I'm not tech-savvy - but within hours I could buy an illegal knife on social media'

I'm 48, use social media occasionally, and I'm not very tech-savvy. Until recently I'd never used Telegram
seemed like the children in the case were able to buy huge, deadly weapons with shocking eases,So in spring 2024, I set up several social media accounts in the name of a fake 18-year-old man. He is a Londoner who is friends with a group of young men who carry knives. He thinks he needs one too, to protect himself, and he knows larger knives are more intimidating.I got myself a separate mobile so my new searches would not impact my usual browsing algorithms. I started searching for knives, liking and following accounts which offered content.

The groups contained images of young men posing with knives, videos of close-ups of the blades, and some had videos of knife fights. Very quickly my new social media accounts started showing me more similar content.A familiar pattern emerged. Knives were being advertised in posts on Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok, with sellers directing buyers in their bio to their Telegram channels - encrypted groups where videos, photos and prices of knives for sale were openly sharedTwenty-two-inch machetes cost £40 and 24-inch zombie knives were £50 - with new stock arriving soon. The seller was based in Walsall and promised delivery to the Birmingham area for £5. Days later, a message went up saying the machetes and zombie knives had sold out.

Then a poll went up, asking "Should I get stab-proof vests?" Fifty-six subscribers answered. A few weeks later, stab vests were available to buy.Within a few weeks I found more than 10 social media accounts offering illegal knives for sale. It didn't take long for me to learn the slang used for terms like knife seller, flick knife and zombie knife.added it worked closely with government and police to understand changes in knife crime, and assisted police enquiries.

I reached out to Meta too - which hasn't yet provided a comment. Previously a spokeswoman told the Times that the promotion and sale of weapons on Meta's platforms was banned, and that such content was removed when found.