

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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Computational Story Lab | Vermont Complex Systems Center
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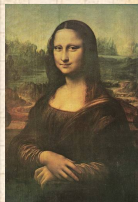


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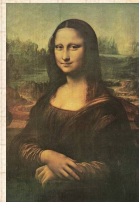


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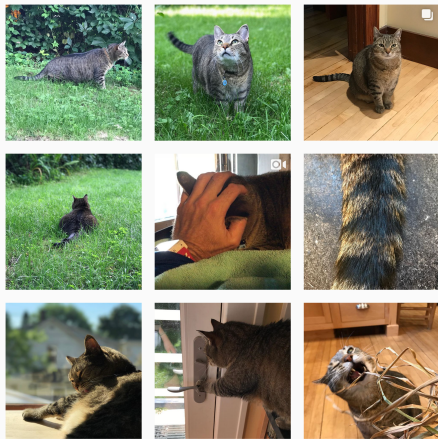
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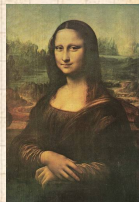
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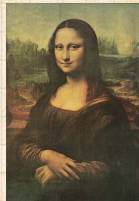
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The most famous painting in the world:

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The dismal predictive powers of editors

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Twelve ...

The completely unpredicted fall of Eastern Europe:



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

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We understand bushfire stories:



1. Sparks start fires.

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We understand bushfire stories:



1. Sparks start fires.
2. System properties control a fire's spread.

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We understand bushfire stories:



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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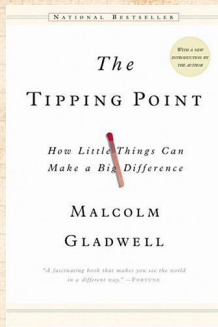
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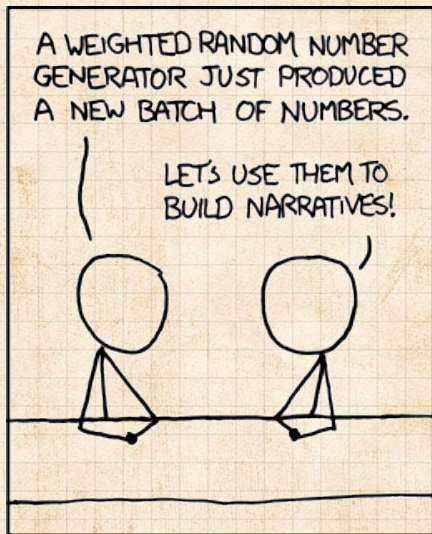
Reason 1—We are Homo Narrativus.

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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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it's just so disappointingly small



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

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Stolen in 1913, recovered in 1915.



See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon 

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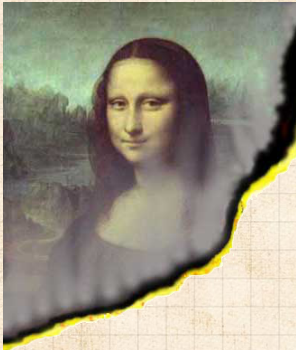


Hidden during WWII.



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

Mistake 1: Success is due to intrinsic properties



Repeatedly vandalised and attacked. [↗](#)

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



48 songs
30k participants

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Exp 1— weak social

Rank	Title	Score
1	WANT TO BE	25
2	DEEP END OF THE	24
3	THE WINDY SPARKLE	23
4	THE BUCKLE PROMISE	22
5	THE NEW GAME	21
6	NOBODY AT HOME	20
7	NEVER SHAKED	19
8	NET FROM BONDOLATA	18
9	SHINE SHINY	17
10	PART OF ME	16
11	WONDERFUL WANDERING	15
12	EVERY DAY	14
13	SHINE THE SHINE	13
14	THE NEW GAME	12
15	REMEMBER	11
16	ALL OF THEM	10
17	WANT TO BE	9
18	DEEP END OF THE	8
19	THE WINDY SPARKLE	7
20	THE BUCKLE PROMISE	6
21	THE NEW GAME	5
22	NOBODY AT HOME	4
23	NEVER SHAKED	3
24	NET FROM BONDOLATA	2
25	SHINE SHINY	1
26	PART OF ME	0
27	WONDERFUL WANDERING	0
28	EVERY DAY	0
29	SHINE THE SHINE	0
30	THE NEW GAME	0
31	REMEMBER	0
32	ALL OF THEM	0
33	WANT TO BE	0
34	DEEP END OF THE	0
35	THE WINDY SPARKLE	0
36	THE BUCKLE PROMISE	0
37	THE NEW GAME	0
38	NOBODY AT HOME	0
39	NEVER SHAKED	0
40	NET FROM BONDOLATA	0
41	SHINE SHINY	0
42	PART OF ME	0
43	WONDERFUL WANDERING	0
44	EVERY DAY	0
45	SHINE THE SHINE	0
46	THE NEW GAME	0
47	REMEMBER	0
48	ALL OF THEM	0

Exp. 2—strong social

Rank	Title	Score
1	WANT TO BE	25
2	DEEP END OF THE	24
3	THE WINDY SPARKLE	23
4	THE BUCKLE PROMISE	22
5	THE NEW GAME	21
6	NOBODY AT HOME	20
7	NEVER SHAKED	19
8	NET FROM BONDOLATA	18
9	SHINE SHINY	17
10	PART OF ME	16
11	WONDERFUL WANDERING	15
12	EVERY DAY	14
13	SHINE THE SHINE	13
14	THE NEW GAME	12
15	REMEMBER	11
16	ALL OF THEM	10
17	WANT TO BE	9
18	DEEP END OF THE	8
19	THE WINDY SPARKLE	7
20	THE BUCKLE PROMISE	6
21	THE NEW GAME	5
22	NOBODY AT HOME	4
23	NEVER SHAKED	3
24	NET FROM BONDOLATA	2
25	SHINE SHINY	1
26	PART OF ME	0
27	WONDERFUL WANDERING	0
28	EVERY DAY	0
29	SHINE THE SHINE	0
30	THE NEW GAME	0
31	REMEMBER	0
32	ALL OF THEM	0
33	WANT TO BE	0
34	DEEP END OF THE	0
35	THE WINDY SPARKLE	0
36	THE BUCKLE PROMISE	0
37	THE NEW GAME	0
38	NOBODY AT HOME	0
39	NEVER SHAKED	0
40	NET FROM BONDOLATA	0
41	SHINE SHINY	0
42	PART OF ME	0
43	WONDERFUL WANDERING	0
44	EVERY DAY	0
45	SHINE THE SHINE	0
46	THE NEW GAME	0
47	REMEMBER	0
48	ALL OF THEM	0



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

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

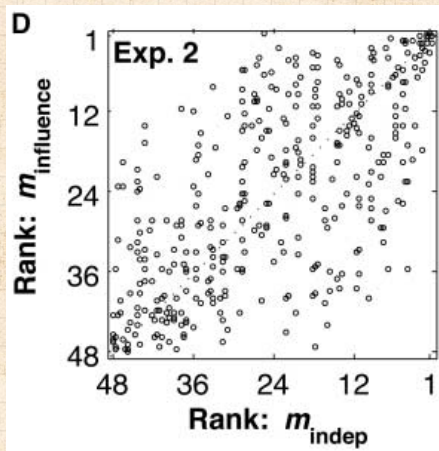


Resolving the paradox:

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Increased social awareness leads to
Stronger inequality + Less predictability.



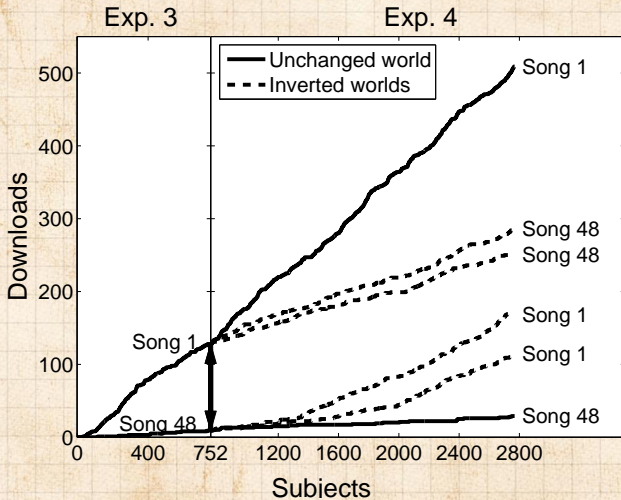
Payola/Deceptive advertising hurts us all:

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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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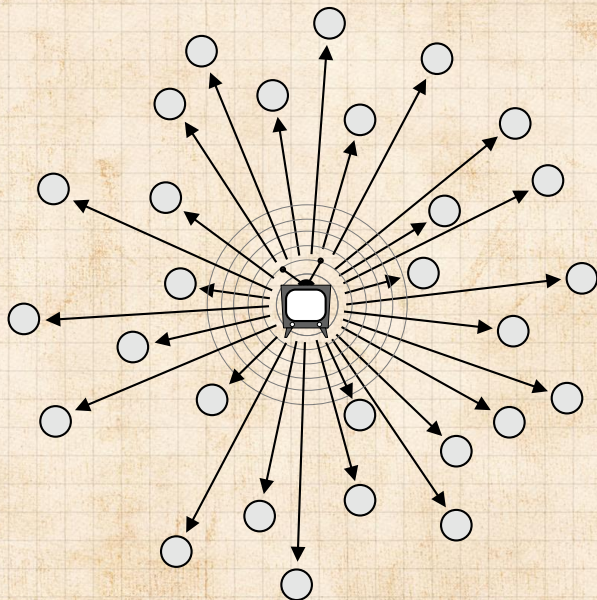
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The hypodermic model of influence:



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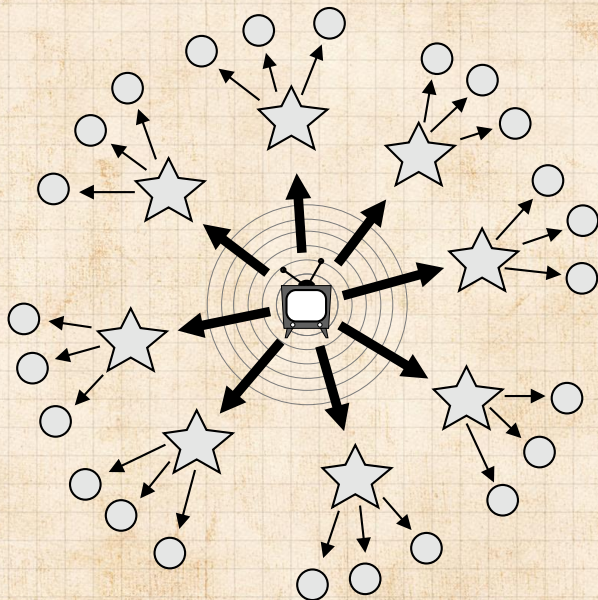
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The two step model of influence: [1]



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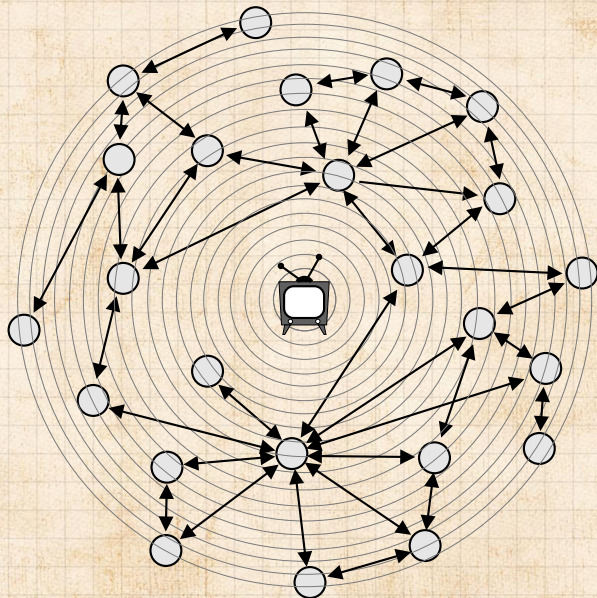
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The network model of influence:



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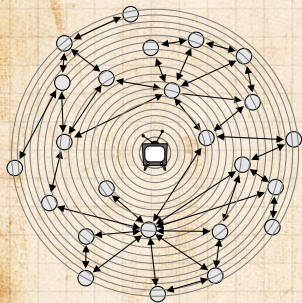
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The network model of influence:



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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“Influentials, Networks, and Public Opinion Formation” 

Watts and Dodds,

J. Consum. Res., **34**, 441–458, 2007. ^[4]



Things that spread quickly:



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+ News ...

buzzfeed.com 



Etymological clarity:

 **Fate**—from the Latin *fatus*: meaning “spoken”.

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Etymological clarity:


 **Fate**—from the Latin *fatus*: meaning “spoken”.



 Fate is talk that has been done.
“It is written”, fore-tell, pre-dict.



Etymological clarity:


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 “There is no such thing as fate, only the story of fate.” 




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 Destiny is probablistic.





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 Fame is inherently the social discussion about the thing, not the thing itself.





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





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
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“There is only one
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“There is only one
thing in the world

worse than being
talked about,



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and that is



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“There is only one
thing in the world

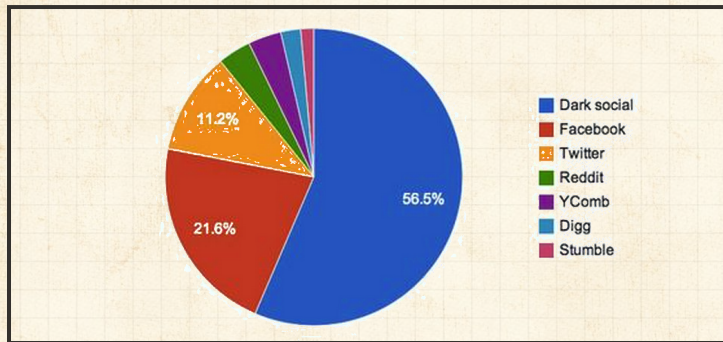
worse than being
talked about,

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



A completely made up pie chart:



Real
Dark
Social



Measurable
Web
stuff

PoCS, Vol. 1
Fame and fate:
Why is global
success so
unpredictable?
26 of 30

Superstars

Superspreading

References



How to make things spread (maybe):

PoCS, Vol. 1
Fame and fate:
Why is global
success so
unpredictable?
27 of 30

Superstars

Superspreading

References



Shareworthy Content is King:

1. Build entities/messages/stories that have intrinsic and social value out in the **Social Wild**.



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.





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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