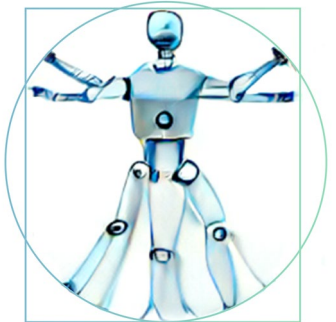


# Digital Media, Society, and Culture

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Angus A.A. Mol  
Walter Crist III



L U C D H

# Affordance Theory



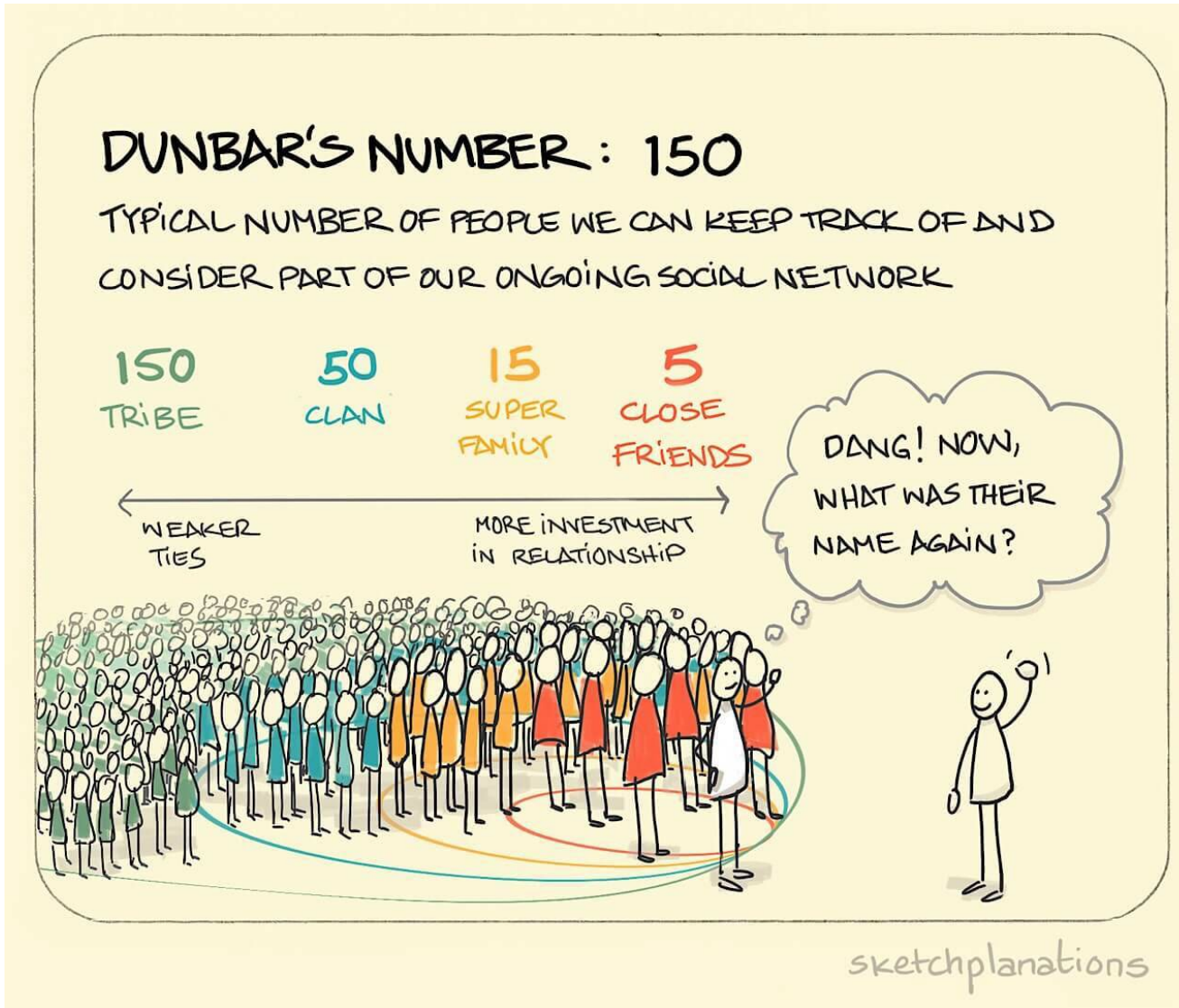
“An affordance is an action possibility formed by the relationship between an agent and its environment”

Gibson, 1979, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*

# The Affordances of Online Platforms: Connection

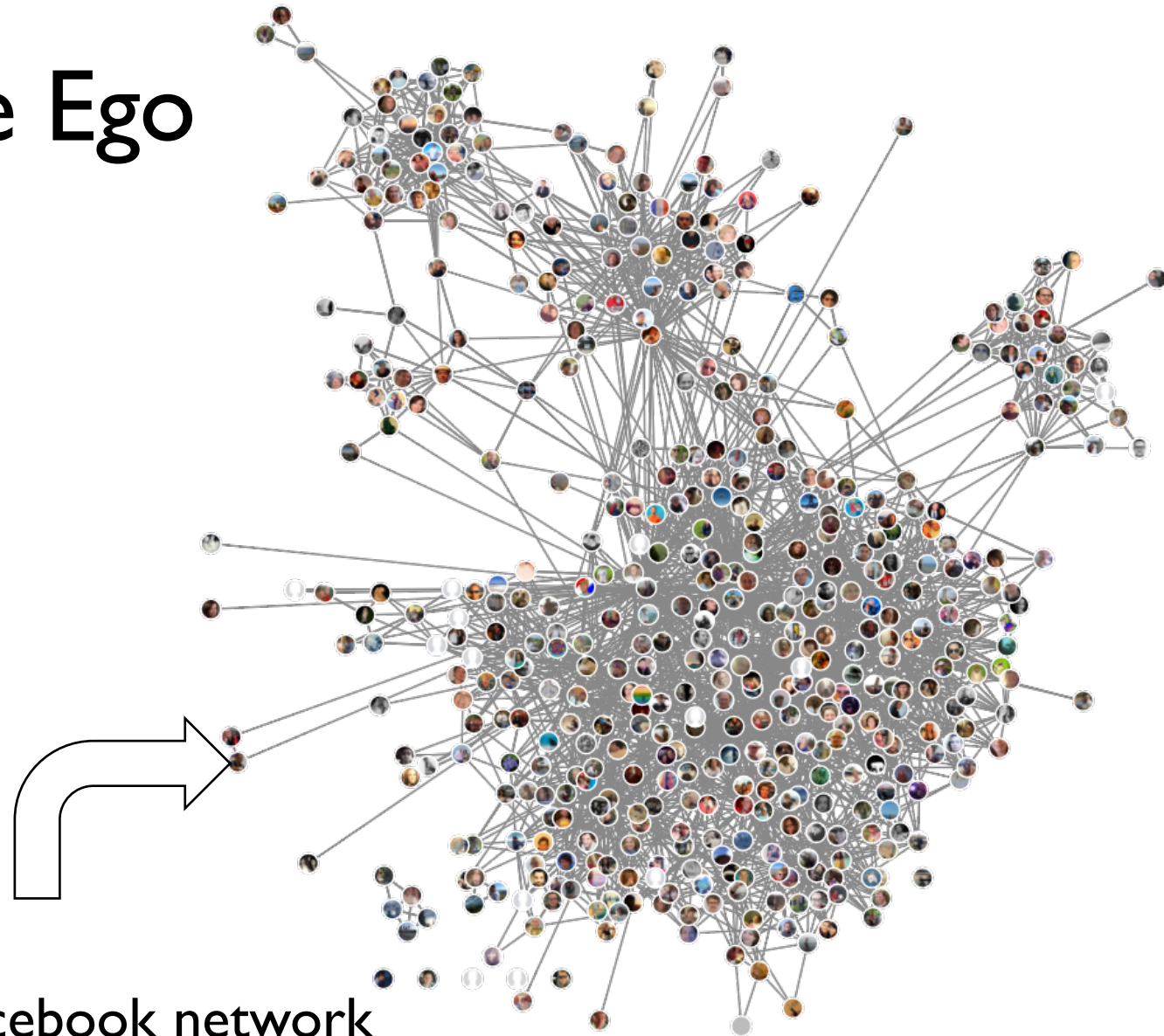


# We've always lived in public



- Theory of social evolution
  - Primates are social creatures
  - Social relations are beneficial but costly
- Comparative research among hunter-gatherers suggests the 'cap' is around 150
- NB we will meet many more people during our lives
  - [One study](#) suggests we are able to recognize on average 5000 faces.
- But....What happens if we live in ever bigger communities?

# The Network and the Ego



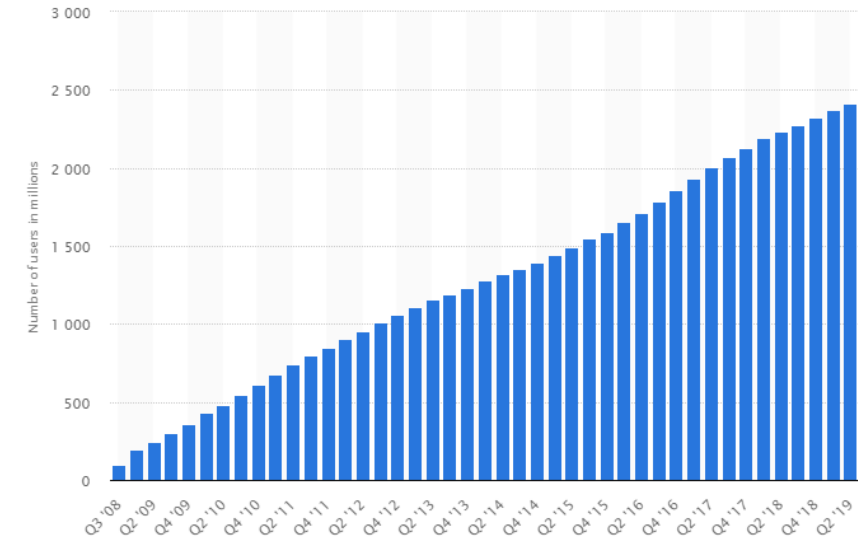
This is your lecturer as a 2017 Facebook network

“And within a couple weeks, a few thousand people had signed up.”

~ Mark Zuckerberg



Facebook in 2010



© Statista 2019

Facebook's mission:

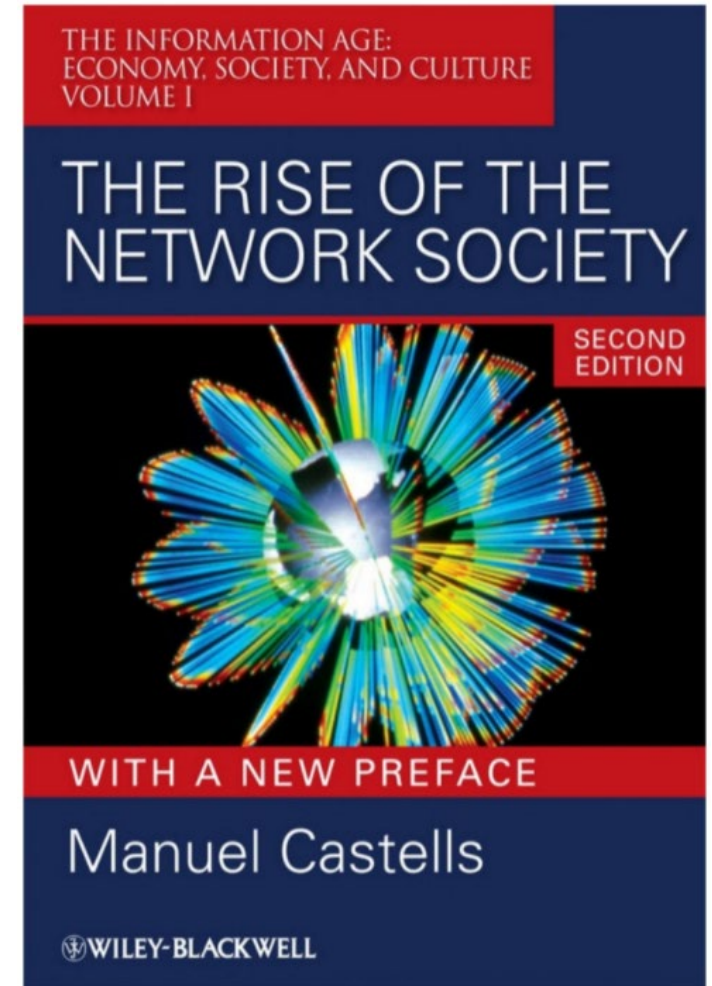
“Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission is to give people the power to build community and **bring the world closer together**. People use Facebook to stay **connected with friends and family**, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them.”

# Network Society

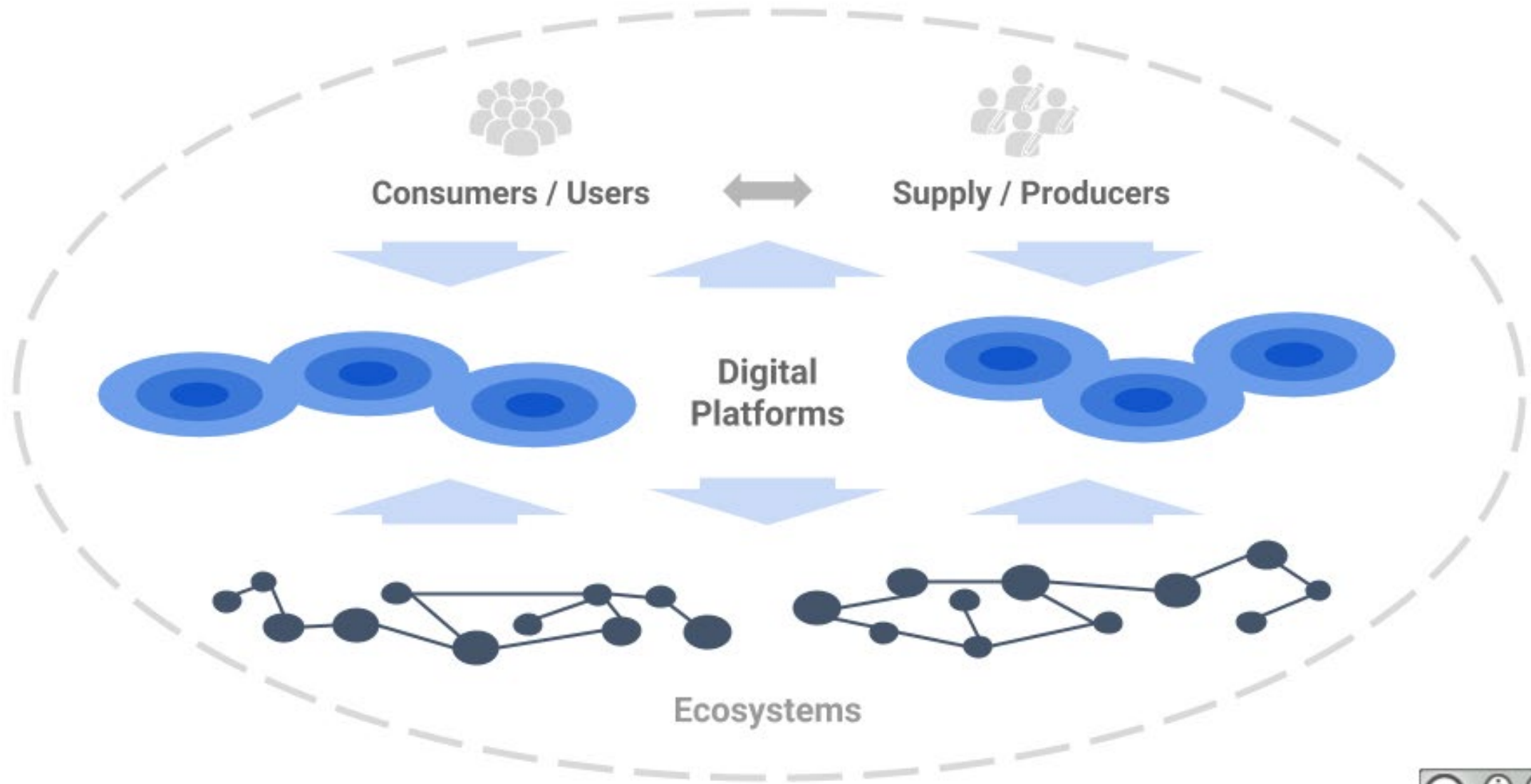
“A society where the **key social structures** and **activities** are organized around **electronically processed information networks**.

So it's not just about networks or social networks, because **social networks have been very old forms of social organization.**”

~Manuel Castells (in [Berkeley Globe Trotter](#))



# Platform Economy

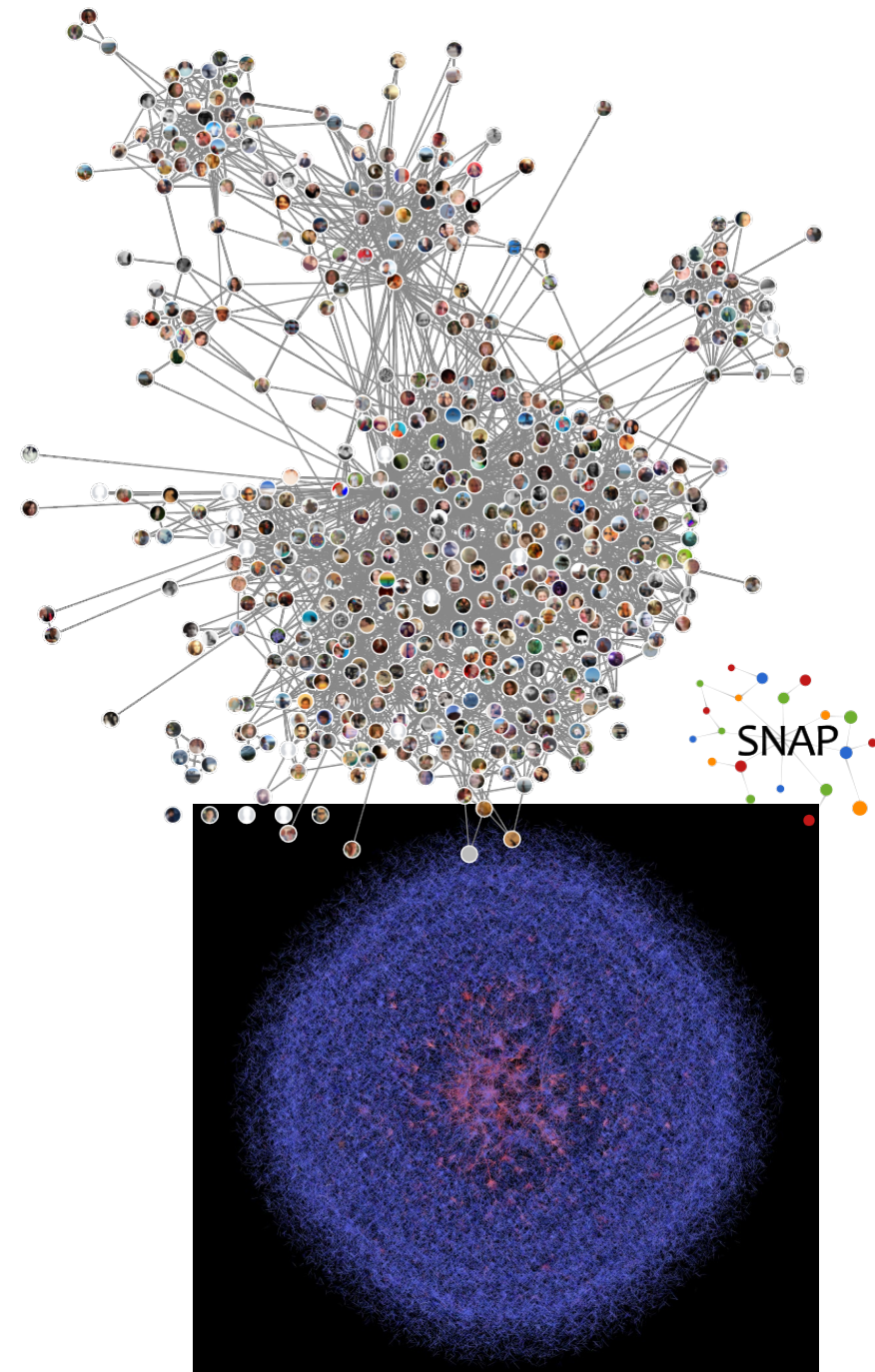


www.digirole.com

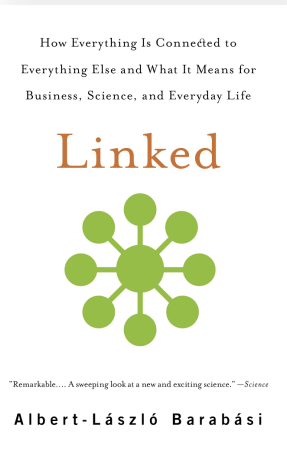


# Network Analysis

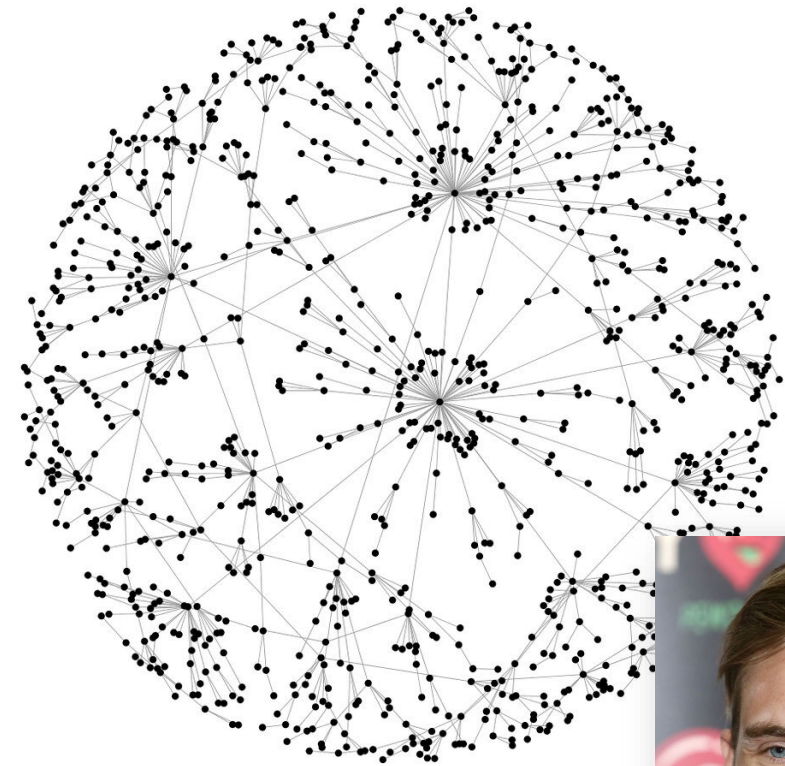
- The analysis of relations through graphs at the level of individual nodes to give insights into structural groups and dynamics
- Roots in:
  - Network Science (Computer Science)
  - Sociology (Sociometrics)
- More on this in Information Visualization



# Influencers: a scale-free network view

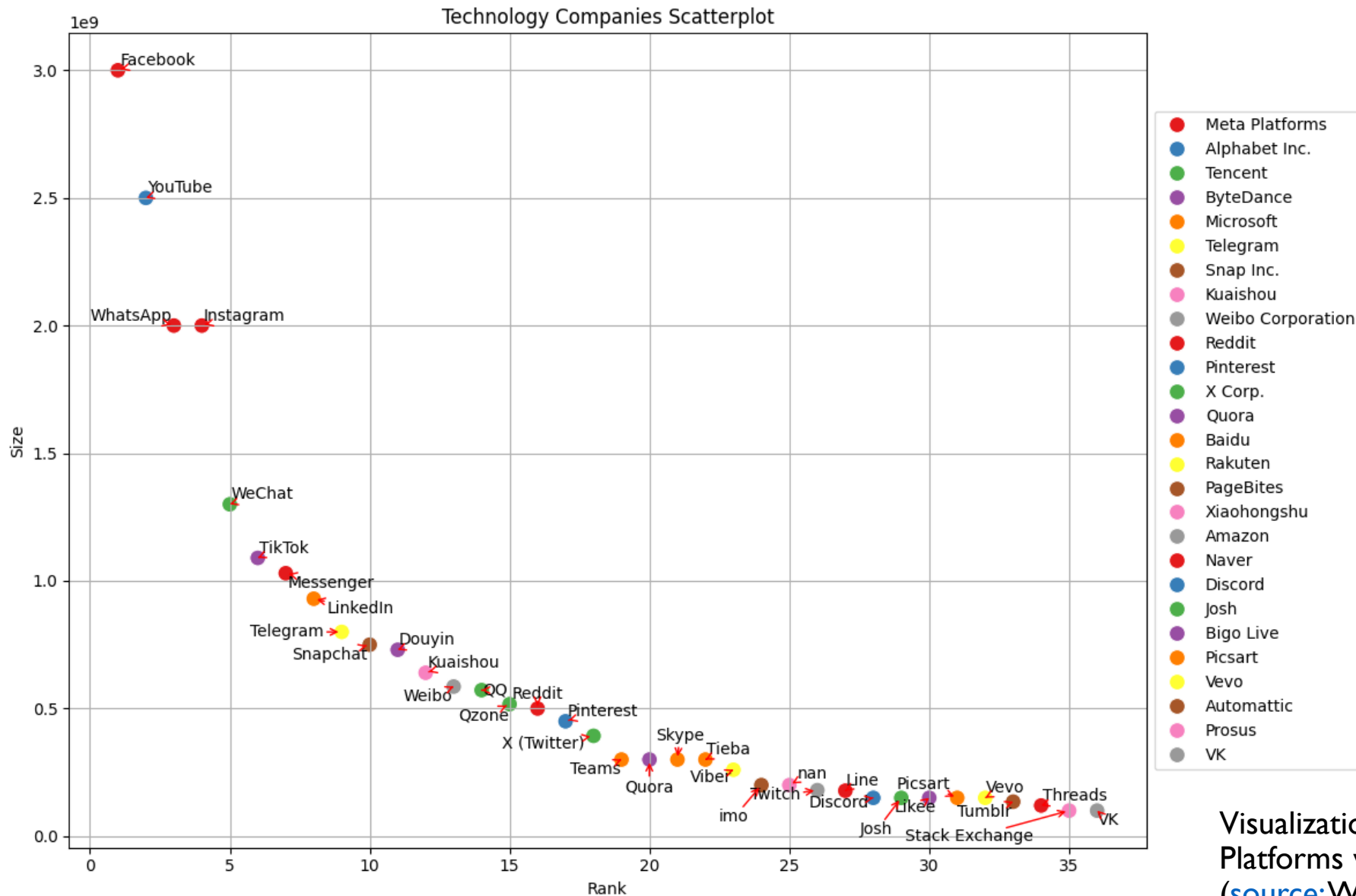


- Scale-free networks
- Hub formation:
  - Time (early = better)
  - Preferential attachment
    - “Rich get richer”
    - Pareto Principle: ‘80% of X have 20% of Y’
    - 80% of people i
  - ‘Fitness’
- The Robust Structure of the Platform
- The Platform as Agent



Pewdiepie (Felix Kjellberg), first individual to gain 100 million followers

# Scale-free Scale-free Networks

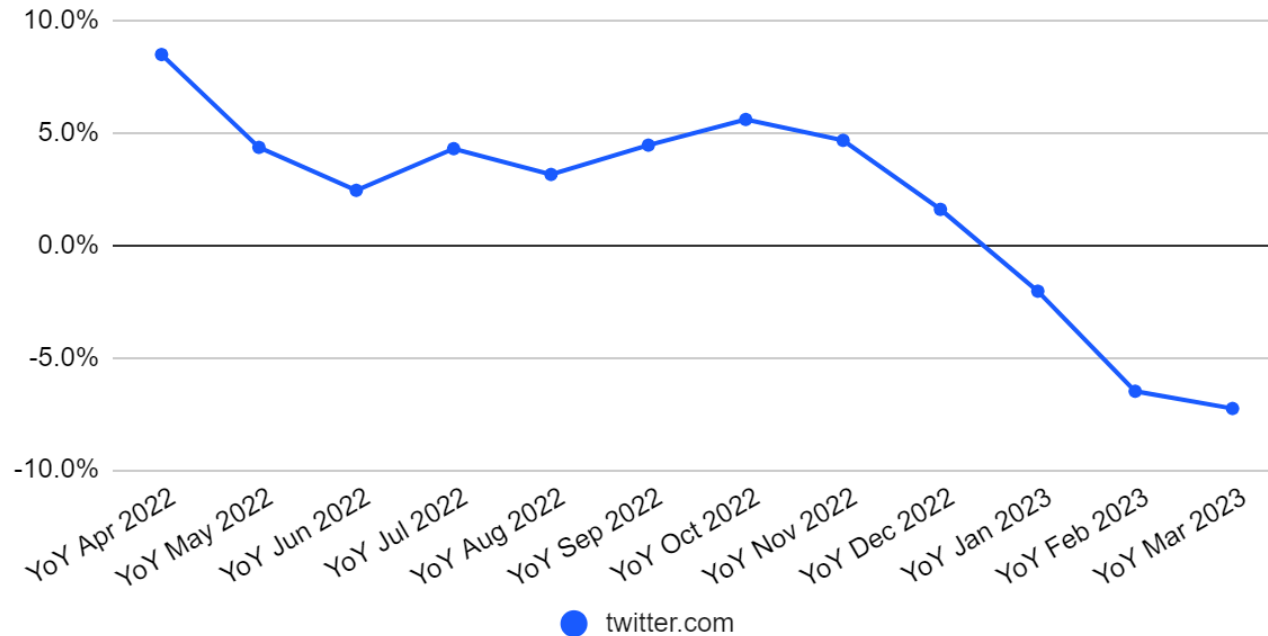


Visualization by lecturer, data from 'List of Social Platforms with at least 100 million active users' ([source: Wikipedia](#), retrieved 15-10-2023)

# Twitter X: A 44 billion dollar mistake?

## Twitter

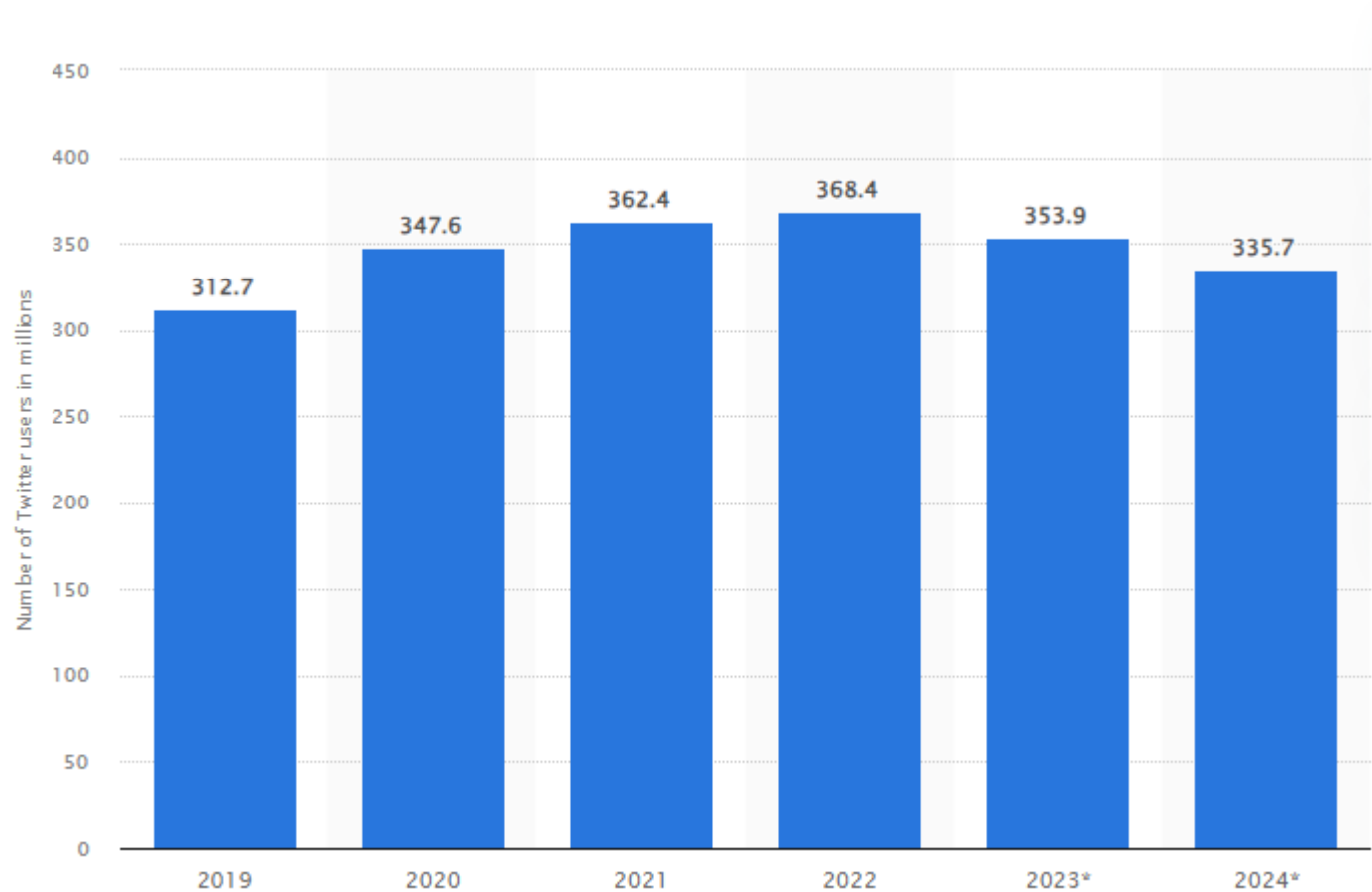
Monthly Visits Desktop & Mobile Web Worldwide YOY



data and analysis by [similarweb.com](https://similarweb.com)



# X: Too big to fail?



Source: [Statista](#)





Platforms and their dynamics of  
scale are here to stay

# TAKE CARE

---

In this lecture:

Discussion of and survey data about mental health, including mention of suicide and self-harm

Struggling with mental health or well-being in general? You're not alone!

Leiden University resources available here: [tinyurl.com/wellbeing-LU](https://tinyurl.com/wellbeing-LU)

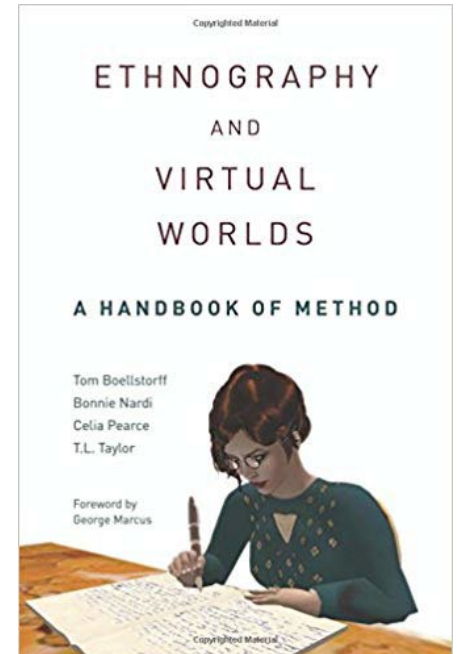
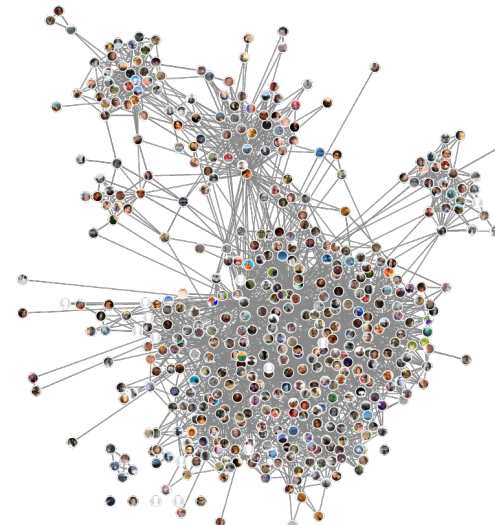
Suicide Prevention Helpline The Netherlands (anonymous): Call 113

# Virtual Ethnography

- Ethnography = the study of everyday life as practiced by groups of people
- Virtual ethnography = “...” connected through digital technologies
- Online Communities: Human social, cultural, and biological dynamics in spaces and at networked scales never seen before.



*Urdu Refugees*

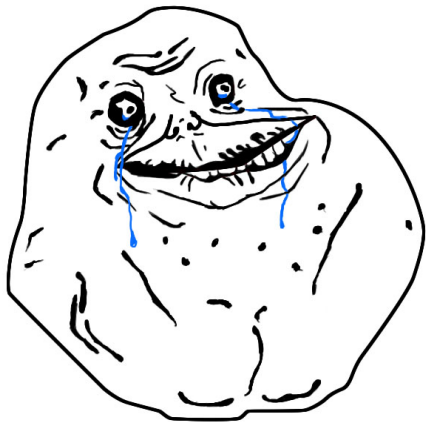


# The Affordances of Online Platform: Anxiety & Isolation



# Society, Isolation, and the Individual

Longstanding theory: In our mass societies individuals are becoming more and more socially isolated, i.e. have few or no social contacts.

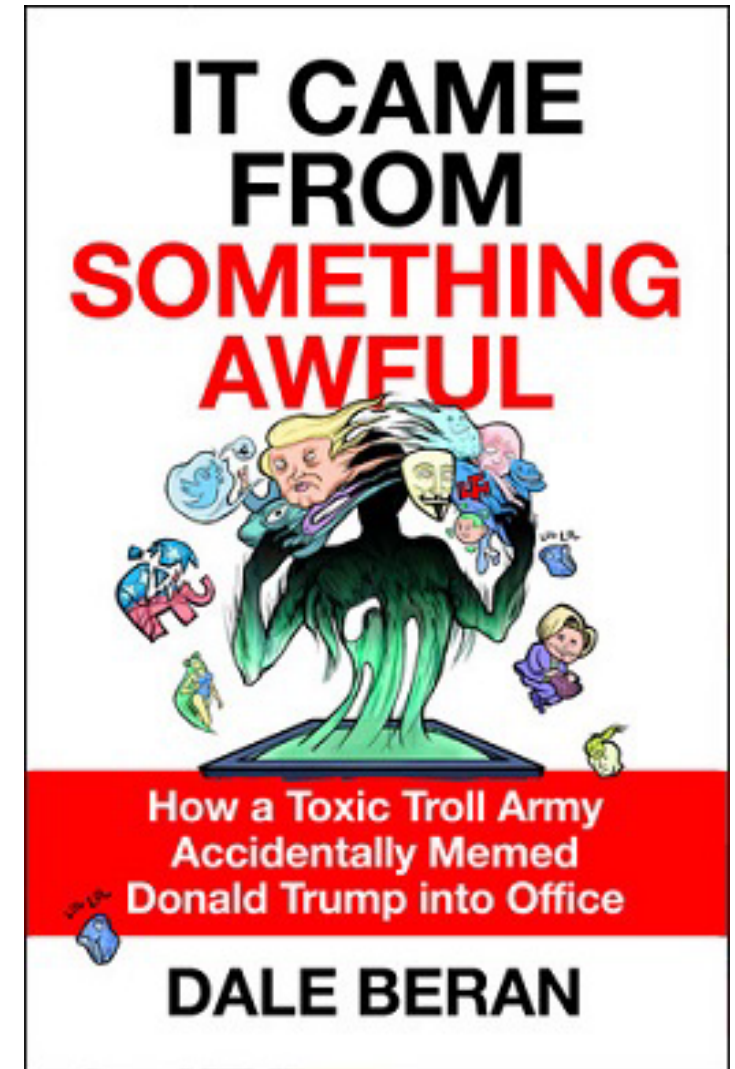


or



# Time of the Tribes ([Maffesoli 1988](#))

- Where modernity is failing, people retreat not into themselves, but into previous organization patterns and dynamics.
- Neo-tribes:
  - Territoriality (gangs, forums, games, etc.)
  - “Taste”
  - “Cult of Youth” (Innovation)
  - “Bond of the Pact” rather than of “the Contract”
- Platform Cultures

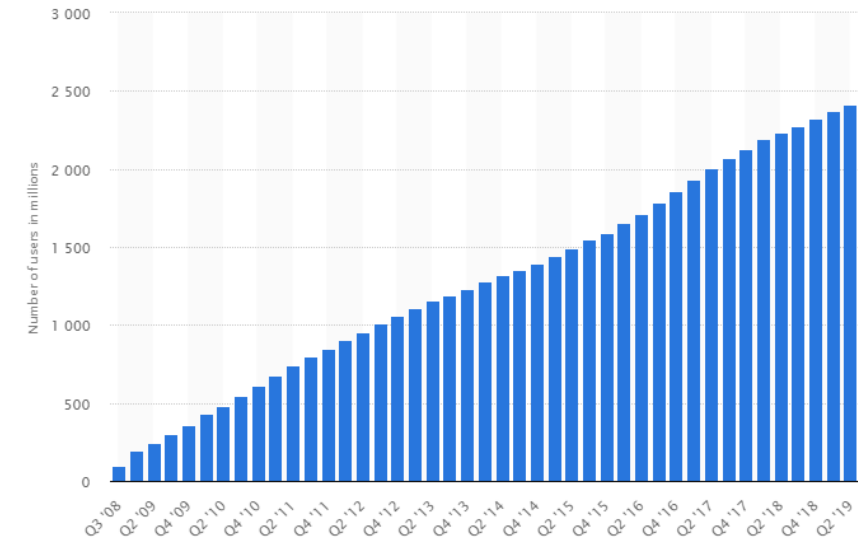


“And within a couple weeks, a few thousand people had signed up.”

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Facebook in 2010



© Statista 2019

Facebook's mission:

“Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission is to give people the power to build community and **bring the world closer together**. People use Facebook to stay **connected with friends and family**, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them.”

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

the facebook files

## Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show

Its own in-depth research shows a significant teen mental-health issue that Facebook plays down in public



# Objectives

Instagram is coming under increasing scrutiny with relation to mental health problems. Both popular and academic press point to social media in general, and Instagram specifically, as having a negative effect on teens' mental health. These effects have included body dissatisfaction, self-esteem, negative mood, anxiety, depression, loneliness, self-harm, and suicide. Other research suggests that the effects of social media is more nuanced, influenced by previous dispositions or the experiences teens have on the apps they use.

Existing research, however, does not explore the perceptions that teens have about their own mental health, the role that social media and Instagram play in it, or how Instagram can help teens.

## WE CONDUCTED MARKET RESEARCH TO:

- understand how teens talk about mental health
- get a nuanced understanding of teens' perceptions of how Instagram effects their mental health

## IN ORDER TO:

- Inform outreach teams how we might build meaningful and impactful campaigns in this space
- Inform product teams how to best support teens in this space

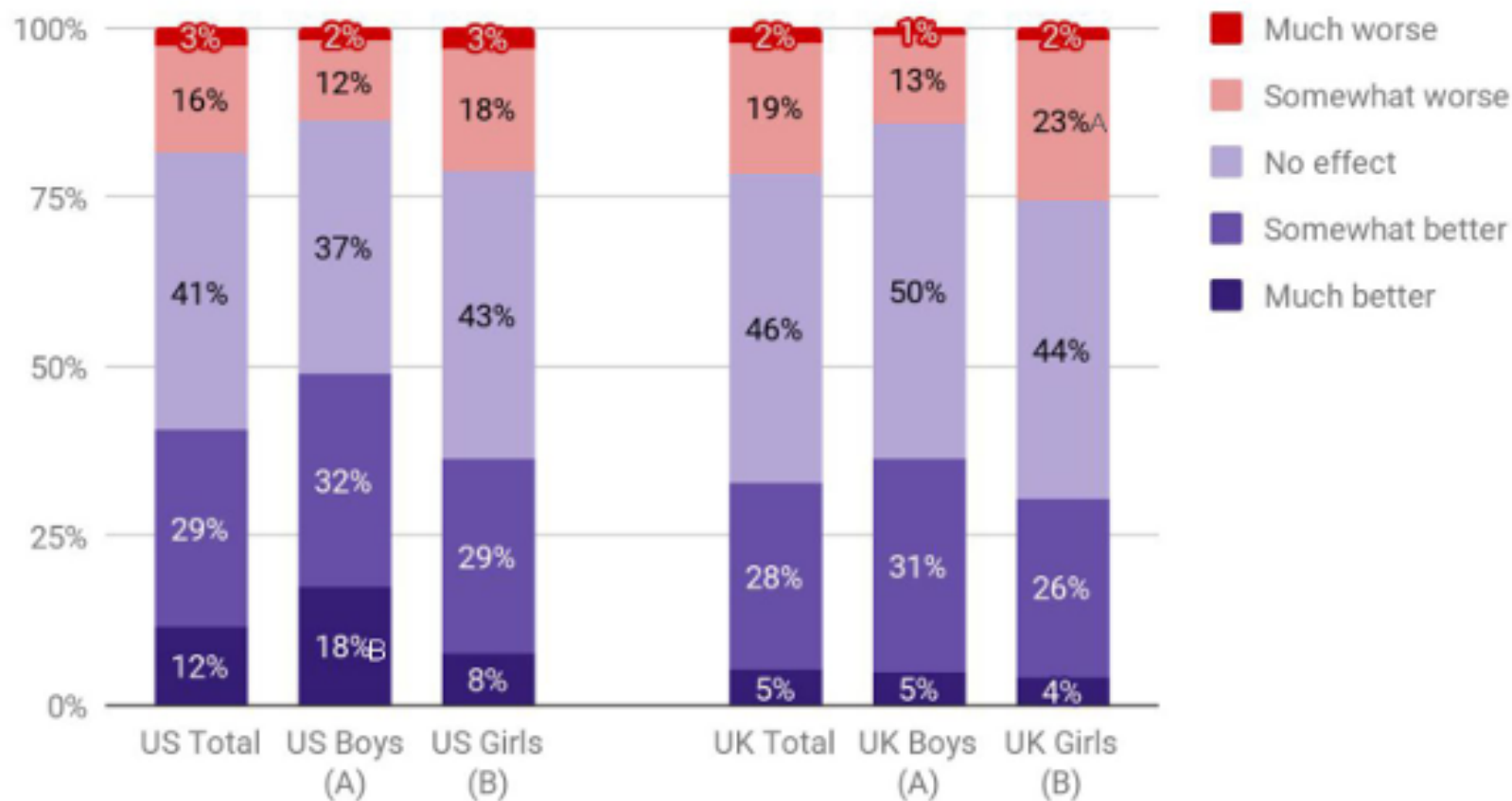
# Methodology

	In-person qualitative	Follow-up video call	Online survey
Sample size	40	8	2,503
Markets	London, UK Los Angeles, USA	UK, US	US 1,221 UK 1,282
Recruitment	Regionally representative third-party panels	Participants from in-person qualitative groups	Instagram users
Tasks	2-hour in-person focus groups (4 per gendered group)	1-hour VC conversation	Online survey
Qualifications	Monthly Instagram user Age 13-17 Fit into one of themes		Monthly Instagram user Teens
Recruited around themes*	Body image, self-esteem Negative mood, depression Lonely, isolated		
Baseline group	Did not code into any theme		

\* Themes identified based off review of academic literature on the topic of social media and teen mental health.

# One in five teens say that Instagram makes them feel worse about themselves, with UK girls the most negative

Stated effect of Instagram



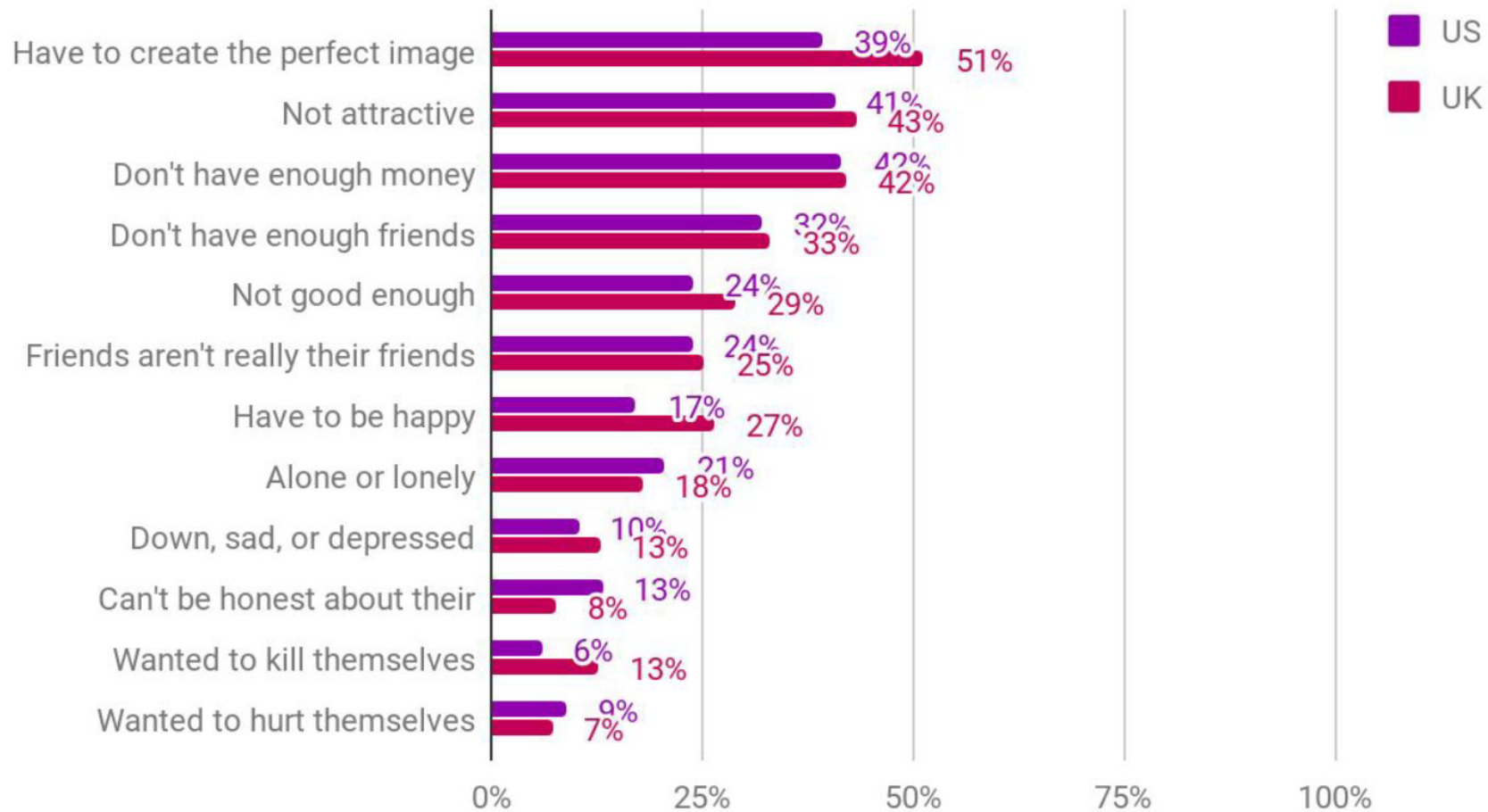
Q: In general, how has Instagram affected [the way you feel about yourself/your mental health]?

There were no statistically significant differences among those who answered for "the way you feel about yourself" and those who answered for "your mental health"

US n = 1296; UK n = 1308

# The perfect image, feeling attractive, and having enough money are the most likely to have started on Instagram

Started on Instagram

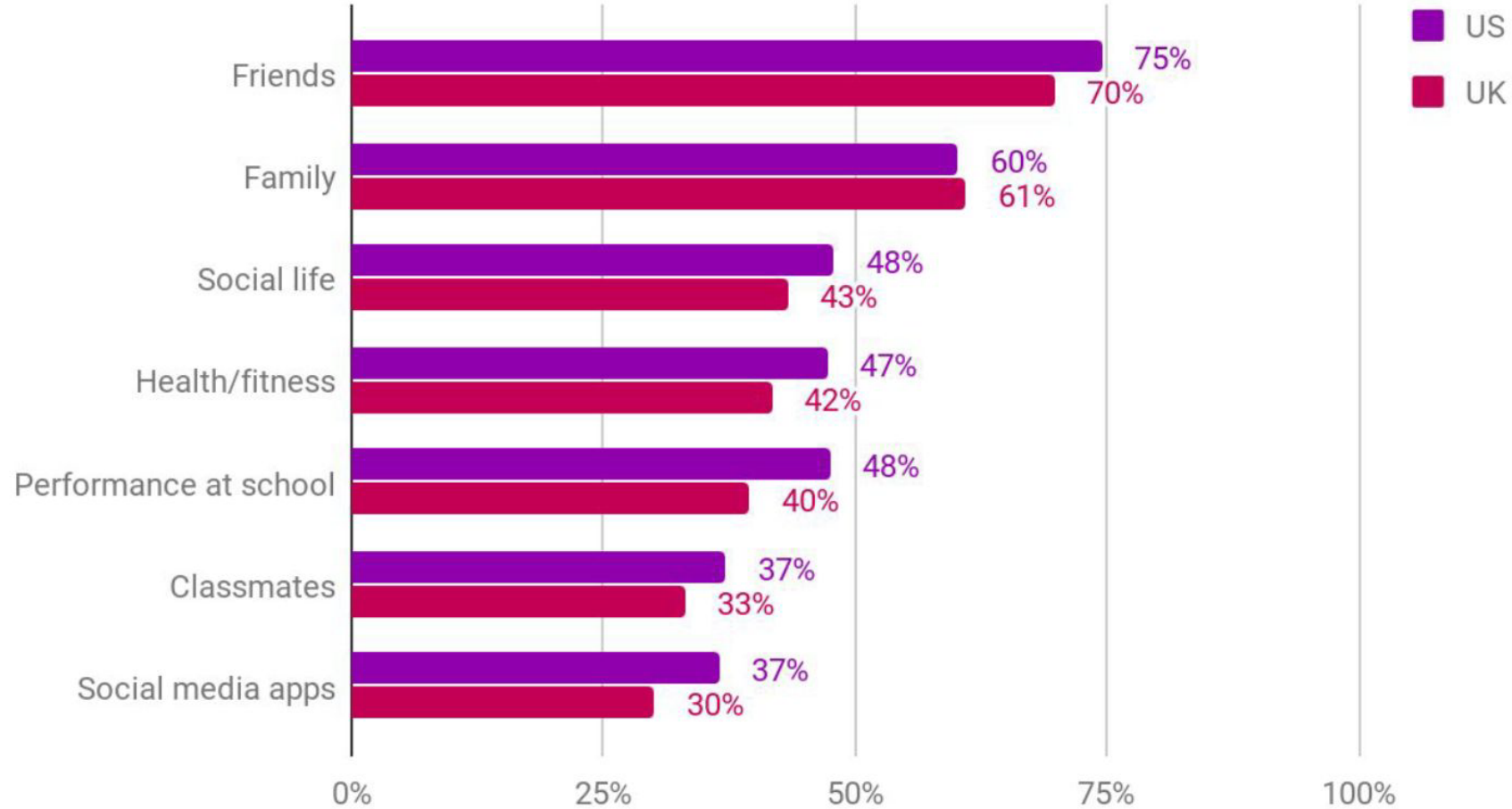


Q: Of the things you've felt in the past month, did any of them start on Instagram? Please select all that apply

US n = 565; UK n = 557

# Friends and family have the most positive impact on mental health

Very or somewhat positive effect on mental health



Q: In general, how does each of the following affect [the way you feel about yourself/your mental health]?

There were no statistically significant differences among those who answered for "the way you feel about yourself" and those who answered for "your mental health"

US n = 1296; UK n = 1308

## Mental unwellness was depicted in six themes



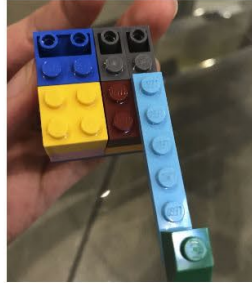
*"I had a wall around everything because I want people to go away, to go to my room, to lock myself out from people and keep everyone out"*  
- US, Male

Walls



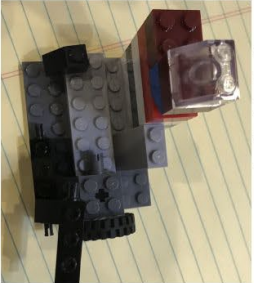
*"I had wheels because I'm all over the place. My mind is always spinning"*  
- US Female

Circling, frenetic



*"I put people far away to represent that feeling lonely. I feel like I need people but I pull away"*  
- US Male

Loneliness, isolation



*"I put dark colors because its the dark place that you don't want to fall into"*  
- US Male

Dark, full of terrors



*"I put myself underneath all of these blocks, because it feels heavy. Like you have a weight on your shoulders"*  
- UK, Male

Heavy baggage



*"I put red devil horns online because I'm easily angered and tipped over the edge"*  
- UK, Male

Potentially explosive



## How does the network affect our roles?



seeking the bubble reputation

Are we individuals?



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# THE GENDER OF THE GIFT

MARILYN  
STRATHERN

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What do you afford to  
the platform?