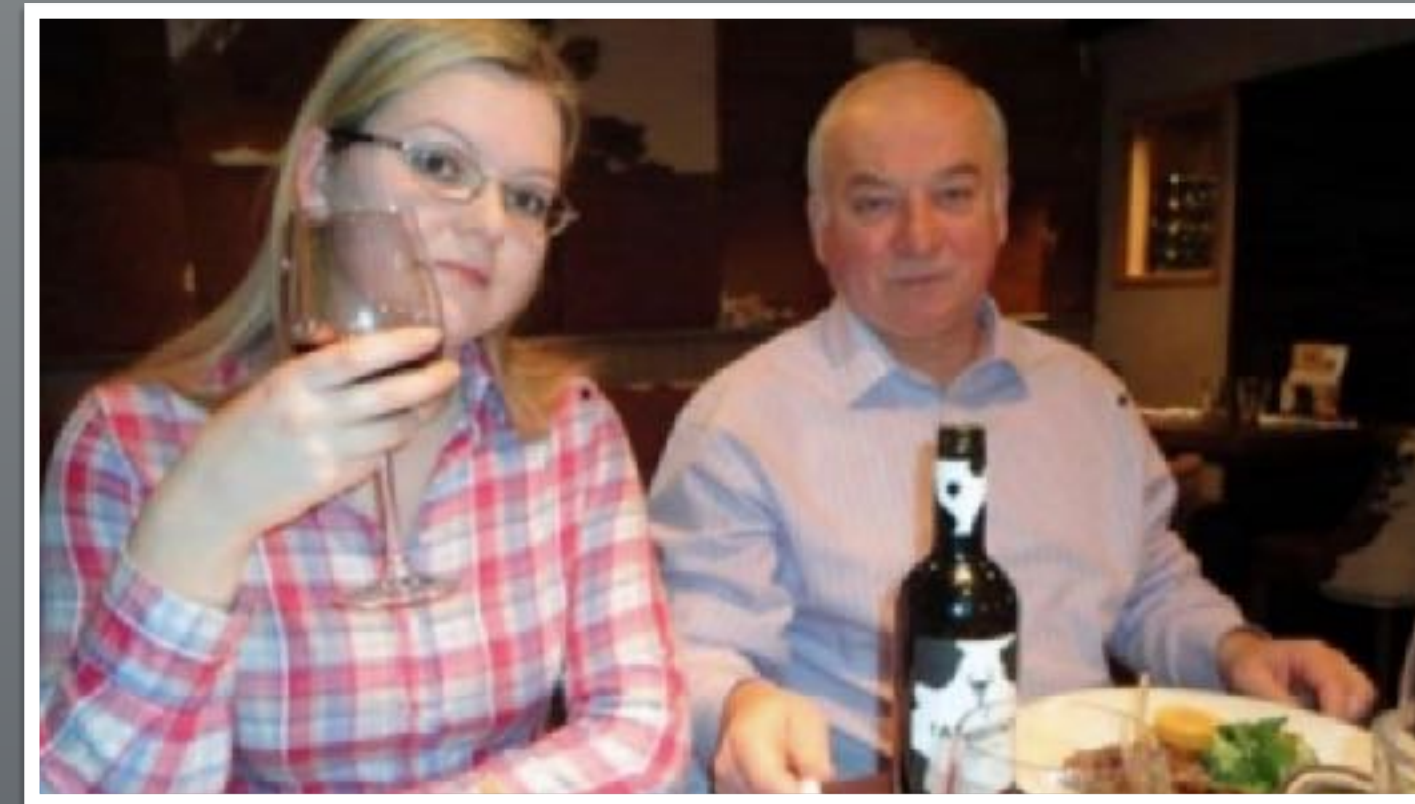
Dis-information

 **The Real Facebook Oversight Board**
@FBoversight

A Real Facebook Oversight Board analysis from 2021 Q2 data found that a majority of the “Number One posts” (most engagement on Facebook for that day) originated from just five known ‘disinformation superspreaders’.



July 28th 2021



“A lie can go round the world, before the truth has got its boots on”



Massive disinformation campaign



Adverts playing on electorates emotions, esp. fear & anger

Undisclosed sums spent in marginal areas

Enabled by no limit on online advertising

*“EU Referendum was the petridish
for the 2016 US Election”*

Carol Cadwalladr, 2017 TED talk



Conspiracy theories

QAnon



Vaccine hesitancy & anti-vaxxers



in UK BAME population is:
x2 likely to be infected
x4 likely to have serious disease and death
but BAME community vaccine take-up is 20% lower
than rest of population, even among health workers

US passed 700,000 deaths in October 2021 (CDC data)
unvaccinated are x10 more likely to die
and yet..... anti-vax voices continue to amplify



#News+
**How Anti-Vax Conspiracies
Converged With QAnon**

Disproportionate risks to young people



Tommie-Lee Billington 2024



Molly Russell 2017



Brianne Ghuy 2023

Social media played some part in the deaths of these three young people

Definition of “popular democracy”

“the belief that everyone in a country has the right to express their opinions, and that power should be held by people who are elected, or a system of government based on this belief”

Cambridge Dictionary

Social media directly impacts who gets heard and what everyone hears

Politicians can directly manage their profiles

Politicians have the means to create & publish their own stories & images, without scrutiny by independent press.

Can be constantly in the public eye without challenge.

UK politicians do fewer interviews & actively avoid more forensic journalists.



Accountability of Government

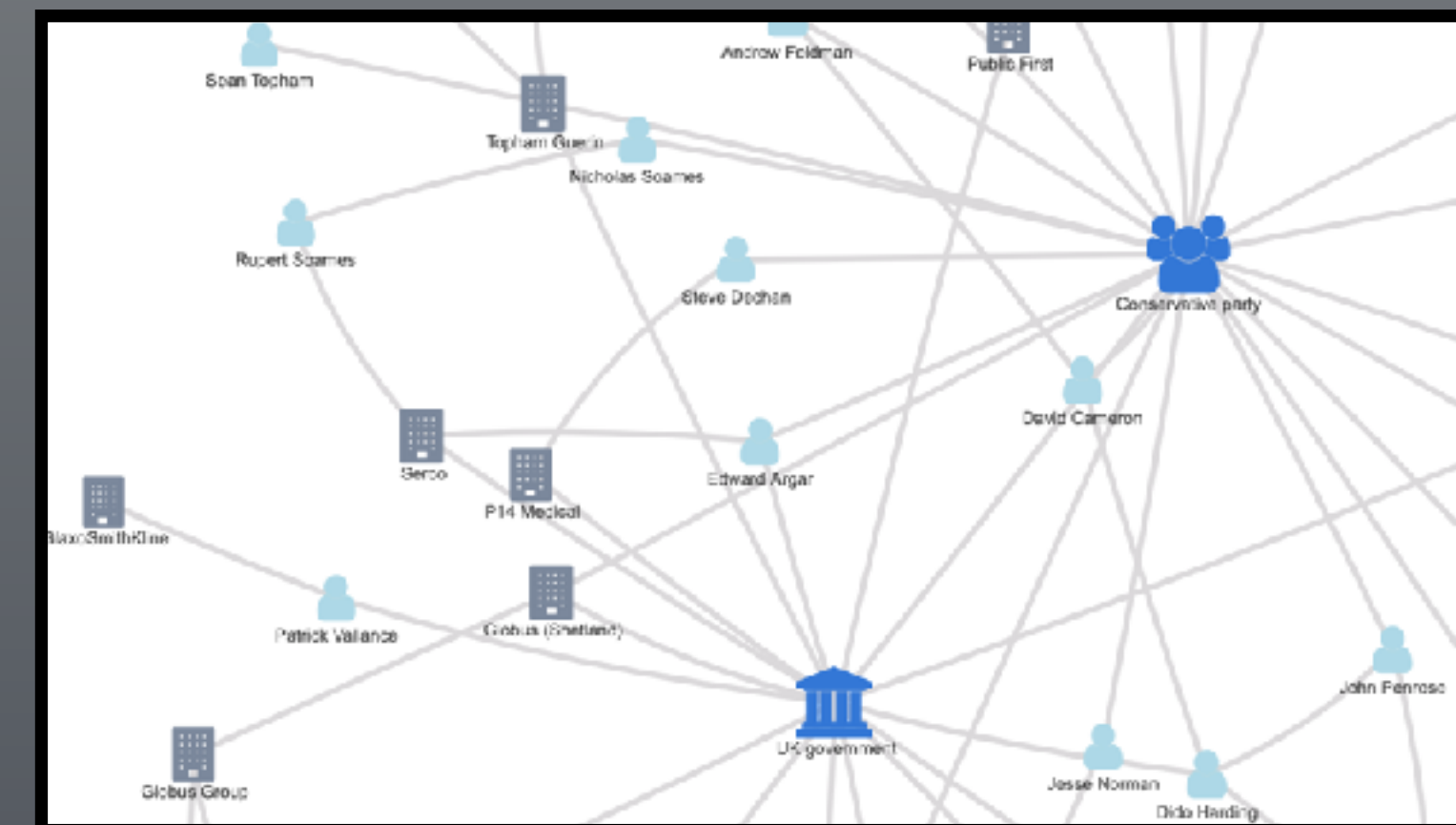
During Covid, UK ministers used encrypted messaging apps
WhatsApp & Signal for government business

Lack of transparency in procurement
Awarding of PPE contracts without due process

Exposed in Covid inquiry

Ongoing erosion of public
confidence in the government

My Little Crony



Political campaigning using social media

Revealed by Cambridge Analytica expose 2018



Using data from 50+ million Americans off FB
Segmenting the electorate
Micro-targeting messages
Voter suppression or encouragement
Transient advertisements

claimed involvement in 2016 US election

Erosion of political discourse

Reduced to viral images and sound bites



*‘when the looting starts,
the shooting starts’*



*“We took all the right decisions
at the right time”*

Limiting debate by de-platforming



Germaine Greer



JK Rowling

US & UK

Covid anti-vaxxers
Race
Immigration

US

QAnon *et al* conspiracy theories
The Big Lie
Roe v Wade ruling

UK

Transgender



Christina Lamb

What has been the Impact of Social Media on Democracy?

We're more connected but also more divided
Algorithmic moderation fuels polarisation and division not consensus

Loss of authoritative sources of information has lead to concept of
fake news, alternative facts & "my truth"

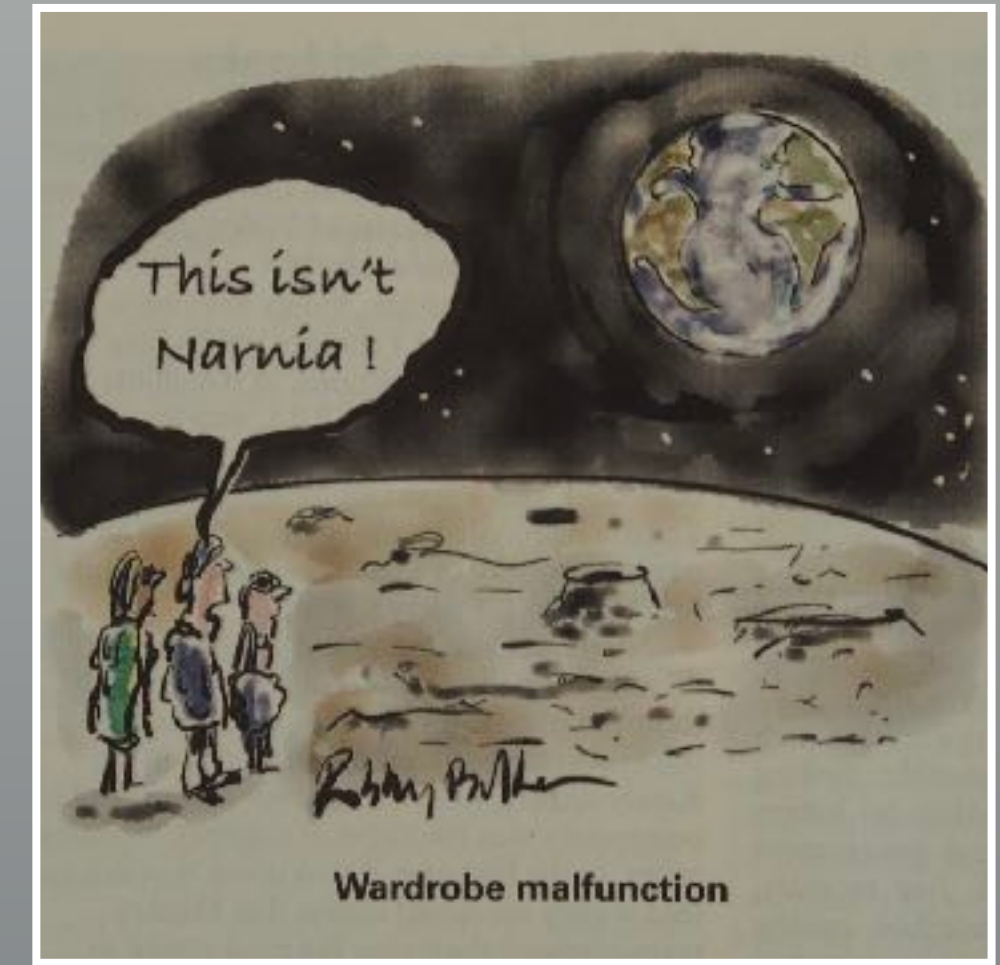
Flash mobs & & vicious trolling has become a fact of political life

Combination of predictive behaviour models & micro-targeting has
irrevocably changed political campaigning

Media savvy politicians have learnt how to optimise

Impact of social media Conclusions

Social media has accelerated an existing social trend



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

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

Mistrust of authority & lack of recognised authoritative sources fuels conspiracies

Weak regulation designed for the analogue age has not caught up

Nothing like the original utopian ideals

Homework Assignment



Try to identify aspects of social media I have covered today.

