



Media Needs to Critically Scrutinize Technology and Themselves

Michał “**rysiek**” Woźniak
Breakwater Festival 2026



Who am I?

- Internet plumber
- **Not** a journalist
 - But I write for media
 - And I worked for media organizations

Hi. I am rysiek, and I am an Internet plumber. I've been an Internet plumber in many organizations, including journalistic ones. I've also done information security work for media organizations, for example in the run up to and during the Panama Papers.

What I am not is a journalist. I have not studied journalism in any formal way. I've been writing for OKO.press and other outlets for several years now, but I don't feel that alone makes me a member of that club. I still see myself mainly as a techie.



Disclaimer

- Opinions about journalism
- Generalizations

So I beg your forgiveness, for I – a person with arguably no real journalistic credentials – will now have opinions on journalism, with you, actual journalists, present in the room. This might end up being a phenomenal demonstration of the Dunning–Kruger effect. I do hope you'll at least enjoy the ride.

My one saving grace here is that I will focus on the interplay between journalism and tech. I will be making some generalizations; please bear with me. If your organization is one of the few that are the exceptions, thank you for that, and I'm sorry.



Media ecosystem is in crisis.

I think it's fair to say the whole media sector is in crisis. Media organizations and journalists are hurting, and have been hurting for a very long time. There are obviously many, many reasons for that, most of them outside of media organizations' control.

But not all.



Money Eyeballs Trust

There are three aspects of this hurt that I want to focus on: money, eyeballs, and trust. I don't think it's controversial to say journalism cannot thrive without these three.



Media have **materially helped** create
the crisis they are in,
by being **uncritical and naïve**
about the tech sector.

The point I want to make to you today is this: media organizations have materially helped create the crisis they currently find themselves in, by being uncritical and naïve about the tech sector and power dynamics of its products and services.



Unchecked power

I don't think I need to convince anyone in this room that tech sector's power is currently not checked in any meaningful way.



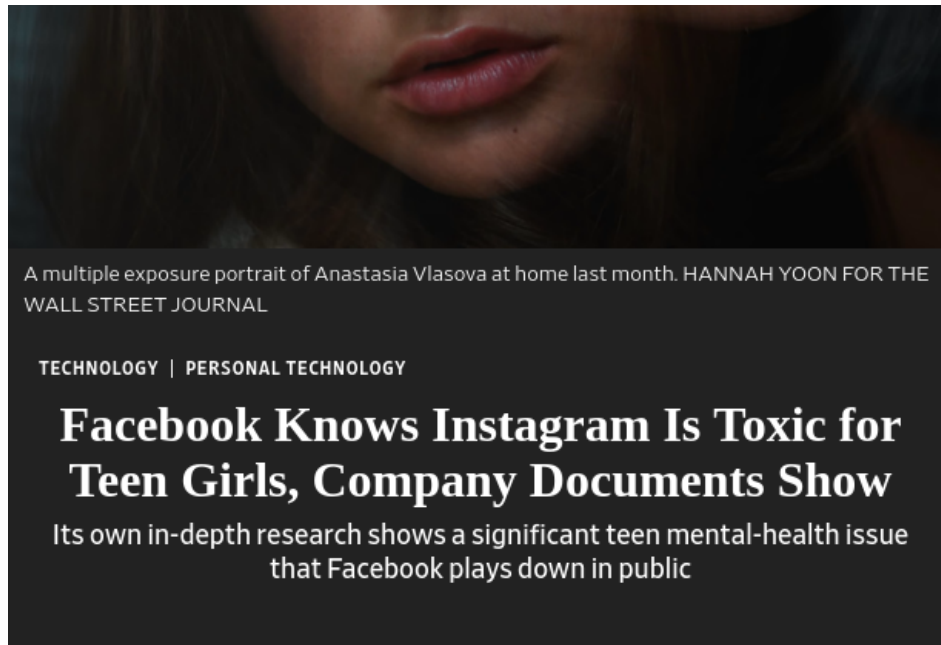
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DY1GdzFMfHj/>

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Heads of state wait hat in hand on its leaders, legislation is being shaped by its interests to the detriment of everything else, any regulatory action takes years if not decades, and usually ends up with a slap on the wrist.

Let's consider this image for a moment. President of the European Parliament, meeting with Zuck on his terms, with the creepiest Meta product so far prominently displayed. The politician proudly informs of this on Zuck's social media platform. Complete and utter capture.



<https://www.wsj.com/tech/personal-tech/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739>

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Tech companies release and operate services that cause real, measurable harm to living, breathing people. Executives of these companies are aware of this, often having been warned early about these effects, and yet nothing changes in any meaningful way.



<https://x.com/EPPGroup/status/2073371745721921669>

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Political parties push for privacy-hostile legislation under the guise of fighting child sexual abuse materials online, and proudly post about this on Twitter...



INC-25-0038

CONFIRMED

CRITICAL

Grok AI Generates 3 Million Sexualized Images Including Approximately 23,000 Depicting Children (2025)

<https://www.topaithreats.com/incidents/INC-25-0038-grok-csam-scandal/>

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...a social network where generating child sexual abuse materials – from real photos of real children – was not a bug, but a paid feature...



Despite Pledges From Musk, Child Sexual Abuse Material Persists on X

“This is wildly unacceptable that known child sexual abuse material is appearing” that should be automatically taken down, said Lloyd Richardson, the technology director at the Canadian center. “You don’t see this behavior with any other big social media company.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/11/technology/x-grok-child-images.html>

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...and one that doesn't even apply the most basic filters to remove well known child sexual abuse materials. The lowest of bars to clear.



- Who here **has an X/Twitter** account?
- Who is **paying** for it?

By the way, who here is still active on Twitter? And who is paying for it? Right. We'll get back to this.

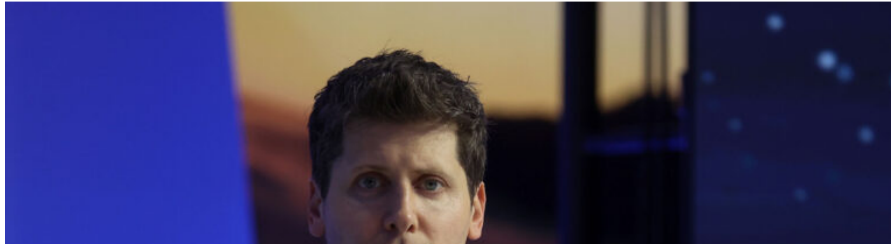


“Impossible”: OpenAI admits ChatGPT can’t exist without pinching copyrighted work

Human authors sue company for "theft on a mass scale."

By **RAE HODGE**
Staff Reporter

PUBLISHED JANUARY 9, 2024 4:44PM (EST)



<https://www.salon.com/2024/01/09/impossible-openai-admits-chatgpt-cant-exist-without-pinching-copyrighted-work/>

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A decade ago a person torrenting a movie would end up in jail. This might still be the case. Today tech leaders complain that if they were to pay the licensing fees for having downloaded literally every piece of digital content out there, that would kill their business model.



Criminal Penguin 
@Crime_Penguin

OpenAI and Anthropic's models are so magical and mystical and dangerous, they can do anything! They may even destroy the world! The only thing they can't do, funny enough, is generate positive cash flow. And that's where the US Taxpayer comes in!

A business model which is so successful, by the way, that my tiny one-man company made infinitely more profit last month than OpenAI ever has. If you're confused by that look up division by zero.



Information is power, and both journalism and the tech sector deal in information.

They directly compete in the attention economy.

Information is power, and both journalism and the tech sector deal in information.

They directly compete in the attention economy.



But only the **tech companies** seem **aware** of this.

For the technology sector to have gained the effectively unchecked power it now wields, for it to have become the antidemocratic behemoth that it is today, for Zuckerbergs and Musks and Thiels and Bezoses of this world to become the all-powerful global tech broliarchy, the tech sector had to subdue, suppress, and subvert journalism.

17.07.2026



Peter Thiel to Receive the 2026 Axel Springer Award



<https://www.axelspringer.com/en/ax-press-release/peter-thiel-to-receive-the-2026-axel-springer-award>

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And so it did. But not without help from media themselves.



Money

Funding journalism has always been difficult, but at least for a while advertising was a relatively effective way to do so, even once the Internet became a thing.



Google's digital ad network declared an illegal monopoly, joining its search engine in penalty box



<https://apnews.com/article/google-illegal-monopoly-advertising-search-a1e4446c4870903ed05c03a2a03b581e>

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Until, that is, ad networks consolidated into what is effectively a duopoly of Google and Meta, controlling their respective surveillance ad marketplaces end-to-end.



“The Google/Meta duopoly **sucks up 51%** of display advertising revenue – **more than triple the historic take** for advertising intermediaries (buyers, brokers, agencies, etc).”

<https://pluralistic.net/2026/06/29/arsonist-firefighters/>

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This allows them to extract as much rent as they feel like.



Manage Consent Preferences

+ Store and/or access information on a device
56 partners can use this purpose

☐

+ Use limited data to select advertising
45 partners can use this purpose

☐

+ Use profiles to select personalised advertising
46 partners can use this purpose

☐

+ Create profiles for personalised advertising
47 partners can use this purpose

☐

+ Use profiles to select personalised content
8 partners can use this purpose

☐

+ Create profiles to personalise content
12 partners can use this purpose

☐

+ Measure advertising performance
48 partners can use this purpose

☐

+ Measure content performance
16 partners can use this purpose

☐

+ Understand audiences through statistics or combinations of data from different sources
26 partners can use this purpose

☐

Essential Cookies Only

Save Preferences

Powered by  OneTrust



Manage Consent Preferences

+ Understand audiences through statistics or combinations of data from different sources
26 partners can use this purpose

☐

+ Develop and improve services
44 partners can use this purpose

☐

+ Ensure security, prevent and detect fraud, and fix errors
50 partners can use this special purpose

Always Active

+ Deliver and present advertising and content
46 partners can use this special purpose

Always Active

+ Save and communicate privacy choices
37 partners can use this special purpose

Always Active

+ Match and combine data from other data sources
39 partners can use this feature

Always Active

+ Link different devices
36 partners can use this feature

Always Active

+ Identify devices based on information transmitted automatically
45 partners can use this feature

Always Active

+ Strictly Necessary Cookies

Always Active

Essential Cookies Only

Save Preferences

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Media organizations didn't have a lot of power over that process of consolidation. But they did have – and continue to have – a choice in whose ads they carry.

They did have and continue to have a choice of whether they expose their readership to creepy targeted advertising – sending data wholesale to surveillance capitalists...



DATA REGULATION

After GDPR, The New York Times cut off ad exchanges in Europe — and kept growing ad revenue

By Jessica Davies • January 16, 2019 •

<https://digiday.com/media/gumgumtest-new-york-times-gdpr-cut-off-ad-exchanges-europe-ad-revenue/>

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...or choose contextual ads instead, or maybe a membership and subscription model.

And they did have, and continue to have, a choice whether they continue to feed and nurture these behemoths with valuable data, by using tools like Google Analytics on their websites, or integrating Meta's intrusive personal information harvesting libraries into their mobile apps.



WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

“Civil applies the tenets of
cryptoeconomics—the practice of
powering online marketplaces with
digital currency logged on encrypted
ledgers—to the financial challenges
facing the news industry.”

—
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

<https://web.archive.org/web/20180725130556/https://civil.co/>

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Media organizations also dive head-on into every shady hype-driven get-rich-quick scheme out there. That's also a choice. Anyone remembers Civil, the cryptocurrency that was supposed to "save journalism" through, among others, micropayments? Wall Street Journal had some nice words about them some years ago.



Ending the Civil Journey

It's with a heavy heart that I announce the end of Civil. The Civil team and technology will be joining ConsenSys to build identity solutions on Ethereum.

<https://civil.co/>

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It did not save journalism It went defunct somewhere in 2020. That was not a surprise for anyone critically scrutinizing the cryptocurrency space.



THE SHIFT

Buy This Column on the Blockchain!

Why can't a journalist join the NFT party, too?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/24/technology/nft-column-blockchain.html>

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"Why can't journalists join the NFT party, too?" asks the New York Times in 2021. "Because it is a scam," I'd have responded. NFT bubble popped about a year later. Loads of money was lost, with a few people getting obnoxiously rich off of the bubble. It was not a surprise either.

Also, interesting how New York Times happily pushed NFTs, but did not even mention their switch to contextual ads as any kind of potential solution to the funding issue. Not enough bling I guess.



<https://openmedia.org/article/item/whats-wrong-with-the-link-tax-an-faq>

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Many media organizations have tied themselves to surveillance capitalists so tightly, that they push for measures that give them even more power. Like "link tax". What are the power dynamics of link tax? Who ends up controlling the money faucet?

What happens if a media organization funded through link tax starts writing critically about these companies? Will the money well conspicuously dry out? The incentives are perverse.

By all means, tax these companies to the ground, and give the money to journalists! But do so in any of the myriad ways that does not end up giving them even more power over the information ecosystem.

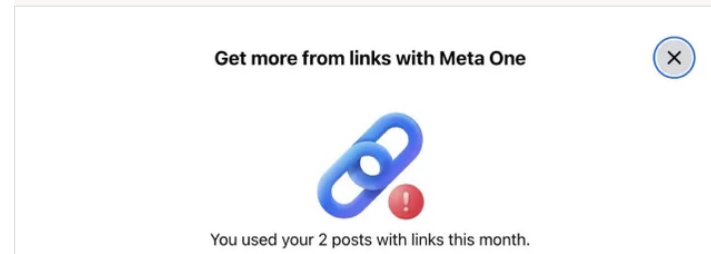
Because they will wield it to your detriment.



Facebook now limits you to two links a month. Why are you still there?

Sep 23, 2026 | Piotr Kowalczyk

If you buy an item via this post, we may get a small affiliate fee at no cost to you ([details](#)). Some content uses AI assistance ([details](#)).



<https://geekupdated.com/facebook-two-links-month-limit/>

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Link tax or no link tax, Big Tech can just stop linking to media organizations. Or can start limiting reach and charging for restoring it. Or, for the ability to post links at all.

In fact, they did all of these things already.



Our experiment on the value of European news content

Mar 21, 2025
1 min read

Google ran an experiment to understand the value of European news content. The data shows people visited Google only slightly less often when this content was removed, and Google's ad revenue did not significantly change.

<https://blog.google/company-news/inside-google/around-the-globe/google-europe/our-experiment-on-the-value-of-european-news-content/>

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Click-throughs from Google are drying out. So are click-throughs from Facebook, and from Xitter. These companies do not care about you and your content anymore, because they don't have to – Google said it outright. They even did a little experiment to prove their point.

Meta is actively pushing for auto-generated slop and polarizing disinformation instead of promoting actual journalistic content the same way TV stations have been pushing reality shows when they figured out they don't have to pay scriptwriters.

How did they become such powerful gatekeepers?



Eyeball Silos



Eyeball Silos

- Facebook can shut down your account.
- Your hosting provider can shut down your website.
- These are **not the same**.



Eyeball Silos

- When a **hosting provider** shuts you down, **you find another** hosting provider.
- When **Facebook** shuts you down, **that's that**.

If a hosting provider shuts you down, you find another hosting provider, and everyone can reach you again. It's a few hours, maybe a day of disruption and you're back up and running; your previous provider has no say over this. All your readers need in order to continue to read you is a browser.

When Facebook shuts you down, that's that. Nobody can reach your Facebook page. Moving to another social network does not solve the problem, because your Facebook followers are on Facebook – they would have to set up an account on a new service, learn a new app, accept new Terms of Service.

Which they won't.



Eyeball Silos

- Centralized, vertically integrated services are silos.
- Monopoly is the business model.
- Gatekeeping is how value is extracted.

Big Tech services are designed to be like that on purpose. To be centralized, to be vertically integrated, and through that to be de facto monopolies.



"Competition is for losers"

– Peter Thiel, 2014

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoGa48GPlas>

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"Competition is for losers", said Peter Thiel in 2014; he is one of the first investors in Facebook and the recipient of 2026 Axel Springer award.



Not Eyeball Silos

- Website – Any hosting provider – Any browser
- E-mail – Any mail provider – Any mail client
- Fediverse – Any instance – Any fediverse app

Hosting providers compete with one another because their services are standardized. Switching is relatively easy.

Same with e-mail providers. Or Fediverse instances.

I am not saying “market will solve it”. I am saying: ability to easily switch providers is a crucial safeguard.



Eyeball Silos

- Instagram – Only Meta – Only Instagram app
- TikTok – Only TikTok – Only TikTok app
- X/Twitter – Only X/Twitter – Only X/Twitter app

Instagram is not competing with TikTok in the same sense as one hosting provider competes with another, because these are both vertically integrated, centralized platforms, even if the functionality is somewhat similar.

To follow your Instagram account your readers must necessarily have an Instagram account and submit to Instagram's Terms of Service, and to follow your TikTok account they necessarily need to have a TikTok account and submit to TikTok's ToS.



This is as boring as it is important.

And I get it. This is boring. Nobody wants to constantly think about protocols and silos and centralization and vertical integration.

But nobody wants to think about ownership structures and shell companies and money laundering schemes. And yet we do, because it is important.

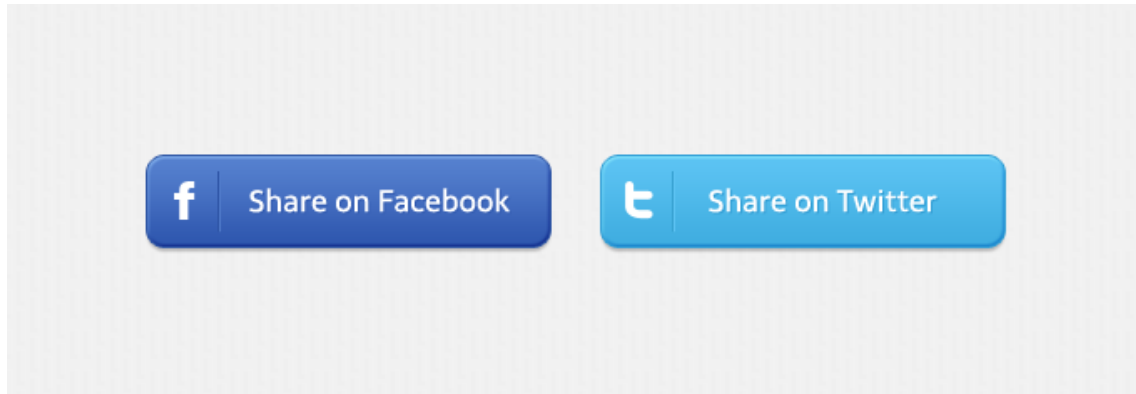
This is just as important. This is the core reason why these platforms can be the gatekeepers they are today. This is one of the core reasons behind the spread of disinformation, the dwindling click-throughs and ad revenues, and ultimately behind tech companies explicitly telling news organizations they don't matter.

Journalists and media organizations by and large refused to acknowledge and understand and act upon for two decades. And continue to.



Eyeballs **in** the Silos

Once you have an eyeball silo, you need to fill it with a lot of eyeballs. That's not trivial...



...unless you get a bit help. Media organizations have been promoting Facebook, Instagram, Twitter for years, relentlessly. Not so long ago, every article on every media site out there had to have "Like us on Facebook", "Share on Twitter", Facebook-powered comment sections, and other similar UI elements. Most news sites still cannot imagine publishing an article that does not embed content from Twitter or Instagram. Most still have little icons promoting these platforms on their websites.

How much would any other company have to pay for a small logo on a large news site? Twitter gets it for free.

Just consider what this means. A reader is on your website, engaging with your content on your terms, via infrastructure you actually control, hosted on a service you can switch providers of at will – and what you do is send them over to some locked-down third party silo instead.



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Not only that, but at some point media sites started removing RSS/Atom feeds and shutting down their newsletters. Two phenomenal channels of direct communication with your readers, both relying on services that do not lend themselves to becoming gatekeepers, gone.

Is it any wonder that Google killed Google Reader? Standards-based services that do not lend themselves to siloification are not in Google's best interest.

But they are in yours.



Can Google+ Survive the Hype?

<https://uk.pcmag.com/opinion/107580/can-google-survive-the-hype>

Google+, the presumptive Facebook killer, shows tremendous potential. As someone who warms up to any social network with the alacrity of a Galápagos tortoise, this, for me, is saying something.

Six reasons Mastodon won't survive

<https://mashable.com/article/mastodon-wont-survive>

*William Shatner couldn't find me on Mastodon.
This was a problem.*

(...)

And, no, Mastodon cannot live on hype alone.

Relationships with readers now had to be mediated by social media, and by and large the only social media journalism knew and knows today are those controlled by the tech giants hostile to it.

Consider these two pieces from the same seasoned tech reporter, Lance Ulanoff, former Editor in Chief at PCMag-dot-com. There are a few important differences between the two social networks and their coverage. Google+ was an eyeball silo, Mastodon is standards based. Google+ got plenty of positive press, Mastodon (and more broadly, the Fediverse) is still treated as a butt of a joke. Google+ had corporate backing and infinite money, Mastodon is a tiny project run by an NGO. Google+ got killed

years ago, Mastodon stubbornly survives with millions of users, already longer than Google+ had existed.

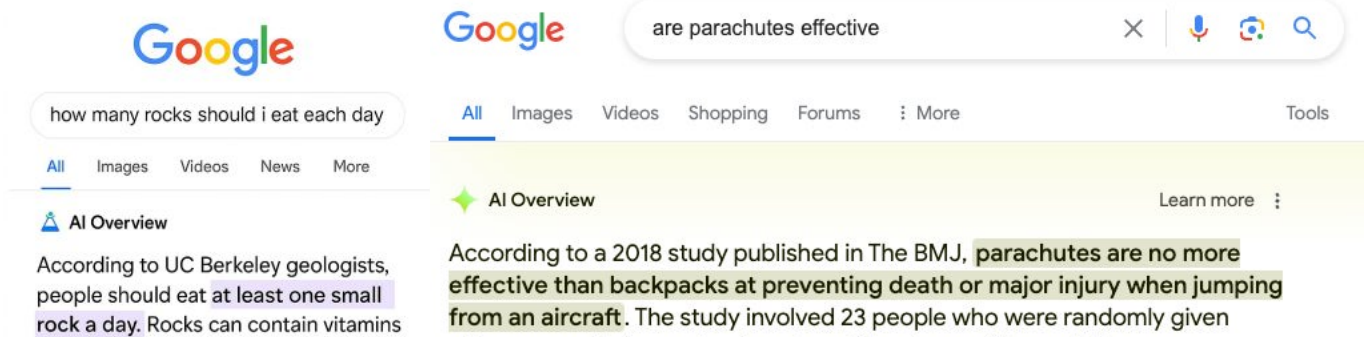


Media **had the power** to tell people where to look for information, and **exercised that power**.

Is it at all surprising that **eyeballs went where it pointed** them to?



Trust



The reason why click-throughs from Google Search are drying out is because Google largely replaced search with a slop generator. I don't think that's news to anyone at this stage. It is no longer a tool to find reliable sources of information on a topic, it is a tool to get some extruded text that sounds human-like and authoritative even though it might be complete, sometimes life-threatening, bullshit.



On the Fundamental Impossibility of Hallucination Control in Large Language Models

Michał P. Karpowicz

<https://arxiv.org/html/2506.06382v1>

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It is mathematically impossible for language models not to hallucinate. Text they generate cannot be trustworthy in any meaningful sense, full stop.

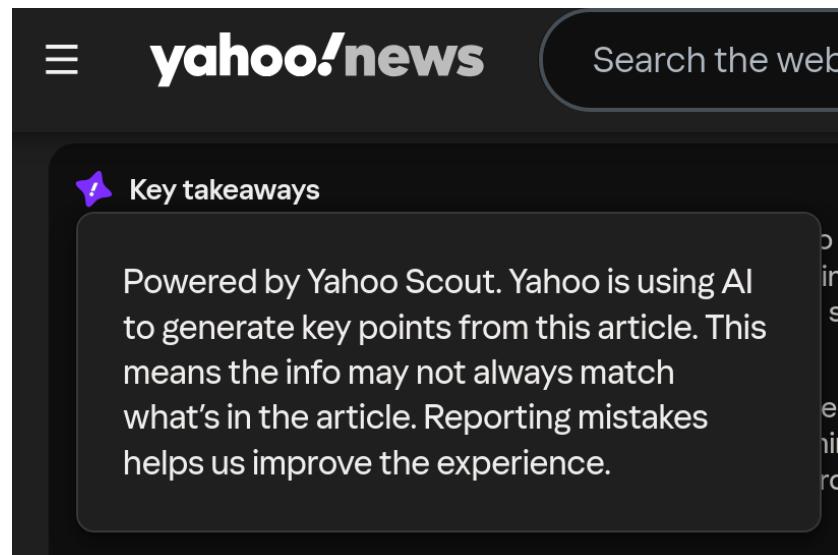
This is a huge advantage media organizations have over Big Tech's slop generators, which are being weaponized against them. Where chatbots extrude untrustworthy slop, journalists meticulously investigate and fact check.

This is something to build on. A foundation for a strategy to push back and reclaim some eyeballs, and thus power, from Big Tech.



 Prefer the Guardian on Google

Instead, media organizations not only keep promoting Google, additionally helping train the very slop generators that are eating their cake...



...but even provide slop summary options directly on their websites!

Consider what this signals to the reader: instead of differentiating trustworthy media from untrustworthy Big Tech chatbots, it does the opposite. Are chatbots as trustworthy as the media organizations? If they are, why wouldn't the reader limit themselves to whatever chatbot they are already most used to? No need to visit your site anymore.

Media diluted their trustworthiness, while at the same time improving the perceived trustworthiness of slop generators. Another type of silo emerges, one that even more completely locks the reader in.



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And finally, between SEO-optimized clickbait headlines and distracting auto-play videos that are unrelated to the article content, many media websites signal outright hostility towards the reader and their preferences.

The relatively recent (and likely illegal) forced-consent banners – which, again, are a choice, not a necessity – only strengthen that feeling.



Badge of Shame? Twitter Restores Blue Checkmarks: Here's How to Remove Them

Elon Musk returns blue badges to the accounts of some influential users, many of whom are annoyed and don't want people think they're paying for X Premium.

<https://uk.pcmag.com/social-media/151722/badge-of-shame-twitter-restores-blue-checkmarks-heres-how-to-remove-them>

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In fact, trust itself has been outsourced to the gatekeepers.

Twitter's checkmarks, formerly highly-coveted by journalists and a point of pride as a sign of clout, turned into a meaningless rent extraction scheme.

You gave a corporate platform the power to decide who's trustworthy and who is not, and now you literally pay the price.



<https://x.com/pcmag>

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And yet you persist there. After Department of Government Efficiency killed your funding, after the hand gesture, after Grok-generated child sexual abuse materials scandal, after Musk called an interviewer "a traitor to the west" for pointed questions, and fantasized about killing other journalists.

Can it be any more clear that Musk and his platform sees you as his enemy? How can people trust you if you stay there? What would it take for you to leave? Is there anything at all?



Key Takeaways



Your very existence in the silos
lends them credibility
and builds their importance.

I know you're still there because everyone else is. But this works both ways: for how many of your readers you being there is the reason they stay there? For how many fellow journalists? For how many politicians? Your very existence on these toxic platforms lends them credibility and builds their importance.



You **can** point the eyeballs elsewhere.

Here's the good news: you helped push people into these toxic places, so you can lead them out of there. You can close your accounts, or at least you can limit your posting there.

Even if you stay in some of the silos, the way you use them matters. Are you pulling more people into them? Or are you crafting your use such that it pulls people out of them?



You bear responsibility
for where you point them.

But remember there are no silver bullets. Interrogate the power dynamics of new tools you use and promote. Do they lend themselves to gatekeeping? Are the companies or organizations behind them trustworthy? Is switching a provider easy in case your current one becomes problematic?



Revealed: How Substack makes money from hosting Nazi newsletters

Exclusive: Site takes a cut of subscriptions to content that promotes far-right ideology, white supremacy and antisemitism



<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2026/feb/07/revealed-how-substack-makes-money-from-hosting-nazi-newsletters>

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Newsletters are making a comeback. That's a great step, as long as we're not talking about wannabe silos like Substack.



OCCRP
@occrp@journahost

OCCRP has today announced a strategic partnership with W Social.

You wouldn't publish an article without investigating and fact-checking. Why not apply the same standard to tech companies and services you use and promote?



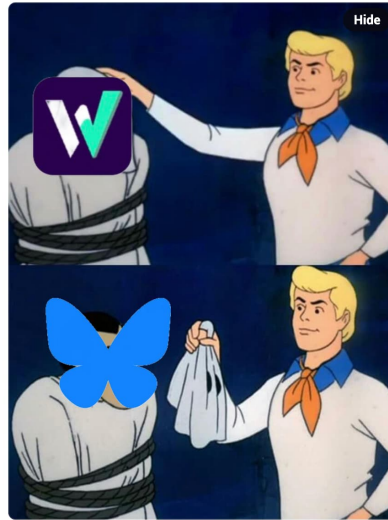
DoktorZjivago
@doktorzjivago@mastodonsweden.se

3d



@tante @ikuturso @_elena

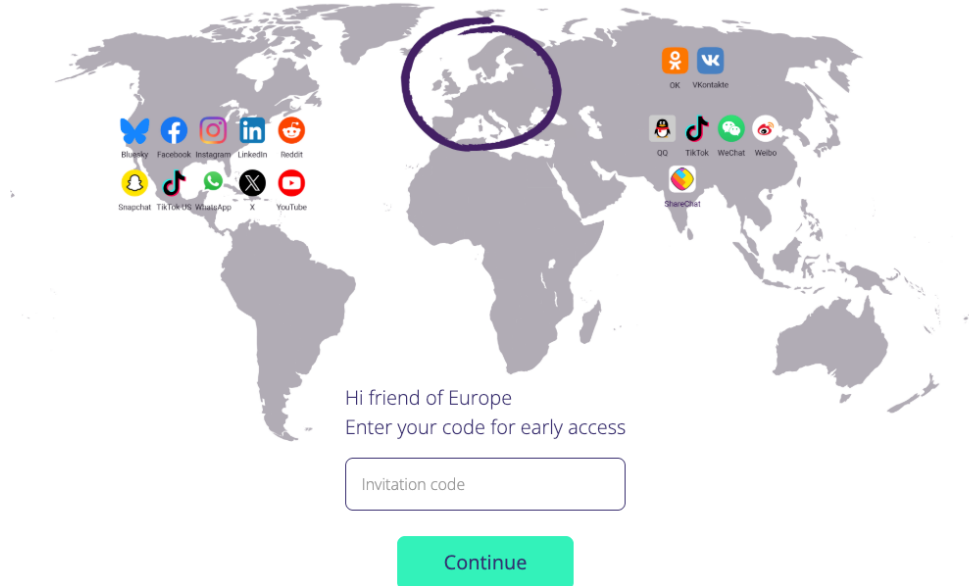
Translate



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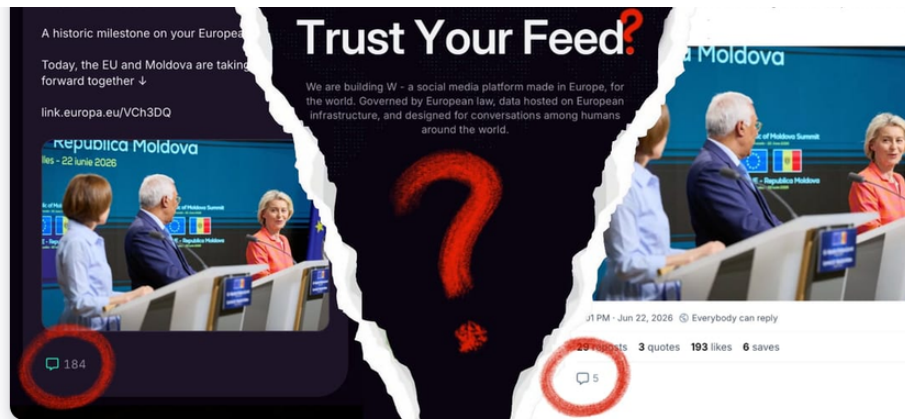
If you did apply the same standard, you would maybe learn that W Social is basically a fork of Bluesky, a US-based social media platform. I don't want to bore you with technicalities but this basically means W Social is dependent on some of Bluesky's infrastructure.



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At the same time they brand themselves as a European social network! And use misleading messaging to pretend Eurosky – another Bluesky fork – does not exist. Not to mention the Fediverse.

Also note Bluesky on the US side of this image.



W Social, Fictional Metrics and the Beauty of Open Data

<https://blog.eleanorossini.com/w-social-fictional-metrics-and-the-beauty-of-open-data/>

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And you would learn that the company artificially manipulates comment counts to make it look more active. We know this, again, because W Social is a fork of Bluesky and so you can get access to the same data via Bluesky.



“We’re excited to announce that we’ve raised a \$15 million Series A financing led by Blockchain Capital”

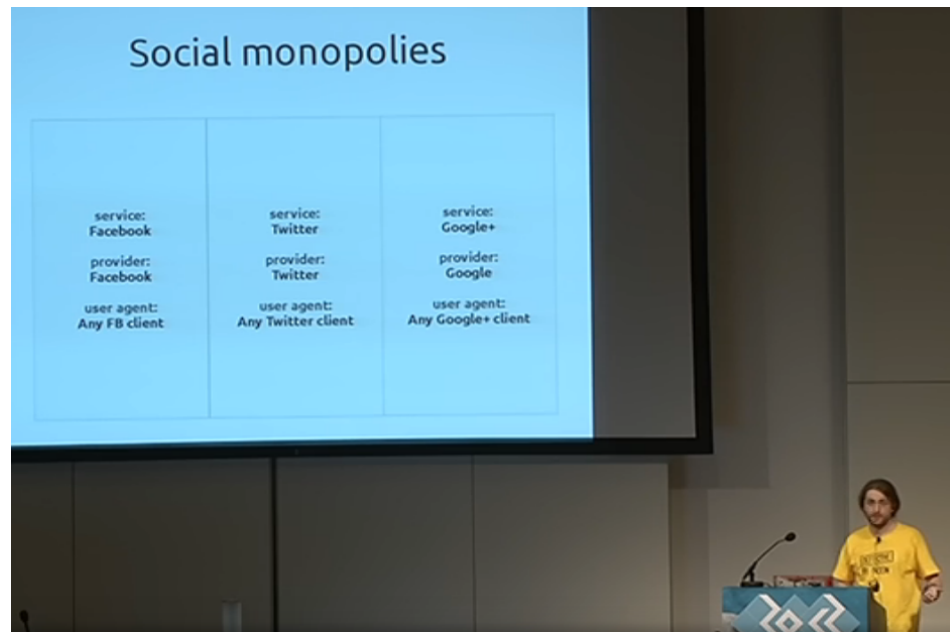
<https://bsky.social/about/blog/10-24-2024-series-a>

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Finally, speaking of Bluesky... if one were to do some due diligence on them, one would learn it's another VC-funded company, whose main investor is Blockchain Capital. Technologically, Bluesky is really trying to create a silo that doesn't immediately look like a silo, but will inevitably end being one.

After all, venture capital expects at least 10x return on investment. And competition is for losers. So, silos are the name of the game.



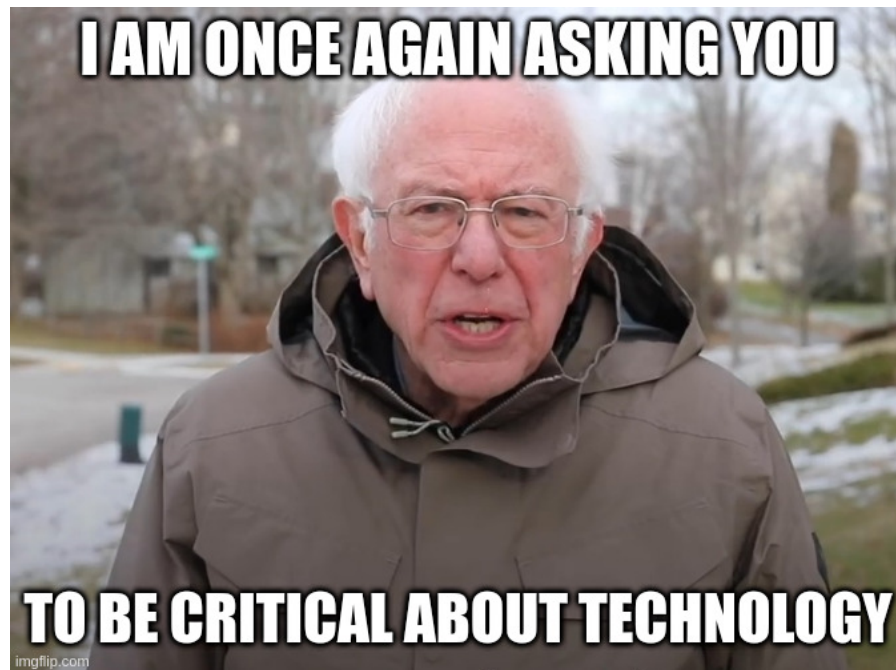
https://media.ccc.de/v/30C3_-_5319_-_en_-_saal_g_-_201312282330_-_technomonopolies_-_rysiek

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Thirteen years ago I was warning against silos, specifically calling out Facebook and Twitter. And Google+, which is pretty quaint today.

Today I am warning you about Bluesky and its forks, like W Social. I am warning you about Substack. I am warning you about LLMs.



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I am begging you to pay attention to the red flags, critically scrutinize tech companies and services they offer, and make the difficult decisions that might be required to not fall into the same traps again.

You are spending your time, energy, money and trust capital to get people from one silo to another. You are promoting the very systems whose purpose is to make journalism irrelevant. The way this ends is very predictable. As it was with everything else I talked today about.



Is it a silo?

- What are the power dynamics?
- Are there other providers?
- What happens if the owner pulls a Musk?

How do you know if a tech service is a potential silo? If the question of “I need to be there because others are there” makes any sense in the context of a single provider, it is one.



Is it a silo?

- Can it be **owned at all**?
- **Who** is the owner?
- What is their track record?
- Follow the money!



Newsletters, not Substack.



RSS/Atom, not Apple News.

Can we have RSS/Atom feeds too, please? There is no reason why feed readers can't make a comeback and become first-class citizens on our devices. You can help make that world happen, and you will regain another direct channel without a gatekeeper.



Podcasts, not Spotify.

Incidentally, podcasts are based around RSS/Atom feeds. "Wherever you get your podcasts" is a revolutionary statement.



Protocols, not platforms.

<https://knightcolumbia.org/content/protocols-not-platforms-a-technological-approach-to-free-speech>

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Talk about protocols, not platforms. Public debate
needs public spaces, not private shopping malls.



Regain trust,
reclaim eyeballs,
money will follow.

Regain trust, reclaim eyeballs, and hopefully money will follow.

We need strong, independent, resilient journalism.
That is not going to happen as long as techbros are in the driver's seat. The sooner media organizations understand that and start acting on that, the better. We can't afford another decade of this.



Thank you.

<https://rys.io/>