



Living with Big Tech, Social Media & AI

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Autumn 2024

Week 2

*“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 did SM become the digital junk food of our age?

What does social media actually do?

Social networking

Instant messaging & microblogs

Video sharing

Video microblogs

Photo sharing

Social bookmarking

Business networks

Collaboration

Online gaming

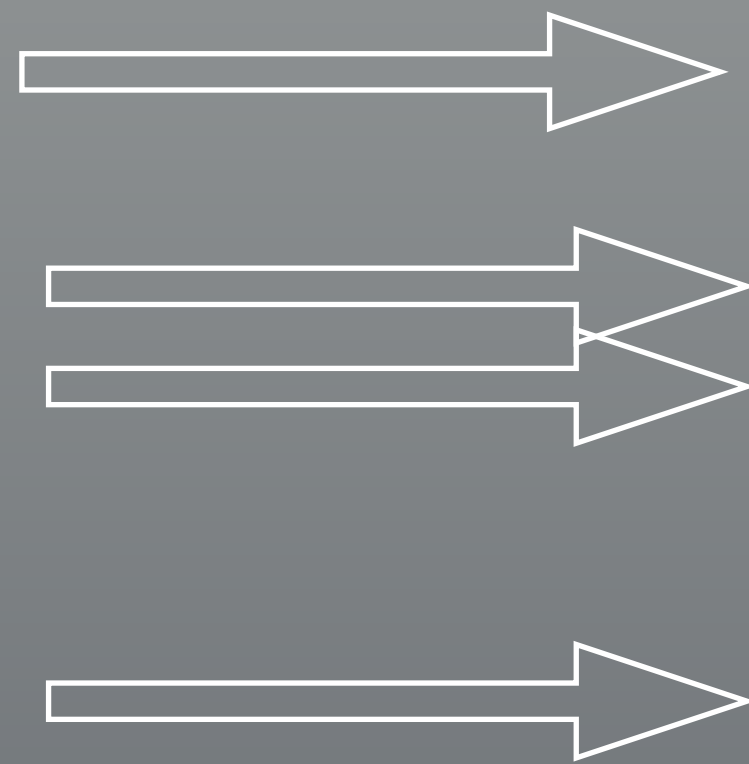
Virtual Worlds

Who are the main players in social media?

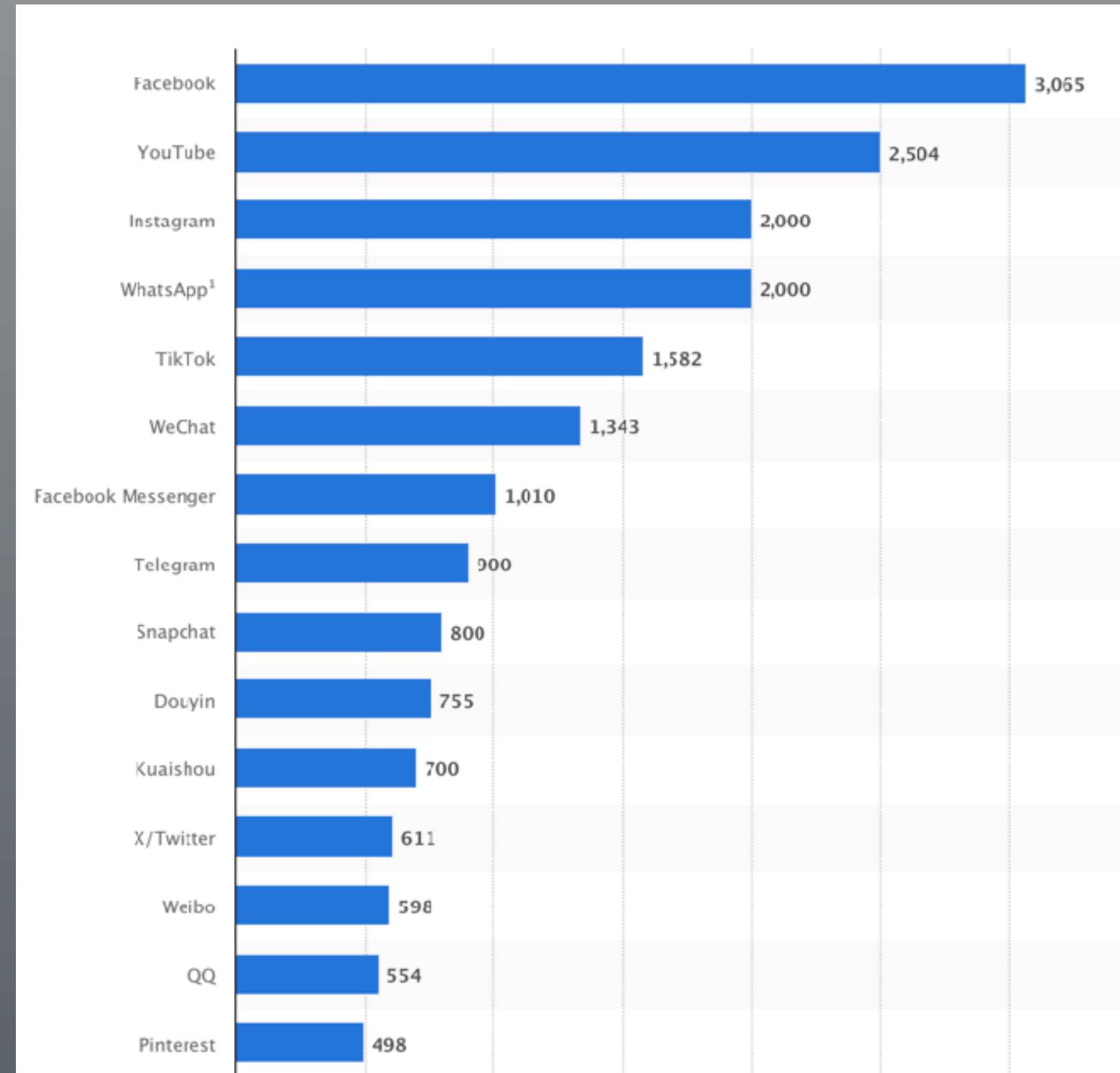


Numbers of users of social media

Numbers of global users, April 2024



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



Source: Statista

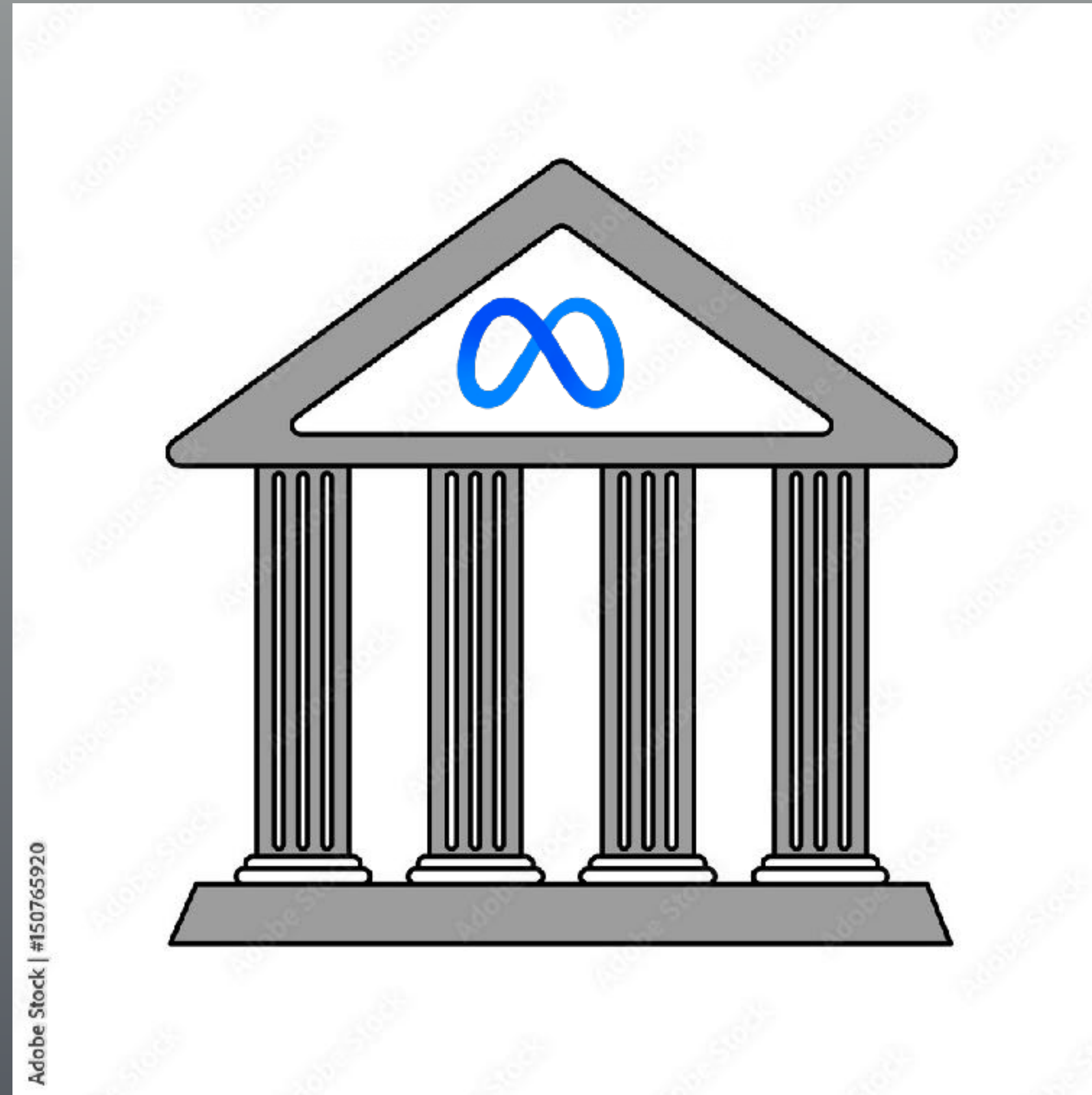
How we got here
The four pillars of social media

Corporate ownership

Business model

Technology

Regulation





Corporate Ownership *How we got here*

2004 The Facebook launched

2006 turned down \$1bn takeover offer from Yahoo



2012 bought Instagram for \$1bn

2012 Facebook's IPO (valued company at \$104bns)

2014 bought WhatsApp for \$19bns

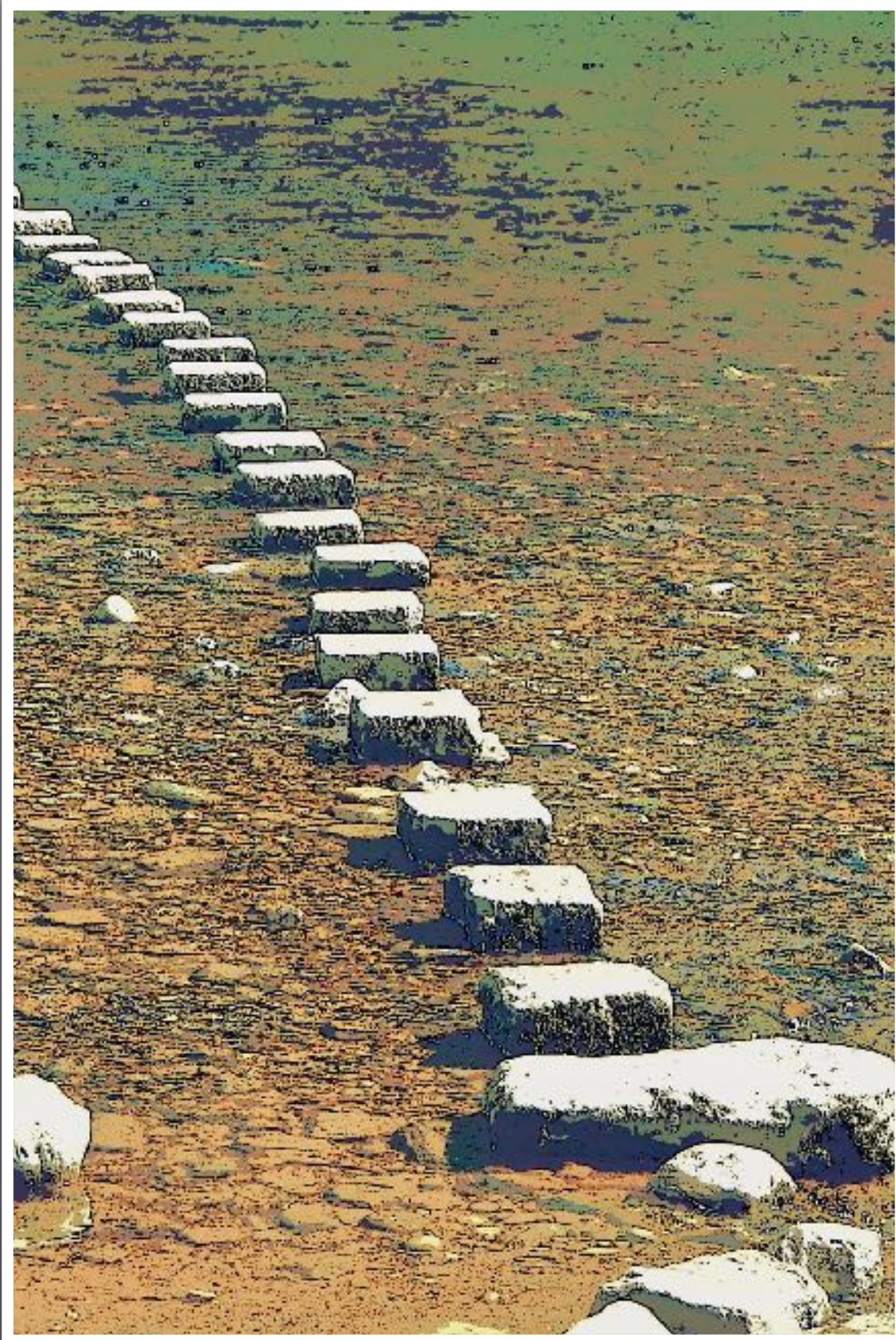


2021 changed company name to Meta



Mark Zuckerberg owns a controlling interest

Where we came from



All started so optimistically in mid-1990s

"Be Connected. Be Discovered. Be on Facebook."

Internet mantra

"Information should be free & universal"

Implicit social contract with users

Free service exchange for "digital exhaust"

Some milestones along the way

Advent of internet enabled smartphones
(iPhone 2007)



App design optimised for mobile phones

Continuous scrolling

“Intermittent variable reinforcement”

Significant social media software features

2005 Introduction of News Feed

Creation of Groups

2008 “Likes” and comments

Retweet on X/Twitter

“This is your digital life” study

Academic study into “likes” & emojis

Found that could create accurate personality predictions from 30+ responses

Massively useful in profiling users for micro-advertising

Enables behaviour modification

Controversial

privacy issues & ethics

subsequent link to Cambridge Analytica

Contagion Study - an example of Facebook's experimentation on users

2012 experiment with approx 600,000 users

Two groups of FB users:

- reduced the positive content within the NewsFeed
- reduced negative content

Observed whether subjects subsequent messages reflected a change in mood

The results were statistically significant, but only to a small extent

Ethically questionable study

<https://ideas.ted.com/need-to-know-about-facebooks-emotional-contagion-study/>

Business model

Data sources that contribute to your online profile

Phone - use of apps & location

Internet browsing history

All Facebook apps

All purchases

YouTube history

Alexa, Siri & any other listening device eg. TV

Household appliances eg Doorcams

Car telematics

Gleaned & packaged by third party agregators then sold to advertisers

How come these companies have so much information about us?

Because we have given them permission, for example:

We don't charge you to use Facebook or the other products and services covered by these Terms, unless we state otherwise. Instead, businesses, organisations and other persons pay us to show you ads for their products and services. ... You acknowledge that by using our Products, we will show you ads that we think may be relevant to you and your interests. We use your personal data to help determine which personalised ads to show you.

Facebook's Terms & Conditions

Other companies' ToS are similar

The fundamental contradiction

Key social media metrics are:
“engagement” & frequency of use

Over-riding aim is to keep users on their platform
Continual stream of prompts & suggestions based on Likes, reactions, shares &
news feeds
More important than accuracy or balance

The more contentious the material the more likely it is to be shared
Amplified by confirmation bias & selective perception to create *echo chambers*

Social media business model

Soshana Zuboff

Private personal experience as raw material
(from multiple data sources)

Generate predictive models of human behaviour
“behavioural surplus”

Creates one way mirror

Asymmetry of power between users & customers

Users are not customers of social media

Have become “behaviour modification engines”

“surveillance dividend” commercial benefit of behavioural change



“If you’re not paying for the product, then you are the product”

Business model

“Now that we have your attention, let’s monetise it”

2004 - 2009 FB was funded by investors

2007 enter Sheryl Sandberg, ex Google VP

Selling advertising, not products

2009 becomes profitable, based on banner adverts & pop-ups

Move to Adwords auction to advertisers turbo-charged ad revenue



AdWords example

Prompt was “Hotels in York”

B. <https://www.booking.com/city/gb/york.en-gb.html> ...

[The 10 best hotels in York, United Kingdom - Cheap York hotels](#)

Find and compare prices and deals for 186 hotels and places to stay in York, a historic city with Roman walls and a cathedral. See customer reviews, ratings, photos and amenities for each hotel and book online.

The best hotels in York City Cent... Radisson Hotel York features modern air-conditioned accommodation, a...	The 10 best accommodation in Y... Good · 749 reviews. A 10-minute walk from the centre of York, Diamonds...
The 10 best places to stay in Yor... 9.7. Exceptional · 105 reviews. Rowntree One - Stunning Apartment-...	The 10 best cheap hotels in York... The average price of a cheap hotel in York for this evening is £170...

🌐 https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotels-g186346-York_North_Yorkshire_England-Hotels.html ...

[THE 10 BEST Hotels in York 2024 \(from £49\) - Tripadvisor](#)

Find the best prices and deals for hotels in York, a historic city with medieval streets and attractions. See photos, reviews, ratings, and tips for different areas, seasons, and types of hotels.

B. <https://www.booking.com/district/gb/york/yorkcitycentre.en-gb.html> ...

[The best hotels in York City Centre, York, United Kingdom - Bookin...](#)

Compare and book from 448 hotels and other places to stay in the historic centre of York. Find deals, reviews, prices and availability for different dates and options.

🗞 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/united-kingdom/england/yor...> ...

[Best hotels in York | Telegraph Travel](#)

Grays Court Hotel. Hotel York, Yorkshire, England. 9 /10 Telegraph expert rating. In, arguably, York's prime location - between the Minster and the walls - and with a history dating back to ...

B. <https://www.booking.com/accommodation/city/gb/york.en-gb.html> ...

[The 10 best accommodation in York, UK | Booking.com](#)

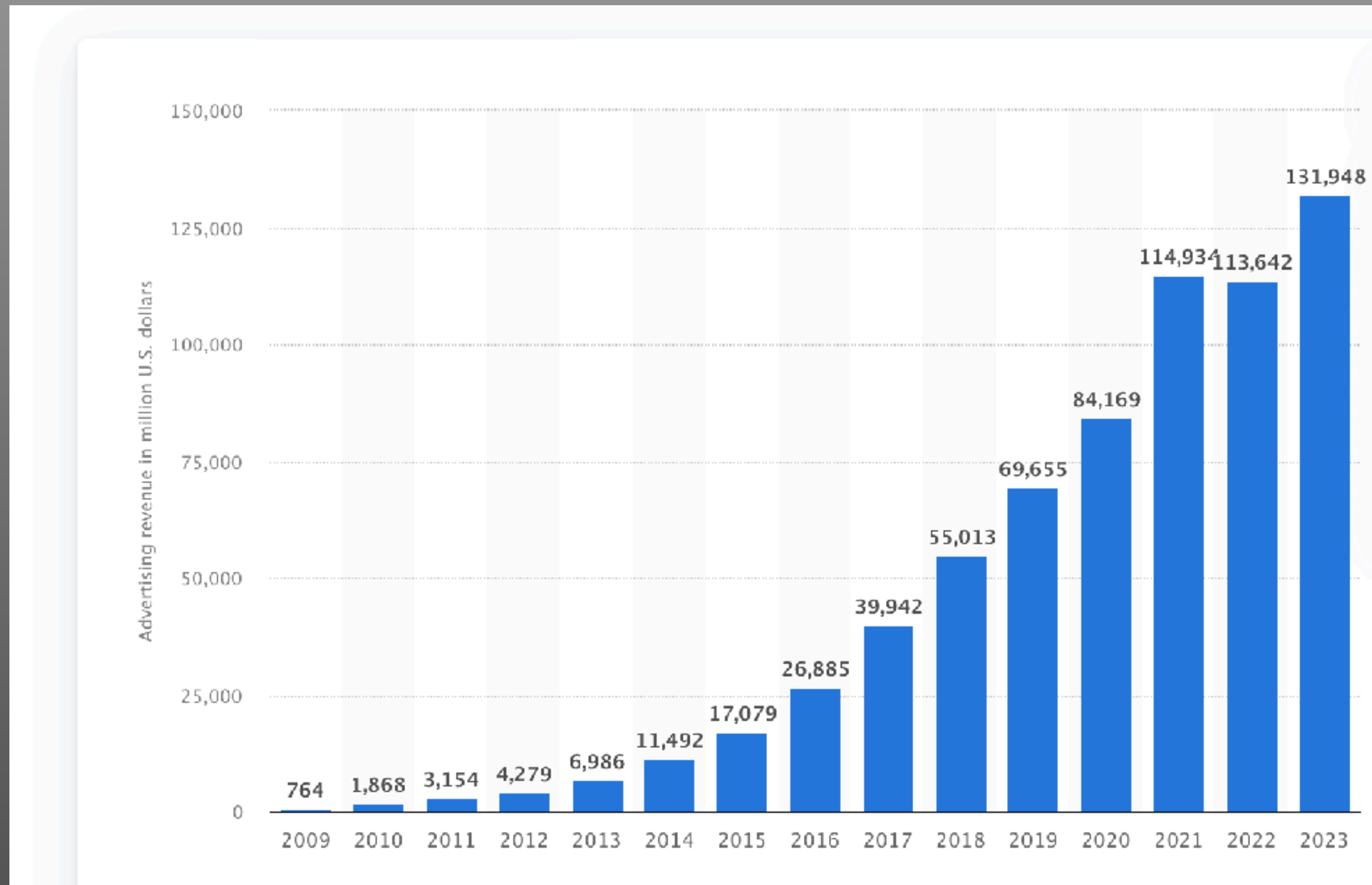
Good · 749 reviews. A 10-minute walk from the centre of York, Diamonds Lodge is an elegant Victorian town house with a garden and free Wi-Fi. York Minster is within walking distance. It was a very good experience staying in diamond lodge.

🌐 <https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/HotelsList-York-City-Centre-Hotels-zfp8816.html> ...

[THE 10 BEST York City Centre Hotels 2024 \(Prices\) - Tripadvisor](#)

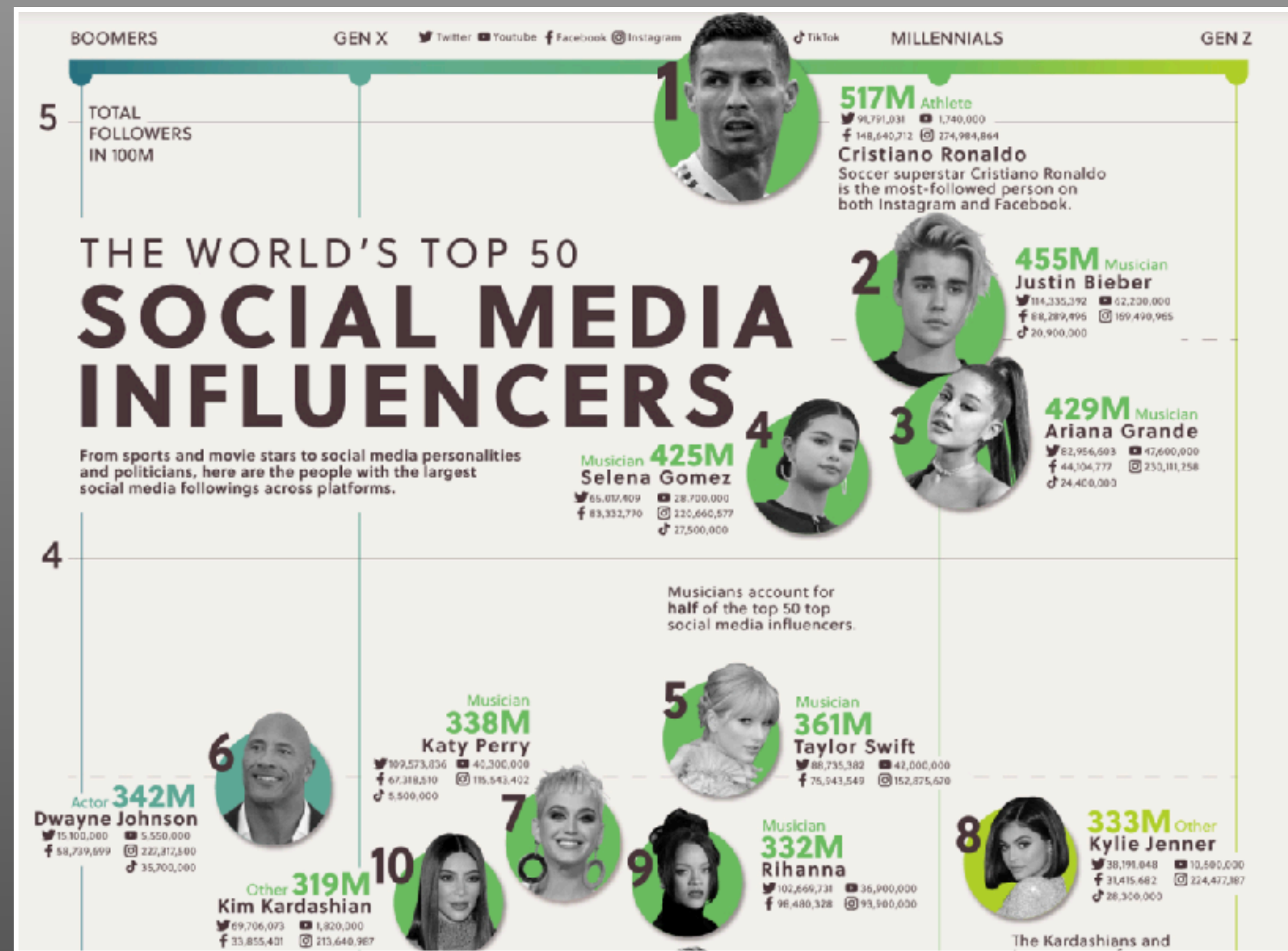
Compare and book hotels in the heart of York, close to the historic attractions and the train station. See ratings, amenities, photos and traveller reviews of 12 hotels in York City Centre.

Facebook's Advertising Revenues 2007 - 2023



Source: Statista

The role of “influencers”



Influence consumer behaviour by having a on more personal connection with user

Greater likelihood to swaying purchasing decisions

Used to influence public opinion in US 2024 presidential election by both parties

Influencers have become central to social media marketing at all levels

Online game playing meets the commercial world

Pokemon Go launched in 2016. Hugely popular



Basis of the game was finding digital characters in the real world

Location of characters and routing was algorithmically determined

Players were routed passed venues that sponsored the game

Who decides what you see?

Algorithms

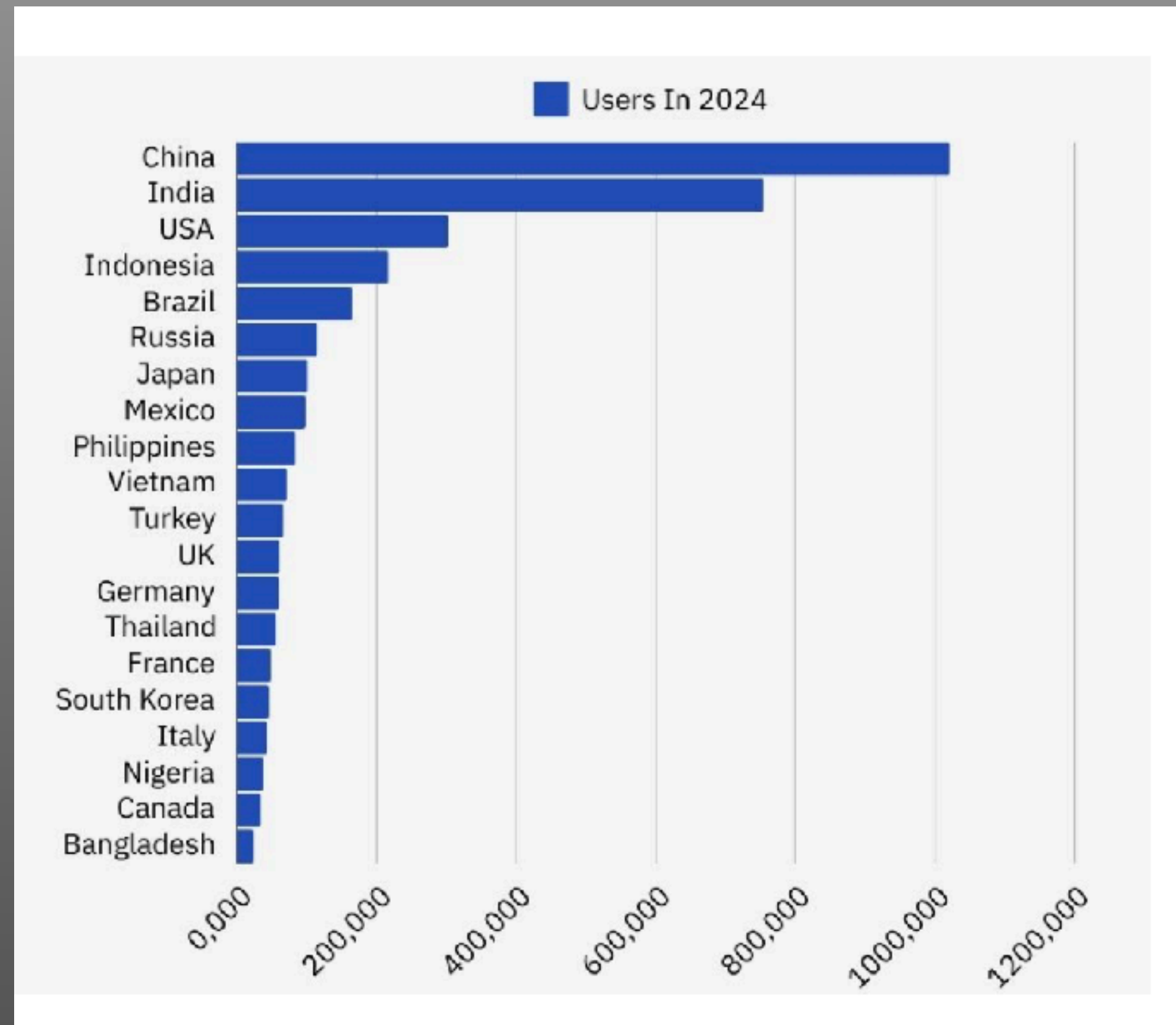
Based on your personal profile

Commercial considerations eg Adwords auction

Owner's whim in the case on x/Twitter

Content moderators in case of controversial posts

Going global - the growth imperative



Source: Priori Data

Facebook drive for growth over profitability in developing countries

Agreement with local mobile phone companies to provide Free Basic service

FB pre-loaded onto mobile phones & no data charges.

FB has become the *de facto* internet in many countries

Regulation:

How social media companies became “neutral platforms”

No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.

Section 230

Communications Decency Act, 1996

Has been described as “*the twenty-six words that created social media*”

Ever since, social media companies have been trying to minimise regulatory oversight

Implications of becoming neutral platforms

Users could post anything provided it was not illegal

Social media companies were not required to fact check or verify users' posts

In US, First Amendment rights to free speech protected almost all opinions

Fact checking by main stream media started after 2016 US election

Growing list of concerns about social media

Breaches of users' data privacy

Spread of mis- & dis-information, hate speech

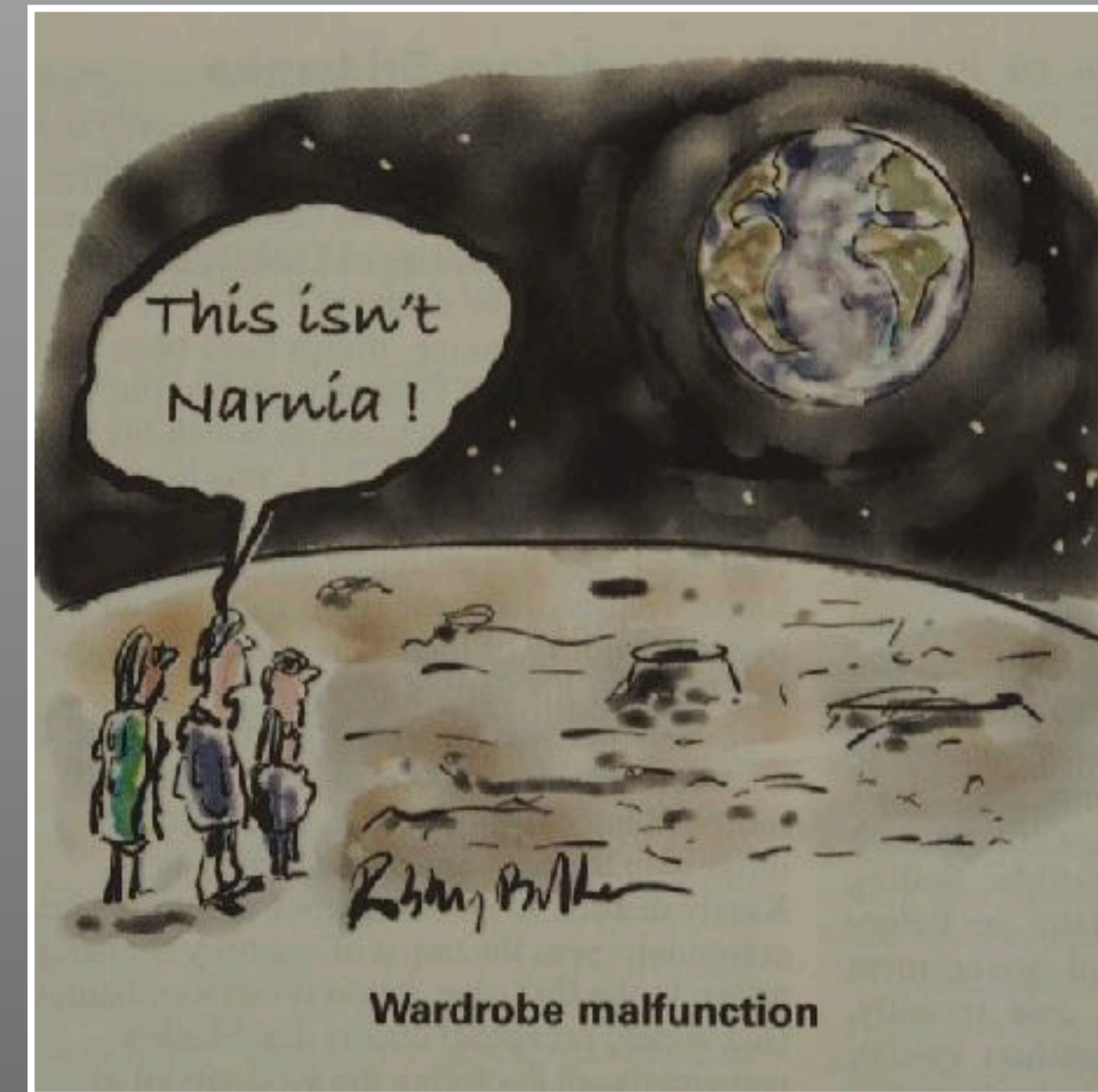
Political influence in elections worldwide

Social harm, especially among women & girls

Profitability perceived as more important than user safety

Next week

*“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”*



Homework is to:

look at use of Adwords in your searches
download your data from Facebook