

# Welsh Affairs Committee

## Oral evidence: Broadcasting in Wales, HC 620

Wednesday 10 May 2023

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Members present: Stephen Crabb (Chair); Simon Baynes; Virginia Crosbie; Wayne David; Ruth Jones; Ben Lake; Rob Roberts; Beth Winter.

Questions 265 - 329

### Witnesses

**I:** Tomos Grace, Head of Media and Responsibility, Strategy and Operations, YouTube Europe, Middle East and Africa; Giles Derrington, Senior Government Relations and Public Policy Managers, TikTok; Megan Thomas, Public Policy Manager, Meta.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tomos Grace, Giles Derrington and Megan Thomas.

Q265 **Chair:** Good morning. Welcome to this session of the Welsh Affairs Committee, where we are continuing our inquiry into broadcasting in Wales. We are delighted to be joined this morning by representatives from what I would call social media companies, but you might correct me on that description. You might describe yourselves in a different way, but we are joined by Tomos Grace, who is head of media and responsibility, strategy and operations at YouTube Europe; Giles Derrington, senior government relations and public policy manager at TikTok; and Megan Thomas, public policy manager at Meta.

On that note, perhaps we can start the conversation by asking you to take a moment to talk about how you see your companies fitting into the overall broadcast landscape that we are talking about and whether social media is the correct label to use to describe you. More specifically, how do you see this landscape changing and where do you see your companies fitting into that? Megan Thomas, you are here on behalf of Meta. Could we say Facebook? That is probably the product that we are most focused on. Perhaps you could start off, please.

**Megan Thomas:** Thank you for inviting me here to give evidence on behalf of Meta. Clearly, the landscape in terms of broadcasting has changed, but perhaps it is helpful to explain to the Committee about Meta. I am here to speak about Facebook broadly, so I will explain what Facebook is. We are a social media company. We provide people with the opportunity to share information and connect with their friends and interests, personalised to them. Increasingly, we see video becoming a more popular platform on Facebook and across Instagram as well.

Reels is our fastest-growing product in that space. There are 2 billion shares of reels per day, but we are not a broadcaster, per se. We do not commission content. We do not have editorial control, but we do provide a platform for people to share content that is of interest to them.

Q266 **Chair:** Would you say, Megan, that it is true that people are increasingly accessing traditional broadcast output, but using Facebook as a platform for that? Is that true or is that just a crude assumption?

**Megan Thomas:** We do provide a free platform for broadcasters, as well as publishers, to be able to use, and for creators and other organisations to be able to share content. They can share either links to that content or videos, but we provide a free platform where they will then have a reach to new audiences. Those broadcasters can then redirect those audiences back to their own platforms, where they can monetise that content and get lots of traffic. We provide monetisation tools as well, but we are not a broadcaster in that sense. We provide a platform for organisations to use.

Q267 **Chair:** Tomos Grace from YouTube, of course YouTube was set up to be a platform for video content. Do you see yourselves in competition with



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traditional broadcasters or is it a much more complicated, nuanced relationship than that, where they use you to build and protect their audience?

**Tomos Grace:** Thank you for having me. I feel privileged and grateful to be here, and I say that as someone who is passionate about Wales, comes from Wales, is passionate about the language and passionate about public service broadcasting. It is a real privilege to be able to contribute. I hope I can.

To your question, YouTube has no content. YouTube is very clever technology, but we rely on partners like broadcasters such as S4C, BBC Wales and ITV Wales in this instance, to upload content to YouTube. It is our role to work with them to make sure that they meet their objectives on YouTube. Those objectives vary enormously. It may be that they want to reach a particular demographic. It may be that they want to reach younger audiences that are very prevalent on YouTube. It may be that they want to export and reach a Welsh diaspora outside of Wales and outside of the UK. Most content produced in Wales is actually viewed outside of Wales. It may be that they want to build businesses and generate revenue. In the case of the BBC, they would not monetise within the UK, but they would monetise outside of the UK.

We are there to partner with broadcasters and make sure that they succeed on YouTube because, when they succeed, we succeed.

Q268 **Chair:** Thank you. That is helpful. Giles Derrington of TikTok—which, I confess, I know almost nothing about—how would you describe yourselves fitting into this changing world that we are talking about today?

**Giles Derrington:** First of all, I echo everyone's thanks for having us. It is a really interesting session to have. For those who do not know TikTok, it is a short-form entertainment platform. To your point about social media, yes, TikTok has social media elements, but fundamentally it is an entertainment platform. It is about showing people short video.

The core difference between a social media platform and something like TikTok is that, on social media, an algorithm is looking at what your friends are watching, what they are interested in, and reflecting that to you, so you can see what everyone else is doing. TikTok is looking at what you are interested in. As you scroll through TikTok, if you watch a video on sport, it will go, "Okay, maybe you are interested in sport. We will show you a few more sports videos." It gradually builds a picture of your interests.

What that means for broadcasters is that they are using TikTok effectively as a shop window for some of their content. If you take the BBC, which has about 4.5 million followers on the platform for its main account, often it is posting short bits of videos from BBC programmes as a way to highlight what it is doing and entice people in to go watch



traditional broadcasts, or doing bespoke short-form videos—a short comedy sketch, a short piece on Eurovision coming up this weekend, etc.

What they are not doing is putting their full length programmes on to the platform, because the average video is somewhere in the region of one minute. Videos can go up to 10 minutes, but most of what we see is short-form video.

Q269 **Chair:** All three of you have made a point that you do not produce the content yourselves. You provide a platform, a vehicle, for others to use, whether that is traditional, well-established broadcasters like the BBC or S4C in Wales or somebody at home doing it as an amateur.

Do you see yourselves as neutral players, therefore, in this? We keep hearing about the revolution going on in terms of the broadcasting world and how people consume their news and entertainment. Do you see yourselves as neutral players in that or are you conscious that you are agents helping to change that and make that revolution happen? If so, what is the world that you eventually want to see? Where do you see this all leading to eventually? Giles, perhaps you could pick up on that theme first.

**Giles Derrington:** Ultimately, we are defined by our users. What our users want to create as creators and what they want to watch as normal users is really important, and that will define the types of content on the platform. We do look at what is doing particularly well on the platform and make sure that we are catering to those particular spaces. Again, to give you an example of sport as a category, we recently sponsored the Six Nations. We did a lot of work with the Welsh Rugby Union, as well as the other nations, to make sure that they were promoting content on the platform and that it was content that worked well for the particular platform.

There is a lot of work to educate people on what works particularly well for TikTok, because it is different from what works on other platforms. That is where we see our responsibility: helping people create the best-quality content for that type of viewership.

Q270 **Chair:** Do you see a world in the future where linear TV channels just do not exist anymore? Do you think that that is where we are heading?

**Giles Derrington:** I do not ultimately think so. Everyone watches the latest big blockbusters and long-form video as well. What you are seeing increasingly is mixed-modal watching and dual screen watching. Often, particularly with young people, they will use TikTok of an evening and flick through half an hour of TikTok rather than watching half an hour of television. That is the comparison that we would make. They are maybe watching TikTok during the ad breaks of their favourite TV programme, as well. It is that kind of usage that we are looking at.



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You are never going to really replace big, tentpole television. Obviously it would be for BBC and others to talk about what that means for the type of content they produce.

**Q271 Chair:** If you look at the amount of time people are spending watching the traditional linear TV channels, the graph is going down and yours is going up. That is where the trend is going, is it not? People eventually will stop watching the traditional channels. Do you think that is too radical a view?

**Giles Derrington:** For us, we do not see it as a replacement. There is maybe a rebalancing going on. Someone might choose to watch half an hour of entertaining content that has been chosen for them and will show things they are particularly interested in, rather than figuring out what to watch of an evening. What I am getting at is that we are not replacing those big, important TV programmes that exist, which people can tune into and engage with. Indeed, a lot of the content that you will see BBC, Sky, etc. put out on to our platform is promotional elements of that content to entice people from the platform to watch the longer-form stuff.

**Q272 Chair:** Tomos Grace, early on in the inquiry we spent a bit of time hearing from the public service broadcasters—BBC Wales, ITV Wales, S4C—and all three of them were very keen to emphasise the important role that they feel they continue to play in Welsh national life. As we think about the world that you guys operate in and the trends that we are seeing, do you think the very concept of public service broadcasting is going to become outdated at some point?

**Tomos Grace:** No. That is very important. Public service broadcasting is extremely important. It is something that we support and it is why we work very, very closely with S4C, BBC and public service broadcasting across Europe. We have a very close relationship with S4C. We met Siân Doyle and the team very recently. We have a team of partner managers here in the UK who work directly with broadcasters to make sure that they are getting the best out of their YouTube channels.

S4C runs about 20 YouTube channels and they vary from general sports, Sgorio, to Cyw, which is much more for younger audiences, or maybe Hansh for youth audiences. They have a very diversified and segmented approach to the way that they are using YouTube, which is exactly the right approach, but everybody recognises that there are changes. This is one of the questions that you were asking my colleagues here.

The world is going online. Video is going online. It is much more on demand and much more diverse than it used to be. S4C and other PSBs recognise that. S4C has a channel on YouTube that is dedicated to cartooning in Welsh with English subtitles. That is pretty niche, but it works. That kind of focusing on something that is online, is on demand and responds to specific audiences is exactly the right way to be going. I am very upbeat about their performance and that of other PSBs.



Q273 **Chair:** Megan Thomas, Meta as a company has reinvented itself precisely because it has a particular view of what the future could look like and sees itself as very much one of the leaders of the pack that are helping to shape the new digital world. Does Meta still see a future for linear TV channels and the very concept of public service broadcasting? Does that fit easily into the world of Meta?

**Megan Thomas:** Yes, absolutely. We have seen big changes in digitalisation and the way that entertainment, news and other formats are consumed, but that is not to say that people do not still have preferences as to how they consume types of content. Linear TV and public service broadcasting will still remain very important to lots of people.

What I would say about Facebook and our services is that we are a complementary service. We are not a broadcaster. Our platform is driven by personalisation, showing people content they want to see based on their preferences, or who they are friends with, and their likes and interests. That is essentially how it works. We are not replacing, but we see all broadcasters up and down the country, nationally, using our services to promote their content for free and to drive new audiences and traffic to their own platforms. We are really pleased to be able to provide that type of service.

Q274 **Chair:** Fundamentally, what you want—and it is true for all three of your companies—is for people to spend a greater share of their free time on your platform, with you, consuming their content through your vehicles, rather than sat at home on the sofa in front of a traditional television box with a remote control flicking through traditional channels.

**Megan Thomas:** We want the time that people spend on our platforms to be meaningful and we give people controls about how much time they are actually spending on our platform. For example, on Instagram, we have rolled out different features such as “take a break” and daily limits. We encourage people to be mindful about how much time they are spending on our platforms.

As social media organisations and platforms, we are in fierce competition for audiences. We are reflecting the needs of what our consumers want.

Q275 **Wayne David:** I will ask this to Giles specifically but, if the others wish to comment, that is great. The Government recently issued a diktat that Government Departments were not going to use TikTok from now on. Their concern, as I understand it, is its Chinese ownership. Has that been followed by the devolved institutions, the Welsh Senedd in particular? Have they issued any kind of similar diktat and, secondly, what do you understand the Government’s concerns to be?

**Giles Derrington:** I am very happy to answer this and I can happily provide more information to the Committee, if that is helpful. I am appreciative of the time but, very quickly, the Welsh Assembly Government and Welsh Parliament have followed suit. We would expect



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that, as a lot of people follow the UK Parliament's lead. We have a very good relationship with the National Cyber Security Centre and work very closely with it on a lot of these issues, to understand exactly where the risks are seen, on our platform and all other platforms, because this is a wider industry debate.

What the Government said and what Oliver Dowden said in the House was very clear that this was being done largely because of geopolitical concerns, because others have taken similar steps, and on a purely precautionary basis. There is no specific issue that they have identified and, again, that is something we consistently hear reflected back to us from the National Cyber Security Centre. To be clear, we, as a company, are not headquartered in China. TikTok does not even exist in China. It is headquartered elsewhere. Our senior leadership, for what it is worth, is in Singapore and in the US. Our shareholders are primarily from the US and 60% of them are big venture capital firms.

The challenge of all types of hostile actors exists for any platform that captures big data and collects a lot of data. What we have been doing very closely with the US Government, with technical officials there through something called Project Texas, and are now doing in Europe through Project Clover, is to try to make sure there is protection, so that every user and every Government can be sure that we are keeping their data safe. If you will indulge me for one minute, I will just explain very quickly what the key elements of that programme are.

For Project Clover, first, all UK and EU citizens' data will be and is being moved to data centres within Europe. That is incredibly important. They will be in Ireland and in Norway. The intention of that is that they are then in European sovereign countries, governed by GDPR, and no other country can force a sovereign state to breach GDPR or breach its own laws. Secondly, we are strengthening even further the gateways we have internally about who can access what data. Data should only ever be able to be accessed by people who need specific bits of data to do their job, whether that is to understand an engineering problem or to see broadly how a particular advert worked, etc., but severely limiting that data down to what can go outside of Europe. There will still be some things that need to travel outside Europe. For example, public videos will inevitably need to travel around the world to be public.

Then, thirdly, the most important point of this is that we are putting in place a third party that will be employed to check and verify that those access controls are being used properly and safely. That is not something that exists anywhere else in the sector. We think it is incredibly important. We have not announced who that is going to be in Europe just yet. In the US, we are using Oracle, although because the US does not have GDPR, it is a slightly wider format. We have had to effectively create data protection legislation in the US to govern it. The data will be in Europe. What data can leave Europe will be incredibly limited, and what limited data is transferred will be overseen by a third party, who



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can safeguard everyone's controls. That reassurance is the kind of thing you want to see.

The final thing I will note is that, as Mr Dowden said in the House, the Government is also looking at an access control list for all apps, because, again, this is a wider debate about anywhere where there is lots of data being stored on particular phones, where specific, sensitive security data may be held as well.

**Q276 Wayne David:** Did the other panellists want to add to that, briefly, as it is a wider issue and not just peculiar to TikTok? Do you think it is a peculiar problem for TikTok?

**Megan Thomas:** Just to clarify, would you please repeat the question? Are you asking about the broader data landscape?

**Q277 Wayne David:** The Government have said, because of Chinese ownership, no Government Departments are to use TikTok. Is that right or wrong?

**Megan Thomas:** I would not want to comment.

**Q278 Wayne David:** More broadly, do you see issues there that would be relevant to Facebook in certain circumstances, or do you think there is a fundamental difference in the way you operate, the nature of ownership and control of data?

**Megan Thomas:** I cannot speak for TikTok but, more broadly, we take data protection extremely seriously at the company and we have many measures in place around that. It is not an area that I directly work on and I would not want to misrepresent some of my colleagues, but I would be happy to follow up in writing on that.

**Tomos Grace:** It is a geopolitical question, as you say. It does not affect us. We have American shareholders and so it is not as relevant.

**Q279 Ruth Jones:** Thank you for coming this morning. You have been very clear, all three of you, that you do not see yourselves in competition, but as facilitating public service broadcasters. Thank you for explaining to people who do not fully understand what the platforms are and how they work. You said that you work with the public service broadcasters. My question is how you work with them. They are very established—suits and whatever—and you are new, dynamic, coming up through. How do you work with them to ensure that they can attract new audiences through your platforms?

**Tomos Grace:** As I say, we have a team of partner managers here in the UK who will work directly weekly, monthly, daily with the digital teams, with the commercial teams, with the marketing teams at those broadcasters. That is about understanding what they want to get out of it, but it is also about advising them on how to get the best out of YouTube.





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It is no use having a single YouTube channel called S4C. What you need to do is identify the areas of passion, the communities of interest that exist in the Welsh language, where S4C can launch channels. As I say, they have 20 channels now on YouTube that do respond to those. Some of them are quite seasonal, like the Eisteddfod or the Royal Welsh. Others are permanent, like Sgorio for the football. I mentioned Hansh and Cyw for younger audiences. That is part of what we do.

The other element of that is that they are able to export beyond the borders of Wales. My children grew up in Paris; then we were in London; then we were in Berlin, and I speak Welsh to them. It is not easy to access Welsh language media outside of Wales. I was able to show them videos on Cyw and make sure that they were getting that Welsh language video input. That is the kind of area where we can help public service broadcasters: to access the Welsh language and Welsh audience not just in Wales but beyond.

**Q280 Ruth Jones:** That makes sense. Megan, in terms of the nuts and bolts of how you do it, how do you meet with them? How do you do it?

**Megan Thomas:** First and foremost, we offer a platform for free where public service broadcasters, as well as publishers, are able to post either snippets of video or links to their programmes. They get free audience reach on the platform, and then people can click on those links and be redirected back to the publisher's own websites. We provide that huge traffic and reach for PSBs.

We have also made direct investment into the Welsh ecosystem more generally. As part of our community news project, which is more focused on print journalism, we have supported several Welsh-based publications. Through that, we have a Welsh-speaking reporter based in Aberystwyth, who we have helped fund and train. We have provided strategic guidance for the Welsh broadcaster S4C. We have done this through training. We spoke at their production summit last year, which trained 90 people, and that was all about reaching younger audiences across Facebook and Instagram, and encouraging the use of the Welsh language through short-form videos. We have done various investments in that sense.

**Giles Derrington:** I would echo a lot of what the others have said about the partnership work and, indeed, if we look at our direct stakeholder managers in the broadcasting and media space, they are doing similar things. We also partner on particular big projects. We are working very, very closely with the BBC at the moment on Eurovision, and how we can promote and get the best out of Eurovision, for the UK but also for every other country in Europe, in particular Ukraine. That is quite detailed work about what content you are producing and when.

For TikTok, as I explained a little bit before, there is an education piece as well about what works best on the platform. Again, if you speak to someone at the BBC, they have been very open about the experimentation going on at their side about what works well, what



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videos particularly hit big trends, what is getting the most viewers, etc. We can work with them to explain what they need to be framing and how the platform operates for ordinary creators.

There is also a pipeline element of this. What you often see is that creators on TikTok have huge audiences. Some of them are incredibly successful and, increasingly, TikTok is being seen as a place to scout talent for traditional broadcasters, to bring them in. That is everyone from Priya Hall, who is a Welsh comic, on the Welsh stand-up circuit, but increasingly doing BBC sets, etc. because she has a following there, to, on an even larger scale—I appreciate it is an English example, but you may have seen Francis Bourgeois. He is basically a trainspotter on TikTok who has a massive following. He is adored on the platform. Because of that, he then got a commission to go and make a programme with Channel 4 about trains and trainspotting. There is pipeline of talent. It is not just one way either.

**Q281 Ruth Jones:** That makes sense. All of you have been very clear that it is not a competition. What about the new trend for news snacking, for instance? Younger people do not sit down for half an hour to watch a programme on news. They snack here and there. How do you ensure that you are not in competition with, say, the BBC in that respect?

**Megan Thomas:** We have this free platform that broadcasters such as the BBC and others can use in order to promote and disseminate this content, but we are not creating content in the same way. We just provide the platform for them to use and then get audience reach, including from young people. We are mindful about young people's time on the platform and that is why we have introduced new tools around that, but we are not creating content in the same way that the BBC is for people to consume.

**Tomos Grace:** Having quality, authoritative news on the platform is very, very important. That may be long form. That can be live—Sky News broadcasts live globally on its YouTube channel—but it can be short form, as you say. It really depends on the partner and the kind of content that they want to make, and it depends on the audience and the type of content that they want to consume.

News is so important that we have launched a number of different products that highlight authoritative news content. That could be from sources like the BBC or Sky News, so when there is breaking news and people are searching for particular stories, the quality news, the authoritative news, rises to the top. Whether that is live, short form or mid-length, it does not really matter. The important thing is that it responds to the interest of the user and that it is high-quality, authoritative news.

**Giles Derrington:** When it comes to news, a lot of our biggest broadcasters are quite adept at doing short-form news, because bulletins are a form of short-form news content. A lot of those practices have been



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taken over to a platform like TikTok, where the skill of explaining something in 30 seconds, a minute, is incredibly important. A lot of the content you see on TikTok now from the likes of the BBC will either be kind of fact-checking type pieces to camera, similar to things that you would see on the BBC News website—"Here is the story of the day and here is what you need to know about it in brief"—or more authentic, up-to-date things. Chris Mason is increasingly being seen wandering down Millbank with his phone saying, "Here is what has just happened at Prime Minister's Questions", and that content plays incredibly well on the platform.

Again, there is experimentation here. Hansh has done a lot of work on the platform with vox pops in Wales, going out on to the streets of Swansea or Newport and going, "What do you think about this?" It is a different type of engagement with a news story.

The non-mainstream news we see on the platform is more niche. For example, Future Explored will purely do tech news. Every week, they will say, "Here are the five things in the tech world that you did not know about", so if you are interested in tech content, because you will be scrolling through and the algorithm will show you that kind of content, you will see more of that. When we talk about news, it is a broad category. Sports news is very different from hard political news about this place or the Senedd. There is something to cater for everyone and users will find the things that work for them.

**Q282 Chair:** Tomos, you mentioned S4C using YouTube very effectively as a channel for putting out lots of different content to different, niche cohorts of its audience. When you look at the BBC iPlayer, which S4C also uses, do you think that you are in the same world? Is the iPlayer an effective product for S4C when you compare it with how you described what you are able to do for S4C in spreading the Welsh language and this very tailored content? Do you see the iPlayer as not really in the same league in terms of reach and breadth of content?

**Tomos Grace:** They serve different audiences and, of course, S4C has its own platform in Clic, but it is also available on the iPlayer. A lot of content is also available on YouTube and on the other platforms here.

We have done quite a lot of research that demonstrates that there is a core audience on S4C. There is an additional audience on Clic, on the iPlayer, and there is an incremental audience on S4C's YouTube channel. That is the area that we play. It is not to cannibalise the audiences that already exist on their owned and operated platforms. It is to be incremental to that. It is to add additional reach, if that is what they want, or different audiences—usually younger audiences or international audiences. As I say, most of S4C's viewership is outside of Wales. The ability to add to what S4C is already doing is the role that we play.

**Q283 Virginia Crosbie:** Croeso, welcome. It is great to have you here today. I hope you are putting on your social media channels that you are giving



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evidence this morning at the Welsh Affairs Select Committee. Tomos, you spoke quite a lot about content. Everybody has talked quite a lot about content, and clearly S4C is doing fantastically in terms of its content, but I wanted to draw attention to some of the stats that we have.

BBC Radio Wales has 13 YouTube videos. BBC Radio Cymru has 177 videos. BBC Cymru has six subscribers and one video. Clearly, S4C is doing very, very well and it is all about content. How are you working with some of the broadcasters to help and support them?

**Tomos Grace:** As I say, the core part of what we do is to work with their teams directly so that they understand how organically they can get the best out of YouTube. That is really simple stuff like the metadata that they employ, the titling, the thumbnails—all of these things that educate the algorithm that this is high-quality content and that it is appropriate for a particular audience. Then we are able to match content to audience.

To the examples that you cite, it may be that the BBC has decided that, actually, a broader umbrella channel on YouTube is much more effective than individual niche channels. That can be part of the strategy. When we are working with the BBC to help it understand how to optimise that audience, how to get the best out of the content that it has, it may not be segmented. It may be a broader channel is part of what we do. There are different ways that we work with different broadcasters to make sure that they, again, meet their objectives on YouTube.

Q284 **Virginia Crosbie:** Megan, I want to ask you about trends, in terms of how people are using your sites. Do you see any differences in terms of your users in Wales versus other parts of the UK?

**Megan Thomas:** We are pleased to be able to offer a platform that people in Wales benefit from. The way that our platform works is that it is driven by personalisation, not trends per se. It depends entirely on what pages you like, who you are connected to and who you follow. That is how your Facebook will appear. That is how you will be able to interact with content on Facebook. That is exactly how it works, but we do offer things for people in Wales, like switching your Facebook into Welsh language, for example, which people find benefit from.

Q285 **Virginia Crosbie:** Giles, you have talked quite a lot about TikTok, but I am quite interested to see how TikTok, YouTube and Meta fit in with platforms like LinkedIn and Instagram. How do you see that fitting in with this whole smorgasbord of social media?

**Giles Derrington:** All platforms serve slightly different purposes. As I say, TikTok specifically is an entertainment platform. That is what we want to provide as a service, which is something very different from LinkedIn, which is a professional networking service, ultimately. For us, what we see as our USP is that ability for anyone to create good-quality, authentic, interesting content that can be seen effectively by anyone if the content is good enough.



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Unlike a social network concept, where the people who have the most followers will always be the people whose videos are most successful, because of the way the TikTok algorithm works, you can have relatively few followers and yet you will be making something that is interesting, speaks to people, and grows very, very rapidly. That is what we see as a huge value for us.

If it is helpful to very briefly explain what that means for Welsh content in particular, we look at what hashtags are used on content. The hashtag "Wales" has about 4.2 billion views on content; "Cymru" has about 300 million; "Welsh" has 1.3 billion; and "WelshTok", which is usually used by people in Wales talking about their communities, has about 70 million. You are seeing a lot of content produced for people with an interest in Wales, Welsh culture, Welsh sport, etc. and that is what we can provide. If you are trying to find that kind of content on the platform, the algorithm is going to show you that kind of content.

**Q286 Chair:** Just on that point, are you able to give us some examples and a flavour of content made in Wales that captures people's attention in Wales? What works well? Have you seen examples that you could point us to, to say, "That has really galvanised Welsh interest"?

**Giles Derrington:** There is a huge variety. One thing that is very clear is that what captures people's interests within a particular community on TikTok can be very, very different. What people see in BookTok, which I can explain in a bit, or TravelTok is going to be different, and they are going to find a very large audience in their niche.

I will give you some good examples of creators. Caz Price is a Welsh creator who does travel videos, particularly about the natural beauty of Wales, and that content does incredibly well. She has about 186,000 followers on the platform. Similarly, abanos, who has about 37,000 followers, is also doing travel videos about Wales, but it is far more about, "I am on a day out with my family and here is what we have been doing. Here is why the kids have got up to mischief". It is a very similar overall theme, but two very different types of content, which work well.

Similarly, things like sports, music and comedy work well. They are big communities on the platform. If you will indulge me, BookTok is a great example of this and speaks to some of those points around people's interests off the platform and what they do off the platform. BookTok is people posting reviews or books they are interested in and it is huge on the platform. There are hundreds of billions of views. The Publishers Association in the UK did some work last year, which found that 59% of 17 to 24-year-olds said they had taken up reading and found a passion for reading because of BookTok. About 49% of them had then gone to a high street book shop to buy a book. Again, that is the kind of thing we want to encourage and support on the platform as much as possible. When you speak to publishers, their biggest complaint about BookTok is that a book will go viral on the platform that has been out of print for 10



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years and suddenly they need to find a load of copies. They are good problems to have for that industry.

**Tomos Grace:** One example, which reflects probably the biggest story to come out of Wales in the last few weeks, is Wrexham football club. Clearly, it has the Hollywood stardust and glitter to it, but on YouTube we have the unique element, which is the goalkeeper. Ben Foster is a YouTuber. He has a YouTube channel, which is called The Cycling GK. It has about 1.5 million subscribers. He is a former England goalkeeper and former Premier League goalkeeper. Now, he is Wrexham FC goalkeeper and he has a GoPro in the back of the net. He edits it up with fan footage, with official footage, with vlogger footage of him on the pitch. He has him saving the penalty against Notts County, which was a crucial game in their run for promotion.

This is part of him not as a goalkeeper. He would probably say he is, first and foremost, a YouTuber, a vlogger, but able to take that story of Wrexham, of the town, of Wales, to the world, because that is the big story and he is a big part of telling that story.

Q287 **Chair:** I was going to mention the case study of Wrexham. Some of us were fortunate enough to be able to visit the States in January. We were struck by the sheer number of people in New York and Washington who, when they found out that we were from Wales, immediately mentioned "Welcome to Wrexham". It has been an incredibly dynamic and innovative shop window for Wales, in a way. That seems to have been almost entirely created by the new digital platforms, with the documentary that Disney Plus put out and all the different elements that have been put out there on social media.

I suspect all three of your companies have hosted very successful content recently about Wrexham, but does that not just point to the kind of future that we were talking about right at the beginning of the discussion and the way the world is moving? You are going to see more and more of that kind of content. The traditional channels have been playing catch-up on that, reporting a story that was created in the online world.

**Tomos Grace:** It is created on the pitch first and foremost. It is then reported in traditional media on traditional channels, but also traditional media on new channels. It has this extra layer of creativity that is added by people like Ben Foster. It is about that whole ecosystem that is evolving, and it is important that traditional broadcasters understand how that ecosystem is evolving. There are different techniques.

Q288 **Chair:** Do you think they do? Do you think they really understand?

**Tomos Grace:** Yes, they do. Increasingly, they do but it is important to understand that this online world, this on-demand world, with the different types of content, different ways of editing, different ways of creating, different ways of storytelling, is different and, to engage with that audience on their platform with their content, they do have to learn those new tricks.



Q289 **Chair:** Do you think BBC Wales, or the BBC as an entity in its broader sense, culturally is well equipped for the kind of world that we are talking about?

**Tomos Grace:** All I know is that they do a terrific job on their YouTube channel. There are obviously different cultures within the BBC and within S4C. Some are much more traditional in the way that they broadcast, produce and create. Others recognise that it is a slightly different platform, different audience, different type of content, different form of editing and storytelling.

**Giles Derrington:** We have been very proud to sponsor Wrexham. To your point about learning this stuff, the content they have produced for the platform has been very much behind the scenes, letting people in the door, which has been incredibly helpful. They have grown their audience. I think the video of Paul Mullin lifting the trophy had about 11 million views on the platform. It has been incredibly successful but, as you get into the backstage "how the sausage is made" type of stuff on football, that is what is incredibly interesting. The BBC and others have started to do those kind of documentaries as well.

Q290 **Chair:** In a world where none of these digital online platforms existed, the Wrexham story probably would not have happened at all, or certainly not in the way that it has.

**Giles Derrington:** It would have been harder to reach a US audience. That is probably true but, ultimately, we have seen Cinderella stories before. We will hopefully see them again. One of the catalysts of those new ways of thinking is going to be the platforms that we represent, but there are other challenges as well. If you look at the public sector broadcasters, generally speaking, whether it is through iPlayer and Channel 4 on demand, or the invention of BBC Television going way, way back, they have been pretty good at getting there with new trends and new cultures.

Q291 **Chair:** Megan, you mentioned earlier that Meta has done training with S4C and other traditional broadcasters. When you do that, do you find that there is a bit of a culture clash or is it the case that everyone in this world that we are talking about is getting on to the same digital page?

**Megan Thomas:** Every major broadcaster and publisher has a presence on Facebook in order to distribute its content, gain new audiences, monetise that traffic and redirect them back to its own services. We are providing that type of complementary platform, but we are providing support. We have a partnerships team internally as well, who have supported other organisations, such as WalesOnline. That is through training around creating short-form video, which will do well on our platforms. We also have different expedited media portals, and things like that that they can use, too.

Q292 **Rob Roberts:** I want to pick up on something that Tomos mentioned earlier, in response to Ruth's question. You said that the highest-quality



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content tends to rise to the top and is more noted. I saw a documentary recently, a “Panorama”-style investigative journalism piece, where a journalist set up a fake profile of a 13-year-old boy and in a very, very short amount of time, they were getting shown Andrew Tate. They were getting shown misogynistic content. They were getting shown very, very disturbing imagery and things on YouTube and on TikTok—you get a free pass on this one; I will come back to you later.

What are you doing to shield the younger generation from harmful content? It worries me greatly that “influencer” is now being quoted by kids as an aspiration of what they want to be when they are older. Your platforms feed them such harmful stuff. Others will talk about algorithms later, but it is all along the same lines.

**Tomos Grace:** Specifically on Andrew Tate, his channel has been removed from YouTube. We have very strict community guidelines on the kind of content that we allow on YouTube and that applies to all age groups. When it comes to children, which is your question, we have a separate app, YouTube Kids, where content is monitored and it is a safe environment for children. Beyond that, we recognise that there is lots of content created on YouTube that is aimed at a younger audience. Not all of it is of the same quality, so we do work with educational experts to ensure that the higher-quality children’s content rises within our algorithms, within our product, and that is the kind of content that will get more viewership.

We take that very, very seriously. Where content is harmful or breaches community guidelines, we act very, very quickly to remove it. Content that is not illegal or does not breach the guidelines, but which we feel is of a higher quality, is promoted within the product.

**Giles Derrington:** As you have reflected, these are challenges across platforms: the quality of content, and content that may be harmful, particularly to teenage users. To be clear, TikTok is not available for under-13s. That is the starting age and we have quite important age-appropriate design principles built into the system. For example, we do not allow direct messaging at all under the age of 16.

Q293 **Rob Roberts:** Is that self-declared age?

**Giles Derrington:** It is self-declared age. We use a number of signals to identify and remove underage users from the platform, and we are transparent about the number of underage people we remove from the platform every year. We are the first company to be transparent about those numbers and we will continue to do so.

Q294 **Rob Roberts:** Could you send us those numbers?

**Giles Derrington:** Yes, very happily. They are available on our website, but I will happily do so.





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One of the biggest challenges we have seen in some of these reports is when, to Tomos' point, the content itself may not be harmful, but may be an indication of a challenge that a young person is having. For example, healthy eating videos are not harmful in and of themselves. Dietary information is important, but, if someone is watching and looking for that content exclusively over and over again, that might suggest a pattern of behaviour that we need to work with them to address.

There are three things we can do there on TikTok. The first one is working with experts to understand what those signals might be. We work very closely with organisations like Beat, the Samaritans, etc. to try to identify those and understand what intervention is going to work the most effectively.

The second is dispersion, when people are watching that kind of content over and over again. Particularly because TikTok is short-form video, in the space of half an hour you may watch 100 videos. You can gradually disperse people's interests and try to move them away from just that one particular type of content. It is important because human beings generally get bored of any single type of content anyway, so actually you have some mechanisms that you can draw on there.

The third thing is taking a zero-tolerance approach to the pure harmful content on the platform. We have, frankly, quite conservative community guidelines about what is and is not available on the platform. For example, I think we were the first platform to determine that misogyny was something that we would not allow on the platform at all. We have taken action to remove misogynistic content as its own category, rather than sitting it under broad hateful behaviours, etc. There are things we can do in that sense.

We are never going to be perfect and we are incredibly conscious of that, but we want to work with Parliament, with others, with experts, in order to make sure that we are as good as we can be on these things.

**Q295 Wayne David:** I take it from that that you would welcome the Online Safety Bill.

**Giles Derrington:** Yes, absolutely. I should say that TikTok is five years old, so the Online Safety Bill is actually older than TikTok in terms of its parliamentary passage, but we have been very supportive of the fundamental concepts in the Bill throughout. We have some specific challenges about exactly whether it is going to be future-proofed in the right way. It is probably best not to go into that now, but I am happy to engage with the Committee on that if that is useful. We just want to make sure that it is not preventing us from developing new safety tools in the future, but fundamentally, yes, we think it is a sensible step.

**Q296 Rob Roberts:** I just wanted to pick up, very finally, on what Tomos said about there being a YouTube Kids app. In a similar way to how TikTok has a self-declaration of being under 13, and Facebook is also for over-



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13s, if you restrict the content on YouTube Kids, that is fine. How many kids are using YouTube Kids and how many are using actual YouTube? I did not even know YouTube Kids was a thing until about 30 seconds ago and I have children. How well publicised is it that, if you have children, you should be encouraging them to use the kids' one, which is more heavily monitored and regulated?

Why is it more heavily monitored and regulated, from one degree? Harmful content is harmful content to everybody, although I appreciate it is more harmful to kids.

**Tomos Grace:** Clearly, we could do a better job of marketing YouTube Kids. It is a separate app and it is designed specifically for children, for under-13s. It has content from the BBC. It has content from Cyw, which will be available on that platform. It is a separate design. It is a separate app, but we can always do more to make that better.

Q297 **Rob Roberts:** In the same way, it is also user-created content. It is just more heavily regulated.

**Tomos Grace:** No. There would be a set number of suppliers who would be vetted and approved within that. As I say, whether it is CBeebies or Cyw, that is the kind of content for Welsh audiences that we would make available.

Q298 **Ben Lake:** To follow on from Mr Roberts' questions there about how you monitor harmful content, can you elaborate a little bit? Do you actively go out and monitor the usage? Mr Derrington, you mentioned that you vet to ensure that users are the age that they claim to be. I would be interested to see how precisely you actually determine the age of a user profile.

**Giles Derrington:** Forgive me; I am not going to go into detail about those tools because, naturally, we want to keep some of those private, about the kind of signals we use, but it is something we are constantly looking at. It is worth saying that we are already regulated by Ofcom. We have some of these conversations with Ofcom pretty regularly, because we are a VSP provider under the AVMS directive. We are actively regulated, slightly differently to the Online Safety Bill coming in, which will replace some of that. Those are the technical level conversations that we will have with them.

It is probably similar for all platforms but, to speak about TikTok, we use a range of things. We use machine tools to identify lots of different categories of content. Every video that gets uploaded to the platform will go through those tools to identify anything that is a potential flag, either to remove it directly or to flag it to a human moderator to make a determination. Inevitably, there are some categories of content that are more challenging for machines to identify. You will need a human to look at that and go, "Is this the correct decision or not? Is this trying to pull the wool over the machine's eyes?"



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The other thing I would say about TikTok is that, as a video grows in popularity, it will go through further moderation. The levels of moderation will advance over time, to make sure that anything that is being seen by lots of people is being vetted pretty comprehensively. We publish numbers on exactly which categories of content we have removed videos for, whether those were seen by anyone before they were taken down, and how many were taken down within 24 hours, etc. I am happy to share that with the Committee.

**Q299 Ben Lake:** I appreciate that you cannot disclose or divulge the trade secrets. How confident are you that the systems in place catch the vast majority of those individuals who perhaps lie about their age in order to access the full catalogue of TikTok services?

**Giles Derrington:** As I said previously, we know we are not perfect. These are challenging things to do. There is a huge role here for parents, and for us educating and working with them, so they understand the tools available to them; so they understand that TikTok is for over-13s only and they should act appropriately; and so we can give them the tools they need to monitor their over-13s' screen time usage, etc., as well as these removal tools. We are fairly confident, which is why we publish the numbers that we do on how many people we remove, but we know that it is not going to be perfect. We are constantly looking for new technologies and partners. We speak to Ofcom and others about exactly how these things work.

There is a big debate to be had about things like age assurance and age verification, and part of that is taking place in the Online Safety Bill. Some of these technologies are not yet mature enough to be foolproof, and there is always going to be a balance between age assurance and data protection. What we do not want to be doing as an industry is collecting lots of under-13s' passport details and whatever else, which is obviously a different challenge that we have to face.

**Q300 Ben Lake:** Would you have knowledge as a company of the length of time it has taken for a user who has lied about their age to be found out?

**Giles Derrington:** I honestly do not know if we have that detail. I suspect that we do not break it down, but I will happily check and come back to the Committee on that one.

**Q301 Ben Lake:** It would be useful. It may well be the case that they would get caught out straight away, but then others might have used the app for a number of weeks before they are found out. If that information is available, it would be great. In terms of Ms Thomas and Meta, I have similar questions. What is the age restriction now on Facebook?

**Megan Thomas:** You have to be over the age of 13 to use our apps. Perhaps it is helpful to give the Committee an understanding of how we find and remove harmful content. It is similar to what Giles has explained. We have community standards, which are the rules that govern which types of content are or are not allowed on our platform. We



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write these rules in consultation with experts, and we increasingly use a combination of human review and technology to find and remove harmful content. We have 40,000 people working on safety and security at Meta, and we invested \$5 billion just last year alone in this task. Because of the scale and the tens of millions of posts, we are increasingly relying on technology to do this, and we publish how well we are doing in our community standards enforcement reports, which we publish every quarter.

To give you an example, Mr Roberts mentioned violent, graphic content. We removed 98% of that proactively in Q4 2022 before it was reported to us. We are transparent about how we are doing. When it comes to underage users, we do not allow under-13s on the platform, and we pick up signals as well to determine if we think that somebody might be under the age of 13. As an example, if somebody writes "Happy 10th Birthday" on a Facebook page, we can put that into a checkpoint and then, at that point, ask for ID.

Q302 **Ben Lake:** You mentioned that you had 40,000 employees looking at the monitoring and security side of things. I take it that that is the global figure and not just in the UK.

**Megan Thomas:** Yes. We have 40,000 employees globally working on safety and security.

Q303 **Ben Lake:** How does that compare in terms of staffing to other functions of the company, such as partnerships and advertising?

**Megan Thomas:** I would have to check in terms of a breakdown of our actual figures, but a considerable proportion of the organisation are dedicated to safety and security.

**Ben Lake:** It would be useful to have that breakdown. I appreciate I put you on the spot there.

Q304 **Rob Roberts:** We all grew up watching films, and they went PG, 12, 15, 18. The first I saw of 13 as a cut-off point was on Facebook. How did it come to be 13? What made you determine that 13 is the age that suddenly everyone is mature enough to see random nonsense? Why not 12 or 14? How did you get to 13 as a number?

**Megan Thomas:** We classify 13-year-olds and under as children. They are not allowed on our platform. For people between the ages of 13 and 18, we know that their experience of Facebook should be different, so we provide a different service with stronger rules around what type of content that those between 13 and 18 can see on the platform.

Q305 **Rob Roberts:** But, again, how did you determine that 13 was the number?

**Megan Thomas:** I would need to double-check.



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**Giles Derrington:** I would need to double-check. I believe I am right in saying that it is a mixture of US legislation, which is where our platform started, and we are obviously a younger platform in that regard, and something to do with the App Store rules and how they classify age ranges. You need to work to the App Store's rules as well.

**Chair:** Any further information you can find about that would be helpful.

Q306 **Wayne David:** I wanted to ask a little bit about the legislation that is currently going through Parliament. We have mentioned the Online Safety Bill. There is also the draft Media Bill, which will have implications for you. There is also the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill, which is a bit of a mouthful. Do you have any concerns about those two pieces of legislation that we have not mentioned so far?

**Megan Thomas:** As far as I understand it, we are not in scope for the Media Bill, so I will leave my colleagues to comment on that. In terms of the competition Bill, it is a huge piece of legislation that has just been introduced into Parliament. We are still digesting its contents. A lot of the conversation has been framed around publishers, and we want some of the debate around that Bill to truly reflect the value exchange between platforms and publishers.

**Tomos Grace:** Similarly, my understanding is that YouTube is not in scope of the Media Bill. My understanding is that it is about the visibility and the future of public service broadcasting, and, as I have said, that is something that we regard as very important. This is high-quality content, and these are important audiences that they deliver. When they succeed, we succeed. We work with them very closely to make sure that they are getting the best out of YouTube. When it comes to the role that we can play, it is about making sure that the content matches the audience. This is where platforms such as YouTube are particularly strong in making sure that, if the high-quality content is there, it reaches the right audience. That is the way to generate the greatest possible viewership and reach, and the greatest possible benefit for public service broadcasters.

**Giles Derrington:** On the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill, we as a platform do not quite distribute the same network effects as some of the other platforms, because we are younger, smaller, and a singular app in terms of large scale. There is a question about exactly how much that Bill will ultimately impact us directly as of this moment, but we are thinking about it for the future.

Q307 **Virginia Crosbie:** I wanted to ask you about the Welsh language. Megan, you mentioned it in terms of Facebook and, Tomos, you seem to be doing quite a lot personally, so thank you very much, diolch yn fawr, for that. In terms of the data, it was found that almost 70% of Welsh speakers used English on social media, with the vast majority using English more than Welsh. What are you doing to support and encourage people to use Welsh online?



**Tomos Grace:** Coming back to the answer to Mr David, this is really about connecting the right content to the right users. For Welsh speakers, the Welsh language content is available, and is the kind of content that surfaces to them in their YouTube experience. To give a recent example, I was sent a Welsh language music video by Candelas by my daughter. I watched that video, and it was great. The next video that was suggested was by Yws Gwynedd, which I watched; then there was Fleur de Lys, another Welsh language band, which I also watched, followed by Gwilym, another Welsh language band. Before you know it, I had chosen to watch a series of Welsh language music and was able to send a suggestion back to my daughter. That is the kind of experience that we hope to encourage: once you have experienced Welsh language content on YouTube, more is suggested, and you are given a diet of Welsh language content that suits you as an individual.

**Megan Thomas:** As well as being able to switch your Facebook into Welsh, we see people, pages and groups being created on Facebook to encourage and support the revitalisation of the Welsh language, and to share it with people in Wales and around the world. That is exactly the type of community building that Facebook was built to encourage and support, so it is great to see that. We have also made direct investments around this. I mentioned earlier that we have our community news project, which is our support scheme for local budding journalists, and as part of that, we are supporting a reporter, as part of Tindle in Aberystwyth, who is focused on Welsh-speaking communities. We have provided strategic guidance for S4C around Welsh language as well, on how to disseminate that and find people interested in that on Facebook and Instagram.

**Giles Derrington:** The most important thing we can do is support Welsh creators and Welsh language creators, and those interested in finding such content. That discovery is an important part of the way that TikTok works, and, if you are watching that kind of content in Welsh, you are going to see more of that content. For example, "Cymraeg" has about 82.4 million views of hashtags related to that content, so specifically Welsh language stuff. "Learn Welsh" has about 2.7 million views, so people are actively searching out opportunities to build their Welsh as well. There are a number of prominent creators who are working on teaching Welsh on the platform in short-snippet, easy education courses, people like Bethany Davies, who has about 44,000 followers, and Nicky Gamble, who has about 40,000. These are people who are actively on the platform, teaching people their language and helping to promote it that way, which is incredibly important.

Q308 **Chair:** The message that you are giving us collectively is that you believe that your platforms are a force for good in terms of protecting, sustaining and encouraging the growth of the Welsh language.

**Tomos Grace:** Absolutely, that is really important, but it is not just about us as platforms. There is the supply side as well, and it is



important that S4C and other Welsh language institutions work with us, and perhaps understand that it is one Welsh language ecosystem. S4C has a commissioning background. What has worked particularly well on YouTube is collaboration between creators, between YouTubers, and there is a role for S4C to play not just as a commissioner, but as a collaborator, as part of that Welsh language creative community that exists on YouTube.

**Q309 Ben Lake:** I am interested in understanding what data you have on your typical users, and whether you collect information in such a way that you could answer where a typical Welsh user lives and whether they are watching particular categories of content. I am really interested to know how much we can glean on the typical user. On the traditional broadcast media, for example, we can tell you what the typical Welsh viewer tends to do, whether they are listening to more radio than the UK average or watching more television. I am interested to know whether we can draw any similar conclusions about the typical Welsh TikTokker, for example.

**Giles Derrington:** We do not collect data down to that level. We do not collect precise GPS location data, so we do not break things down in that regard. Most of the time, what the algorithm is doing is looking for content that you are interested in and showing you that, and it is a very individualised experience. We would not necessarily be able to draw out commonalities because it is a personalised experience.

**Megan Thomas:** I would echo the same thing. The way that Facebook works is that it is driven by personalisation, and people see content that is of most interest to them. We are pleased to see different groups emerging around Welsh language, for example, and that is the exact sort of community building that our platform was created to facilitate, but it is driven by personalisation. What you see in your feed is entirely dependent on you as an individual.

**Q310 Ben Lake:** Just with Facebook, for example, is it possible to say that your typical Facebook user who lists their location as a place in Wales will be of a certain age? Is that level of information available? There are anecdotal accounts that suggest that Facebook tends to be of a mature age—I include myself in that—where Instagram is slightly younger, for example. Is that sort of information available on a Welsh basis?

**Megan Thomas:** I do not have that data, but we know that Facebook is used across all ages, and it is driven by that personalisation. An example that might be helpful is that we have a product on Facebook called Facebook News, and within that it has a local news section. If you are based in Wales, you would be able to see news in your local area, as an example of how that might be personalised.

**Q311 Ben Lake:** Might that include your local newspaper?

**Megan Thomas:** Yes, that is exactly right.

**Ben Lake:** That is interesting, thank you.



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**Tomos Grace:** It is hard to generalise, but we are seeing some trends. While most of the content that we would expect to be particularly popular, such as Sky News and the Sidemen, which is more a youth-orientated channel on YouTube, are also very popular in Wales, there are some differences. We noticed that Ben Foster, the Wrexham goalkeeper, was particularly popular. He is popular globally, but particularly popular in Wales. Welsh rugby content was popular, and Cyw, the S4C kids channel, was higher than anywhere else in the UK, which is what one would expect.

Q312 **Ben Lake:** In terms of YouTube, is the information available for you to say that typical viewers who register themselves in Wales, as far as it is possible to know, are watching a lot more documentaries or factual categories on YouTube as opposed to music?

**Tomos Grace:** I am not aware of that level of detail.

Q313 **Chair:** Are you saying that you do not have the information to point to whether there is a trend around growth or decline of Welsh language content on all of your platforms?

**Giles Derrington:** I gave numbers earlier on the watchers of videos that would likely relate to that kind of content, such as "learn Welsh".

Q314 **Chair:** That is a static picture.

**Giles Derrington:** It is, but it is ever-changing in the sense that those numbers inevitably grow over time.

Q315 **Chair:** Is there a trend on TikTok for a growing use of TikTok as a platform for Welsh language content?

**Giles Derrington:** We would not break down into that level of detail, not least because it is a five-year-old platform and trends are quite short term, when you think about it.

Q316 **Chair:** What about on YouTube?

**Tomos Grace:** It is very hard. One can look at the metadata and try to glean from that whether it is Welsh language content, but to be certain of trends over time is hard.

**Megan Thomas:** We do not have that type of data, but it is really great to see these types of groups that are supporting Welsh language emerge and thrive on the platform.

Q317 **Chair:** It is going to become an increasingly important question. The most recent census data was not that encouraging for Welsh language use in Wales. The social media platforms that you all represent will be an increasingly important part of the way that people communicate and do their daily living. Being able to see whether Welsh is being used as a language of choice on those platforms would be very helpful in the future.





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**Giles Derrington:** Our users are your constituents. The trends that you see in your constituencies are going to be reflected in what we see on the platform as well. It is not just a question of what platforms are doing, because we are, as has been said, a window into this. What are we doing in Wales in schools, and on broadcast television outside of S4C, to encourage the Welsh language? If that is successful, it will be successful on the platform. What we see on TikTok is that there are some incredibly passionate Welsh speakers who are doing very well at finding an audience on the platform, who, candidly, might not have found an audience were it not for the platform, because it is a hard thing to break through. There are relatively few opportunities on broadcast to speak Welsh, particularly about niche content that is of interest to them and maybe to others.

Q318 **Beth Winter:** On that point, are you choosing to be geographically blind and Welsh language blind in terms of the data you collect, or is there a reason that you cannot collect that data? We look at algorithms as well in terms of what that collects. You clearly do not collect that data at the moment. Is that a choice?

**Giles Derrington:** Fundamentally, we do not break down to that level of data, partly because we as a platform do not need it to offer the content. It would be very complicated to do, not least because, if you are using IP addresses to define where someone is, that changes all the time. Are you talking about the web app versus the mobile phone app? You get into quite a lot of complicated data science questions when you are trying to do that.

Q319 **Beth Winter:** But you do collect data on users.

**Giles Derrington:** We collect data on users, but the data itself, if not labelled, etc. is not usable for identification.

Q320 **Beth Winter:** You often ask people to put in their contact data and location, so that data is available.

**Giles Derrington:** We as TikTok collect only broad location data such as IP addresses, which can be quite wide. If you are talking about anywhere around the borders, you are going to be very non-specific on region.

Q321 **Beth Winter:** Do you choose not to collect this data in terms of the geography and the Welsh language?

**Tomos Grace:** Geography, yes, but the language is more complicated to collect, as I was saying. I am not aware of specific Welsh language tracking that we do, but that is something that I could look into if that is of interest.

**Beth Winter:** That would be useful, thank you.

**Megan Thomas:** The same applies from our perspective. I am not aware that we track that type of data, but we do offer people the option to



switch their Facebook into Welsh. I am pleased that we are able to offer that.

**Q322 Beth Winter:** Related to that point, the public broadcasters are primarily the promoters of the Welsh language at the moment. You have already mentioned S4C, which does a very good job with lots of users. The public broadcasters are very keen and see an urgency in terms of the Media Bill, which my colleague mentioned earlier, to enable the public broadcasters to have a better platform in terms of the stuff that you do. Do you support that? If you do, what are you doing in collaboration to support the passage of the Bill? That has implications for the Welsh language, and also in terms of public service broadcasting having the opportunity to extend its remit to online platforms.

**Tomos Grace:** As I was saying earlier, YouTube is not in scope of the Media Bill, but the promotion of public service broadcasting, and particularly Welsh language public service broadcasting, is something that we are very supportive of. We do that through partnership. It is also important to recognise the role of public service broadcasters like S4C and the supply of that content on YouTube, and how they work with other Welsh language creators, as I was saying earlier. S4C used to be the Welsh language in video. That is no longer the case. It is a part of the Welsh language ecosystem on platforms like YouTube. Their role in promoting Welsh language on YouTube themselves, but also working with other Welsh language creators, is important.

**Megan Thomas:** As far as I understand, as I said, we are also not in scope of the Media Bill either, but I echo what Tomos has said, in that public service broadcasters play a really important role. Separately from legislation, as a platform, we are really pleased to be able to provide a place where broadcasters, publishers and others can promote this type of content and reach audiences through that.

**Q323 Beth Winter:** Is there a risk that you could end up crowding out the public service broadcasters?

**Giles Derrington:** I do not have much to add on the Media Bill. We see ourselves, as we have explained, to be in partnership with those broadcasters. The BBC has spoken very openly about this when it comes to TikTok. "This is a major place where we can get a new audience that maybe is not watching our traditional formats so much, and we can engage them, but it has to be in a slightly different way and will gradually change over time". In the same way, they were relatively early in spotting the move from live-stream television to iPlayer as an important place where people would view their content after the broadcast.

**Beth Winter:** So you would all say that you encourage and support public broadcasting—brilliant.

**Q324 Ben Lake:** Forgive me for coming back to data, but I am curious. Say I have a business and I want to pay for some advertising, and I know for a



fact that you can target advertising so you get more bang for your buck, to steal a phrase. You have all said that it is difficult to collect some of the information about individual users of your platforms, particularly their language preferences and geographical locations. If I run a Welsh language translation service and come to your platforms wanting some effective advertising, there is no point in advertising in England. I need it to be in Wales, and you may well suggest a part of Wales, if it is for translation services. If I was a businessman, what sort of conversation would we have? What would you be able to offer me as a potential customer? Sorry, it is a hypothetical situation.

**Tomos Grace:** This is probably a question for our sales team, and I would be happy to connect you so that you could spend your money with our sales team. There are a number of signals that they use to try to identify audiences that are relevant for the kind of campaign that you are talking about. Geography is one of them. I do not know what kind of information you would be able to get on the detail of language and the nuances beyond that. Clearly, the model of platforms like ours is trying to identify the right audience for the right message, whether that is advertising or through organic content that is produced on the platform. It could be very effective, but I am not sure of the exact level of detail.

**Megan Thomas:** I echo that. We believe that we have democratised advertising for small organisations, including our hypothetical Welsh language translation business. Small businesses are able to personalise adverts based on geography, I believe, demographics and interests in that sense, so that is possible.

Q325 **Ben Lake:** It is interesting, because, as a user of some of these platforms, I am always pleasantly surprised when I get Welsh language adverts. I would be keen to learn more, because none of my accounts has specified that I speak the Welsh language. I have not set Facebook to the Welsh language, for example, although I know you can. Clearly, there is that level of data, and it is possible to use it. Perhaps, in future, there needs to be consideration of reporting a bit of that for the purposes of the vibrancy of the Welsh language. As the Chair mentioned, the recent census data had suggested a significant decline. There are conflicting sources trying to say how many Welsh speakers there are. It strikes me that your platforms could be another important source to verify, in broad terms, how many Welsh speakers there are, not just in Wales but across the UK.

**Chair:** There is a question about whether social media broadly threatens or enhances and encourages, if I can use the phrase, minority languages. There was a study done at Swansea University, reported in December last year, which suggested that social media use, by encouraging and prompting native Welsh speakers to use English more often in the amount of time they have available during the day, weakens attachment to the use of Welsh language and is therefore a threat. That is a discussion that your companies will need to engage in a bit more in the future. In a world where you are developing incredibly sophisticated AI



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tools to pick up misogyny and other threats online, keeping track of Welsh language use seems to be a fairly straightforward thing that you should be able to do.

Q326 **Rob Roberts:** You have all said a number of times, at various points, that YouTube, Facebook, etc. are not in scope of the Media Bill. Should they be and, if they should not, should your sector be more heavily regulated generally than it is, or do you feel that the balance is okay where it is at the moment?

**Giles Derrington:** As I said, TikTok is already regulated by Ofcom as a VSP. We found that engagement with the regulator beneficial with testing us on where we are strong and where we need to do better. With the Online Safety Bill, we will see more of that scrutiny, and that is to be welcomed. In general, scrutiny is valuable, not least of us. As I said, when it comes to things like data protection, we are looking at third-party oversight as well in that same regard.

When it comes to the Media Bill, and I am not an expert on it in detail, the crucial distinction is that online streaming platforms are producing content and choosing what content they produce and what they put on their platform. That is a fundamentally different case and, therefore, is in direct opposition to the programme editorial controls that the BBC, S4C or others would use. We are offering a platform for creators to put whatever content on they choose, and so we have less control over what goes on our platform, as long as it fits within those community safety guidelines. It is a slightly different thing that we are offering, and the mechanisms and levers in the Media Bill are better aimed at that full editorial control.

Q327 **Rob Roberts:** It is different, but only subtly different. Megan mentioned earlier that you are not creating content. You are not creating content, but you are creating audiences, which is what the streaming services are seeking to do. They are trying to create an audience, and you are also trying to create an audience via the use of your algorithms and feeding people with stuff that they want. In that respect, you are very similar to the streaming services.

**Giles Derrington:** Our ability to create an audience is only as good as our creators, so, fundamentally, it is for them to decide what the audience looks like, for them to decide what kind of content they want to produce, and for users watching it to decide whether that content is worth their time. It is different from us saying that we have decided that we want to commission a documentary series on football or whatever else it might be.

**Megan Thomas:** We are a complementary service, and we can direct those audiences back to broadcasters as well. They can promote their content on our platform, but then they gain those audiences back to their platforms, too.

Q328 **Rob Roberts:** The reason I asked the question is that, when you have a



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Netflix show or a BBC show, it is a one-off show or series of shows, and people can watch them or not. It is a very controllable microenvironment. As Tomos helpfully pointed out earlier, he looked at one thing, and it showed him something else and something else. It was wonderful stuff, and that was all very wholesome, great, useful Welsh content, but you also must see how that same principle applies to things that are less helpful and wholesome, and you can have much more influence than a streaming service, which is more about one-off content, by going again and again and again at a particular message. It is a much more powerful way of influencing people than regular broadcasting. Is that making sense?

**Tomos Grace:** Yes, I understand the point you are making. The reality is that the community guidelines we have are there to ensure that the direction of harmful content that you are alluding to is avoided. That is not just something that we regard as wrong, but it is not good for users, other creators or advertisers. It is not good for YouTube. Harmful content, and even borderline content, is something that we are very firm on and that we will either remove entirely or reduce in audience potential.

Q329 **Rob Roberts:** Do you feel sufficiently regulated?

**Tomos Grace:** I am here from the business side. That is a question for my policy colleagues. We are supportive of the legislation that is going through Parliament at the moment. We want to engage with DCMS; we want to engage with Ofcom, but for more detail on policy that would be for my colleagues.

**Chair:** Tomos Grace from YouTube, Megan Thomas from Meta, Giles Derrington from TikTok, thank you very much for giving us so much of your time. Thank you for being patient with us as we worked through what, for some of us, might not have been straightforward issues. It has been a very useful discussion. We do appreciate your engagement. Thank you very much.