

# Fame and fate: Why is global success so unpredictable?

Principles of Complex Systems | @pocsvox  
CSYS/MATH 300, Fall, 2015 | #FallPoCS2015

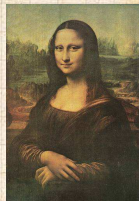
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References

Prof. Peter Dodds | @peterdodds

Dept. of Mathematics & Statistics | Vermont Complex Systems Center  
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Fame and fate:  
Why is global  
success so  
unpredictable?

Sealie & Lambie  
Productions



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# Outline

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Why is global  
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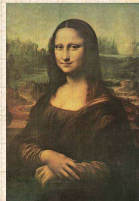
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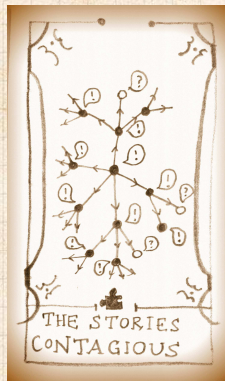
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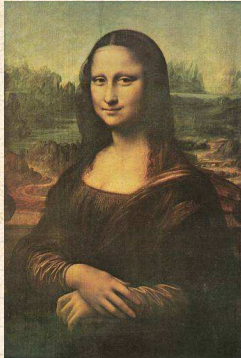
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# The most famous painting in the world:

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Why is global  
success so  
unpredictable?



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# The dismal predictive powers of editors .....

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success so  
unpredictable?

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Twelve ...

# The completely unpredicted fall of Eastern Europe:

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success so  
unpredictable?



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Timur Kuran: <sup>[2]</sup> "Now Out of Never: The Element of  
Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989"



# We understand bushfire stories:

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Why is global  
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1. Sparks start fires.
2. System properties control a fire's spread.
3. But we make two mistakes about Social Fires...





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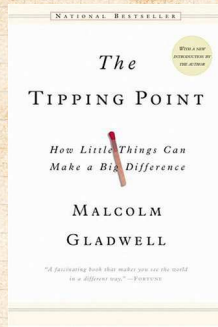
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3. But we make two mistakes about **Social Fires**...



# Reason 1—We are Homo Narrativus.

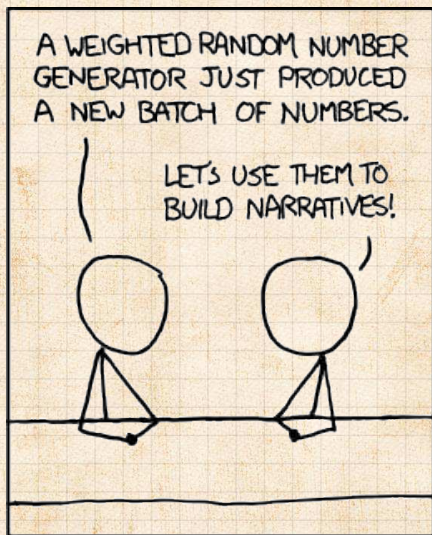
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ALL SPORTS COMMENTARY



<http://xkcd.com/904/>

## Reason 2—"We are all individuals."

Archival footage:

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- ▶ Individual narratives are not enough to understand distributed, networked minds.



## Reason 3—We are spectacular imitators.

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BBC/David Attenborough.



# Mistake 1: Success is due to intrinsic properties

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See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon 

# Mistake 1: Success is due to intrinsic properties

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it's just so disappointingly small

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See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon [↗](#)





# Mistake 1: Success is due to intrinsic properties

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Stolen in 1913, recovered in 1915.

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See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon 

# Mistake 1: Success is due to intrinsic properties

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Hidden during WWII.

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See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon [↗](#)

# Mistake 1: Success is due to intrinsic properties

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success so  
unpredictable?



Repeatedly vandalised and attacked.

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See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon



Fame and fate:  
Why is global  
success so  
unpredictable?

48 songs  
30k participants

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## Exp 1— weak social

	Rank	Artist	Lyrics	Rank	Rank
WANT TO BE	1	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	1	1
DEAR MOTHER	2	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	2	2
THE WEEKND	3	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	3	3
THE WEEKND	4	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	4	4
THE WEEKND	5	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	5	5
THE WEEKND	6	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	6	6
THE WEEKND	7	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	7	7
THE WEEKND	8	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	8	8
THE WEEKND	9	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	9	9
THE WEEKND	10	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	10	10
THE WEEKND	11	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	11	11
THE WEEKND	12	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	12	12
THE WEEKND	13	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	13	13
THE WEEKND	14	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	14	14
THE WEEKND	15	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	15	15
THE WEEKND	16	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	16	16
THE WEEKND	17	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	17	17
THE WEEKND	18	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	18	18
THE WEEKND	19	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	19	19
THE WEEKND	20	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	20	20
THE WEEKND	21	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	21	21
THE WEEKND	22	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	22	22
THE WEEKND	23	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	23	23
THE WEEKND	24	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	24	24
THE WEEKND	25	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	25	25
THE WEEKND	26	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	26	26
THE WEEKND	27	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	27	27
THE WEEKND	28	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	28	28
THE WEEKND	29	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	29	29
THE WEEKND	30	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	30	30

## Exp. 2—strong social

	Rank	Artist	Lyrics	Rank	Rank
WANT TO BE	1	THE WEEKND	"I'm on a roll"	1	1
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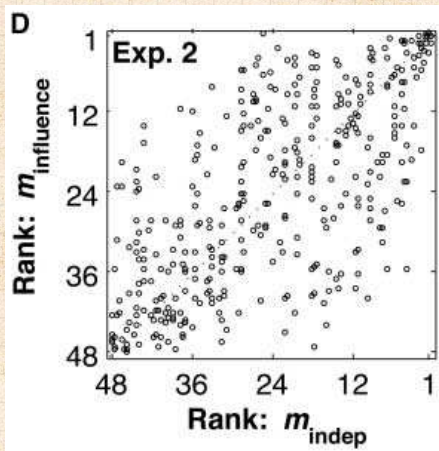
“An experimental study of inequality and unpredictability in an artificial cultural market” ↗

Salganik, Dodds, and Watts,  
Science, **311**, 854–856, 2006. [3]



# Resolving the paradox:

Fame and fate:  
Why is global  
success so  
unpredictable?



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Increased social awareness leads to  
Stronger inequality + Less predictability.



# Payola/Deceptive advertising hurts us all:

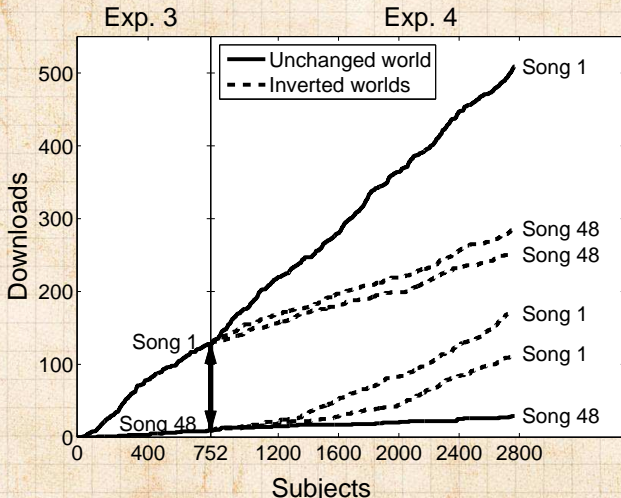
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## Mistake 2:

Seeing success is 'due to social' and  
wanting to say 'all your interactions are  
belong to us'

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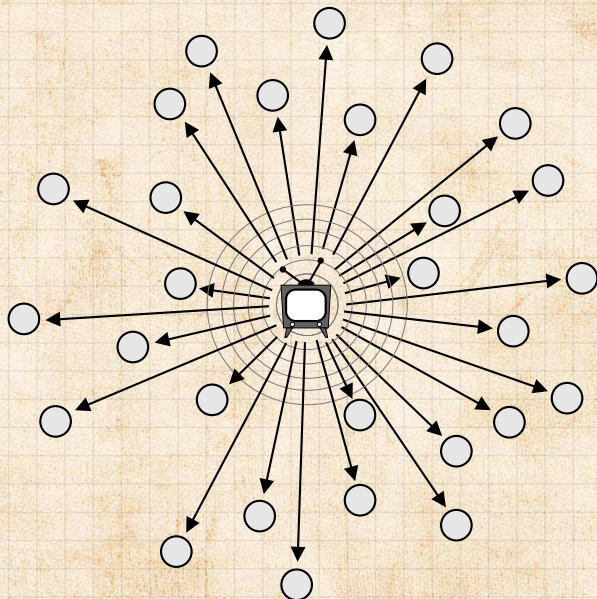
References



# The hypodermic model of influence:

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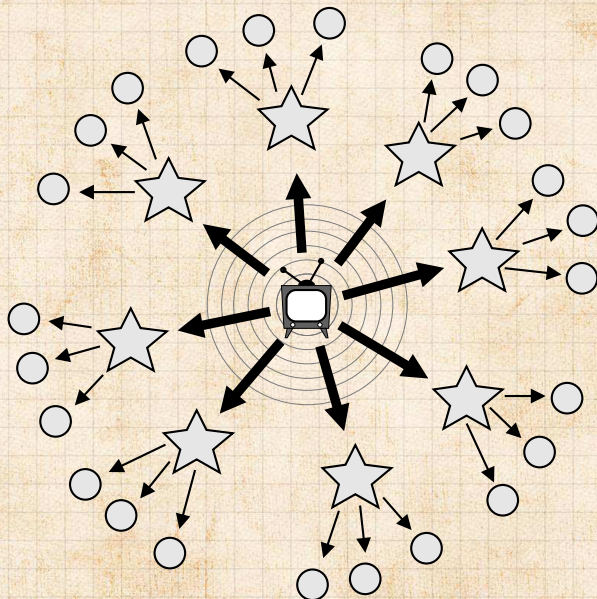




# The two step model of influence: [1]

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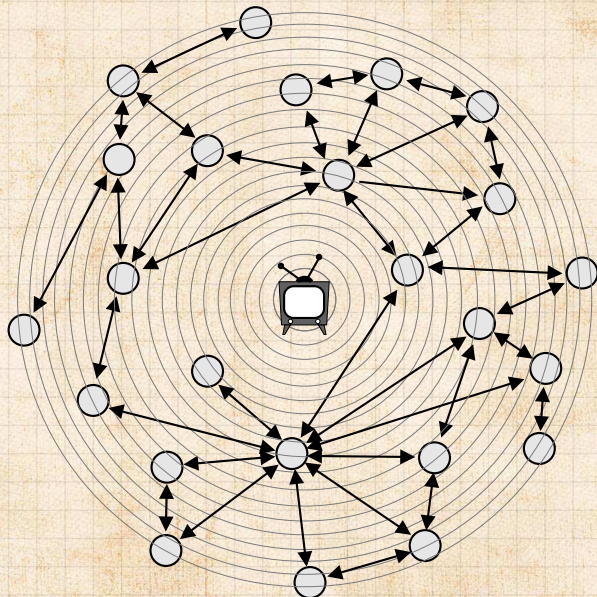
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# The network model of influence:

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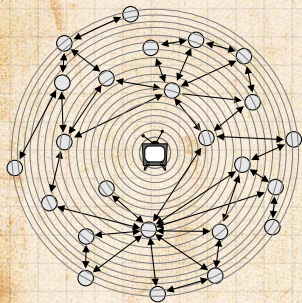
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# The network model of influence:

Fame and fate:  
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## How superspreading works:


Many interconnected, average,  
trusting people  
must benefit from both  
**receiving** and **sharing** a message  
far from its source.

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References



"Influentials, Networks, and Public Opinion  
Formation" 

Watts and Dodds,

J. Consum. Res., **34**, 441–458, 2007. <sup>[4]</sup>



# Things that spread quickly:

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Fame and fate:  
Why is global  
success so  
unpredictable?



:p


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References



+ News ...

[buzzfeed.com](http://buzzfeed.com) 



Fame and fate:  
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unpredictable?

## Etymological clarity:

- ▶ **Fate**—from the Latin *fatus*: meaning “spoken”.
  - ▶ Fate is talk that has been done.  
“It is written”, fore-tell, pre-dict.
  - ▶ “There is no such thing as fate, only the story of fate.”
  - ▶ Destiny is probabilistic.
- ▶ **Fame**—from the Latin *fāma*: meaning “to talk.”
  - ▶ Fame is inherently the social discussion about the thing, not the thing itself.
- ▶ **Renown**: Repeatedly named, talked about. Old French *renon*, from *re-* + *non* (“name”).
- ▶ **Reclame**: “Clamo”—Proto-Indo-European: “to shout” (again).

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# Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray

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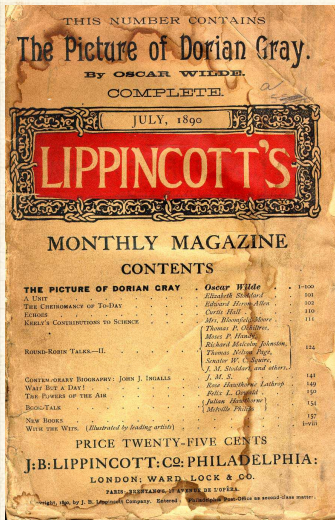
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# Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray



“There is only one  
thing in the world

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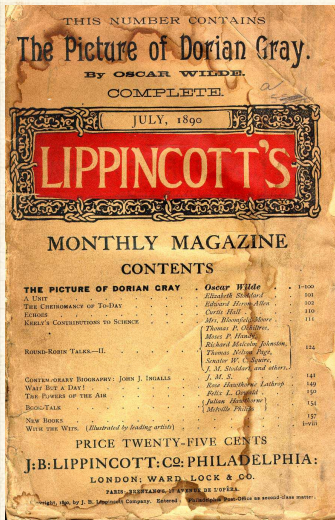
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“There is only one  
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worse than being  
talked about,

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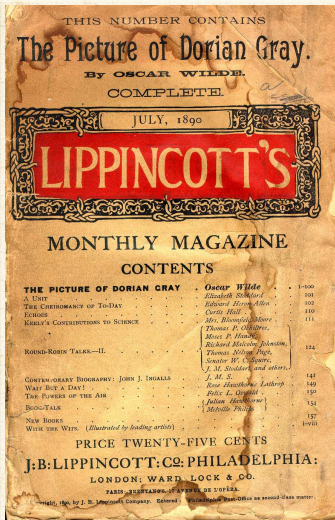
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“There is only one  
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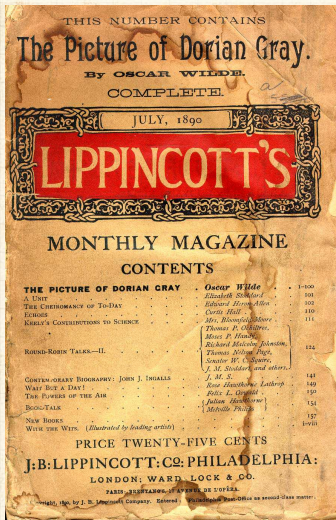
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“There is only one  
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talked about,

and that is

not being talked  
about.”



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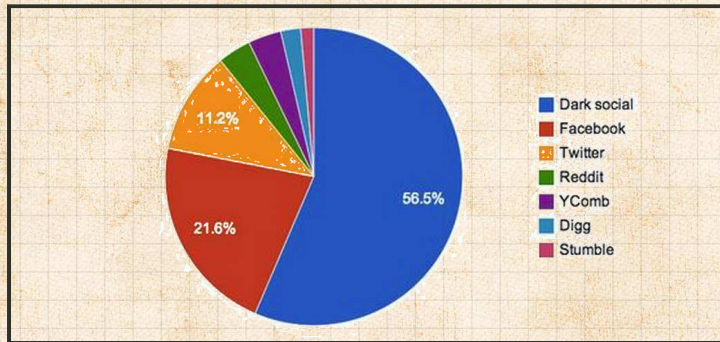
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# Spreading in the social wild:

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Fame and fate:  
Why is global  
success so  
unpredictable?


## The Dark Social Web



Superstars

Superspreading

References

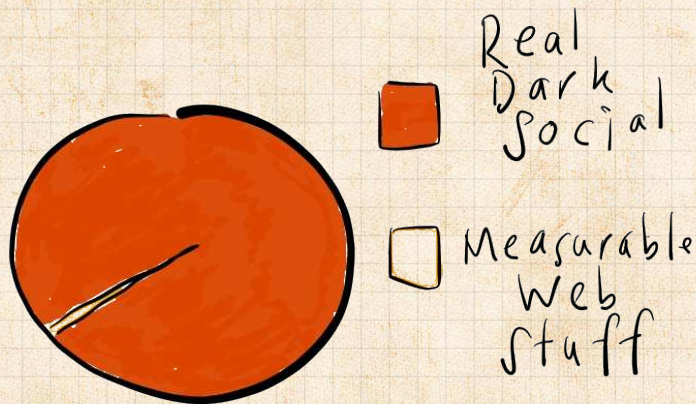
Dark Social: We Have the Whole History of the Web  
Wrong  [The Atlantic]



# A completely made up pie chart:

PoCS | @pocsvox

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## How to make things spread (maybe):

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## Shareworthy Content is King:

1. Build entities/messages/stories that have intrinsic and social value out in the **Social Wild**.
2. Advertise but lay off the social interactions.
3. Just keep trying.



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