

The little Bonafide Book

TYLER IBRAHIM

July 2025

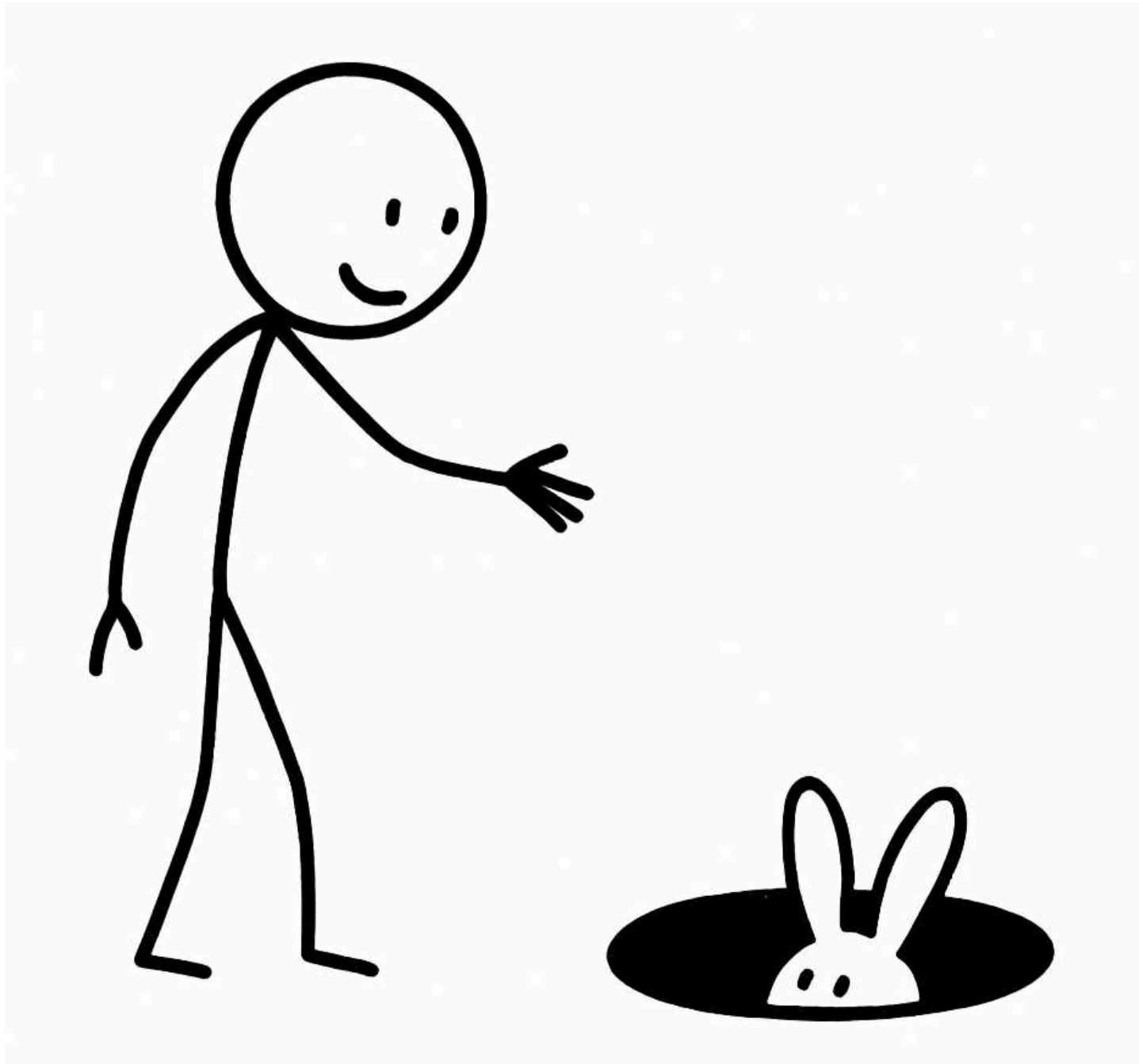
Before You Begin

This book is about what went wrong with the internet.

What follows is a plainspoken account of how the internet was captured, why most fixes don't go far enough, and how we can change direction.

If you've ever felt something was off but couldn't quite explain it, this will help you name it. And once you see it, you can't unsee it.

You're not just a reader. You can be part of the reset.



PART I

Down The Rabbit Hole

You felt it yesterday, even if you couldn't name it.

Maybe it was picking up your phone 93 times¹ – notifications that interrupted your day. Or maybe you wanted to quickly look something up and tumbled down a different rabbit hole². Every interaction with an app seemed designed to keep you hooked.

Maybe it was the news story about housing prices in your neighbourhood skyrocketing as Airbnb investors buy up real estate³.

Or one about the gig workers who make everything from ride hailing to food delivery possible, but who can't earn a living wage⁴.

Or the fact you can't even get Canadian news on Meta platforms like Facebook and Instagram because they've blocked it⁵.

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1. Greater mobile device-prompted phone pickups are associated with daily parent stress, *Acta Paediatrica*.
 2. A Mixed-Method Exploration into the Mobile Phone Rabbit Hole, *ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*.
 3. Spain Orders Airbnb to Take Down 66,000 Rental Listings, *The New York Times*.
 4. Half of UK gig economy workers earn below minimum wage, study reveals, *The Guardian*.
 5. How Meta's news ban reshaped Canadian media, *Digital Content Next*.

Maybe it was a small business that was growing until it got crushed by Amazon when they copied its product and buried it in their search results⁶.

Maybe it was sharing something meaningful and feeling like no one saw it. Or noticing your kid pause before posting, already calculating how it might be judged. Or scrolling through carefully curated photos that made you feel left out anyway.

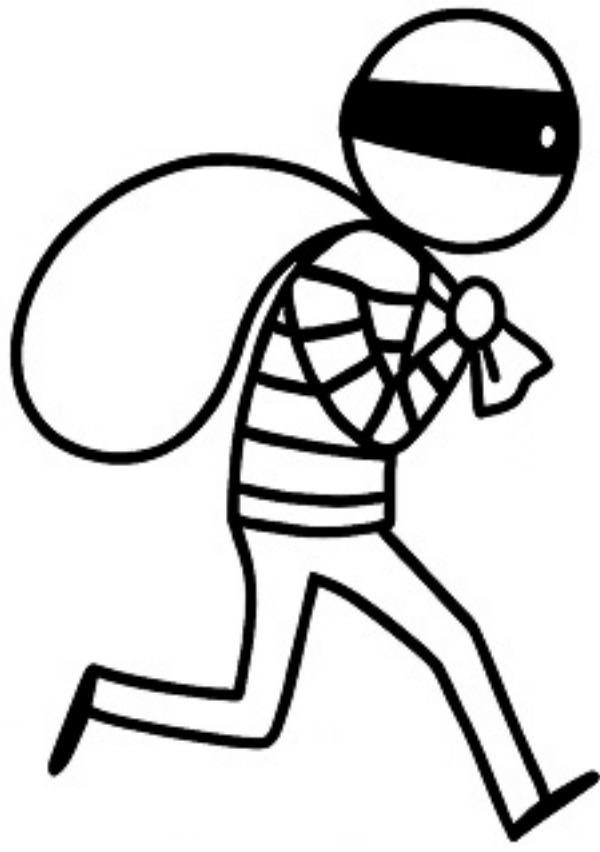
It was supposed to be about connection, but somehow these apps made everything feel lonelier.

Maybe you tried to delete an app, but couldn't. All your friends, photos, or playlists are trapped inside, and leaving means starting over or being left out.

You feel like something's wrong with the internet. You just can't quite explain what, or how to fix it.

6. How We Analyzed Amazon's Treatment of Its "Brands" in Search Results, *The Markup*.

Amazon's own products made up only 5.8% of products in the sample, but they gave their own products and exclusives the number one spot 19.5% of the time.



Something Was Stolen

It wasn't a dramatic heist. It was a slow, quiet theft. A bait-and-switch.

The internet was pitched as a transformative invention. It was *supposed* to be an amplifier for humanity: a system where anyone could participate, create, and connect. No gatekeepers. No permission.

But the tools we were given came with strings.

Sold as freedom, they delivered surveillance. Marketed as connection, they created pressure. Framed as open, they became closed.

We were promised tools, and got traps.

Most of us didn't notice the switch until the walls were already built around us.

Just seven tech companies contributed over half of the net earnings growth in the entire S&P 500⁷. That level of power concentration isn't just unusual – it's dangerous. They don't just dominate markets. They shape the internet and how you exist inside it.

What started as open and innovative has become closed, controlled, and stagnant.

We need to take it back.

7. Magnificent-7 Q4 2024 Earnings Review: Growth Holds, but Rotation Awaits, *London Stock Exchange Group*.



Hi, I'm Tyler

I've been watching this slow-motion heist unfold for years.

I'm not a casual observer or some theoretical critic. I grew up inside the world of software.

My dad, Wadood, co-founded a Canadian software company called Protegra when I was seven. He passed down the belief that technology was supposed to serve people, not trap or extract from them.

My dad came to Canada from Baghdad in 1981. After improving his English in Toronto, he moved to Winnipeg where tuition at the University of Manitoba was a fraction of the cost of the University of Toronto. He met my mom during his studies, and they've been here ever since. Their values – fairness, dignity, human rights, freedom – shaped how I see the world, including technology.

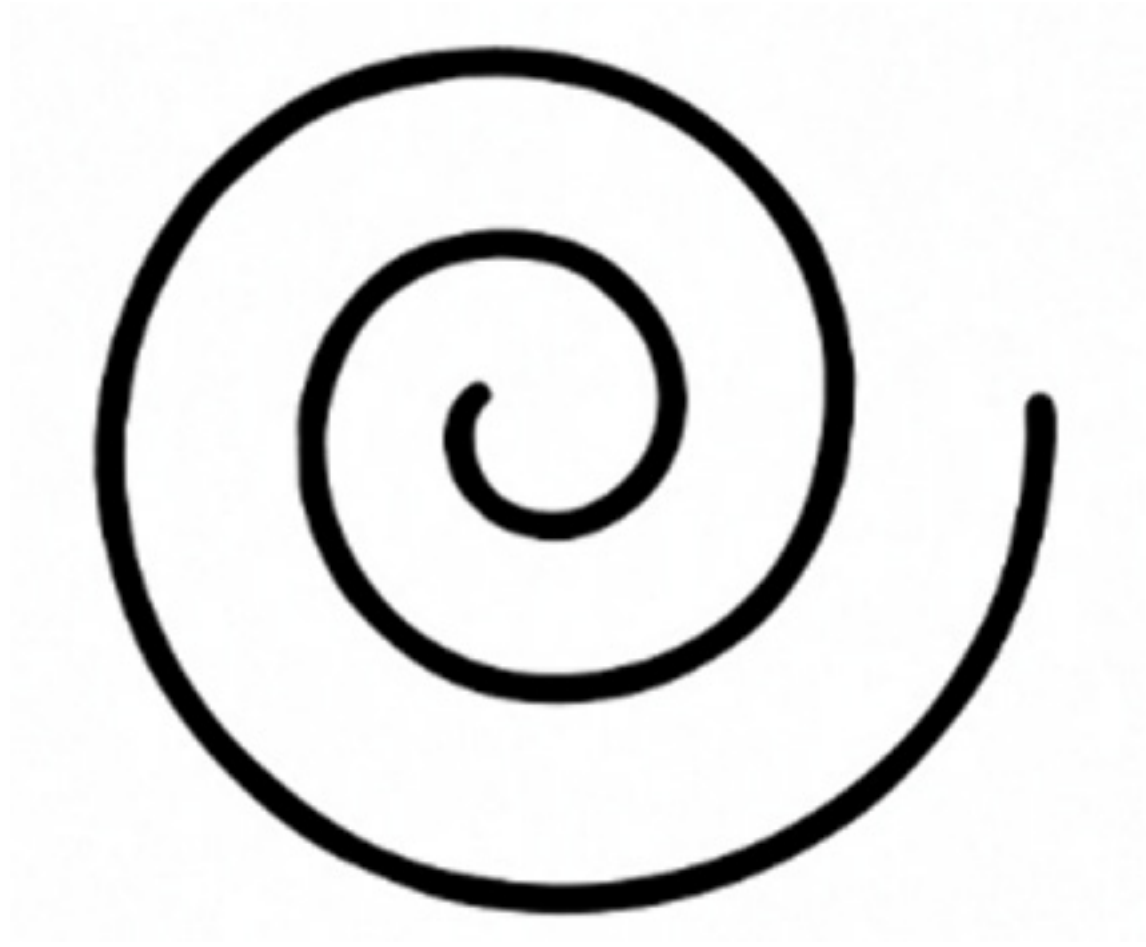
I came to understand why my dad and his co-founders were drawn to software: the challenge of solving complex problems, the elegance of a good solution, the quiet pride in building something useful.

I grew up thinking of technology founders as thoughtful builders, not extractive opportunists.

To me, the internet was magic. It still is.

But I also watched as that magic was captured, rerouted, and monetized – how the idealism of the early web got rewritten by surveillance and venture capital. The web changed from a liberator to a trap.

We wouldn't tolerate a shopping mall that records our conversations, follows us home, and sells our daily habits to advertisers. We'd complain if the only coffee options were two giant chains. But online, we've been conditioned to see it as normal.



Habituatation

It's easy to get used to the status quo.

Canadian legal scholar Peter Biro, in his 2025 Massey Lecture, named habituatisation as one of the three forces that threaten liberal democracy⁸. Constant exposure to corruption, for example, habituates the public, until they barely notice how much it's impacting their lives.

With technology, it works the same way. We get used to how apps work and stop noticing the hidden costs. We assume the status quo is inevitable, and stop looking for alternatives.

8. [Liberal Democracy in the Rearview Mirror?](#), *Massey Lecture, CBC Ideas Podcast*.

Plain Terms

We need a fix.

But the vocabulary around it – decentralization, federation, distributed ledgers – feels designed to repel regular people. It shouldn't take a computer science degree to reclaim your autonomy.

That's why I wrote this.

My perspective sits between worlds. I understand the technical architecture, the business models, and the economic incentives that shape the online landscape. But I also see something many technical experts miss: if you're diagnosing the problem or proposing a solution, you need to explain it simply – or it's not a real fix.

I can meet you halfway.

You don't need to understand code to know something's gone wrong, or how we can fix it. You don't need to speak the language of protocols to know that your data and relationships should belong to you. I'll translate the system piece by piece, in plain language that any thoughtful person can follow.

This isn't a nostalgic eulogy for the early days of the internet. It's not about doom or some quick privacy tips. This is about structural problems, and why we need structural fixes. It's a blueprint and a roadmap.

This is about values – and the kind of internet, and world, we want to build. I'll show how the system works today, how a few big companies lock in control and block competition, and how startup culture bent good ideas into extractive machines.

You'll see how a simple shift – from platforms to people – can reset the whole game.

We were promised a 'bicycle for the mind'. Instead, we got treadmills – all motion, no direction – producing financial, political, and social value for someone else.

It's time to get off and start pedaling forward again, on our terms.

A Bicycle for the Mind

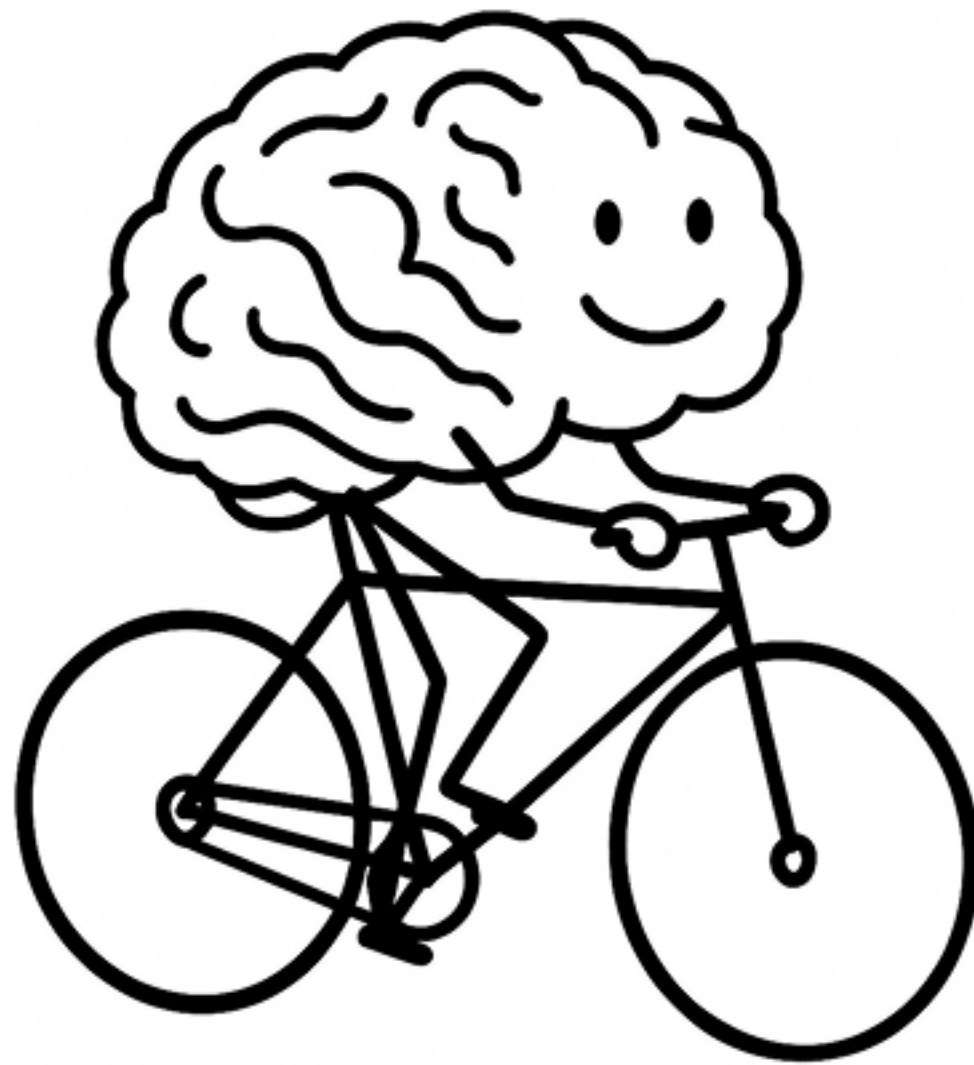
In 1981, Steve Jobs famously described the computer as a “bicycle for the mind.” He was inspired by a Scientific American article that compared the movement efficiency of animals.

Humans ranked poorly – until they hopped on a bicycle. Suddenly, they transformed into the most efficient travelers on Earth, covering more distance per calorie than any other creature.

The beauty of the metaphor is that the bicycle doesn’t do the work for you. You still have to pedal, steer, think, and navigate. The machine just multiplies your capacity through thoughtful design.

That’s what good technology should do.

Extend your abilities, not replace them.
Amplify your thinking, not override it.
Put you in control, not reroute you or manipulate you.



A bicycle responds directly to your input. It goes where you steer it. It moves at the pace you determine. It stops when you decide. It doesn't suddenly change direction because that's more profitable for the bicycle manufacturer.

When Jobs made this analogy, he was talking about personal computers. It was still the early 80s, and the internet hadn't really arrived yet – the first website wouldn't appear for another ten years. Back then, the tech space was growing fast because it was open. Anyone could tap in.

But to understand how we lost that original promise, we need to look at how the internet itself was built – and who controlled what got built on top.



A Brief But Vital History

The internet began at DARPA – the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency – within the US Department of Defense. Like many breakthroughs, it came out of academic labs and government-funded research⁹.

Researchers were trying to develop a resilient communication network that could survive a nuclear attack¹⁰. The phone network was the most advanced communication system, but it had a major weakness. Every call used a dedicated physical phone line. If anywhere on that line broke, the call failed. The military needed something more resilient.

9. New data, old debates: US government-funded R&D and patent policy, Centre for Economic Policy Research.

10. Paul Baran, the link between nuclear war and the internet, Wired.

They called it ARPANET – the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network¹¹.

Instead of relying on a fixed route, ARPANET allowed information to take any available path through a mesh of connected computers. If one computer failed, the message could still get through. It was a breakthrough in resilience.

When you think of “the internet”, you probably picture apps and websites. But at its core, it’s really a method for interconnecting networks – that’s what gave the internet its name.

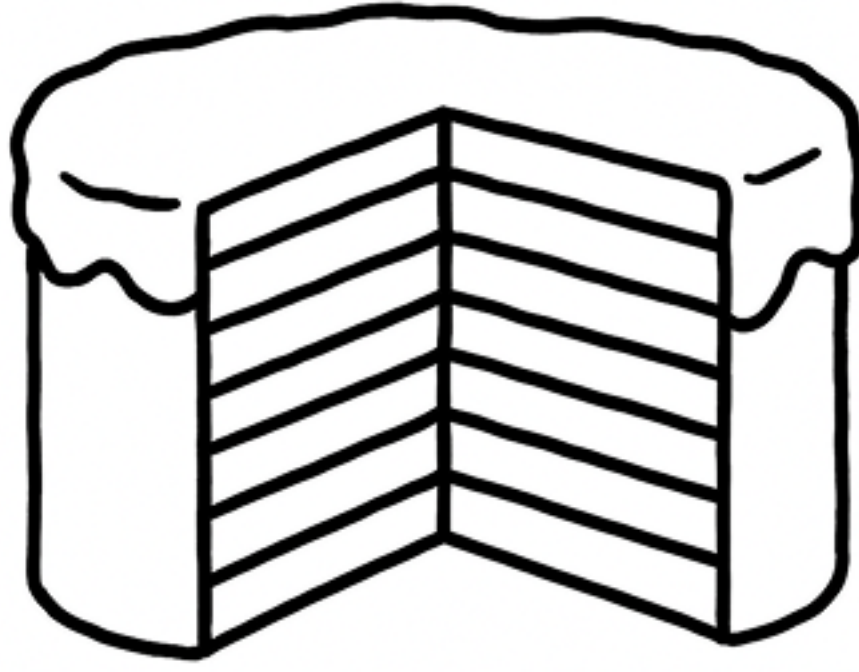
To make this possible, researchers created a shared set of rules: TCP/IP, or the Transmission Control Protocol / Internet Protocol.

In tech, a protocol is basically a shared language for computers, but protocols happen in the real world too. Traffic rules are a kind of protocol, defining who moves when, what signs mean, and which side of the road to drive on.

11. Yes, very creative.

You barely think about them, but they enable safe, predictable driving.

Like road signs and lane markings, TCP/IP defines how interconnected computers communicate and share data.



Layers on Layers

The old phone network had three layers:

- Physical: phones and phone lines.
- Networking: how phones connect.
- Application: services run on the network (e.g. phone calls, voicemail).

The problem? Phone companies owned all three layers, and they controlled what could be built on top.

The internet also has three layers, but nobody owns them – and anyone can build on it:

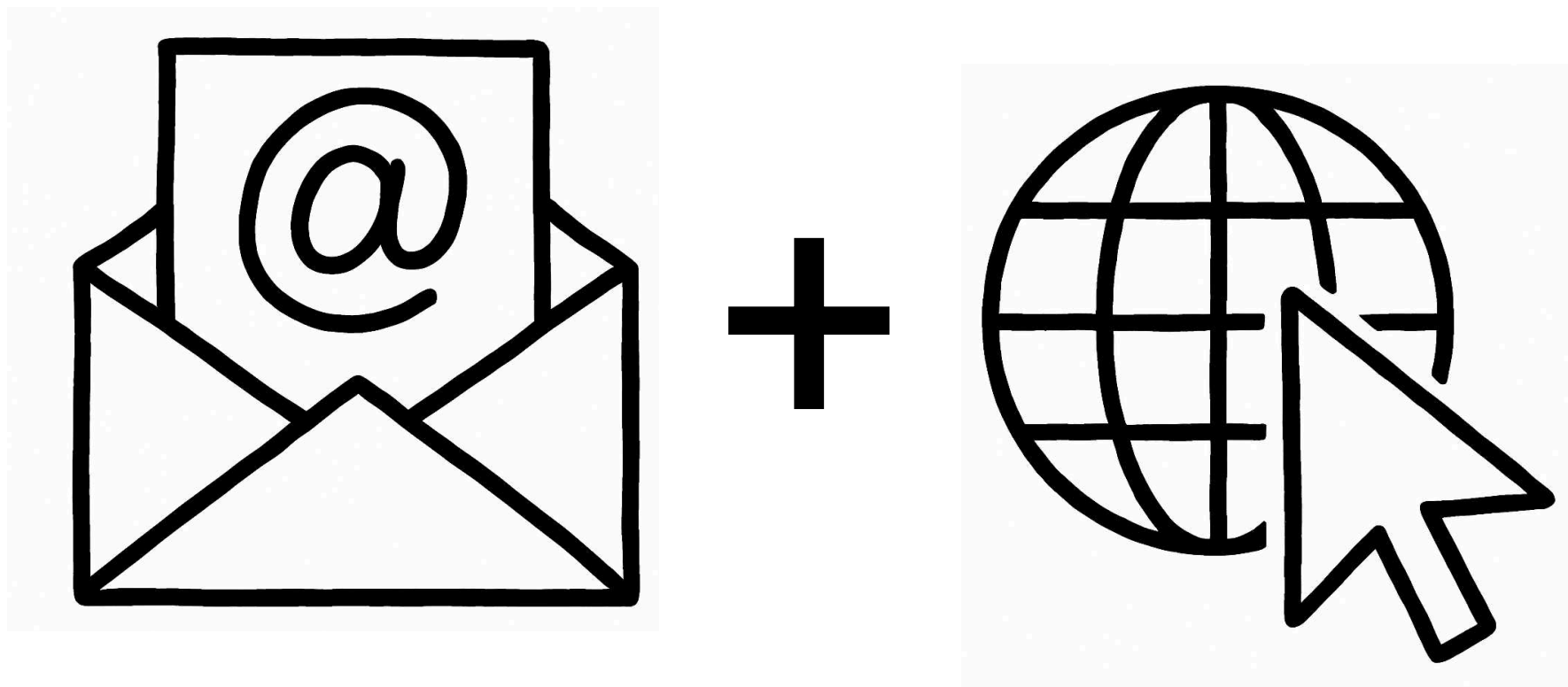
- Physical: computers, cables, hardware (same idea).
- Networking: how computers connect. The shared open TCP/IP protocol. The internet. Anyone could build on top.
- Application: anyone could build on top.

That openness in the networking and application layers sparked an explosion of experimentation and growth.

When those researchers first built this resilient network, they didn't yet know how people would use it.

But since anyone could tap in, it encouraged massive experimentation.

People created new protocols – like email and the web – and layered them on top.



PART II

Two Important Protocols: Email & Web

SMTP – The Email Protocol

When you send an email, SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol) is the system of rules that makes sure your message gets from you to wherever you're sending it.

It handles who it's going to, how to get there, and delivery confirmation.

Just like regular mail doesn't care what kind of envelope or mailbox you use, SMTP doesn't care which email provider you use.

What this enables:

- You can email anyone, no matter their email provider.
- You can switch email providers without losing your email history or contacts.
- New email services launch without needing permission from anyone.
- No single company controls email itself.

That's radically different from today's apps, where WhatsApp can't message Signal, Instagram doesn't talk with TikTok, and switching means starting over.

HTTP – The Web Protocol

If SMTP gave us email, HTTP gave us the web.

When you use a browser like Chrome, Safari, Edge, Firefox, and Brave, HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) is how you actually see the websites.

It's the reason you can type a URL, hit enter, and reliably see a webpage appear.

That little `http://` at the beginning of a web address is telling your browser to use the HTTP protocol to show you the website.

HTTP was even more transformative than SMTP because it enabled far more than just messaging. People could build all kinds of interactive content, and because it was open, it enabled so much:

Anyone can build a website.

Any browser can access any site.

Any device can use any browser.

Like SMTP, HTTP runs on top of TCP/IP. It's not owned by any single company. It's maintained by standards bodies – collaborative groups of engineers, academics, companies, and governments. Nobody owns it, and anyone can build on it.

The web exploded precisely because it was open. Businesses, communities, encyclopedias, stores, blogs – millions of people and businesses created and shared without needing to ask for permission. HTTP turned the internet from a network of machines into a network of people and ideas.

Open protocols like SMTP, HTTP, and TCP/IP are like public roads connecting private properties – they let anyone travel, regardless of their car, route, or destination.

It's hard to picture the internet without email or the web. They feel like they've been part of the internet from the very beginning. They show what's possible when the system stays open – before platforms changed the rules. Innovation compounds, ideas build on each other, and new exciting things emerge. That's the internet at its best.

Open Protocols Drive Innovation

Open protocols created massive waves of innovation, because when no one owns the pathways, creativity flourishes.

What email's open protocol made possible:

- Small businesses could reach customers directly.
- Anyone could start a newsletter and build an audience.
- New email-based tools like schedulers and marketing tools like Mailchimp emerged.
- Governments, schools, and companies could all use the same universal system

What the open web made possible:

- A teenager could launch a unique site visited by millions.
- Small businesses could sell products globally.
- Countless services (e.g. Wikipedia, online banking, weather forecasts) could be accessible worldwide.
- Cross-border information could flow unrestricted by gatekeepers.

Openness was the secret ingredient behind the internet's explosion.



PART III

Why We're Here

Then Apps Became Platforms

The architecture shifted.

Companies realized they could use the open internet to reach users – then build closed ecosystems on top to keep them.

That's a platform.

Take Snapchat. It runs on the open internet – you need a connection to use it – but everything inside is sealed off. You can't message a Snapchat user from another app. You can't take your Snapchat friends and move them over to another app. The rules inside Snapchat – their internal closed protocol – are private and controlled by the company.

That's what makes it a platform: a private, closed protocol layered on top of open infrastructure. The internet stays open underneath, but the experience gets locked in above.



The Application Layer Shift

The lower layers – physical cables and networking protocols like TCP/IP and HTTP – are still open and invisible. You don't see them, but they're what make everything work.

The part that people see and interact with is the application layer – the websites, the apps, the services – and they're mostly closed off.

Email apps like Gmail and Outlook stay open because they all use the same email protocol.

Social media apps use their own private systems, and don't allow switching or let others build on top.

This shift rewired the incentives that once made the internet thrive.

In the protocol world, you compete by building something better. In the platform world, you compete by trapping users and raising the walls.

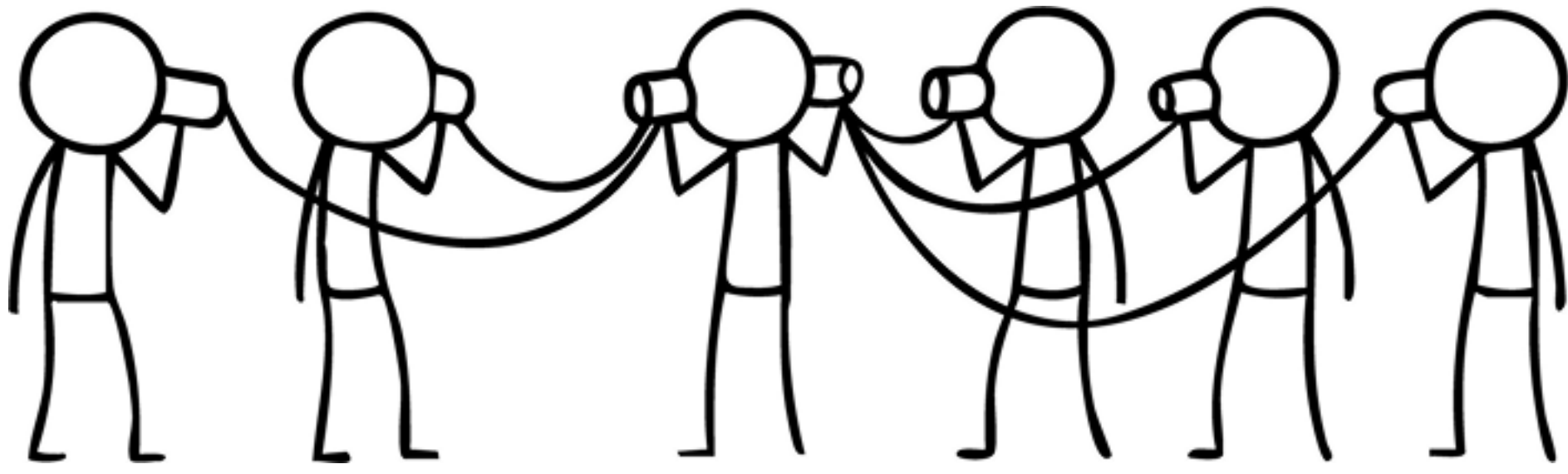
When we lost openness at the top layer, we lost entire categories of potential tools, services, and innovations that couldn't exist inside a closed model.

Imagine if Social Media Were Open

What if social media had been built like email? You could use any app to follow or message anyone. You could switch apps without losing your followers or messages.

Developers could build new social tools that plug into the same social network – and innovation would explode, just like it did with the web and email.

We've already missed out on so much.



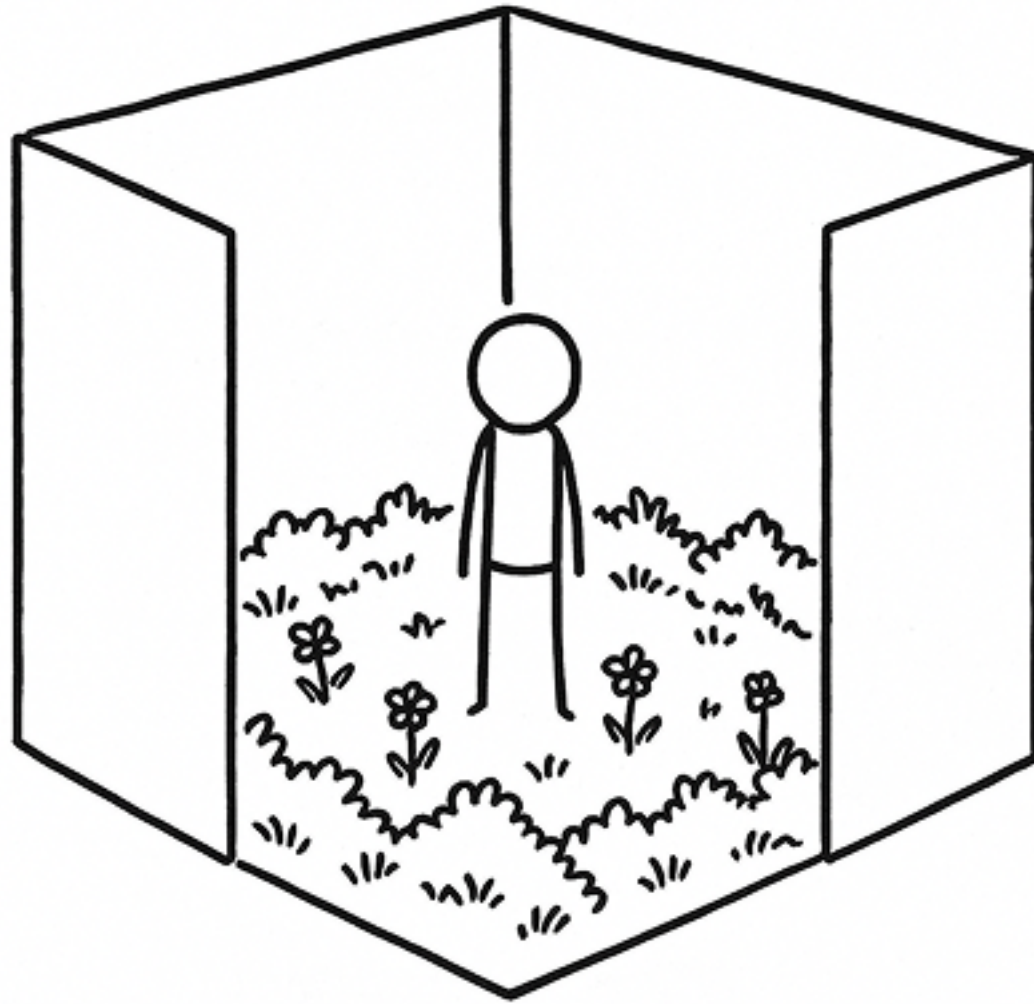
Network Effects: More Users, More Value

A network effect is when something becomes more valuable as more people use it.

It's not unique to tech. Languages have network effects. English is useful because many people speak it. Telephones became more useful as more people got them.

The internet, being inherently social, amplifies this effect.

But here's the catch: who actually gets the financial value?



Walled Gardens: Closed by Design

Imagine buying a phone, but it only works if the person you’re calling has the same brand. It sounds ridiculous at first – of course, phones should connect to any other phone, no matter who manufactured them. But that same-brand restriction is exactly how most internet platforms work¹².

They’re each a walled garden: a closed system where everything is controlled by one company.

Most apps today are walled gardens.

12. Although it sort of happens at the phone level with Apple’s iMessage, which downgrades to green bubble SMS if your friends aren’t using an iPhone. You can’t use FaceTime outside the Apple ecosystem. Or AirDrop. It’s not exactly like needing the same phone to call someone, but it’s not totally unlike it either.

Instagram only allows you to interact with other Instagram users. Apple and Google do this too – their features work best inside their own walls¹³. These walls are built to capture your activity, relationships, data, and eventually your money.

Most users never notice the walls because they’ve been built gradually, behind the scenes. All they feel is the convenience, but it costs them independence. A garden is nice until you realize you’re the crop.

How They Justify It

The companies running these walled gardens have a polished set of justifications¹⁴.

“A Seamless Experience”

They say everything “just works.” What they don’t say is that it works because alternatives are blocked. It’s not seamless because it’s better – it’s seamless because you’re not allowed to choose anything else.

13. You can’t even pair an Apple Watch with an Android (Google) phone.

14. How Apple’s iPhone and Apps Trap You in a Walled Garden, Wall Street Journal on YouTube.

“Quality Control”

They say they carefully vet everything so you only see the best apps, content and providers. But that vetting acts like a gate, keeping competitors out and charging fees to anyone who wants in. App stores, for example, routinely charge up to 30% of revenue.

“Convenience”

They say one login makes everything easier, with all your services neatly synced. But that bundling leads straight to dependence. They tie everything together so leaving gets harder.

“People Prefer Simplicity”

They even say it’s because users like it this way. But you can’t ask for alternatives you’ve never seen. What looks like preference is really manufactured dependence. Most users don’t realize how few options they have because they’ve never experienced anything else.

The Real Problem: Captured Network Effects

The core design flaw of today's internet: network effects create value, but platforms capture nearly all of it for themselves.

Email is an example of an open network effect. You can switch from Gmail to Outlook or ProtonMail and still email anyone you want. As more people use email, the benefits flow to everyone – not just one company.

Now compare that to ride-hailing apps like Uber or Lyft. If all your friends use Uber, but you prefer Lyft, you can't access the same pool of drivers. Each company owns its own walled garden of users and drivers.

Instead of ride-hailing improving for everyone as more people use it, each company hoards its own isolated network.

The value flows upward to the platform owners while users and workers remain locked inside.

And this dynamic repeats across every major internet category.

That's why industries keep collapsing into just two or three giants, and Big Tech feels like a game of Monopoly.

Look at your phone – social media, ride-hailing, food delivery, search, dating – each category only has a few giants.

Now compare it to something like coffee. There's a thriving, competitive market for coffee.

Some people like to make their coffee at home, some like to pick up a cup on the way to work, others enjoy meeting friends at a coffee shop, and others grab one in the office lunchroom.

Some want drip coffee. Others want lattes. Others cappuccinos.



You've got grocery store beans, gas station cups, chain drive-thrus, local shops, bookstore cafés, home grinders, an office subscription, and specialty brewers.

Multiple models co-exist competitively. That's a healthy market. Tech should work the same way.

There are over 50 mainstream standalone email apps that ordinary people would download or buy – plus thousands more in universities, businesses, and self-hosted setups. So it's possible.

Instead, today's internet of big apps locks entire categories down. And it's not just fewer companies – it's fewer ideas that even emerge in the first place. We're missing competition, and whole models that never got a chance.

There are endless ways to design messaging, dating, ride-hailing, and social apps. But with network effects trapped inside walled gardens, we get only a narrow slice of what's possible.

We lose competition and we lose imagination.

The Theme Park Internet

The internet was supposed to be open, like a real city, where anyone could open a business, meet friends, or build something new. Instead, it works more like a corporate-controlled attraction¹⁵.



Today’s internet is like Disney World. Disney simulates a city. You can walk around, ride transit, eat food, and even visit different countries at Epcot. But it’s not a real city. Everything is carefully curated, owned, and operated by Disney. Every shop, ride, menu, and song exists by corporate permission. Disney decides what gets built, how you experience it, and how much it costs. “It’s a small world after all.”

15. Digital Theme Park Platforms: The Most Important Media Businesses of the Future, Matthew Ball.

Fine for a theme park, but not for real life.

Living in Disney World

Today's internet is a glossy theme park – curated, controlled, and monetized.

You don't control the rules inside Facebook. If you want to connect, you play by their terms. Airbnb decides which listings surface. Instagram controls who sees your posts.

Most people either grew up inside platforms or got used to them – with little memory of the open web that came before.

In the early days of the internet, there was:

- No corporate middlemen between you and your connections.
- No algorithm deciding what you see.
- No surveillance baked into default settings.
- No lock-in when switching services.

What we have now is a controlled simulation – only a glimpse of the internet we could have had.

Theme parks are fun for vacation, but they're no place to build your life.

The Growth Imperative

How did we end up here? The economics changed.

The early internet came from idealists, academics, and tinkerers – a decentralized network where creativity flourished, gatekeepers shrank, and anyone could build. Then venture capital and public markets entered the picture, and the incentives changed. The goal wasn't to build great tools anymore – it was to dominate markets.

When companies go public, they don't just promise to make money – they promise to make more money every quarter, indefinitely. Stagnation isn't tolerated. Every public company lives under relentless pressure to deliver short-term growth.

The easiest path was to enclose more of the internet in private walled gardens, then capture more of your time, attention, data, and transactions. They figured out how to shift value away from users and toward themselves.

It Started Gradually

People used to build their own websites.

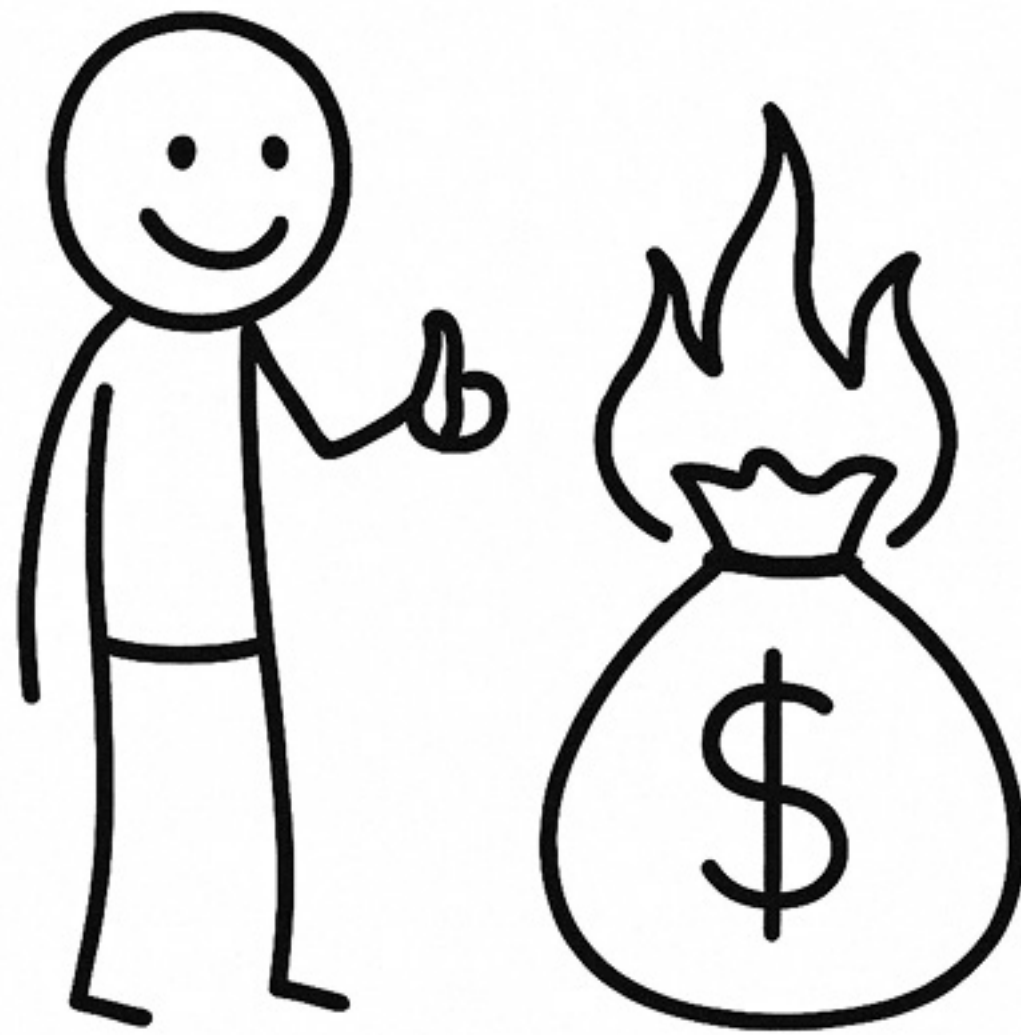
Then MySpace made it easier.

Why run your own forum when Facebook groups were easier? Why manage an email list when Twitter lets you broadcast to everyone instantly?

It felt like progress.

It seemed like things were getting easier and more convenient – like we were getting more with less technical hassle.

That was the trade-off. The business model worked, but the long-term costs were hidden.



Blitzscaling

A new playbook emerged, especially in Silicon Valley: blitzscaling.

First, you pick a social activity that can be put online – dating, ride-hailing, restaurant delivery, learning, creating short videos.

Then raise enormous venture capital and grow as fast as possible – the goal is dominance, not sustainability.

Burn money subsidizing both sides of the market: cheaper rides for passengers, bonuses for drivers; cheaper delivery for customers, lower fees for restaurants.

Once dominant, you tighten the screws. The subsidies dry up, prices rise, and margins expand. Drivers earn less, restaurants pay more, consumers lose choice.

The goal was never just to build a good business – it was to become the default, and trap the market inside it.

Savvy investors gladly eat short-term losses for long-term monopoly power¹⁶. This strategy has produced a generation of apps that trap users, capture value, and funnel wealth and control to investors.

16. This is the infamous “hockey stick” growth curve that dominates startup pitch decks. Early losses followed by exponential gains, once the market has been captured.

Twitter

Twitter (now X) started as a simple app for 140-character updates. It grew organically. Many of its famous features like hashtags and retweets came from users themselves.

But as Douglas Rushkoff explains on his Team Human podcast, when Twitter went public in 2013, everything changed. It sold a fraction of its shares to the public, which gave the company \$2 billion in cash, and valued the company at \$18 billion¹⁷. Suddenly, it had to justify that valuation, every quarter, and keep growing.

The product roadmap shifted from users to revenue growth. Twitter became a vehicle for financial gain and shareholder return¹⁸. New features like algorithmic feeds, promoted tweets, and corporate partnerships, were judged by one metric: growth and shareholder financial value¹⁹. The user experience became secondary.

17. Twitter Prices Its Initial Offering at \$26 Per Share, *The New York Times*.

18. Grading Twitter’s Performance One Year After Its IPO, *Time*.

19. Twitter Has Never Been Stronger—or Weaker, *The New Yorker*.

The New Land Grab

We have a growth-based economy on a finite planet. Historically, corporations grew by conquering new lands, exploiting resources (and people), and sending value back home.

The British East India Company was the prototype, with a blessing from the state to extract value overseas and send it back to England²⁰.

But there's not really any new land left to colonize. That 'easy growth' got harder.

So where will growth come from?

Enter the smartphone: new land.

Suddenly, billions of people carried connected devices everywhere.

20. The Anarchy: The East India Company, Corporate Violence, and the Pillage of an Empire, *William Dalrymle*.

Chartered in 1600 by Queen Elizabeth I, it's often considered the first modern corporation. It was given monopoly trading rights and operated with military powers in colonized regions, extracting vast wealth from India and Southeast Asia.



Location, habits, interests, purchases, and personal connections became new resources to be harvested, analyzed, and monetized.

Even attention became extractable land.

Every idle moment – in line, on the couch, in the bathroom – became a chance to extract data, sell ads, and monetize behaviour.

Your time became inventory.

Idle moments became billable.

Your data was a mineable resource.

The market fell in love.

Building Enclosures

As these companies scaled, they gradually converted public spaces into private enclosures.

Open spaces became walled gardens. The open web was quietly being fenced off, piece by piece.

Today, the most valuable parts of the internet – your data, your content, your connections to people and businesses – sit trapped inside corporate databases you don't control.

If the internet is a giant open network of computers, then walled gardens are private mini-internets owned by corporations.

When you open an app, you're not really on the open internet anymore. You're inside that company's controlled environment – their closed version of the internet.

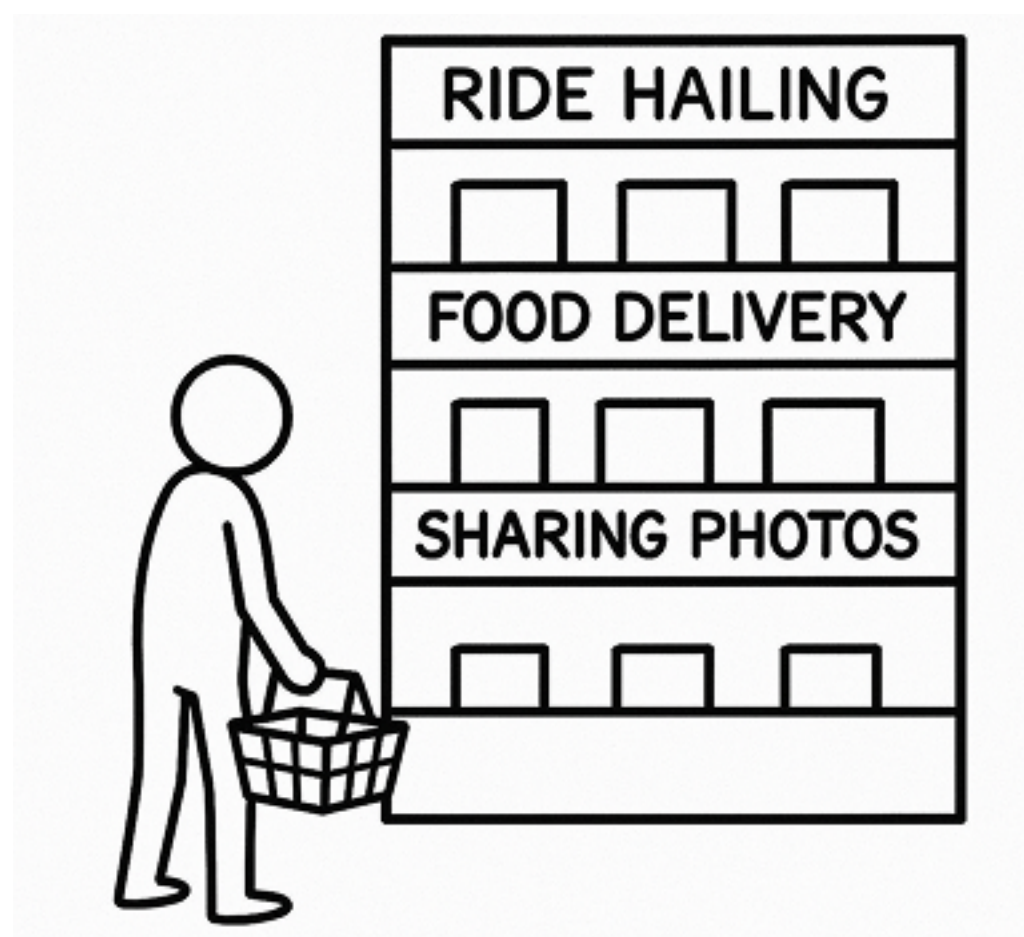
Free Basics and the Illusion of Choice

In developing markets, Meta offers Free Basics, a stripped-down internet where users can only access a small number of Meta-approved websites.

For many first-time users, Facebook is the internet.

When Western audiences learn about Free Basics, they’re horrified. “That’s not the real internet! That’s a prison!”

Then we turn around and pick: Uber or Lyft for a ride, Instagram or Snapchat for photos, DoorDash or Postmates for dinner.



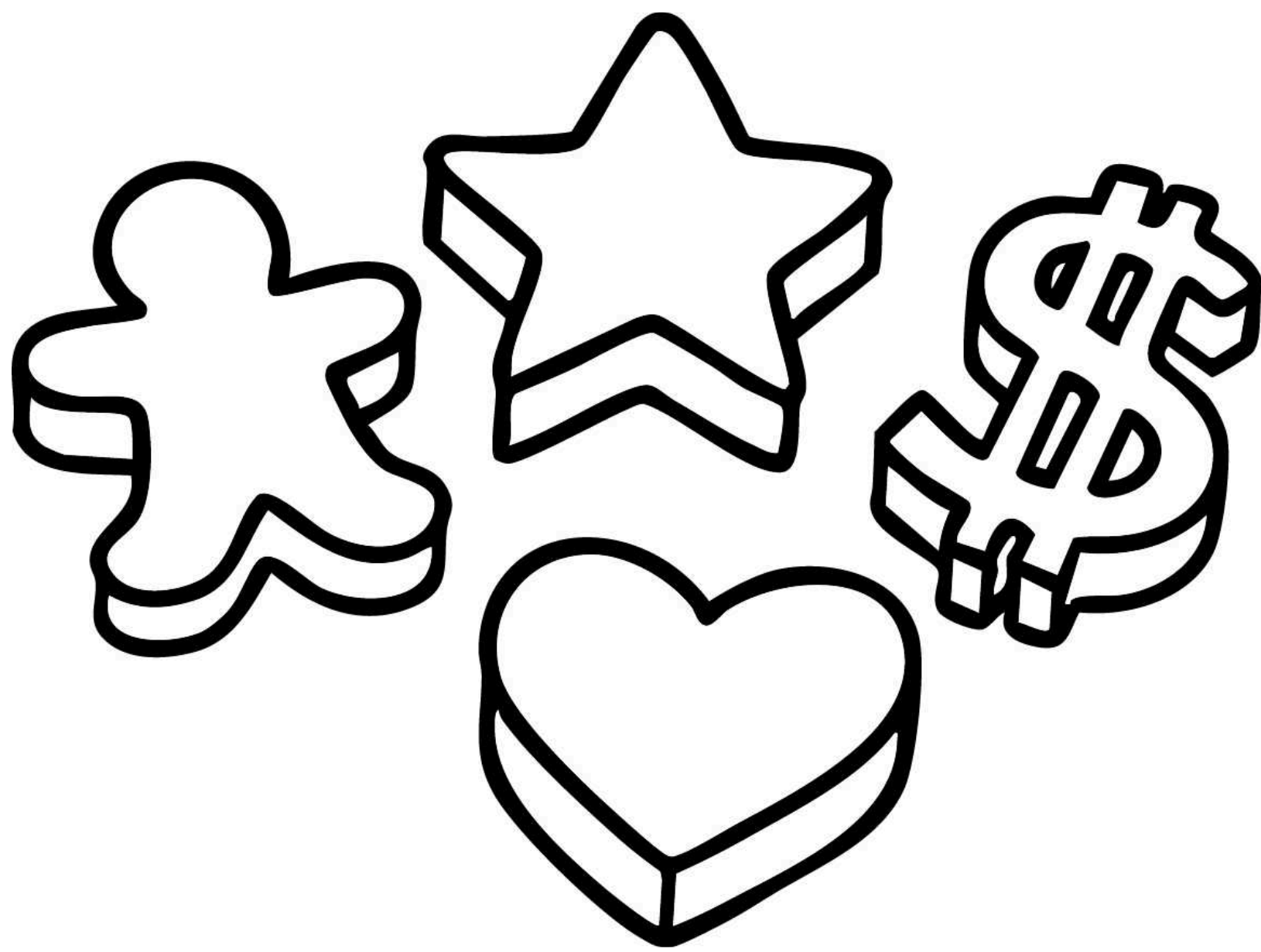
We’re living our own version of Free Basics.

We just don’t see the cage because it’s glossy.

Once you see it, you can't unsee it.

We've adapted to constrained choices, like fish unaware of the water they're swimming in.

But once you see the walls, you start demanding more.



PART IV

The Business Model

This isn't a conspiracy theory.

It's standard practice.

Startups pitch it²¹.

Business schools teach it.

Founders boast about it.

21. Just look up the original pitch decks of today's biggest platforms. You'll see a very different story than what their public branding suggests. Aggressive growth, market capture, and monetization strategies are laid out plainly for investors.

“Subsidize, Then Extract”

Take Uber. Its early rides were heavily subsidized by venture capital, including billions from the Saudi royal family²². The taxi companies couldn’t afford to burn cash like that. Passengers loved the cheap rides, and drivers were lured in.

But once Uber dominated, driver wages dropped while passenger prices climbed²³.

It’s now profitable – but only after burning billions to seize the market.

The same investors who once subsidized your ride now take a significant cut while local drivers in your community struggle to make ends meet.

22. For a wild ride, check out the infamous SoftBank Vision Fund pitch deck that was reportedly presented to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. SoftBank CEO Masayoshi Son was apparently able to secure a \$45 billion investment in just 45 minutes. As he told David Rubenstein in a Bloomberg interview, it was “\$1 billion for every minute.” That fund went on to invest in many big platforms like DoorDash, DiDi, Grab, and WeWork, helping to fuel their rapid expansion and subsidized growth.

23. UK Uber drivers’ earnings cut after changes to secretive algorithm, *The Guardian*.



A Tale of Two Business Models

Your local coffee shop has nothing to hide.

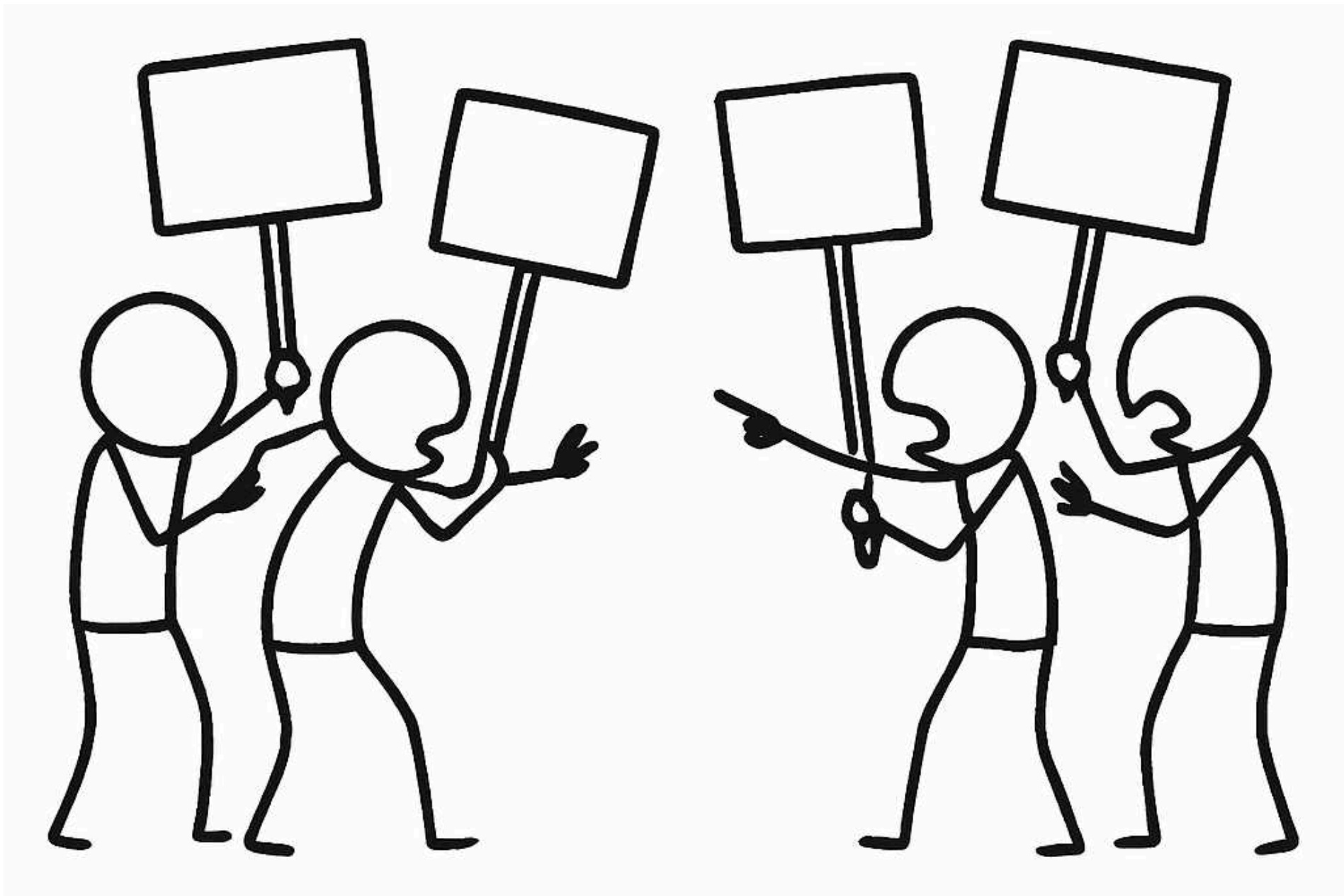
You pay for a cup of coffee that covers rent, beans, equipment, wages, and what's left is profit. Simple, transparent, and fair.

Tech platforms play a very different game. They sell one story to users, and another to investors.

Apps like Instagram²⁴ deliberately obscure how the real money is made – data extraction, algorithmic manipulation, targeting, addictive features – because if users saw the full business plan, many wouldn't open the app at all.

24. The majority of influencer advertising is undisclosed, *Centre for Economic Policy Research*.

Instagram positions itself as a place for connection, but much of its content is undisclosed advertising, blurring the line between authentic content and paid promotion.



PART V

The False Choice of “Free Market” or “Regulation”

The debate about fixing this usually falls into two tired camps: more regulation, or more free market competition.

Both sides miss the structural problem underneath.

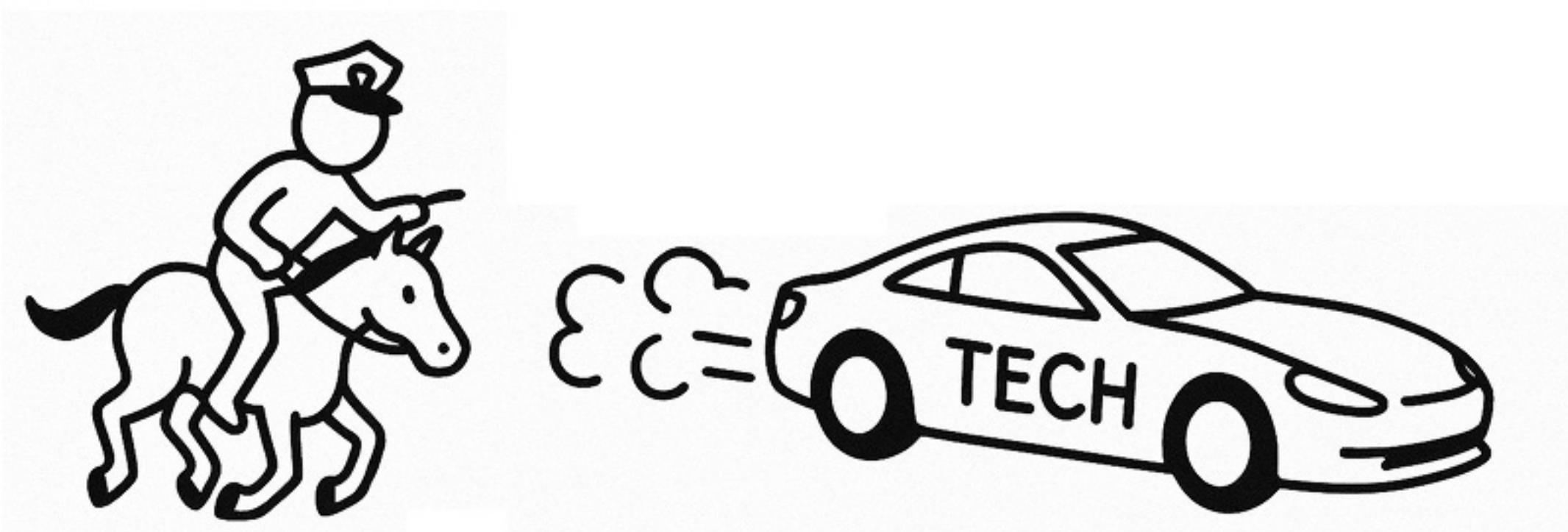
The Limits of Regulation

Regulation tries to patch the most visible harms: privacy violations, misinformation, market dominance, algorithmic manipulation. Lawmakers investigate antitrust violations, hold hearings, and fine companies for data breaches or monopolistic behavior.

But regulation struggles for two reasons.

First, it’s reactive. Regulations tend to address symptoms rather than underlying structures. They tell platforms what they can’t do, but almost never create alternative architectures.

Second, regulations are always several steps behind. Platforms move faster than governments can legislate. By the time a new rule arrives, companies have already adapted their models or moved into new gray areas.



Regulating Big Tech is like controlling an invasive species.

It evolved to dominate one part of the ecosystem – like extracting resources more efficiently than anything else – but it doesn't give anything back.

It crowds out native species, destabilizes the system, and reshapes the environment around its own needs. You can prune it, fence it in, or slow its spread – but unless you restore balance to the ecosystem itself, it won't stop.

Regulation may slow certain abuses, but it doesn't create healthier systems.

It operates inside the existing architecture rather than changing it.

The Limits of “Free Market” Competition

The other common answer is to call for more competition.

“Let the market work,” people say. Let new startups challenge incumbents. If people don’t like Facebook, Google, or Amazon, build something better.

But they can’t. Not really. The size of these companies turns them from competitors into giant gatekeepers.

You can’t integrate your startup with their systems unless they say so. You can’t bring your social followers with you to a new app. You can’t bring your driver rating from Uber to a new ride-hailing app. You can’t compete if all the users, data, and visibility are locked inside someone else’s walled garden.

You can open a coffee shop on any street corner and catch the local foot traffic. But online, it’s like opening a shop but everyone is trapped inside a mall.

These aren’t open markets functioning normally.

Design Is Policy

If you build a city with no sidewalks, of course people drive – not because they prefer cars, but because they have no choice.

The same thing happens online.

Most activity funnels through privately owned platforms, where lock-in, surveillance, and extraction are defaults.

If the foundation is broken, regulation and competition can only go so far.

You can't fix systemic problems with tweaks.

We need to rebuild the foundation. A new design will give us different outcomes.

Solving for the Three Core Problems

Before we get into what a solution might look like, it's worth laying out these problems as I see them.

The patterns repeat across platforms and industries:

- 1. Control & Lock-In:** A system designed to trap users.
- 2. Surveillance & Extraction:** An economy built to profit from your data and behaviour.
- 3. Middlemen & Chokepoints:** A handful of platforms controlling access and skimming financial value.

They all interlock.

Understanding how they reinforce each other is key to seeing why surface-level fixes won't work – and why structural change is necessary.



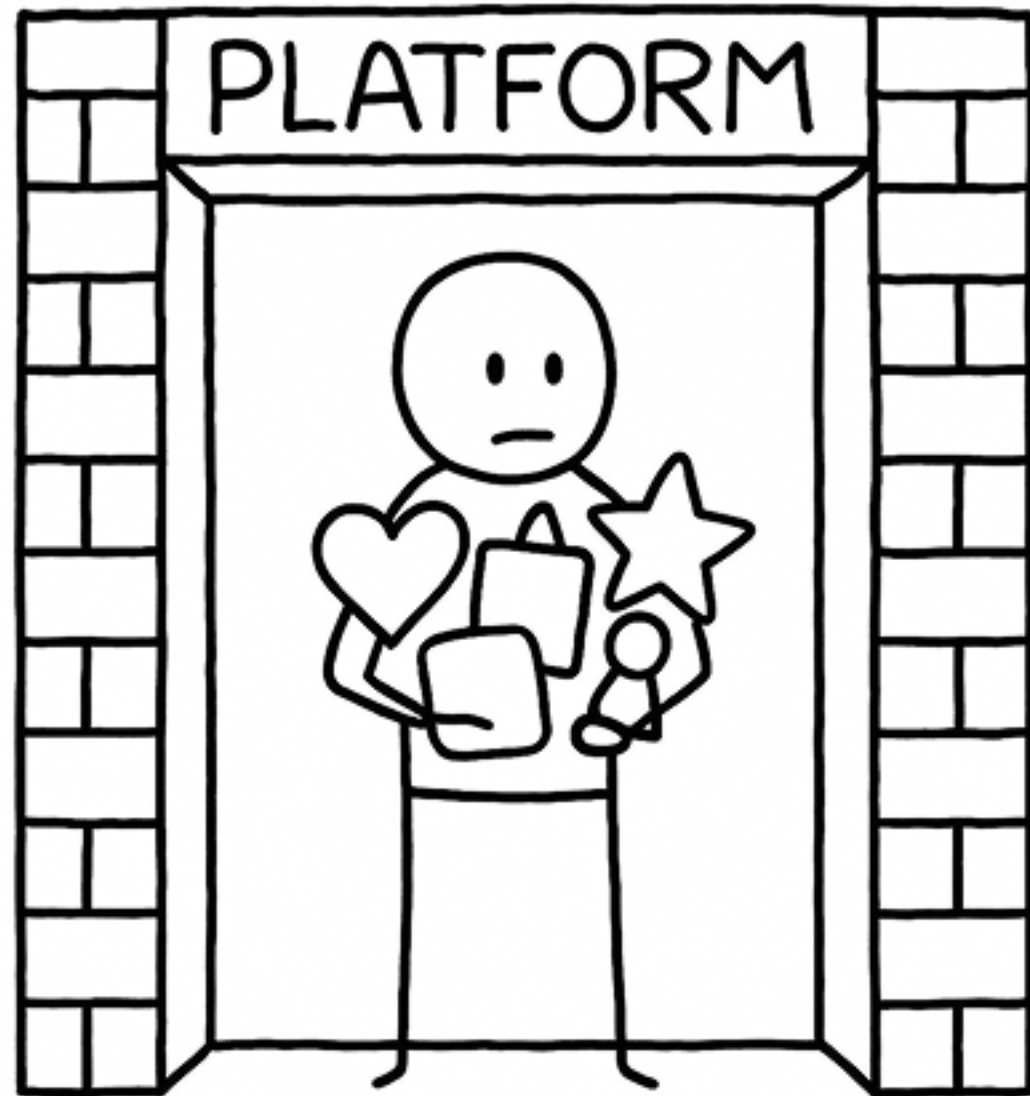
PART VI

Three Core Problems

i. Control & Lock-in

To understand what needs fixing, we need to go back to first principles: platforms vs. protocols.

**Platforms lock you in.
Protocols set you free.**



Platforms Lock You In

A platform is a private system controlled by a single company. All the protocols, access points, and data structures are defined internally.

- Your followers on Instagram exist inside Instagram's database.
- Your Uber rating exists only inside Uber's system.
- Your videos on YouTube are trapped inside Google's servers.

If you leave, none of it comes with you.

Your data stays behind.

Your relationships stay behind.

Your identity stays behind.

Big platforms continue to win because they're bigger.

People go where people already are.

Network effects create a gravitational pull that reinforces dominance.

Over time, real alternatives disappear.

Even startups that might build better products often can't break through because incumbents already own such a large network, and investors won't fund alternatives²⁵.

For companies, the logic is simple: keeping a customer is cheaper than finding a new one²⁶. High switching costs are good for their business.

When leaving means starting over, users stay because they feel trapped.

25. Venture Capital Kill Zones: Defining Harm to Consumers by Big Tech's Long Shadow, *The Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law*.

26. The Value of Keeping the Right Customers, *Harvard Business Review*.

This is the foundation of platform power: whoever owns the relationships controls the market.

It's a deliberate strategy:

- Walled gardens trap your relationships and data.
- Network effects and their gravity severely weaken viable alternatives.
- Closed protocols block competition.
- High switching costs make escaping too painful.



Protocols Set You Free

A protocol is a shared standard that no one owns.

No one owns email. SMTP defines how messages are exchanged. Anyone can build a new email service. You can switch providers while keeping your address, history, and contacts.

Protocols create interoperability.

You don't lose relationships when you switch. You don't have to rebuild your identity. The network effect belongs to the users, not any one company.

The difference between platforms and protocols is control.

Platforms extract because they own and control your data and your network.

Protocols empower because you own and control your data and network, and can choose any provider.

The Protocol Layer Was Hijacked

As we talked about earlier, the internet's early architecture ran on open protocols like TCP/IP, SMTP and HTTP. That openness is why it grew so quickly and so widely.

But as companies moved up the stack into the application layer, they built closed systems that looked open – but kept users locked in.

Facebook Messenger doesn't connect to Signal. WhatsApp can't talk to Telegram. iMessage degrades when messaging Android users.

These are business decisions, not technical limitations.

Open Protocols Drive Business

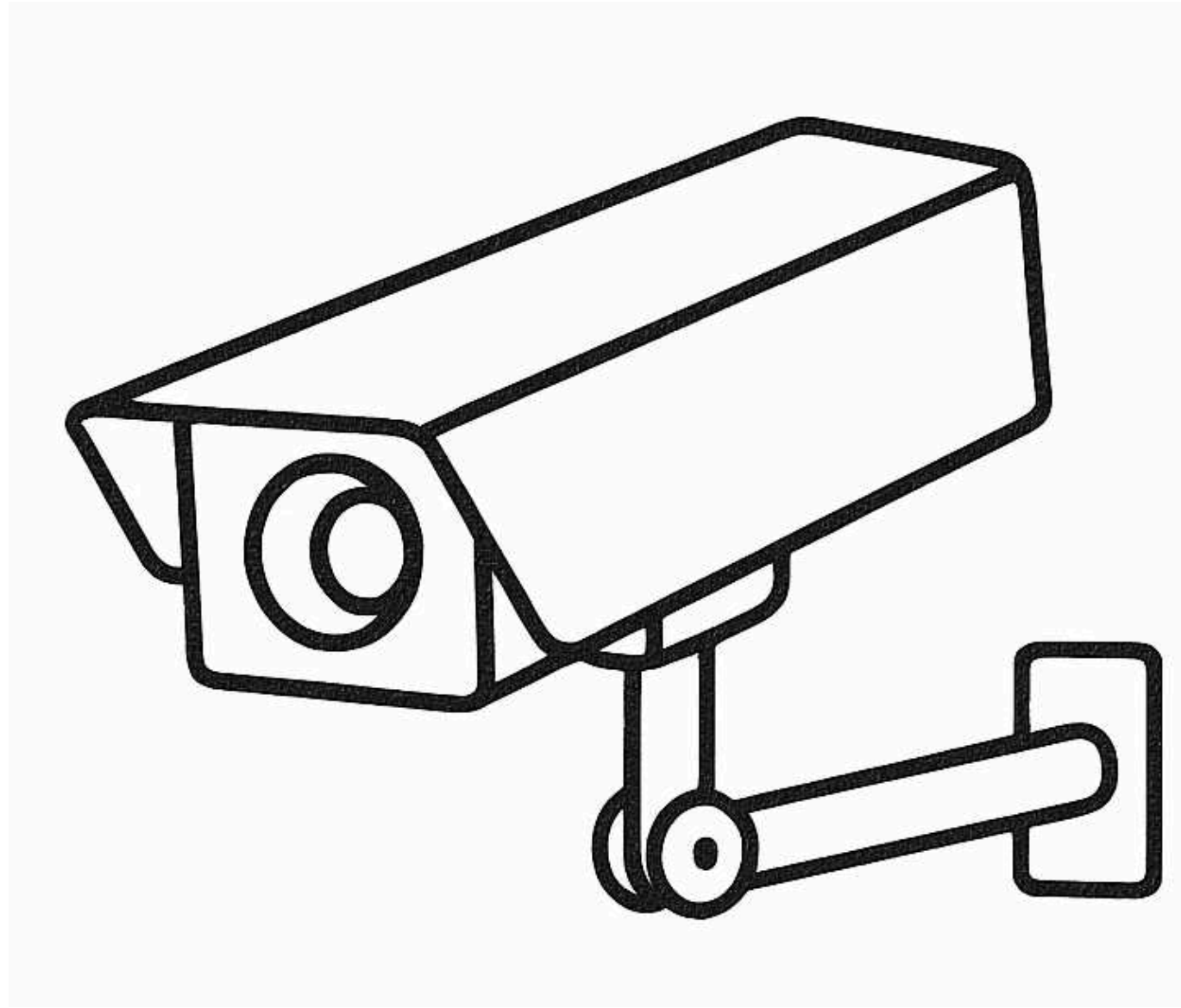
Open protocols create better business models.

Email didn't stop business from thriving. It enabled entire industries like marketing platforms, hosting providers, software tools, and productivity apps.

Open protocols don't mean everything has to be free. They just mean users stay in control of their data and network. That shifts competition to where it belongs: quality of service.

When switching costs are low, companies have to earn loyalty. When users control their data and relationships, businesses must compete by serving them.

That's the kind of market we're missing online.



PART VI

Three Core Problems

ii. Surveillance & Extraction

Once platforms control the network, the next move is to extract as much value as possible from user behaviour.

Surveillance Capitalism

The modern internet runs on surveillance capitalism – a term coined by Shoshanna Zuboff²⁷.

Nearly everything you do online becomes data – what you click, what you search, where you go, what you buy, how long you pause a video. It's packaged, analyzed, and sold to companies you've never heard of²⁸.

When you check the weather, track your period, or plan a driving route, you're not just using an app. You're feeding an industry of data brokers who aggregate your information and resell it.

That pregnancy app might sell your due date. That smart watch might sell your location patterns – revealing when you visit a therapist, medical specialist, or divorce attorney.

27. Her seminal book from 2019, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, outlines how companies like Google and Facebook pioneered this model to extract value from users without their informed consent.

28. Which apps are sharing your data?, *International Accounting Bulletin*.

You click “I agree” but it’s not a real choice. You needed to buy concert tickets, or your kid’s school required an app for parent volunteers, so you clocked through to get it done. Saying no isn’t practical when participation in modern life depends on using these tools. The consent is performative, not meaningful.

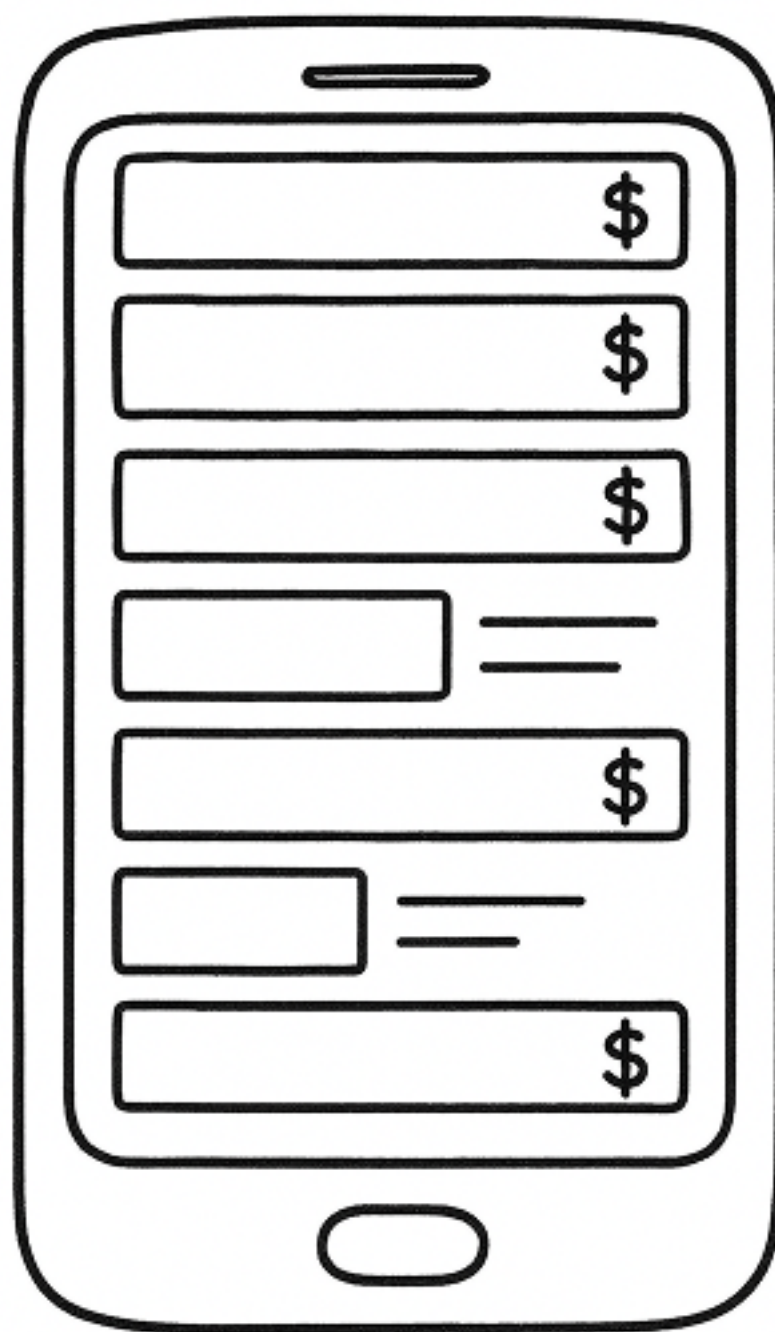
The more accurately platforms can predict your behaviour, the more they can charge advertisers to get your attention at precisely the right moment. The profit engine revolves around predicting what you’ll do – and nudging you to do it. It affects what news you see, what ads you’re shown, which recommendations appear in your feeds, and what opinions you’re exposed to.

Pay to Play

Online, getting your eyeballs is an auction. Whoever pays gets more visibility.

Your experience online feels based on your interests – who you follow, what you search for, what you care about.

But much of what you see is determined by who's willing to pay for access to your attention.



Speech may be “free” but reach is for sale²⁹. You can say what you want, but if you want people to see it, you’re going to have to pay.

29. Deconstruction of a Facebook campaign model on the example of three brands, *Informatologia*.

Authentic voices drown under ads, bots, influencer campaigns, and misinformation.

Your feed, and increasingly your worldview, get distorted by commercial incentives you never see.

The Surveillance Supply Chain

Platforms harvest personal and behavioural data.



Data brokers collect, bundle, and resell it.



Advertisers and political campaigns pay for targeted access to your attention.

An Asymmetry of Power

Economic Power

The five biggest tech companies are worth more than many countries³⁰.

Political Power

Platforms operate as global speech infrastructure without public accountability. They can amplify or suppress information, shape discourse, and influence elections without transparency³¹.

Social Power

Only a handful of companies decide what you see and who you meet.

Platforms know enormous amounts about you. You know almost nothing about what they do with that knowledge.

30. 2023 World Bank GDP data and Q1 2025 market caps from Yahoo Finance.

31. Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach, *The Guardian*. It revealed how Facebook data was used to craft psychological profiles and deliver tailored messages aimed at swaying voter behaviour. But it also showed that many platforms could do this.

You think of yourself as a user, but you're more like a data object inside a system where others profit from your behaviour.

It's why privacy settings within these platforms don't solve this. They give you toggles without changing who controls the system.

Real privacy requires changing who controls data from the beginning.

The “Encryption” Distraction

Tech companies often promote encryption as proof they respect privacy. And to an extent, your messages may be encrypted – protected by complicated math, so even the company claims it can’t read them.

It sounds great, but encryption doesn’t stop surveillance. Even if platforms can’t read your messages, they still collect metadata – who you talk to, when, how often, where you are³². It’s often more revealing than the content anyway.

It’s like the post office not opening your mail, but still tracking who you write to, how often, where they live, and which stores send you packages.

This metadata exposes your relationships, habits, interests, and behaviors. When combined with other data points, it creates a comprehensive profile that can predict your actions and vulnerabilities with unsettling accuracy.

32. [What’s the Matter with Metadata?](#), *The New Yorker*.

Platforms embraced encrypted content because it reassured users – a strategic concession that never threatened the core surveillance business model.

Even encrypted apps struggle with spam, harassment, and unsolicited contact.

Privacy shouldn't only be framed as secrecy. It's also about controlling who can reach you in the first place.

Encryption is necessary, but not sufficient.

A Quick Aside: “I don’t care, I get it for free”

Some people shrug. The apps work. They’re free. Why overthink it?

It’s a fair reaction. The trade-off doesn’t feel urgent when the product works, the experience feels polished, and you don’t see the costs directly.

But you’re paying in ways that are hard to spot.

You’re paying with your attention
– reshaped by feeds optimized for engagement, not value.

You’re paying with higher prices – when businesses have to buy access to you

You’re paying with limited choices – when only a handful of companies decide which products, ideas, and voices make it through the gate.

You're not just using a tool. You're moving inside someone else's system, where every lever is designed to serve their goals, not yours.

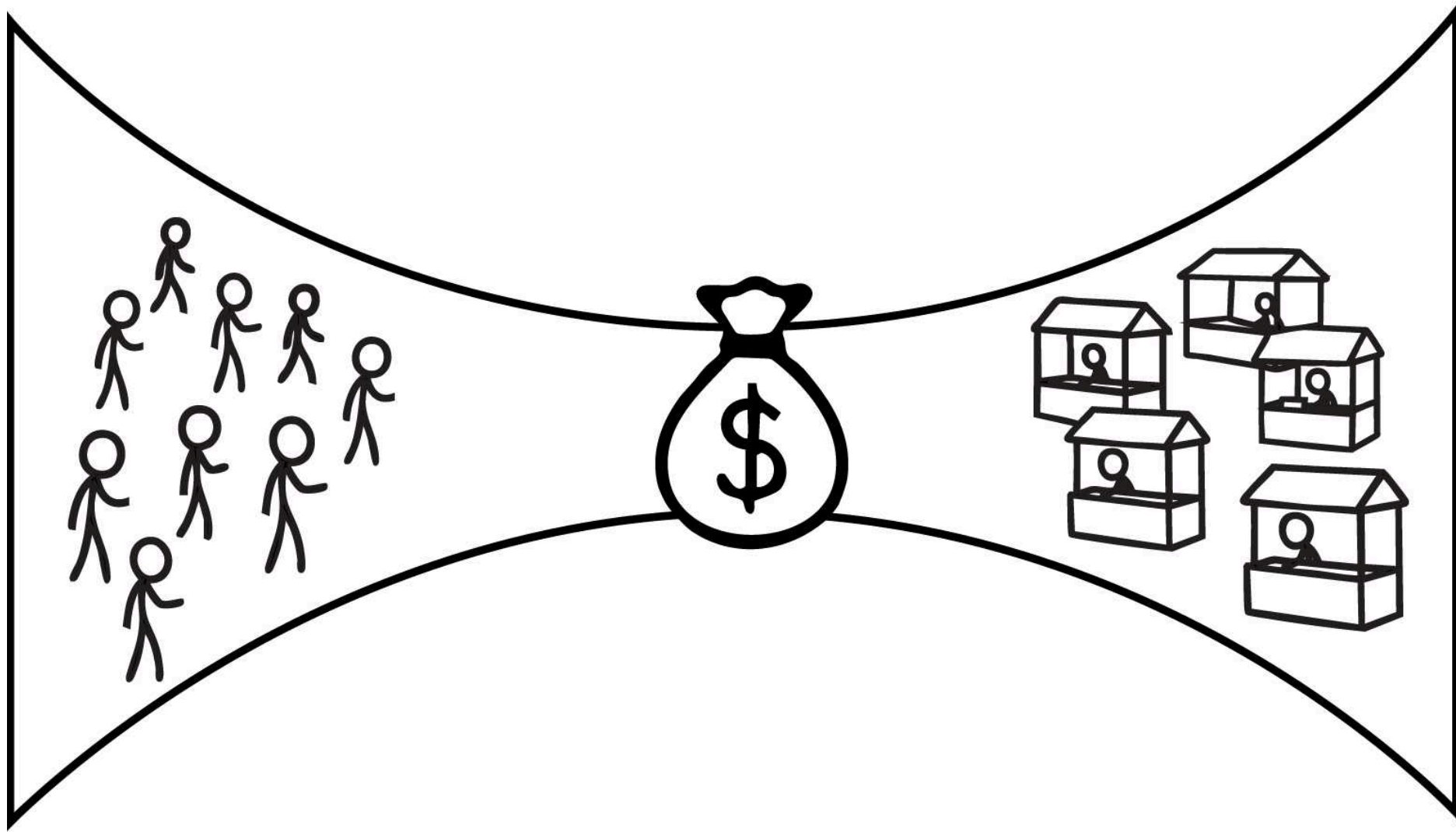
Over time, that shapes what you notice, who you trust, what you believe, and where your money goes.

If you're fine with that trade, that's your call.

But if something about the current system feels exploitative or lopsided – if you feel like you're participating on someone else's terms without ever opting in – then keep reading.

Because there's a difference between free and free by design.

You can have useful, ad-supported apps that respect your boundaries. I'll talk about it a bit later. You can have personalization without profiling, convenience without surveillance, and services without strings.



PART VI

Three Core Problems

iii. Middlemen & Chokepoints

In theory, platforms connect people and businesses.

In practice, once they control the network, they become unavoidable gatekeepers who charge rent on every interaction.

Chokepoints

When two sides of a market meet but must pass through a gatekeeper, that's a chokepoint³³.

Think of Google search: billions searching on one side, millions of websites seeking clicks on the other, but only a narrow path between them³⁴. Being in control of that bottleneck gives enormous power over who gets seen, buried, and paid.

If you grow an audience on Instagram, you're never really in control of who sees your posts. You'd assume that everyone who chooses to follow you will see your posts, but the algorithm decides what surfaces and what doesn't. Even your own audience might not see your content unless the platform chooses to distribute it.

33. The term “chokepoint capitalism” was coined by Rebecca Giblin and Cory Doctorow in their 2022 book *Chokepoint Capitalism: How Big Tech and Big Content Captured Creative Labor Markets and How We'll Win Them Back*.

34. You are how (and where) you search? Comparative analysis of web search behavior using web tracking data, *Journal of Computational Social Sciences*.

This study showed 97% of all clicks being made were on the first page.

The bigger the market and the narrower the chokepoint, the more profitable the middleman becomes.

This is the position of dominant platforms today:

- Ride hailing apps connect riders to drivers.
- Rental apps connect travelers to hosts.
- Shopping apps connect buyers to sellers.
- App stores connect developers to users.

The pattern repeats everywhere.

Middlemen step between the people and businesses who want to interact and skim a cut off every transaction that passes through.

The Platform Tax

At first, the platforms pitch themselves as helpful marketplaces. They claim to make it easier to discover products, connect buyers and sellers, and offer convenience.

But as platforms grow, so does dependency – and the platform tax. Once you own the chokepoint, you can:

- Change commission rates.
- Favour their own products.
- Limit visibility of users or businesses without payment.
- Kick off competitors.

It's like owning the only bridge into town, and deciding who crosses, at what price, and what they're allowed to carry.

Platforms don't enable markets.
They tax them.

In a healthy market, buyers and sellers deal directly. In the platform model, the middleman controls the channel and extracts profit without adding additional value to the transaction itself.

Case Study

How Platforms Evolve: Food Delivery Apps

**Food delivery shows how
platforms evolve from helpful
services to extractive toll
collectors.**

**What starts as empowerment ends
in enclosure.**

The pattern is predictable.

Phase 1: Mutual Benefit (2011-2015)

When delivery apps first launched, they genuinely helped everyone.

Restaurants without delivery staff could reach more customers by outsourcing it. Customers had access to more dining options. Platforms facilitated the connection for a reasonable commission – roughly 10%³⁵.

It was a win-win-win. Restaurants expanded their reach, diners discovered new places, and platforms earned a cut for providing a useful service.

Phase 2: Growth and Control (2016-2019)

As venture capital poured in, sustainable profits weren't enough. Investors wanted scale, dominance, and growth rates that justified growing valuations.

35. Online food-ordering company Seamless moves into new midtown digs, set to hire 50 more workers, *New York Daily News*.

Commissions charged to restaurants climbed to 20–30%³⁶. Platforms built free websites for restaurants but directed that online traffic to their own delivery systems³⁷. They listed restaurants without permission – then used that visibility to pressure them into signing up³⁸.

The relationship shifted. Restaurants weren't partners. They were interchangeable inventory.

You weren't ordering from Vera Pizza anymore. You were ordering from DoorDash. The app – not the restaurant – owned the customer relationship.

Phase 3: Extraction (2020-Present)

With restaurants hooked, the squeeze began.

36. Delivery by the numbers: How top third-party platforms compare, *Restaurant Drive*.

37. You would search for a restaurant and find its “official” website. The “Order Now” button didn’t call the restaurant, but took you straight into the app, taking a cut of the order.

38. Restaurants sue Grubhub over adding 150K non-partnered listings, *Restaurant Drive*.

More charges appeared: marketing fees, placement fees, platform fees³⁹. During COVID-19, as restaurants struggled to survive, delivery apps marketed themselves as “supporting local businesses” while charging some of their highest fees ever.

After platform fees, your \$20 order might leave the restaurant with just \$12–14 before rent, labour, and ingredients. But restaurants can’t leave. They need the app to reach customers. They can’t leave. They’re dependent.

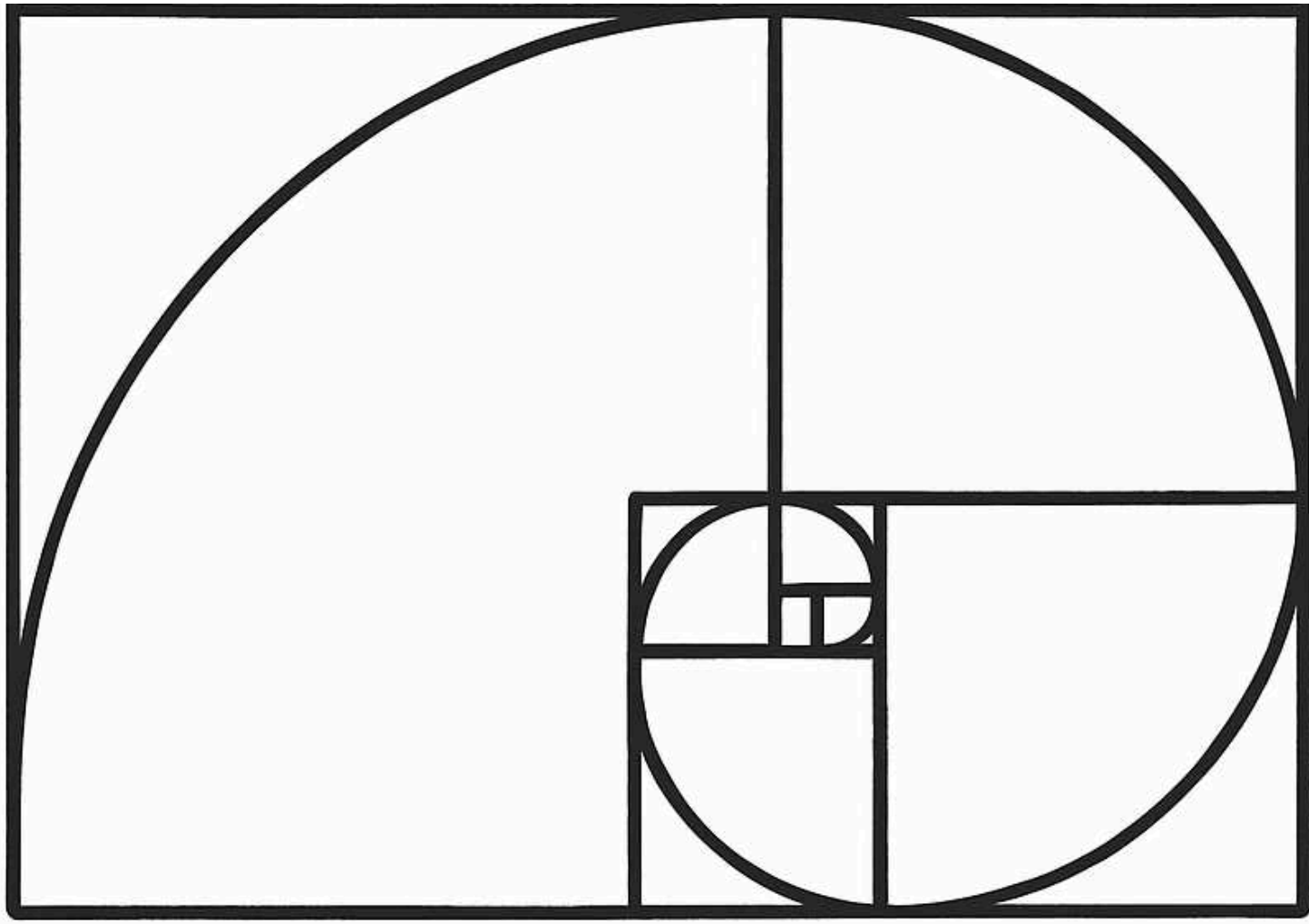
To stay afloat, many raise prices (you pay on average 24% more⁴⁰), shrink portions (you get less⁴¹), or quietly close altogether.

The platform has fully transformed from useful connector to extractive chokepoint. It now taxes every participant in the market it once claimed to liberate.

39. Viral post raises questions about how much restaurants earn from delivery apps, *Today*.

40. Restaurant Friction Index, *PYMNTS*.

41. Next time your tikka masala delivered by a food delivery app comes with half the chicken you used to get, don’t blame the restaurant, blame the app and the platform model.



PART VII

The Pattern is Clear

Food delivery isn't unique.

The same pattern repeats everywhere.

The Platform Playbook

It follows a sequence:

1. Promise empowerment: offer better access, lower prices, easier connection
2. Subsidize growth: use venture capital to undercut incumbents.
3. Insert as middleman: control the connection between users and providers.
4. Achieve dominance: lock in users, drive out competition.
5. Extract relentlessly: raise prices, reduce value, resist accountability.

This pattern repeats because today's internet allows anyone who controls an online chokepoint to gradually raise their toll.

More proof that it's not about innovation. It's about control.

A Connected System of Extraction

Let's step back and see the full arc.

First, an enclosure, then extraction.

Step 1: Enclosure

Platforms trap users by design.

Walled gardens create closed environments where everything happens inside the company's system. As more people join, network effects make the service feel essential. Limited choices and no interoperability eliminate real alternatives. Switching costs make it painful to leave.

Step 2: Extraction

Once enclosed, extraction begins.

Surveillance business models track nearly everything you do. Data brokers compile detailed behavioural profiles and sell them to advertisers, insurers, employers, and governments. Pay-to-play platforms auction off your attention in real time.

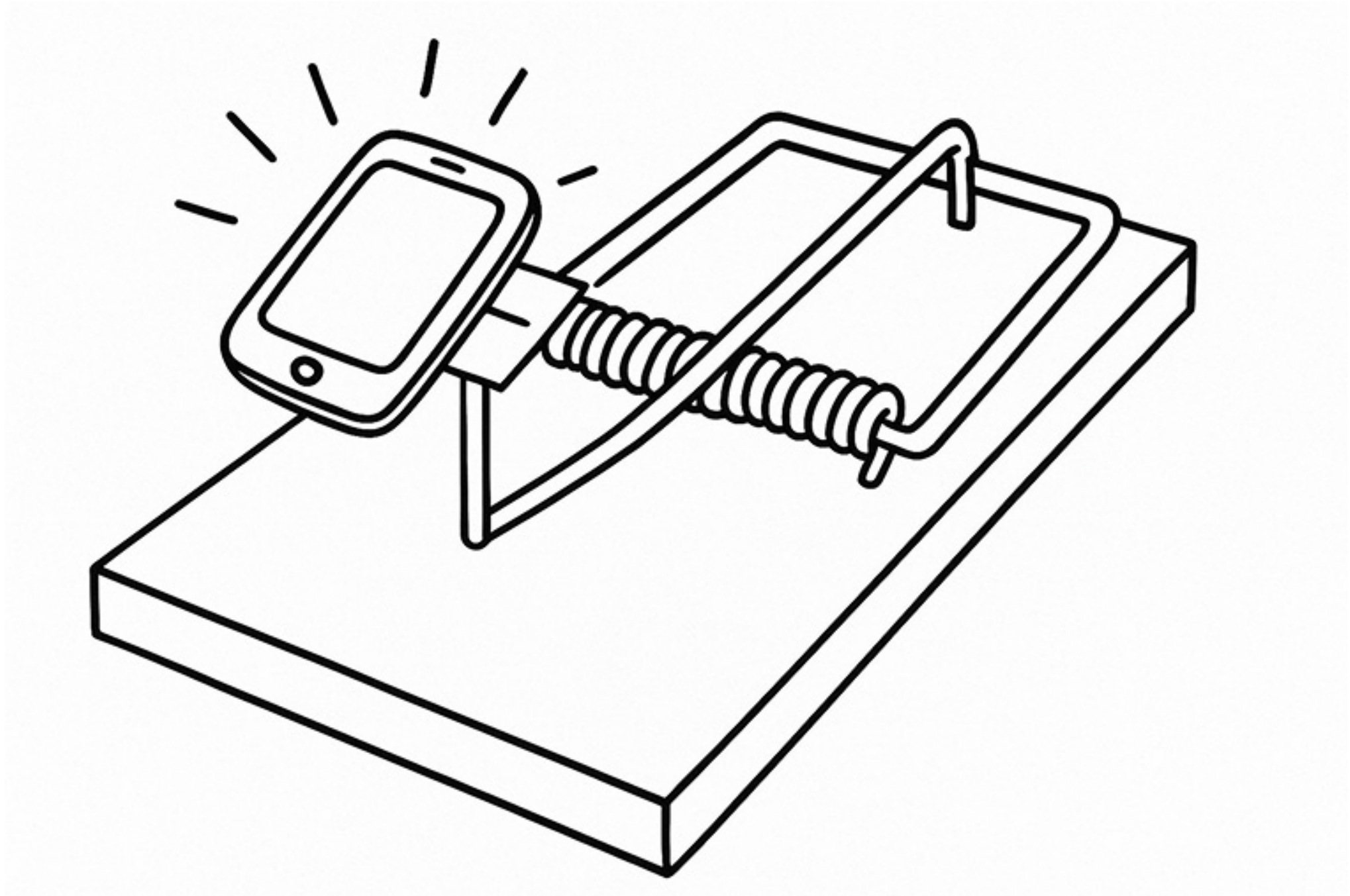
Meanwhile, platforms insert themselves between you and nearly every service you use.

They take a cut from every transaction, raise that cut over time, and extract more while contributing less and less.

The relationship shifts from partnership to dependency.

The most successful tech companies run the full playbook.

They trap, track, and tax your online life.



Tools to Traps

What began as tools for connection, convenience, and creativity have become:

- Machines that commodify our attention and relationships
- Engines for concentrating power
- Systems designed to create dependence
- Intermediaries that extract value from every interaction

This isn't the internet we were promised.

It's a highway of toll booths.
A market of chokepoints.

A system built for extraction at scale.

Taxes vs. Quiet Sneaky Inflation

What makes this system so durable is that it's hard to see the costs.

When governments propose tax increases, people react viscerally. Taxes feel imposed – they trigger outrage, headlines, and political debate⁴².

But platform extractions rarely generate the same reaction, even when the effect is nearly identical. The food delivery apps we just looked at are taxing businesses more heavily each year. That cost passes directly to consumers – higher prices, smaller portions, decreasing value. Platform fee increases often exceed the tax hikes that generate public outcry.

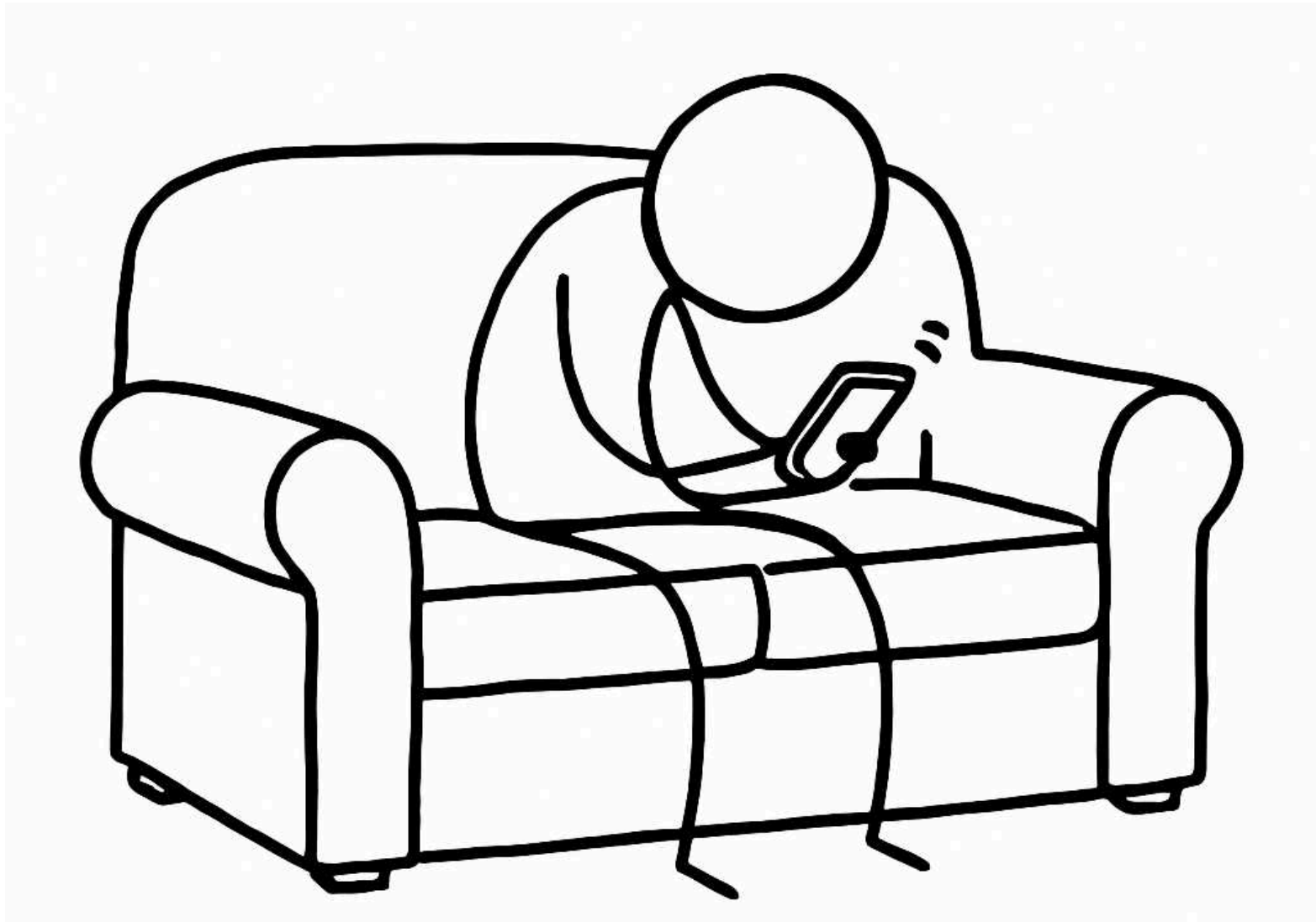
The psychology is different. Government taxes are explicit, loud, and political. Platform tolls are quiet, incremental, and usually invisible. Both extract from the same wallet.

42. What We Talk About When We Talk About Taxes, *Symbolic Interaction*.

While taxes fund public infrastructure and services, platform tolls serve no public good – only shareholder gain.

Platforms impose private taxes on entire industries – taking money out of communities that created it and funneling it into the hands of a few large companies – while offering little beyond maintaining the system they’ve locked in.

The real outrage is that private companies quietly tax everything we do online – and call it innovation.



PART VIII

Social Media

Nowhere is the architecture of lock-in, surveillance, and extraction more visible than in social media apps like Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, and Snapchat.

Is Social Media Social Anymore?

Social media is just one way to be social online. But because of powerful network effects, it's become the default.

Every design decision – from interface to algorithm – is optimized for one goal: maximizing time on the platform⁴³. The longer you stay, the more ads you see. That's the product. Not to help us connect meaningfully, but to be online as long as possible.

The things that frustrate you, addict you, or leave you feeling stuck on these platforms aren't bugs. They're features, and the system works exactly as designed.

43. Social Media Algorithms: Why You See What You See, *Georgetown Law Technology Review*.

Interconnected Problems

When we post to social media, we can't be fully authentic and perform for an audience at the same time.

Everyone has to perform for the crowd.

Algorithms then prioritize content that maximizes engagement, not well-being, so even when we come online to connect with friends, we often get pulled into influencer culture, brand noise, and performative posting.

We end up with a distorted sense of connection, where some voices dominate, others disappear, and everyone feels a little more isolated.

I see social media's harms clustered into three interconnected domains:

Authenticity & Identity

Attention & Algorithmic Manipulation

Connection and Community Problems

Authenticity & Identity

In real life, we adjust how we communicate depending on who we're with. You don't talk to your closest friend the same way you talk to your boss, your grandmother, or your coworkers.

Social media flattens these boundaries.

Everyone sees the same post. That hesitation you feel before sharing to social media is called context collapse. When every audience is combined into one, it's safer to self-censor, post only broadly acceptable updates, or stop sharing altogether.

Over time, sharing to social media starts feeling more like performance. You stop being yourself and become a version optimized for the crowd⁴⁴.

What used to feel “social” now feels like “media.”

44. Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications, *danah boyd*.

Most people retreat into passive lurking. Roughly 90% of users don't post much – they just scroll⁴⁵.

When the people who bring nuance or thoughtfulness go silent, louder and more extreme voices fill the void, and the experience gets worse for everyone.

We end up with performative “dunking” – when someone says something imperfect or unpopular, and strangers pile on to ridicule them. Mockery outperforms understanding. It's more “engaging” to be snarky than sincere⁴⁶. It's not a healthy conversation.

45. The 90-9-1 Rule for Participation Inequality in Social Media and Online Communities, *Nielsen Norman Group*.

46. Out-group animosity drives engagement on social media, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Attention & Algorithmic Manipulation

The entire business model is attention extraction. Every design decision flows from that incentive.

Algorithms reward what content travels fastest – shock, controversy, emotional extremes⁴⁷. You get more of what spikes, and less of what matters. Your feed becomes a highlight reel of distraction.

Even the appearance of connection is manipulated. You think you're seeing your friends' posts, but you're really seeing what the algorithm believes will keep you scrolling. Entire relationships can vanish from your feed without you noticing. Those people didn't disappear, the app's algorithm just stopped showing you their posts.

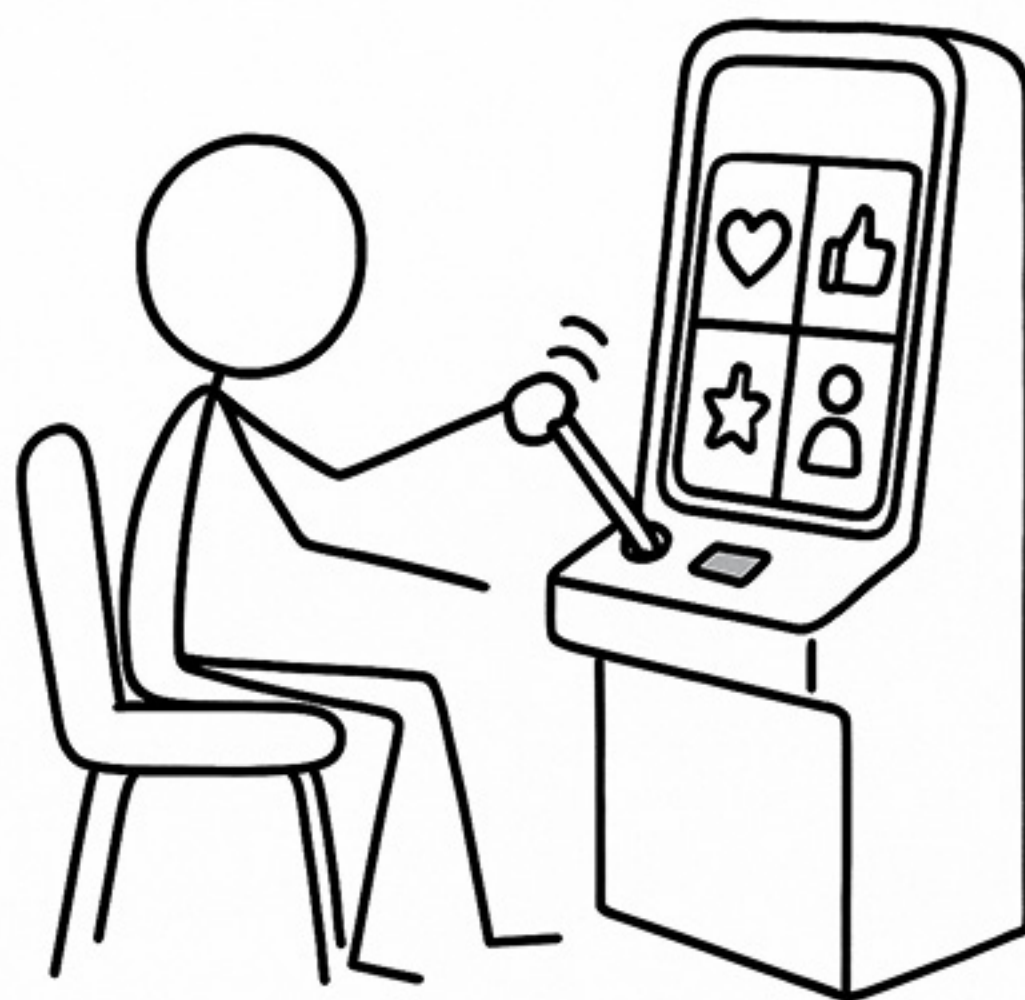
Your feed reflects prior behaviour – your momentary anger, your accidental pause – not your values.

47. Emotion shapes the diffusion of moralized content in social networks, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Over time, your world shrinks into a distorted mirror, and you start mistaking that distortion for reality⁴⁸.

The platforms amplify this with addictive features like streaks, stories and disappearing content. They hire experts to exploit psychological triggers like scarcity, variable reward, and social validation, to create compulsive usage⁴⁹.

It's not that you're failing at self-control. You're getting outmatched by a massive industry built to override it.



48. Beyond Echo Chambers: Unraveling the Impact of Social Media Algorithms on Consumer Behavior and Exploring Pathways to a Diverse Digital Discourse, *Journal of Marketing Studies*.

49. Social media copies gambling methods 'to create psychological cravings', *The Guardian*.

At the same time, platforms push us toward snackable content like short clips and quick takes. It rewards our impulse to consume many small things, and deep engagement loses to bite-sized distraction⁵⁰.

We bounce from topic to topic, issue to issue, without time to reflect or connect deeply about it. Even when you want to share something meaningful, social media nudges you to simplify and cut it into something smaller⁵¹.

Generative AI is making this worse. Social media platforms are wide open, where anyone can post, and anything might go viral. It creates a brutal incentive to flood the zone. More posts means more chances to be seen – and AI makes it trivial to generate endless low-effort content: fake reviews, comment bait, bulk-produced posts. Feeds end up flooded with noise.

50. Impact of Short Reels on Attention Span and Academic Performance of Undergraduate Students, *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*.

51. Causal Effects of Brevity on Style and Success in Social Media, *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*.

Connection & Community Problems

The sad irony of social media is that these platforms designed for people to connect often leave users feeling more isolated.

Social media thrives on highlight reels: vacations, bodies, achievements, perfect meals, social events, and homes.

We know they're curated, but we still compare.

Envy drives engagement. Insecurity keeps people scrolling. People end up with anxiety, depression, diminished self-esteem, social isolation (despite “connection”), and body image issues, especially among young people⁵².

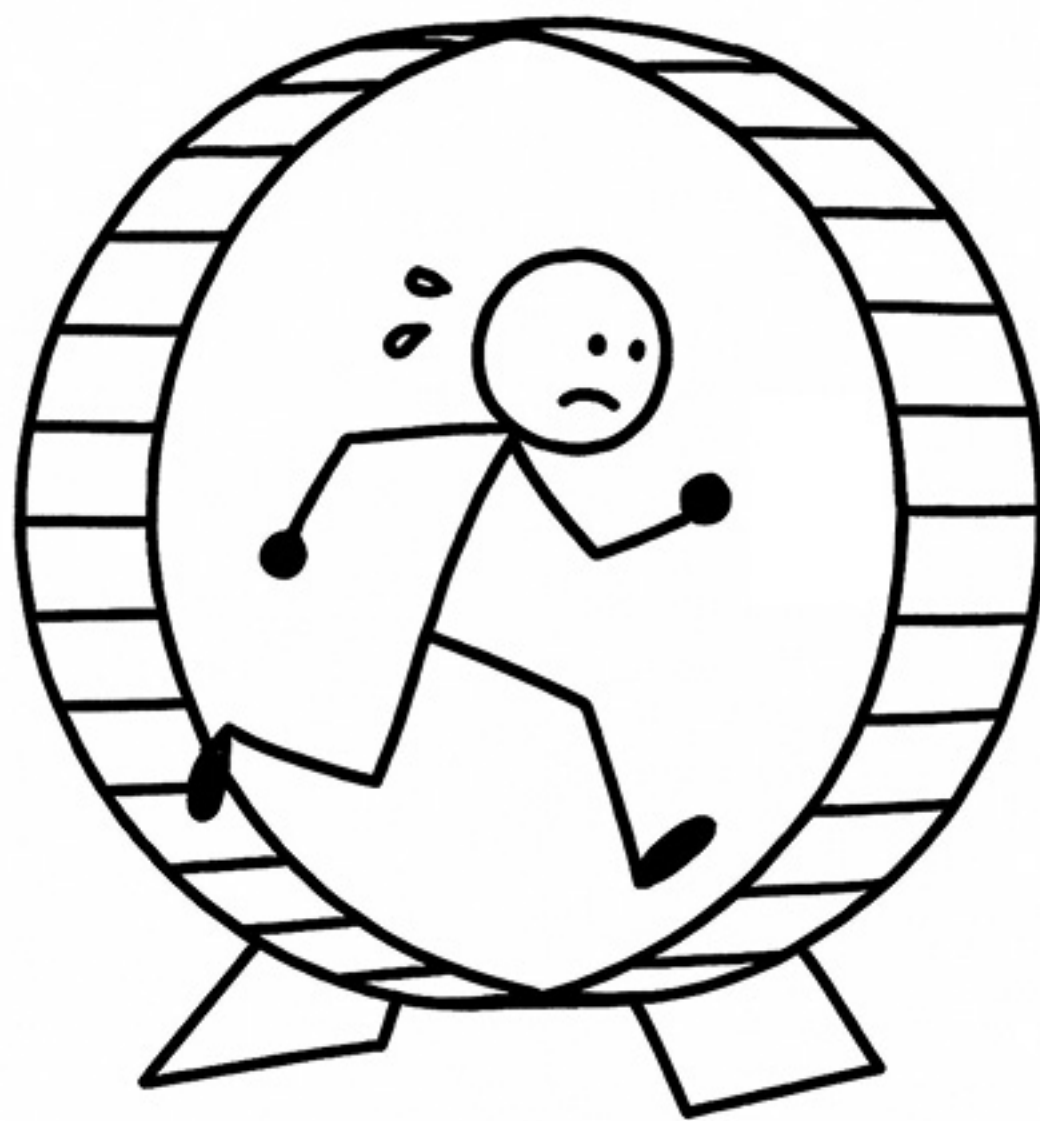
Some people depend on social media to make a living. For these content creators, the system is brutal.

52. Social Media and Mental Health: Benefits, Risks, and Opportunities for Research and Practice, *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*.

It's hard to show up in your social media feed. The pressure to constantly create, post, and chase trends becomes exhausting⁵³. If they pause, they lose reach.

The platform controls access – even the top creators don't truly own their audiences. If they try to share links to their own website or another social media account, platforms can throttle those posts to keep the creator locked in⁵⁴.

It extracts creative labour from people, while the platform captures the value.



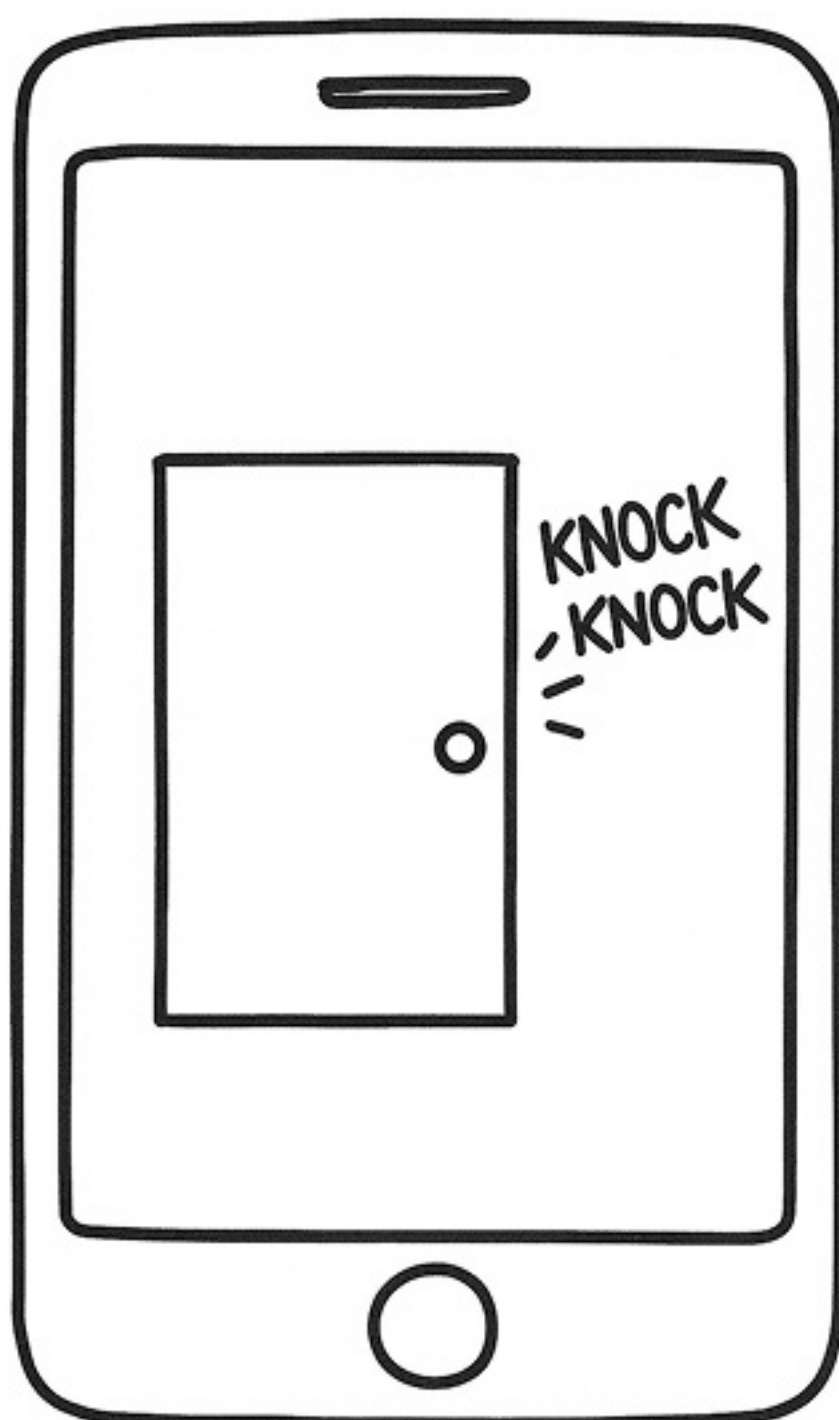
53. If the content being put out sometimes feels forced, don't blame the creator, blame the app that's forcing them to post more frequently, and jump on trends they might not even care about themselves

54. Elon Musk Just Turned Twitter Into the Internet's Dead End, *Slate*.

Loneliness compounds all of this. People come looking for connection but get surface-level interactions instead. The platforms aren't built to deepen connections. They are built to maximize engagement and keep you online.

Meanwhile, platforms expose users to constant risk through open contact systems. Anyone who knows your username can contact you.

Harassment, spam, and phishing attempts are built into the system with open addresses. Sure, you can block or report, but they only work after the harm. They're reactive, not preventative. Strangers can knock on your door because they know your address.

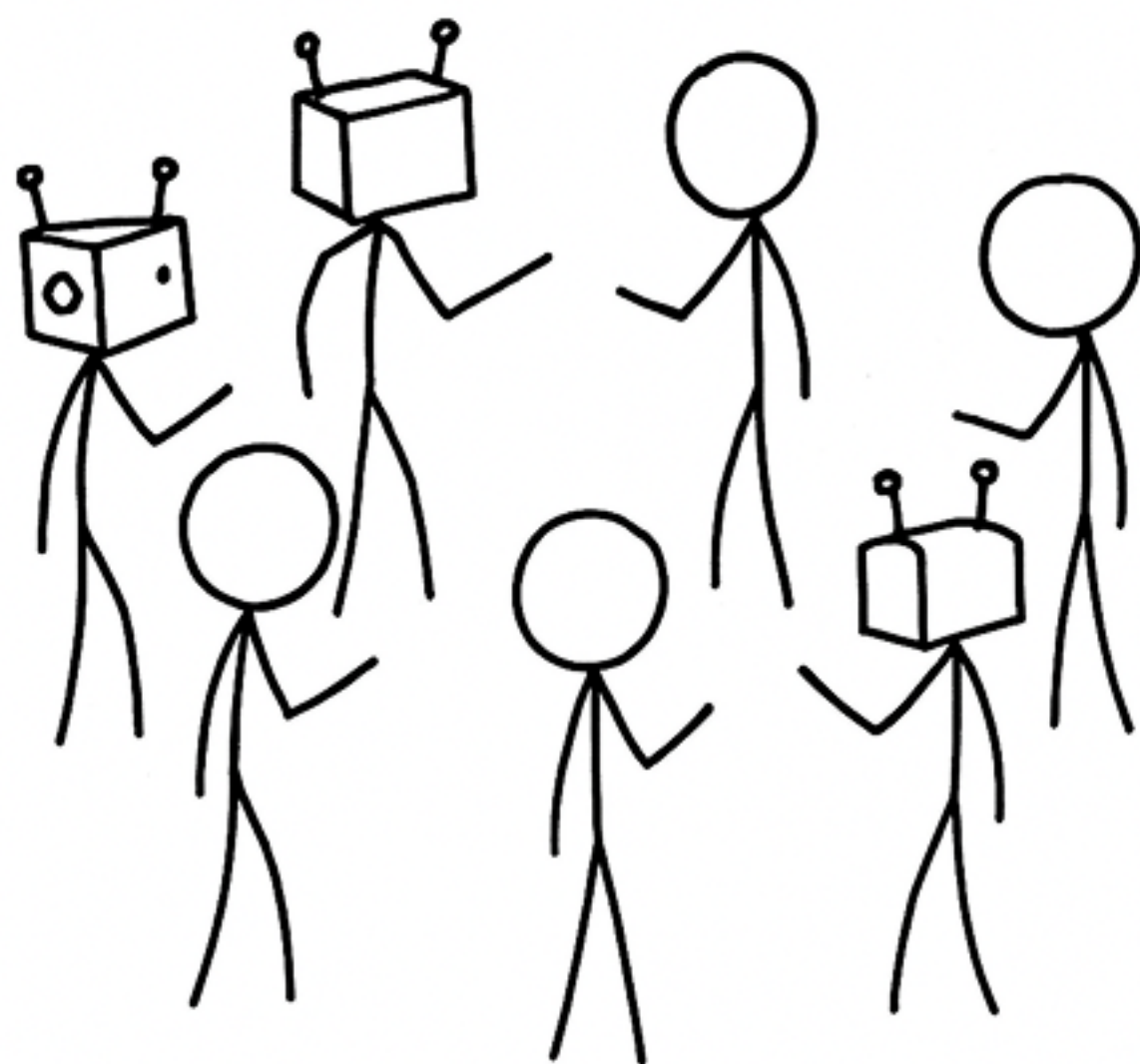


And bots make it worse.

Much of what looks like “engagement” isn’t human at all. Automated accounts like, comment, follow, post, argue, and inflate trends – creating the illusion. They run rampant on big platforms and are hard to detect^{55,56}.

Bots don’t need to hack. The platforms invite them in. Public-by-default design lets them easily slip into conversations with real people.

As they multiply, the line between real and artificial conversation gets harder to see.



55. Elon Musk says Twitter deal ‘cannot move forward’ until it proves bot numbers, *The Verge*.

56. A global comparison of social media bot and human characteristics, *Nature*.

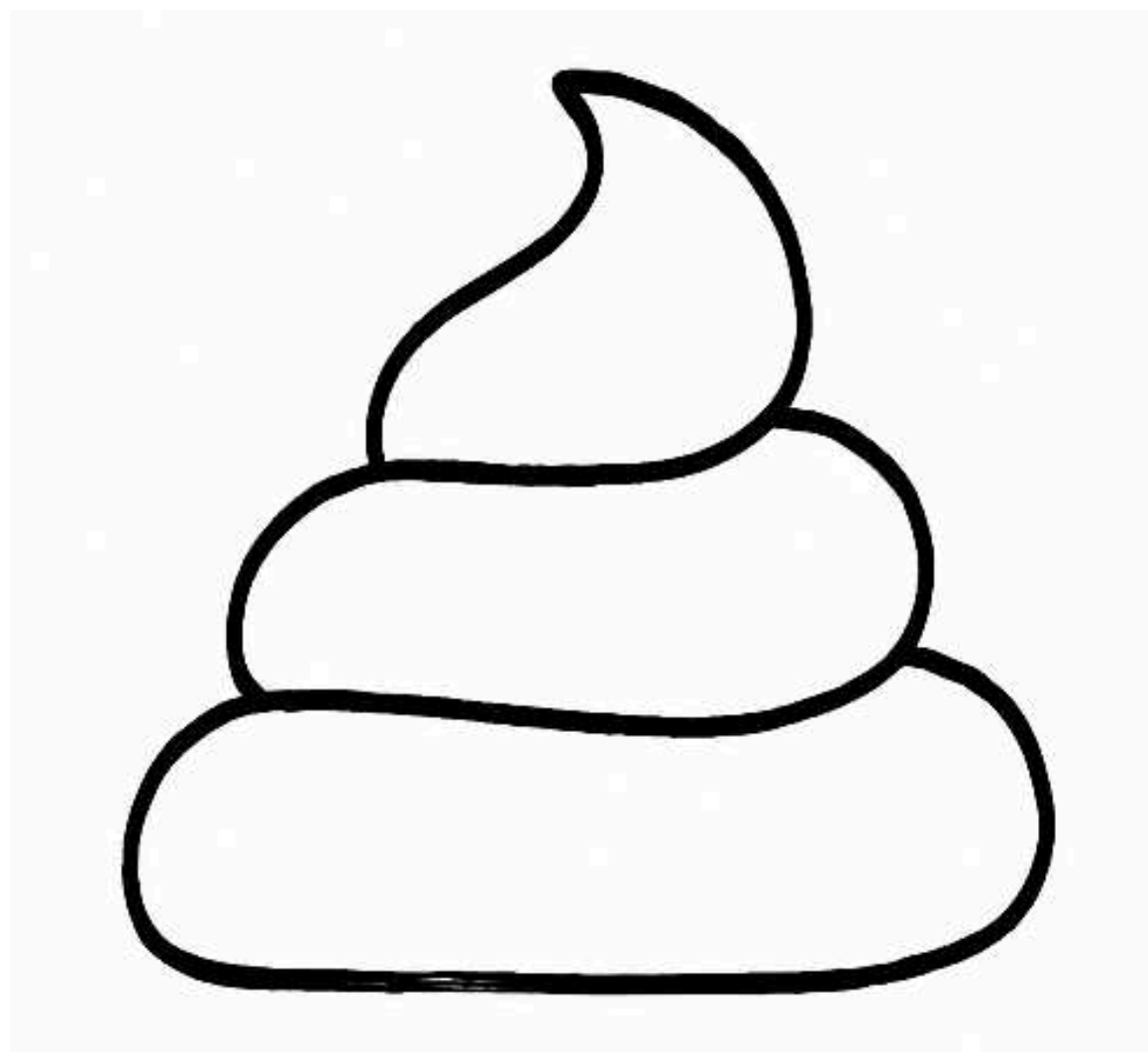
A Fully Connected System of Extraction

Context collapse leads to self-censorship and performative sharing. That drives people into passive lurking, fuels aggressive dunking, and silences thoughtful voices. Algorithms amplify the extremes. Snackable content floods the system. AI-generated filler multiplies the noise. The shallowness feeds loneliness, anxiety, and compulsive use, driving more engagement and more revenue.

Not a pile of bad features – a system. And it works exactly as designed.

The problems are structural. You can't fix this by tweaking a machine built to ignore your wellbeing.

We need reinvention. We need a new model for social technology – where people, not platforms, are at the center.



PART IX

Enshittification

It's not just social media. All extractive platforms follow the same pattern.

Cory Doctorow called it enshittification⁵⁷.

Once you know the pattern, it's easy to spot. By now, this should sound familiar.

57. The American Dialect Society made it their word of the year in 2023.

Phase 1: Serve Users

The platform arrives with genuine value. Few ads, few restrictions, low prices. It works hard to attract users and build its network effect.

Google once showed clean, ad-light search results.

Facebook showed posts from friends only.

Amazon had the best prices.

Phase 2: Serve Business

Once users are sufficiently locked in, platforms start prioritizing business customers like advertisers, sellers, and third-party partners.

Google floods search results with ads.

Facebook fills feeds with sponsored content.

Amazon prioritizes paid listings over organic results.

Phase 3: Squeeze Everyone

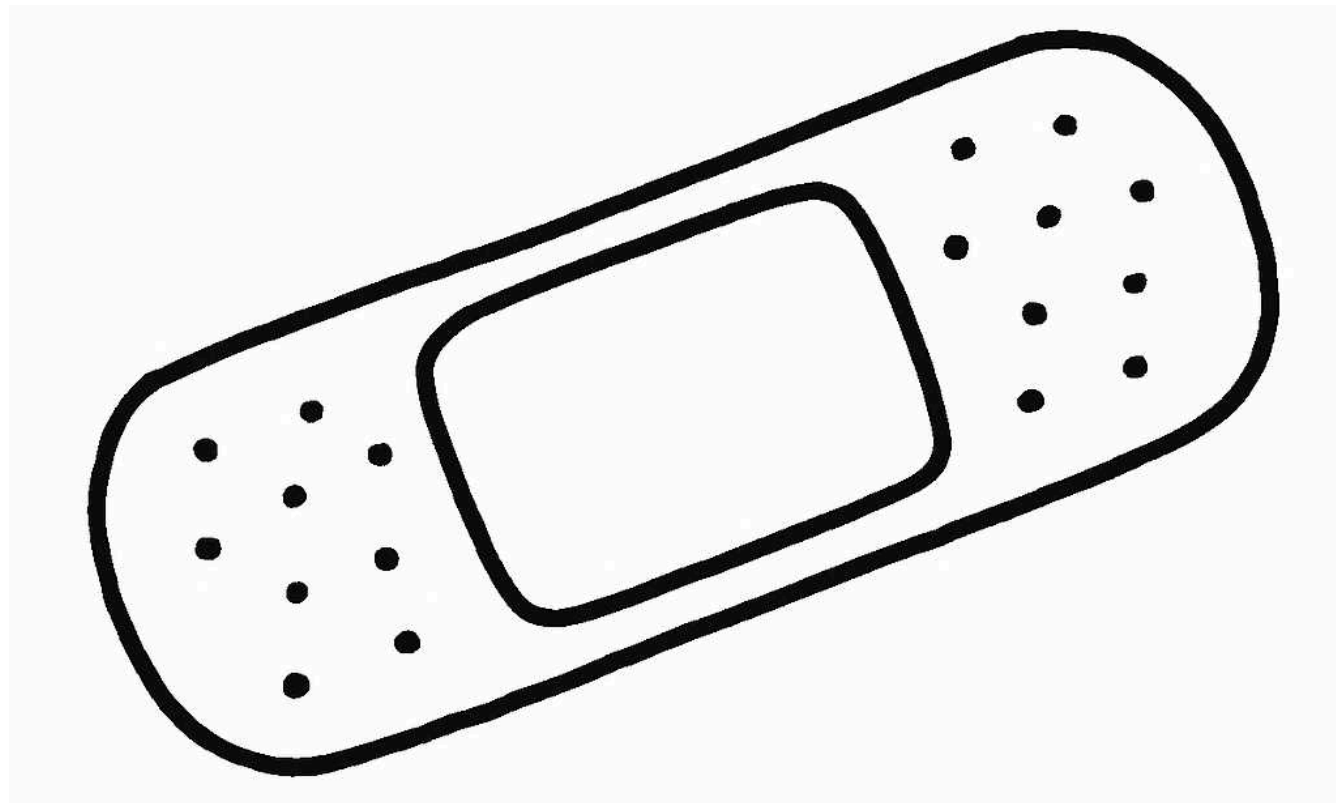
Eventually, the business customers gets squeezed. The platforms claw back all the remaining financial value for themselves.

Google shows AI-generated summaries that prevent you from clicking through to original sources.

Instagram limits how many people will see a post unless businesses pay to reach their own followers.

Amazon raises fees while promoting its own private-label products.

As Doctorow puts it: “First, they are good to their users; then they abuse their users to make things better for their business customers; finally, they abuse those business customers to claw back all the value for themselves. Then, they die.”

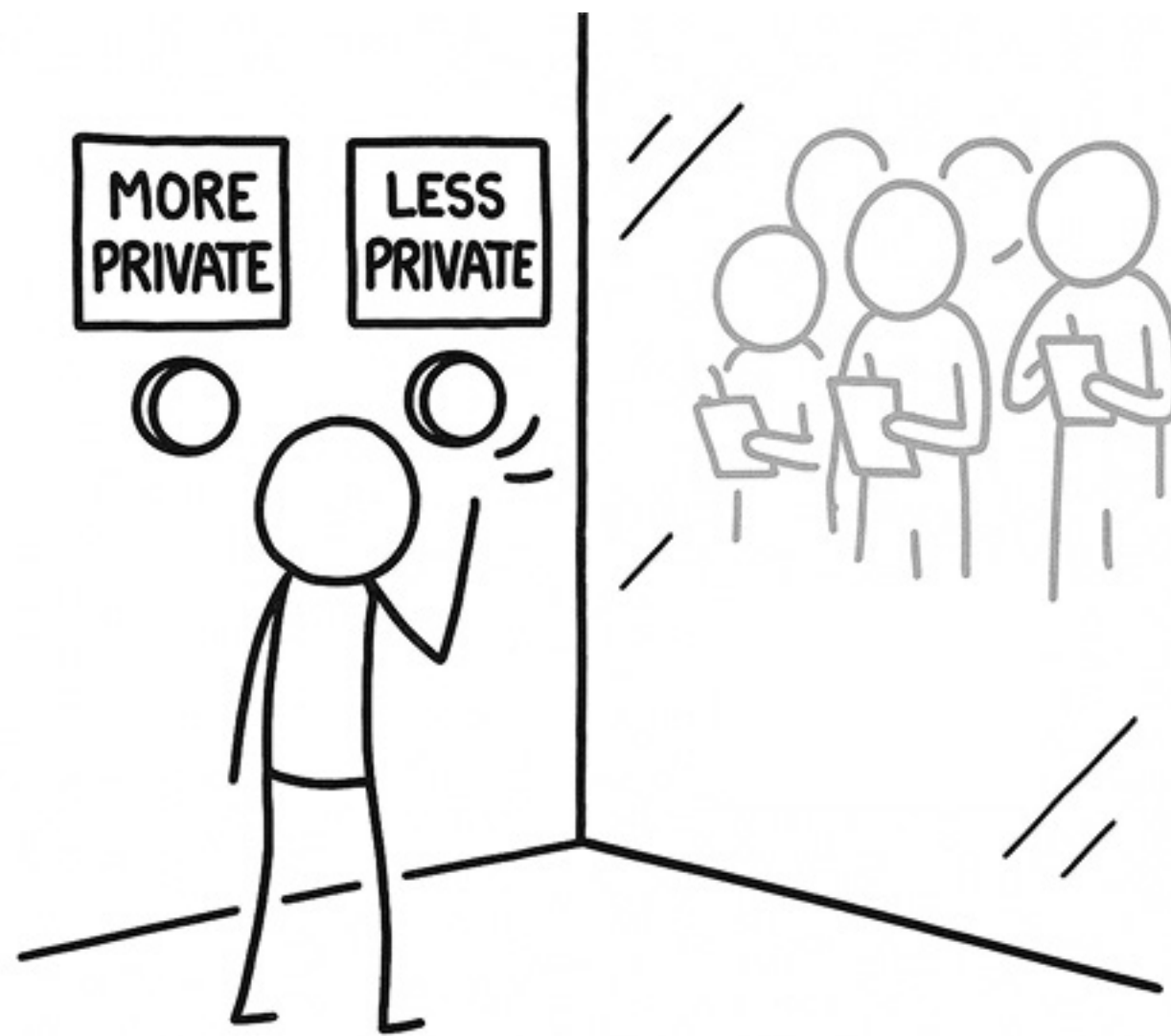


PART X

What Doesn't Fix It

Before we talk about what might work, let's be clear about common proposals that don't work.

Many treat symptoms while leaving the underlying structure untouched.



Privacy Settings

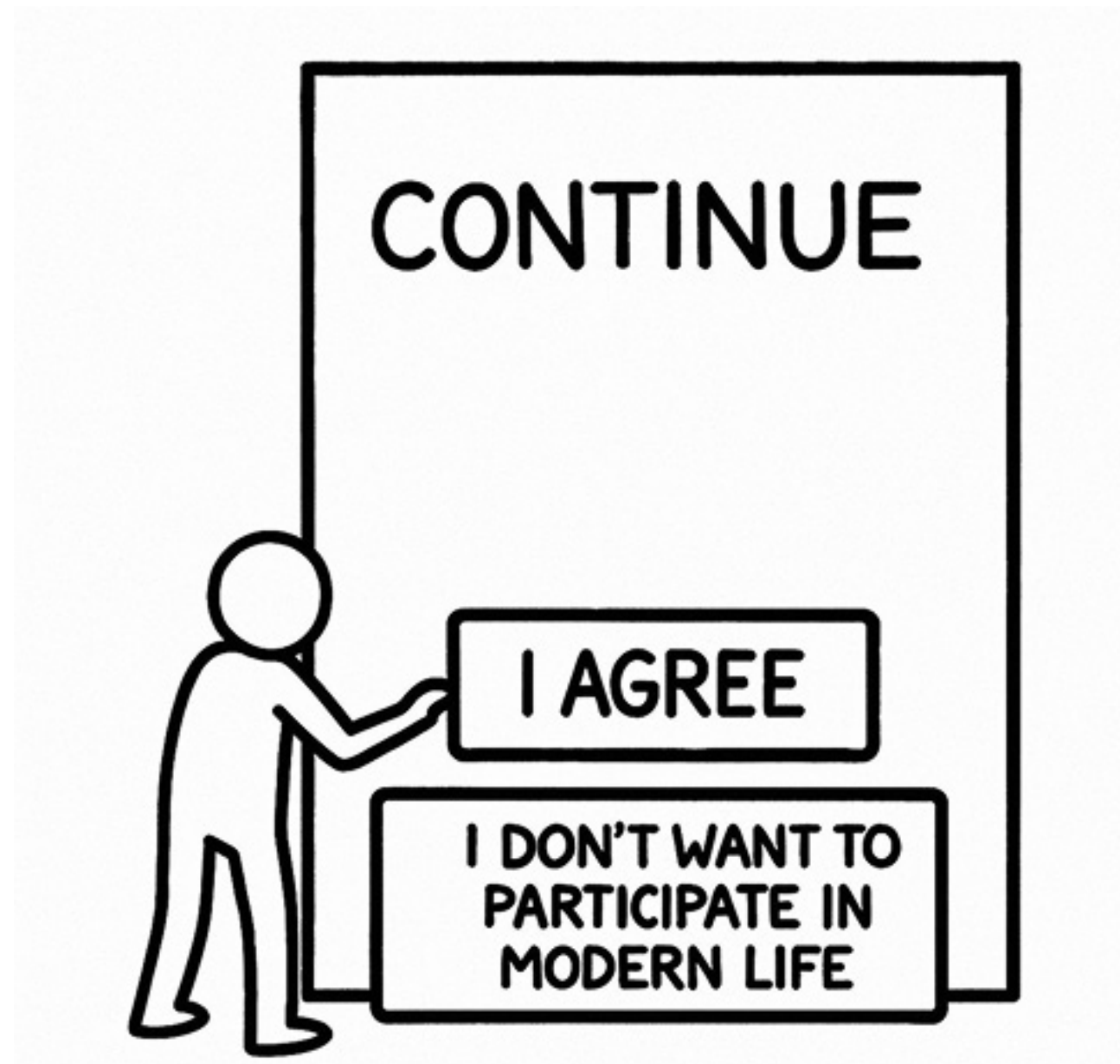
Platforms offer privacy controls: turn off ad personalization, hide posts, delete search history.

Privacy settings may limit the most aggressive tracking – but the platform still collects behavioural data, builds profiles, and optimizes engagement.

The architecture remains the same and the extraction machine keeps operating beneath the interface.

Privacy settings may limit the most aggressive forms of surveillance but don't change who owns the data or how the system works.

They give the illusion of control while preserving the core business model.



User Consent

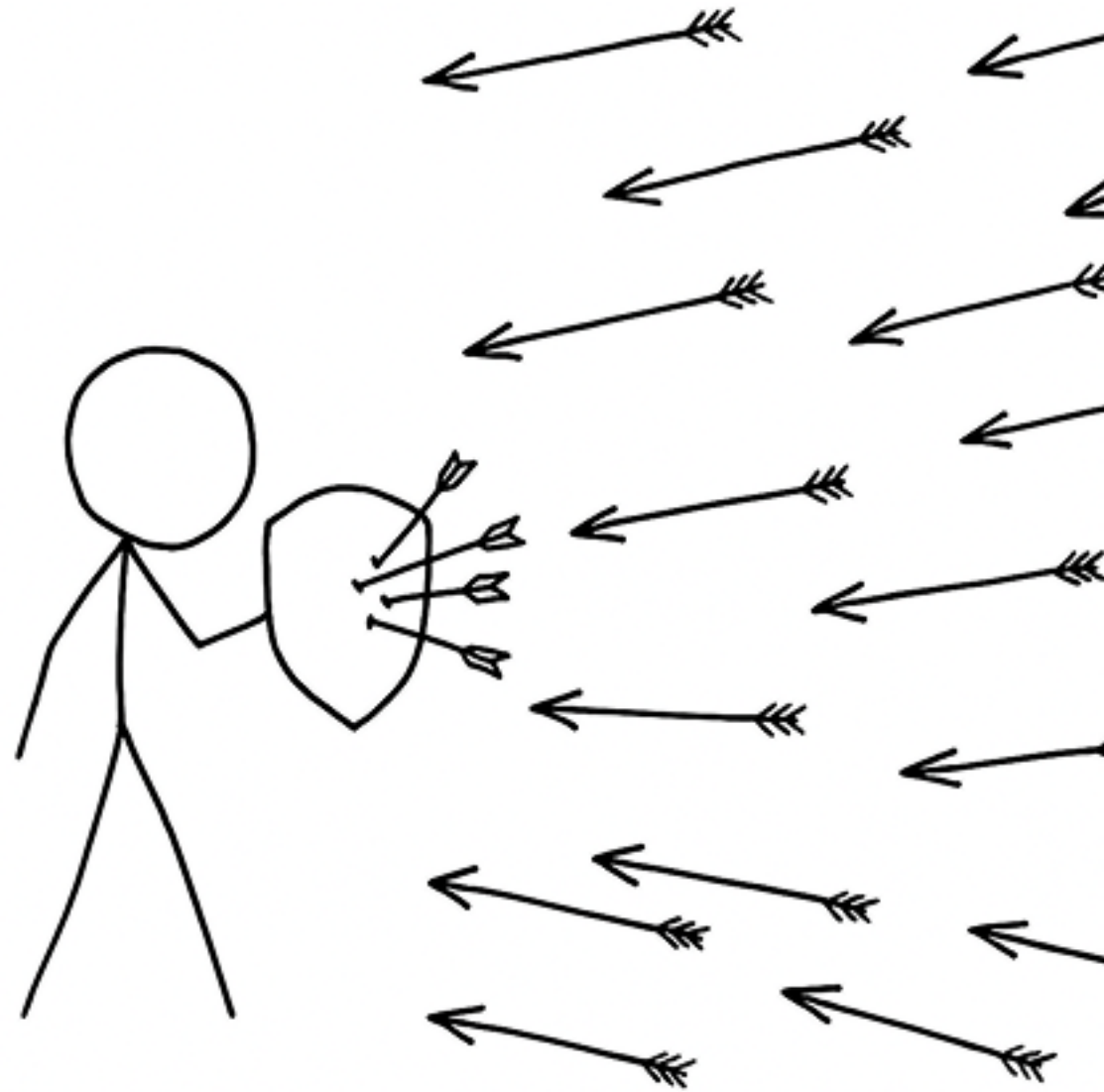
Consent is mostly a legal charade.

You click “I agree” not because you’ve negotiated terms – but because it’s the only way in. The agreements are non-negotiable.

The real “choice” is between surrendering your data or not participating at all. Most people just click “accept” to get on with their lives⁵⁸.

We get meaningless consent and a thin veneer of compliance, with no change to the business model.

58. (Un)informed Consent: Studying GDPR Consent Notices in the Field, 2019 ACM SIGSAC Conference on Computer and Communications Security.

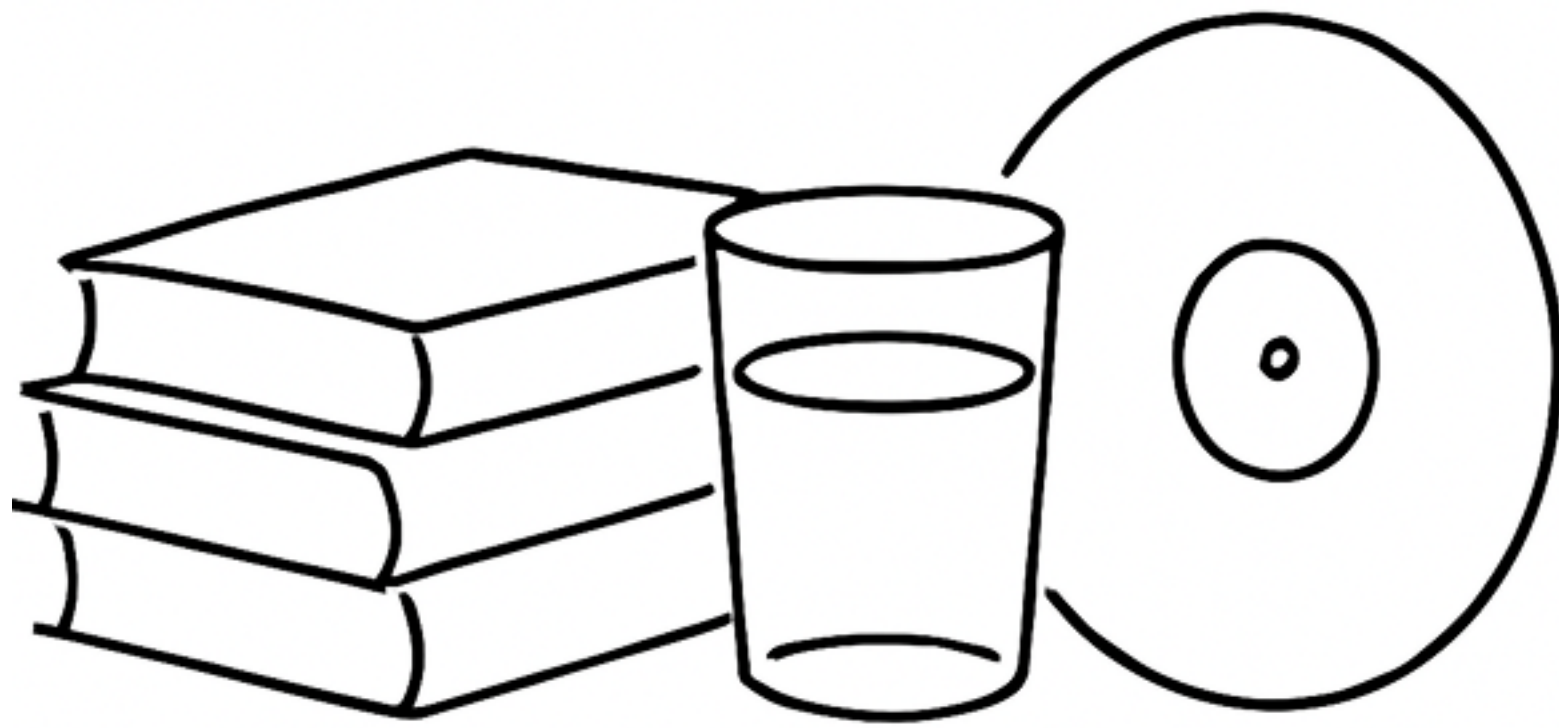


Ad Blockers & Personal Shields

Tools like ad blockers and privacy-focused browsers offer some individual protection, but they don't change the system at scale.

Platforms adapt, develop workarounds, and continue extracting value from the behavioral data they can still capture.

Personal shields might be useful short-term defenses, but they don't change the architecture that enables extraction in the first place.



Detox

There's a growing market of apps, books, and retreats promising to help people unplug, limit screen time, or reclaim their attention.

Like personal shields, these can help at the margins. But digital detoxes put the burden on individual willpower, instead of confronting the system-level design that drives compulsive use in the first place.

The risk is that by retreating from the bad, we abandon the good too. It's throwing the baby out with the bathwater, when what we really need to fix is the plumbing.

Regulation

It’s tempting to believe the right set of laws or aggressive antitrust action could rein in Big Tech. It seems logical, as we regulated other industries like banks and phone companies when they became too powerful.

But as long as the business model depends on lock-in and extraction, regulation won’t fix it.

The Lobbying Machine

Big Tech spends a ton on lobbying⁵⁹. Laws intended to restrain them can often turn into complex rules that benefit them. That’s why you’ll sometimes see people like Mark Zuckerberg publicly asking for “more regulation”⁶⁰. It can be a strategy to entrench themselves more and pass the buck to someone else. Larger companies can easily absorb compliance costs that are more difficult for startups.

59. Big Tech, Big Cash: Washington’s New Power Players, *Public Citizen*.

60. Mark Zuckerberg’s Call for More Internet Regulation Is Self-Serving, *Foundation for Economic Freedom*.

Even when regulators act, the industry moves faster. The rules lag. The platforms adapt. Regulators are constantly chasing an industry that keeps moving to operate in new gray areas just outside their reach.

Symptom Treatment vs. Systemic Change

Much of the regulatory approach treats side effects, not root causes.

- Privacy laws govern how data is used, not whether it's collected.
- Content moderation manages harmful posts but doesn't redesign the public-by-default architecture.
- Antitrust targets specific giants, but doesn't create conditions for protocol-based competition.

Regulation is important but it's not a substitute for an architectural redesign.

You can regulate Facebook's behaviour, but you can't regulate Facebook into becoming open like email.

Web3, Blockchain & False Decentralization

Blockchain is often pitched as the savior of the internet – a way to decentralize power and break Big Tech's grip. The core idea of blockchain is clever, but it's not the magic solution many believe it to be.

You can skip this section if you already know about this space, but I think it's worth doing a bit of a longer explanation.

Like any new technology, people over-extrapolate. They see real problems like platform monopolies, walled gardens, centralized control, and think the latest tech might help fix it. There are all kinds of blockchain-based apps, and some of that experimentation is worthwhile, but it has underlying limitations.

Blockchain in Simple Terms

Think about how your bank works. When you deposit money or make a payment, the bank keeps the transaction in its records, a ledger. You trust the bank to keep accurate records and prevent fraud.

Blockchain flips the model. Instead of one bank keeping the ledger, thousands of computers around the world all keep identical copies of the same ledger.

When a transaction happens, it's verified by many computers, not just one central authority. Once verified, the record locks in and gets added to the shared history.

The innovation is in getting rid of the central authority, while still ensuring tamper-proof records of those peer-to-peer transactions.

Instead of the bank, everyone in the network works together to keep a master record. Everyone agrees on the same version of the truth – but only within that system.

Bitcoin in Simple Terms

Bitcoin, the most famous blockchain application, works like this:

1. When someone sends Bitcoin, their transaction is wrapped in a complex math puzzle – like locking a letter inside a box that takes enormous effort to open. To complete the transaction, the box needs to be unlocked to reveal the contents of that letter.

2. “Miners” around the world use powerful computers that consume massive amounts of electricity trying to solve this puzzle. It costs real money in energy.
3. Once a miner solves the puzzle, they broadcast their solution. Other miners check it, and if enough agree it's valid, the transaction is confirmed.

The clever part is the economic incentive. Miners who correctly solve puzzles get rewarded with newly created Bitcoin. That reward encourages honesty. Why lie and lose money on electricity when telling the truth might earn you way more value in Bitcoin? It's elegant game theory – simple concept with a powerful effect.

4. Once the transaction is confirmed, it becomes part of Bitcoin's permanent record.

Blockchain basically helps the Bitcoin network ensure that all the transactions are accurate, without needing a central authority to do that.

It protects against fraud through incentives that encourage mining.

It uses game theory and economics to incentivize honesty.

People are drawn to this for two reasons:

Libertarian appeal: transact without government or corporate approval.

Efficiency appeal: eliminate the bank, and maybe, the fees that come with it.

Blockchains aren't open protocols like email or the web. They're shared, closed systems.

You can't spin up your own Bitcoin network that talks to the original. You have to join the existing one and follow its rules.

That makes blockchains more like closed platforms than open protocols.

Not a Perfect Solution

As clever as blockchain is, it doesn't solve the internet's deeper structural issues, and introduces some of its own:

Massive energy use:

Bitcoin alone consumes more electricity than entire countries like Argentina or the Netherlands⁶¹. A single Bitcoin transaction consumes as much energy as over 800,000 VISA transactions⁶². This isn't scalable for everyday applications.

New gatekeepers emerge:

It was supposed to decentralize control, but now we have over 80% of Bitcoin's mining power controlled by just 10 mining groups⁶³.

Complexity:

Blockchain apps are confusing and inaccessible for most people. Complex wallets, seed phrases, and gas fees are hard for non-technical users to understand.

Recentralization:

Despite the talk of decentralization, power and profits are still concentrated, just with new logos.

61. [Bitcoin consumes 'more electricity than Argentina'](#), BBC.

62. [Bitcoin Energy Consumption Index](#), Digiconomist.

63. [Bitcoin Mining Pools Comparison](#), Hashrate Index (May 23, 2025).

Speculation over substance:

Despite the decentralization rhetoric, the crypto world is full of meme coins, scams, and pump-and-dump schemes where insiders hype a coin, drive up the price, then sell – leaving ordinary people holding worthless tokens⁶⁴. For many people, crypto is about profit more than it is about freedom.

To be clear, blockchain isn't useless.

It can be a useful tool, and solve some interesting problems in niche contexts, but it's not a universal fix for the internet's structural problems.

64. The best resource I've found is Molly White's "Web 3 is Going Just Great" site, if you want ongoing curated news about cryptocurrency and a lot of these schemes.

Cosmetic Ethical Design

The hope of well-meaning product designers is that improving the design can help make platforms less manipulative and addictive.

But every “ethical” feature you see – screen time reminders, digital wellbeing prompts – is only cosmetic if the business model stays the same.

Social media tells you to take a break, but loads more content.

Companies provide screen time trackers while producing addictive devices designed to maximize usage.

These features mostly serve as PR. They give the appearance of choice without structural change. They signal responsibility but they don't reduce engagement, or it would impact the company's financial obligations to shareholders.

True ethical design requires ethical incentives. It requires business models aligned with user wellbeing.

The Illusion of Personal Choice

“Just don't use it.”

“Delete your account.”

“Get a flip phone.”

These responses treat the harms of today's tech platforms as personal lifestyle choices.

That framing ignores the structural reality, that good liberating alternatives don't exist, and opting out means disappearing from modern life.

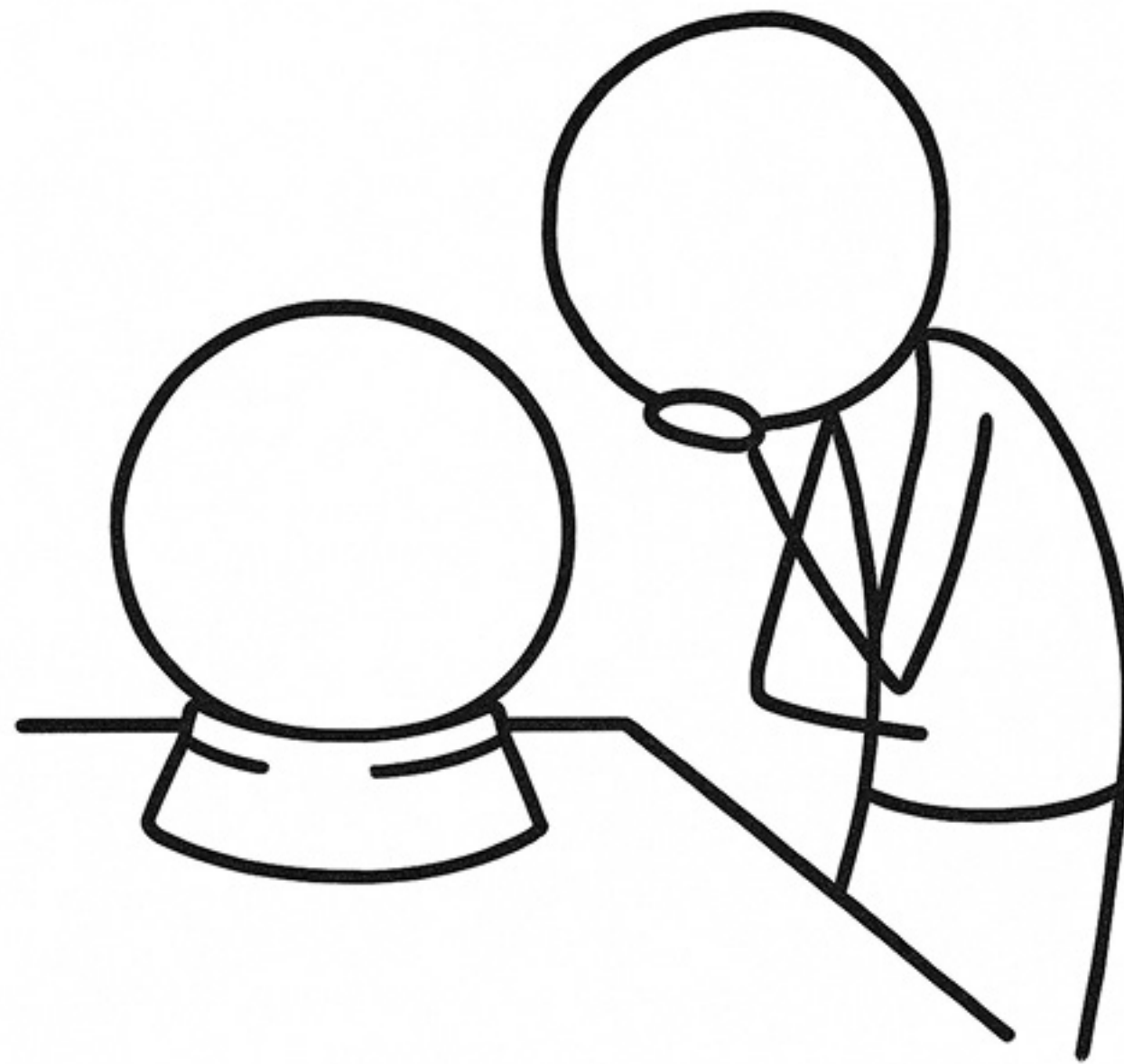
Leaving platforms today comes with real sacrifices:

- Social disconnect: Friends, family, and communities organize online.
- Professional barriers: Jobs and businesses demand an online presence.
- Essential services: Schools, governments, businesses, and non-profits distribute information on these platforms.
- Cultural participation: News cycles, politics, and social discourse increasingly happen on platforms.

Platforms are so dominant in our lives that “just don’t use it” is about as practical as “just don’t use electricity.”

Opting out doesn’t shield you from the system’s broader influence. Even if you never use social media, you live in a culture shaped by what goes viral and what generated engagement on these platforms. Advertising, media coverage, political discourse, and cultural trends are all downstream of platform decisions. You can leave the platforms, but not the world they’ve redesigned.

Individual choices can help at the margins, but structural problems require more systemic solutions.



What Would Better Look Like?

If corporate self-regulation, surface tweaks, and speculative alternatives all fall short, what should we build instead? Let's define the internet we deserve.

I stand on the shoulders of others. Thoughtful critics like Shoshana Zuboff, Cory Doctorow, Tristan Harris, and many more have made the dysfunction visible. Surveillance capitalism, enshittification, and the attention economy describe what's gone wrong.

But most criticism stops at diagnosis, and the prescriptions are often vague. Better laws and more public awareness matter, but they don't build.

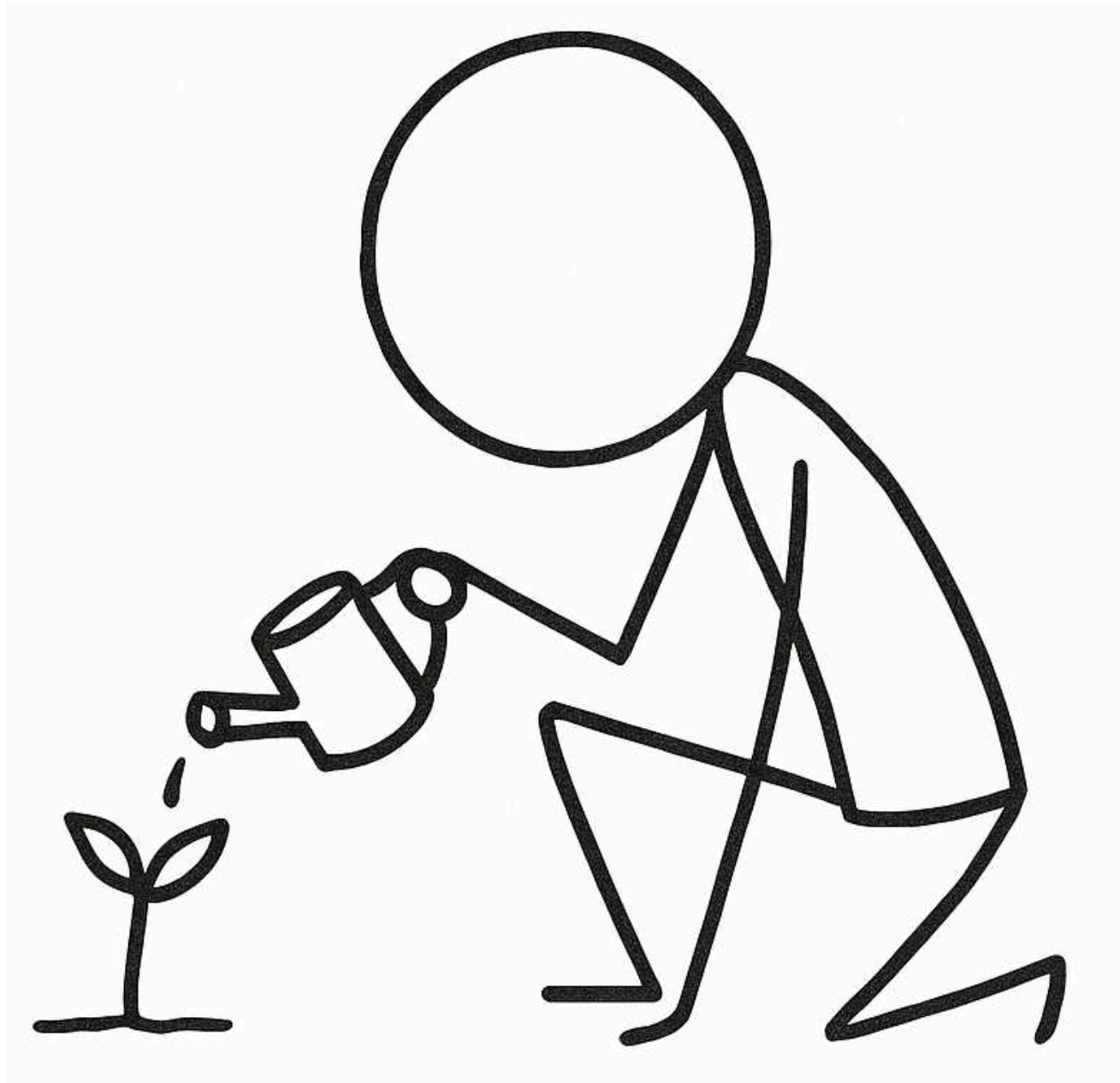
This is the critic's dilemma. Their job is to expose harm, not prototype solutions – so we become experts in what's broken and amateurs in what might work.

Protesters, when what we need are pro-testers.

We know how we're exploited. We know how these platforms distort our lives. But how many of us can describe a better model?

That's the gap we need to fill.
The damage is mapped.
Now it's time to build.

We need a fundamentally different way of building apps, where power shifts from platforms to people.



PART XI

Bonafide: A Different Architecture for a Different Internet

Finally, some optimism.

The Philosophy of Bonafide

What if your online life worked like your offline one – where you own your relationships and carry them with you?

That’s where Bonafide⁶⁵ starts.

It’s a structural response to systemic problems.

Today, platforms own your data, network, and relationships. That control gives them power to lock you in, surveil, and extract.

Everything flows from that flawed starting point.

Bonafide begins with a non-negotiable rule: platforms don’t own or control your data or social graph – you do.

From that foundation, everything else follows.

65. We picked “Bonafide” because “bona fide” means genuine, without intention to deceive, and we thought that rang true with what we’re trying to do.

Direct connections. Relationships are formed directly between people, not brokered through middlemen platforms.

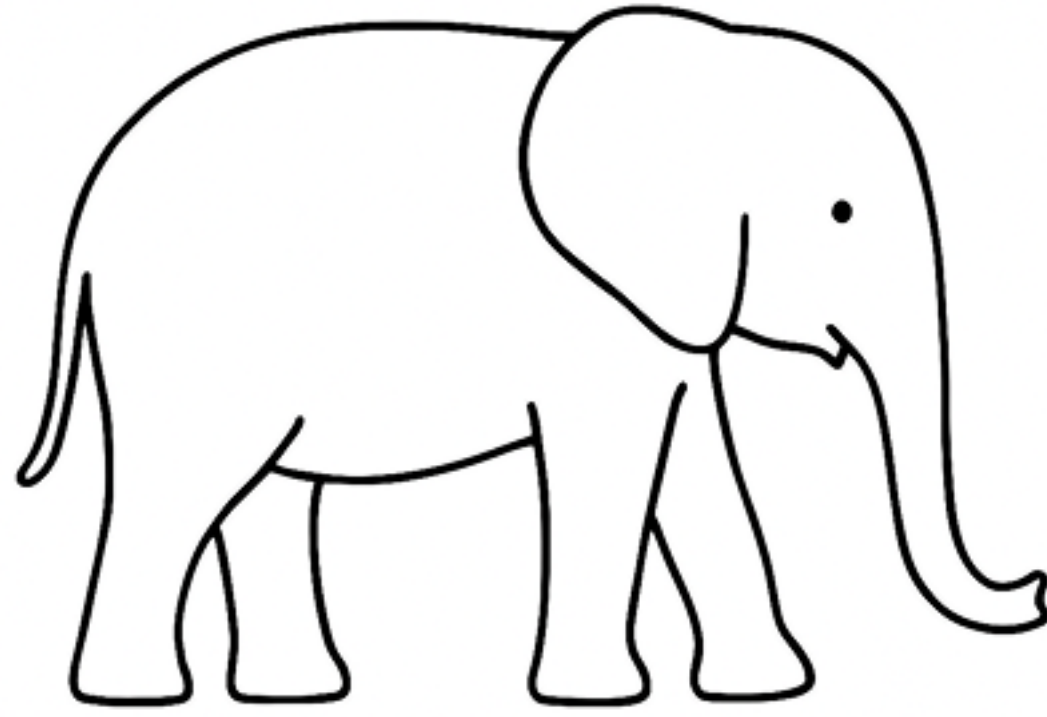
No public address space. Strangers can't spam or harass you by guessing your username or number. People connect only through mutual exchange, like handing someone a key.

Portability by default. Leaving one app doesn't mean losing your data, contacts, or history. The app doesn't store it, it's just the vessel to display it.

Interoperability built in. Apps in such an architecture compete on features and service, because they can't lock you in.

This design flips the incentives.

Power moves away from gatekeepers, and control shifts back to users.



The Whole Elephant

Many projects have tried to address pieces of these problems.

Some focus narrowly on one domain, like Mastodon or Bluesky trying to create an alternative version of Twitter or X. Others address isolated problems, like decentralized identifiers (DIDs) to help reduce tracking.

But most miss the full systemic problem.

It's like the old parable: people stand in a dark room, each touching a different part of the elephant. One feels a leg, one feels the trunk, one feels the tusk, and they reach different conclusions about what they're touching.

No one sees the whole animal.

Bonafide is built for the whole elephant: identity, storage, data ownership, access control, network architecture, interoperability, metadata, verification, and scalability (more in the whitepaper).

The point isn't the technical jargon. It's what they unlock.

You own your social connections, like a contact list that travels with you.

Apps are tools that only access your data with your permission. It's like using a desktop app that uses files from your computer. You grant temporary access for a specific purpose. You still own the data, and the app can't steal it.

Leaving any app doesn't mean starting over because your data from using the previous app comes with you.

No surveillance profiles follow you across apps.

That's the world we're building right now with Bonafide – where you own and control your online life, not a handful of corporations.

Small Shift, Big Impact

Once people own and control their data and relationships, surveillance loses its grip, and lock-in breaks.

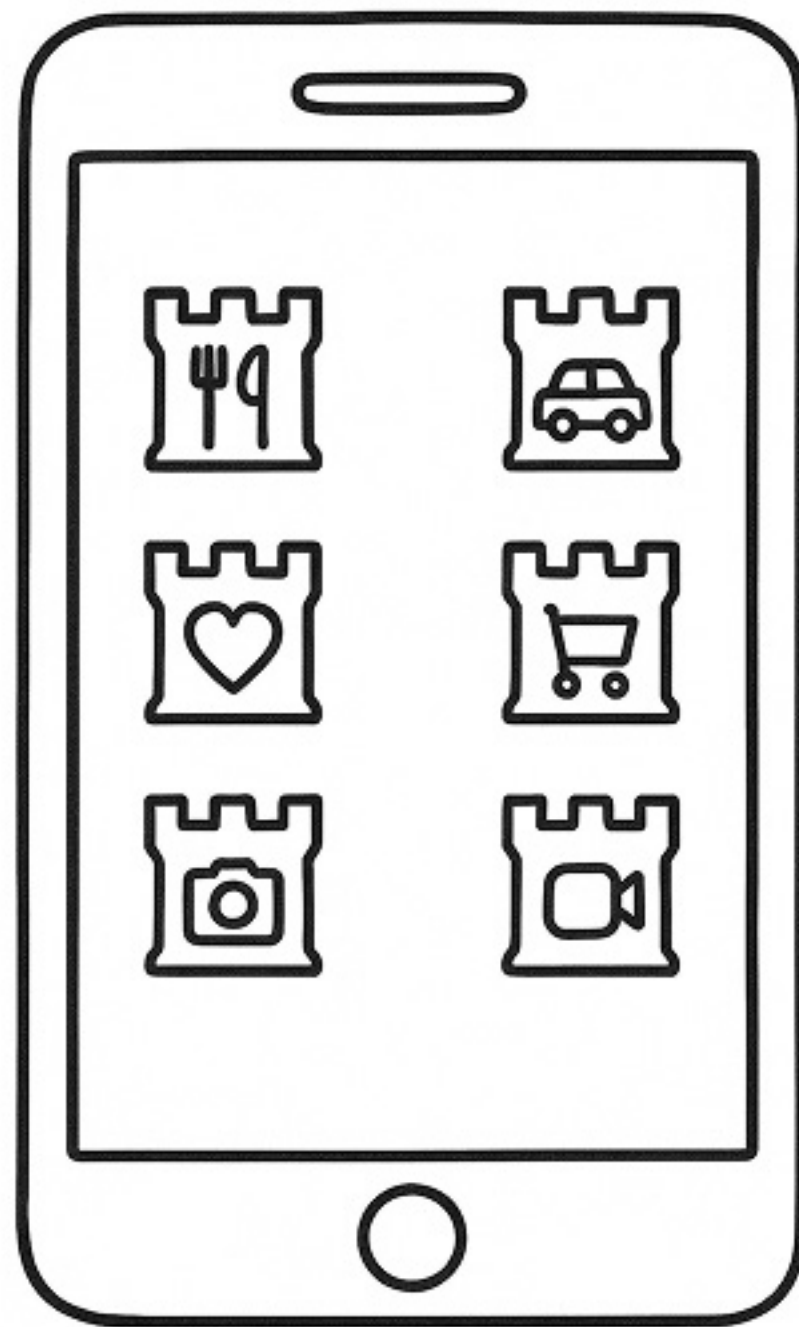
It creates a different online economy:

- Bonafide apps no longer own users – they serve them.
- Leaving a Bonafide app doesn't mean losing your network.
- New Bonafide apps don't need to rebuild networks from scratch.

This isn't anti-business. It's pro-competition.

People can still build great apps. They just won't need to trap users to win.

It's the difference between a monopoly and healthy marketplace.



Today: App Kingdoms

Here's a way to think about it.

Each app you use today builds its own little kingdom. Each of those app icons on your phone is a meeting place for some activity. Your contacts, data, and activity stay trapped inside.

With Bonafide, you own your data and network of contacts directly. Apps plug into your world, not the other way around. You're already the one bringing value. Your network belongs to you. Apps serve you.

A Tale of Two Apps: Platform vs. Protocol

By now, the difference should feel intuitive. Let's make it concrete.

The Platform Model (e.g. Instagram):

- You create an account inside a private, closed system.
- You build a profile, post photos, connect with people – in their locked database.
- The platform decides who sees what, and whether you stay visible.
- If you leave, you lose everything – data, history, relationships.

You don't own anything. The platform does.

The Bonafide Model:

- You create a personal data container – your own secure account.
- Your relationships, content, and history live inside it.
- When you pick a Bonafide app, it connects to your container with your permission.
- You can switch apps at any time, without losing anything or starting over.

You own everything. The apps serve you.



The Keys to the Castle

In today's mainstream model:

You are the product.

The app is the gatekeeper.

Leaving costs everything.

You're stuck in the king's castle.

In the Bonafide model:

You are the customer.

The app is the service provider.

Leaving is easy.

No kings. Everyone has their own castle.

That's what real freedom looks like.

We Built an App to Prove It

Bonafide isn't theoretical. We've already built one app on this architecture, and you can use it right now.

The first Bonafide app we made is called Pools.

Think of it as a case study of what you can do with Bonafide. Anyone will be able to build apps on Bonafide's open protocol – the same way anyone can build on email or the web – so this is just the beginning.

Pools is about sharing.

We started with sharing because the simple act of sending something to someone you care about is one of the most basic things people do online. It's also where platform design has failed the hardest – interruption, performance pressure, context collapse, algorithmic distortion.

Pools was designed to feel more like sharing in real life. It's not like social media as it has come to be known.

Instead of broadcasting to everyone, Pools lets you create dedicated spaces for different people and topics. You control who sees what. It has the intimacy of a group chat, but better organized, and paced for everyone.

Because it runs on Bonafide's protocol layer:

- You're not locked into Pools. As new
- Bonafide apps are built, you can switch and take everything with you.
- You aren't limited to Pools users. Apps built on Bonafide interoperate, like email. When new sharing apps get built, you can still connect with your friends even if they prefer a different sharing app.
- You own your data and connections. Always.

No crap.

No public feed. No strangers. No algorithms. No follower counts. No junk. No growth hacks. No surveillance.

You share what you want, with who you want, in ways that reflect your real relationships and interests.

You Pay for Pools.

Not much. But yes, you pay.

Nothing is free, and since we aren't stealing your data or showing you ads, you're the customer we're serving. We give you a little free window so you can at least take a look at the app and try it out, but then you pay based on your storage, like iCloud or Dropbox.

Part of what you're paying for is the actual cost of storing your stuff. The rest supports the team building, maintaining, and improving the app.

Later, as more people use and build Bonafide apps, it's possible to have privacy-respecting ads that don't rely on surveillance. That could let some Bonafide apps become free – without the hidden costs.

Why This Matters

What looks like a technical shift is really a structural shift.

Apps stop owning people. They start serving them.

Leaving an app no longer means losing data and contacts.

Privacy of your information is a default. Innovation returns, because walled gardens don't fence off and restrict huge networks of users.

A New Inflection Point

Just as HTTP unlocked the open web, Bonafide creates a new foundation for the next era of apps.

We're done with the enshittification cycle.

We want an internet that's competitive, durable, and built to benefit people.

This is our chance to reset the rules.

Wait, Why Hasn't This Been Built Before?

If this is such an obvious improvement, why hasn't anyone done it?

The Business Model Was Misaligned

Venture capital became the dominant funding engine for tech. VC thrives on network effects that can be captured, “moats” that block competition, and lock-in that makes leaving costly.

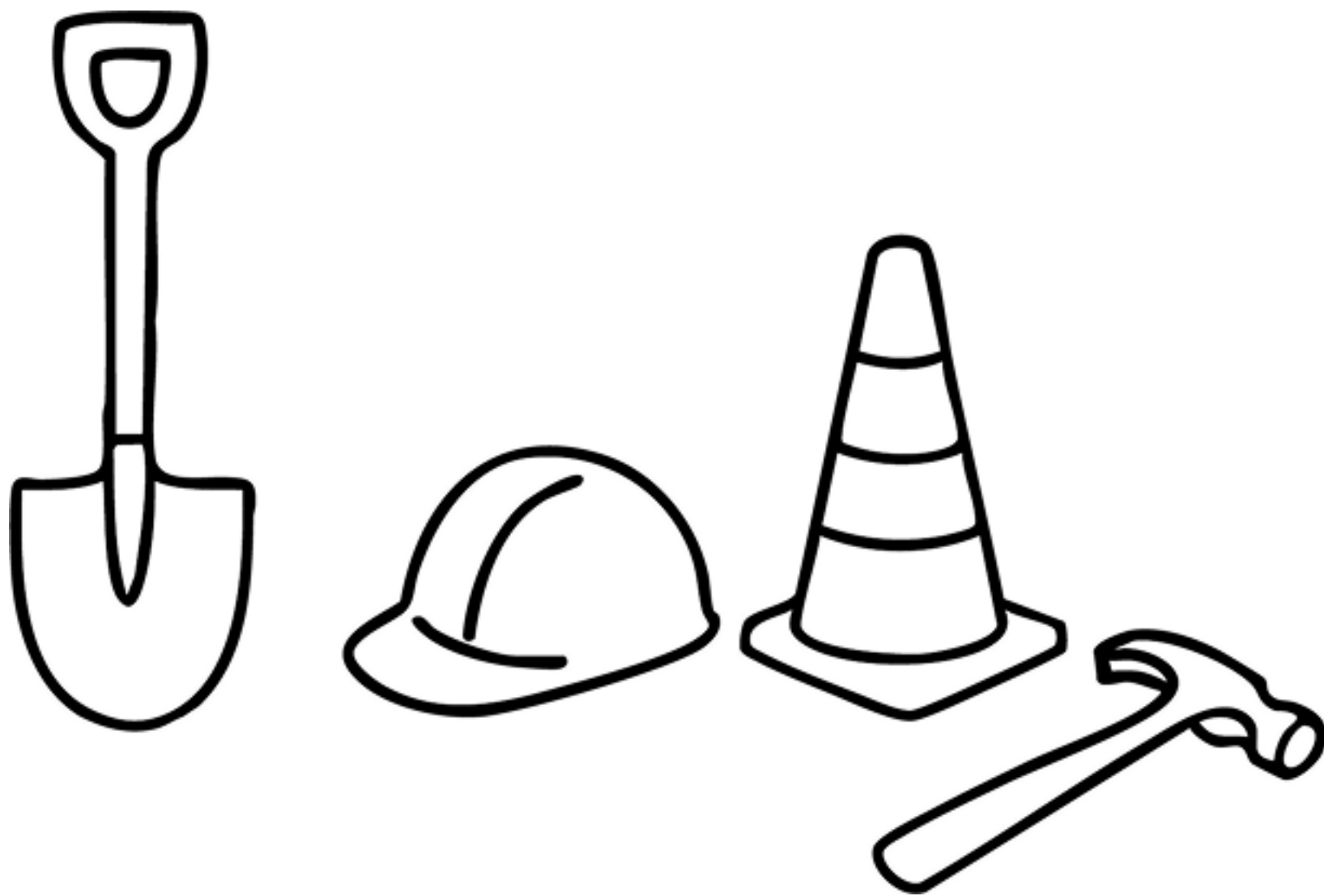
Bonafide's architecture explicitly prevents all of those.

That makes it a non-starter for traditional investors.

The Technical Challenge Was Non-Trivial

Building decentralized systems is hard. It requires a fundamentally new approach, and there's no guidebook.

We took the time to address the whole elephant.



A New Era of Apps

Pools is the first app built on Bonafide, but won't be the last.

We'll build more, but many more will come from others.

Messaging, e-commerce, ride hailing, delivery, professional tools, community platforms – all of it can run on a new foundation where users, not platforms, control the data and relationships.

Keeping Bonafide Open Forever

Protocols must be public infrastructure, not private assets.

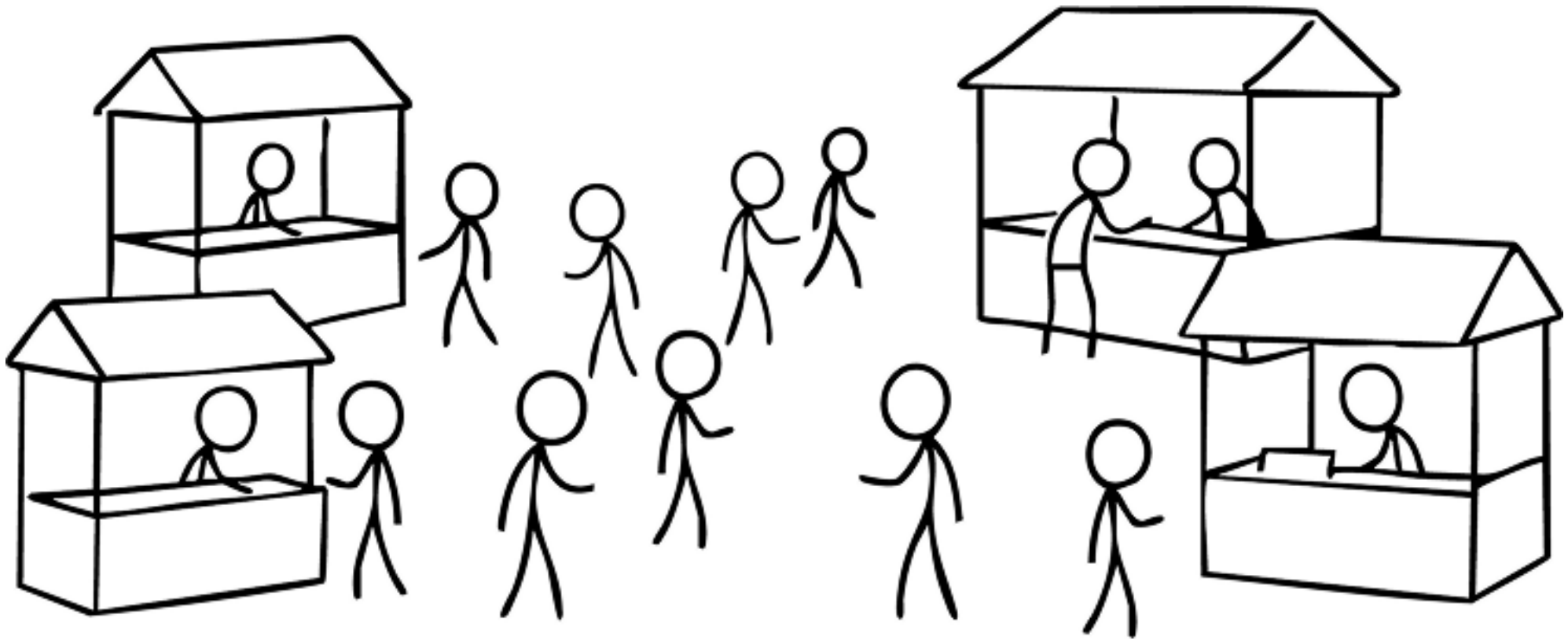
To ensure Bonafide stays open, neutral, and future-proof:

1. A non-profit Bonafide Foundation⁶⁶ will govern the protocol.
2. The codebase will be open-source⁶⁷.
3. APIs and documentation will be publicly available for any developer.

No company – including ours – can own or capture the protocol. Like email and the web, Bonafide is designed as a durable commons.

66. There are similar non-profit foundations like The Linux Foundation that can serve as good reference points.

67. Open-source software is code that anyone can see, use, and improve. It powers much of the internet behind the scenes. Open source gives transparency, collaboration, and independence from Big Tech, showing that global communities can already build essential infrastructure without gatekeepers. For Bonafide to be pervasive, it needs to be open-source so the world can use it.



The Role of Business

I'll say it again. Bonafide is not anti-business. It's anti-monopoly.

There's nothing wrong with building businesses online. The problem is building closed systems that trap users and block competition.

Apps could work more like the coffee market. Starbucks can be big, but your favourite local café can thrive too.

Real choices make businesses better. That's good for everyone.

Advertising Without Surveillance

Can apps survive without tracking-based ads? It's a fair concern, since advertising funds a lot of the internet today.

But tracking people, building behavioural profiles, and auctioning attention in real-time aren't the only ways.

Bonafide enables something closer to *Permission Marketing*, an idea first introduced by Seth Godin in 1999, where people choose to hear from businesses they care about.

A Simple Example

You're in the market for a lawnmower. You open a free Bonafide app that uses ads for revenue.

You opt in to a temporary category as specific as "lawnmower", or as generic as "yard care tools". Relevant offers appear without any tracking, profiling, or creepy retargeting.

After you buy the lawnmower, you turn the category off.

It's *pull-based advertising*, where relevance comes from context and consent, not surveillance.

Because you own your Bonafide container, you choose which categories to hear from, revoke permission anytime, and never see irrelevant or manipulative targeting.

Advertisers still reach qualified audiences without surveillance, and don't waste their budgets on uninterested eyeballs⁶⁸.

Users stay fully private and in control. It's a win-win, unless your business model depends on surveillance.

68. There's growing evidence that contextual advertising can outperform surveillance-based targeting, especially when buyers are in a decision-making mindset. Look at search engines like DuckDuckGo that operate sustainably and still have healthy ad revenue per user despite their lack of surveillance ads.

Addressing the Tough Questions

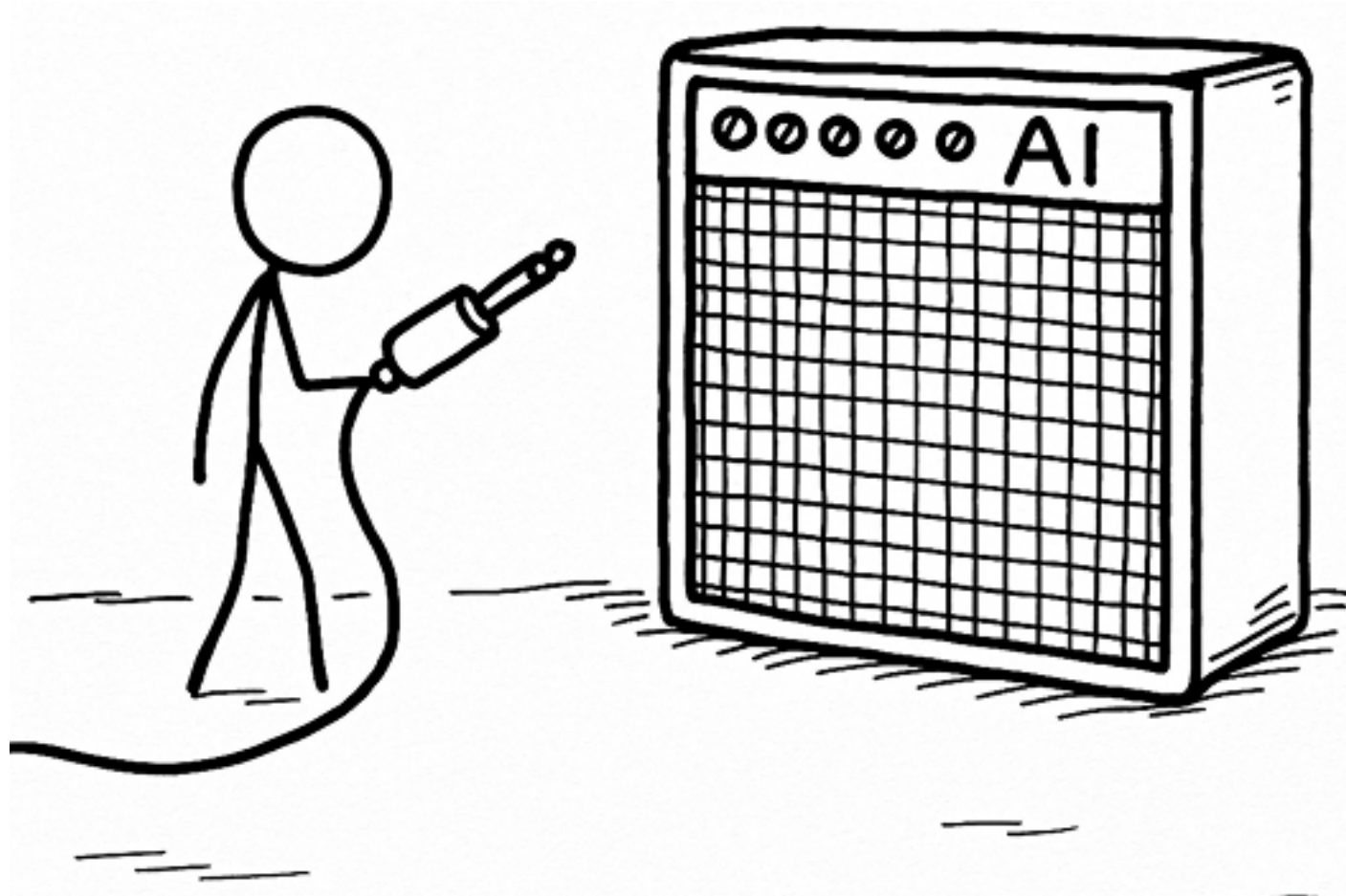
We expect skepticism. Any approach that challenges today's internet structure deserves scrutiny.

Adoption? Bonafide doesn't require mass migration to create value. You can use Pools with one friend. Small networks feel the difference immediately.

Complexity? The protocol stays invisible to the user. You don't need to understand SMTP to send email. You don't need to understand Bonafide to use Pools.

Economic Viability? Extractive business models are profitable but fragile. Open systems reward trust, loyalty, and service. It's a stronger foundation for lasting businesses.

Content Moderation? Most abuse comes from strangers reaching strangers. Bonafide apps like Pools eliminate that possibility by default. There are no public handles, open inboxes, or unsolicited DMs. Nobody can reach you unless you've created a connection. That eliminates spam, bots, and many forms of harassment.



What About AI?

AI is a new tool, not a new ecosystem. There won't be an "AI app store" full of purely AI apps. It's being absorbed into the companies and systems that already dominate. It's already delivering real gains in productivity. But who benefits?

Once again, it comes down to architecture. The problem isn't AI itself, but the system we're plugging it into.

If we layer AI onto the existing platform model, it will only concentrate power further. The gains will flow upward to the platforms, not outward to users, workers, or creators.

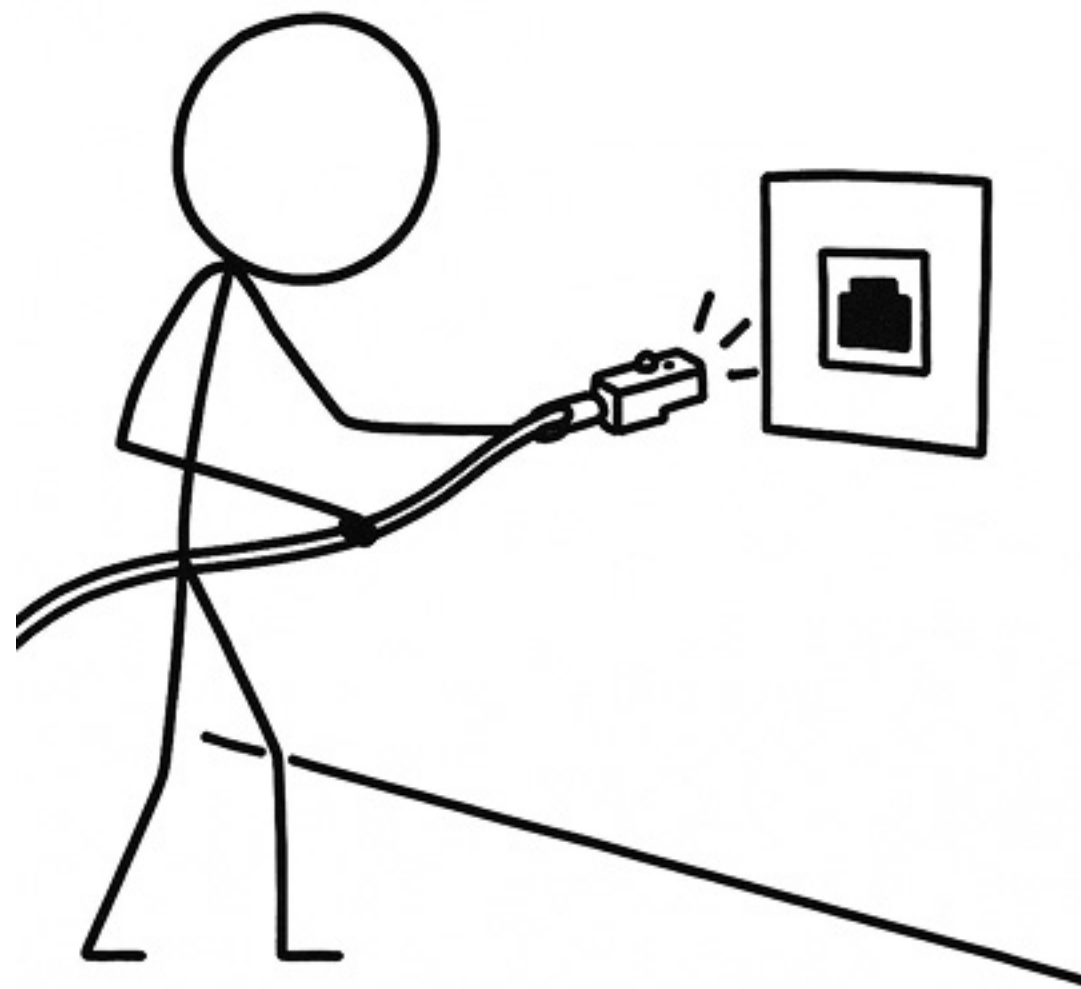
That's why we shouldn't be talking about AI in isolation. It's about the architecture in which we use it.

It's like what I said about AI slop in social media. The problem isn't that someone used AI to help make something. Your favourite musician might have used a tool to edit a song, and that's fine. The issue is when the feeds get flooded with cheap, low-effort, AI content, or when bots overwhelm comment sections and distort conversations. The problem isn't AI, but the app architecture.

Like any new technology, AI accelerates whatever system it's applied to. But the system was already broken, so AI might just make it worse. To us, it only reinforces the need to fix the architecture.

Bonafide was designed to mirror how relationships work in real life. Offline, each connection is unique, with context and trust. Bonafide brings that same model online, and that architecture can extend to the future of AI and AI agents.

Seen through the lens of AI, Bonafide is built for the post-AI internet, where trust, sovereignty, and authentic connections are at a premium.



This is How the Internet Was Supposed to Work

The original internet protocols let anyone build, connect, and publish without permission.

That openness created a wave of innovation.

What broke was the business model layered on top of it.

Bonafide is an attempt to reset that model.

Return to protocols.
Put users back in control.
Embrace competition.
Make switching easy.
Keep power distributed.

This isn't nostalgia. It's a way forward.

The False Narrative of “Winner Takes All”

Big platforms have carefully sold the story that markets naturally collapse into monopolies.

They claim scale requires centralization, walled gardens ensure safety, interoperability is too complex, and privacy can't coexist with convenience.

Never forget that these are business strategies.

Email didn't require monopoly to scale. The web didn't need lock-in to grow. Open protocols built the early internet – and they still work.

The platform's myth keeps you from imagining something better.

The Future Isn't Inevitable

The internet we have today is the result of choices – architectural, business, and regulatory – that concentrated power into a handful of platforms.

Different choices were possible.
Different choices still are.

The most dangerous myth is that consolidation was inevitable, lock-in is natural, and surveillance is the price of being online.

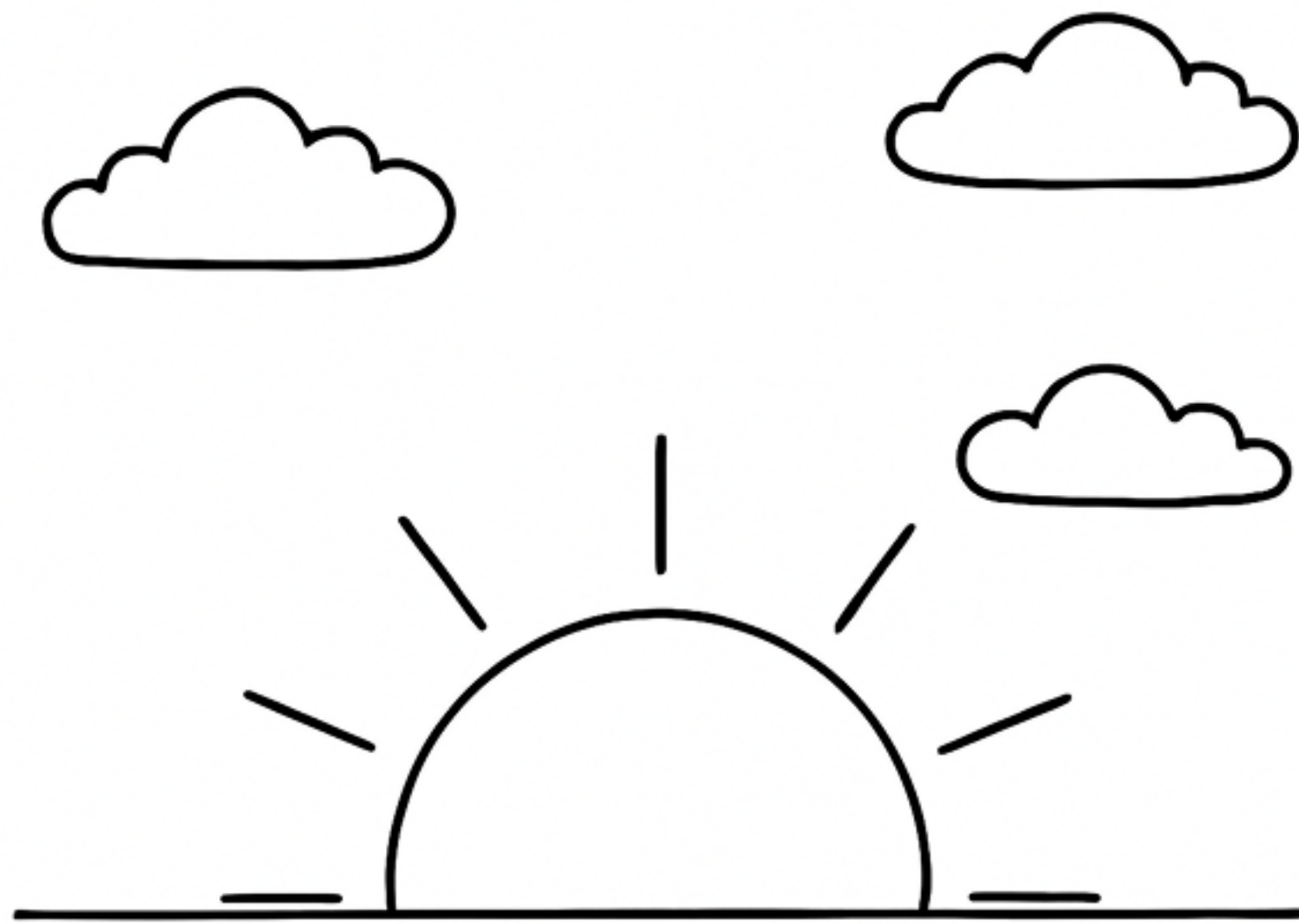
It's not true.

The Cost of Staying on This Path

The business-as-usual trajectory is clear:

- Power continues to concentrate.
- Fewer companies control more of the internet.
- Switching gets harder.
- Dependencies deepens.
- Surveillance grows more sophisticated.
- Public discourse becomes more brittle.

All these trends reinforce each other.



We're Still Early

We're decades in, but we're still early in internet history.

The companies may be huge, but nothing makes today's power structures permanent.

Protocols are still possible.
Interoperability is still possible.
User control is still possible.
Privacy is still possible.

The technology exists. The model exists.

The missing piece is participation.

This Is About Values

Underneath all the technical architecture are basic questions of values:

Who controls your identity?

Who owns your relationships?

Who decides what you see?

Who benefits from your participation?

The current answer: the platforms do.

The Bonafide answer: you do.

Immediate Actions You Can Take

No need for a perfect moment.

You can start now:

1. Download [Pools](#).
2. Create your Bonafide account.
3. Invite one person you share with often.
4. Create one Pool – recipes, links, memories, anything.
5. Notice how it feels to share more intentionally, without pressure or noise.

It feels more like texting – but calmer, more organized, more deliberate.

Why This Matters

Using Pools is a vote for a different kind of internet – one that puts people first.

You're not predicting that Pools becomes the next viral app. You're showing you want a future where you're respected as a user and have real choices. You're demonstrating your belief that better is possible.

The Choice Is Ours

We don't need to romanticize the early internet to know we can do better.

Bonafide isn't the only possible solution. But it's one functioning path that returns power to users, restores competition, and breaks the cycle of dependency.

We don't need slightly better platforms. We need better foundations.

We've been on the treadmill long enough, generating value for someone else while getting nowhere.

It's time to pick up the bicycle again.

We can move forward again – on our own terms.

