

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

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Principles of Complex Systems, Vol. 1 | @pocsvox  
CSYS/MATH 300, Fall, 2020

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Vermont Advanced Computing Core | University of Vermont



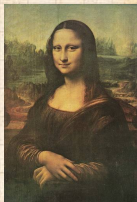
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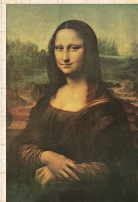
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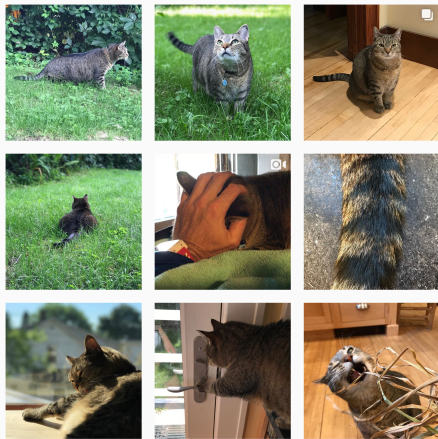
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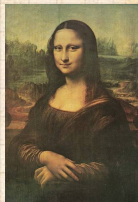


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# Outline

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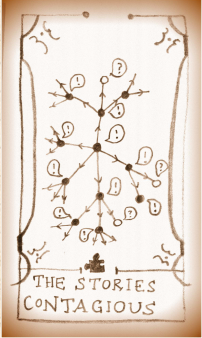
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# The most famous painting in the world:

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

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Twelve ...



# The completely unpredicted fall of Eastern Europe:

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



# Reason 1—We are Homo Narrativus.

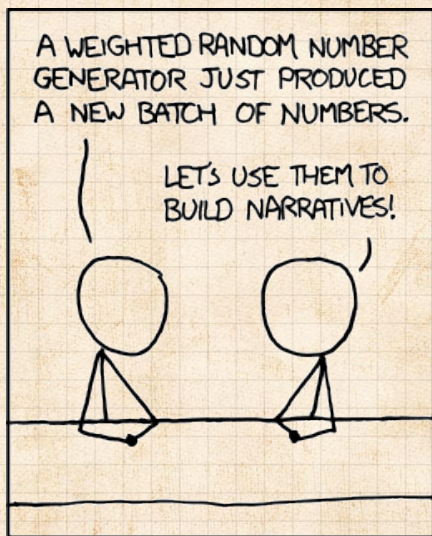
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## Reason 2—"We are all individuals."

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 





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48 songs  
30k participants

## Exp 1— weak social

	Rank	Title	Rank
1	1	THE MARCH	1
2	2	THE MARCH	2
3	3	THE MARCH	3
4	4	THE MARCH	4
5	5	THE MARCH	5
6	6	THE MARCH	6
7	7	THE MARCH	7
8	8	THE MARCH	8
9	9	THE MARCH	9
10	10	THE MARCH	10
11	11	THE MARCH	11
12	12	THE MARCH	12
13	13	THE MARCH	13
14	14	THE MARCH	14
15	15	THE MARCH	15
16	16	THE MARCH	16
17	17	THE MARCH	17
18	18	THE MARCH	18
19	19	THE MARCH	19
20	20	THE MARCH	20
21	21	THE MARCH	21
22	22	THE MARCH	22
23	23	THE MARCH	23
24	24	THE MARCH	24
25	25	THE MARCH	25
26	26	THE MARCH	26
27	27	THE MARCH	27
28	28	THE MARCH	28
29	29	THE MARCH	29
30	30	THE MARCH	30

## Exp. 2—strong social

	Rank	Title	Rank
1	1	THE MARCH	1
2	2	THE MARCH	2
3	3	THE MARCH	3
4	4	THE MARCH	4
5	5	THE MARCH	5
6	6	THE MARCH	6
7	7	THE MARCH	7
8	8	THE MARCH	8
9	9	THE MARCH	9
10	10	THE MARCH	10
11	11	THE MARCH	11
12	12	THE MARCH	12
13	13	THE MARCH	13
14	14	THE MARCH	14
15	15	THE MARCH	15
16	16	THE MARCH	16
17	17	THE MARCH	17
18	18	THE MARCH	18
19	19	THE MARCH	19
20	20	THE MARCH	20
21	21	THE MARCH	21
22	22	THE MARCH	22
23	23	THE MARCH	23
24	24	THE MARCH	24
25	25	THE MARCH	25
26	26	THE MARCH	26
27	27	THE MARCH	27
28	28	THE MARCH	28
29	29	THE MARCH	29
30	30	THE MARCH	30

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“An experimental study of inequality and unpredictability in an artificial cultural market” ↗

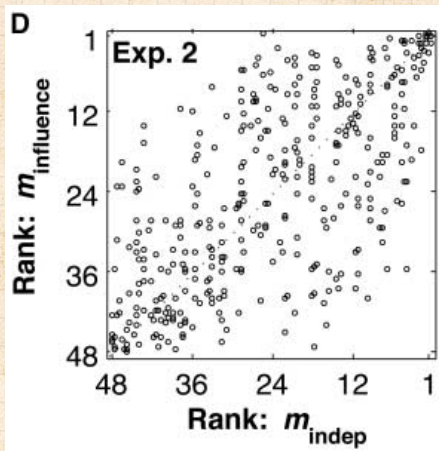
Salganik, Dodds, and Watts,  
Science, **311**, 854–856, 2006. [3]





# Resolving the paradox:

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Increased social awareness leads to  
Stronger inequality + Less predictability.



# Payola/Deceptive advertising hurts us all:

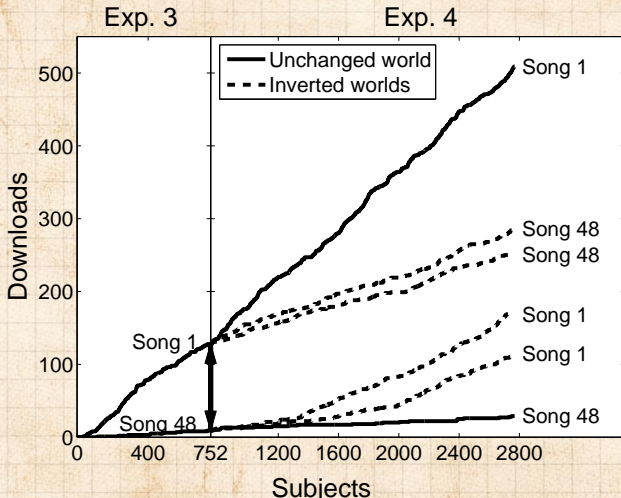
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## Mistake 2:

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

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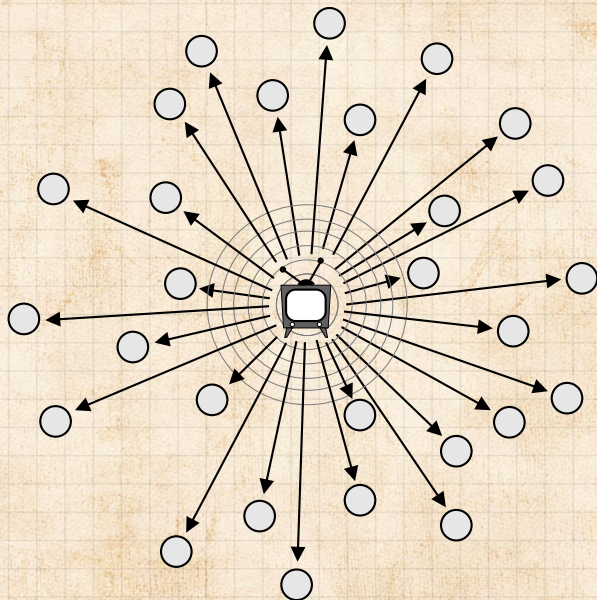
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# The hypodermic model of influence:

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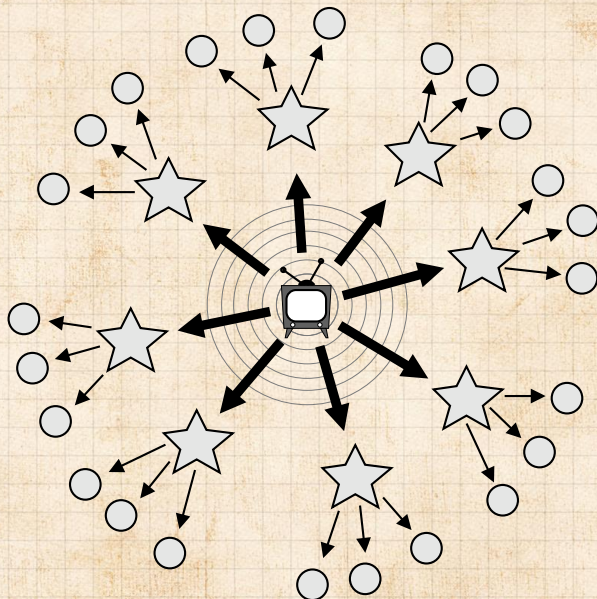




# The two step model of influence: [1]

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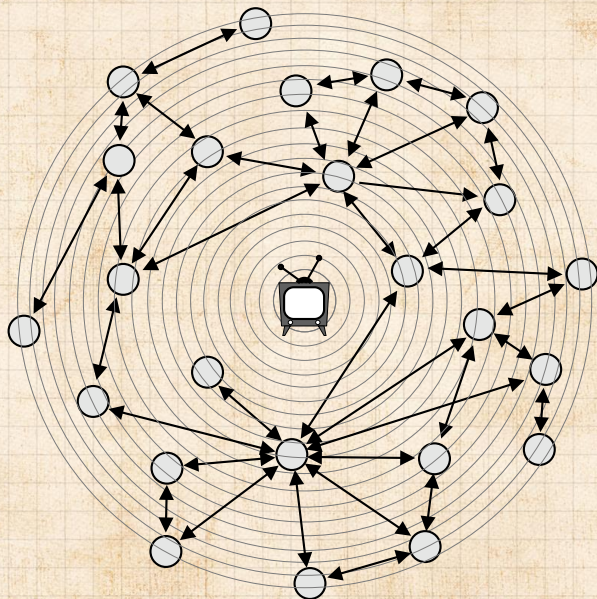
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# The network model of influence:

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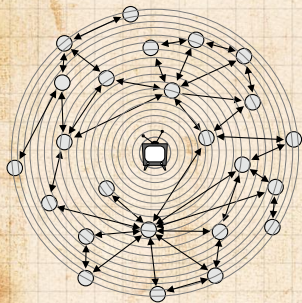
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## How superspreading works:


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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+ News ...


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









## 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 probablistic.

 **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”).

 Réclame . “Clamo”—Proto-Indo-European: “to shout” (again). Connected to “lowing”.

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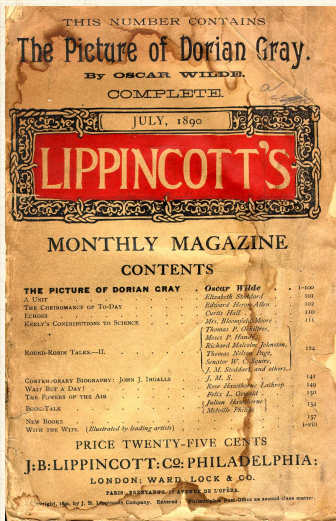
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# Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray



“There is only one  
thing in the world

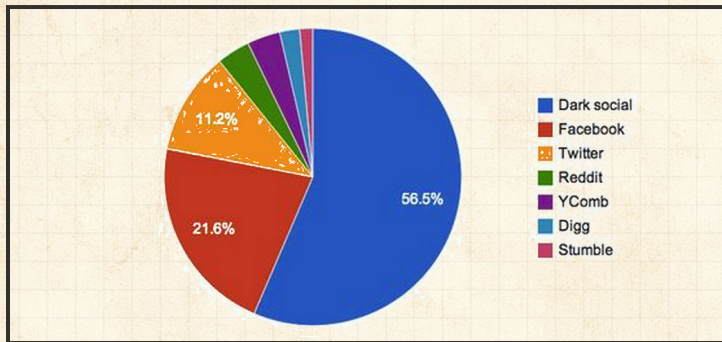
worse than being  
talked about,

and that is


not being talked  
about.”



## The Dark Social Web



“The only real way to optimize for social spread is in the nature of the content itself. There’s no way to game email or people’s instant messages. There’s no power users you can contact. There’s no algorithms to understand. This is pure social, uncut.”

 Dark Social: We Have the Whole History of the

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# A completely made up pie chart:

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Real  
Dark  
Social



Measurable  
Web  
stuff

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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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References



# References I

- [1] E. Katz and P. F. Lazarsfeld.  
Personal Influence.

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References

The Free Press, New York, 1955.

- [2] T. Kuran.

Now out of never: The element of surprise in the  
east european revolution of 1989.

World Politics, 44:7-48, 1991. pdf ↗

- [3] M. J. Salganik, P. S. Dodds, and D. J. Watts.

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Science, 311:854-856, 2006. pdf ↗



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[Journal of Consumer Research](#), 34:441–458, 2007.

[pdf](#) 

