The PoCSverse
Fame and fate:
Why is global
success so
unpredictable?
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Fame and fate: Why is global success so unpredictable?

Last updated: 2023/08/22, 11:48:23 EDT

Principles of Complex Systems, Vols. 1, 2, & 3 CSYS/MATH 6701, 6713, & a pretend number, 2023–2024| @pocsvox

Prof. Peter Sheridan Dodds | @peterdodds

Computational Story Lab | Vermont Complex Systems Center
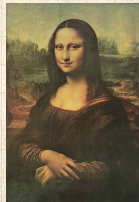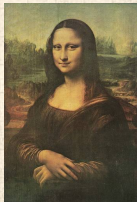Santa Fe Institute | University of Vermont

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Sealie & Lambie
Productions

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On Instagram at pratchett_the_cat
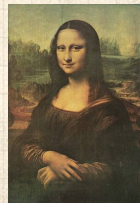
Outline

The PoCSverse
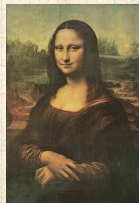Fame and fate:
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THE STORIES CONTAGIOUS

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: [3] "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989"

We understand bushfire stories:

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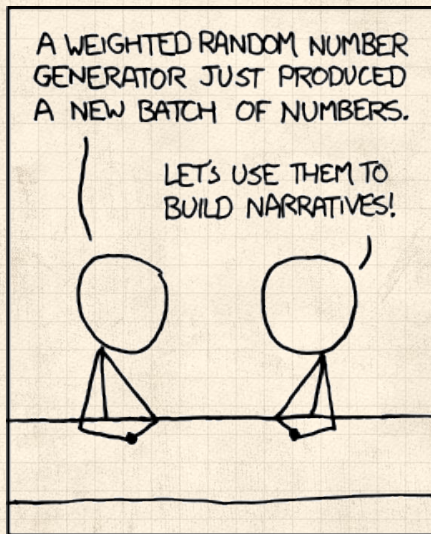
1. Sparks start fires.
2. System properties control a fire's spread.

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

Reason 1—We are Homo Narrativus.

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ALL SPORTS COMMENTARY

http://xkcd.com/904/

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Brian! Brian!
Brian! Brian!

- Archival footage.
- Individual narratives do not describe distributed, networked minds.

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Reason 3—We are spectacular imitators ⊞⏏

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
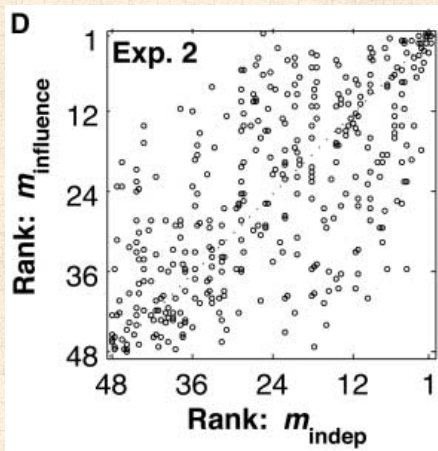30k participants

Exp 1— weak social

Exp. 2—strong social

"An experimental study of inequality and
unpredictability in an artificial cultural
market"🔗
Salganik, Dodds, and Watts,
Science, **311**, 854–856, 2006. [4]

Resolving the paradox:

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Increased social awareness leads to
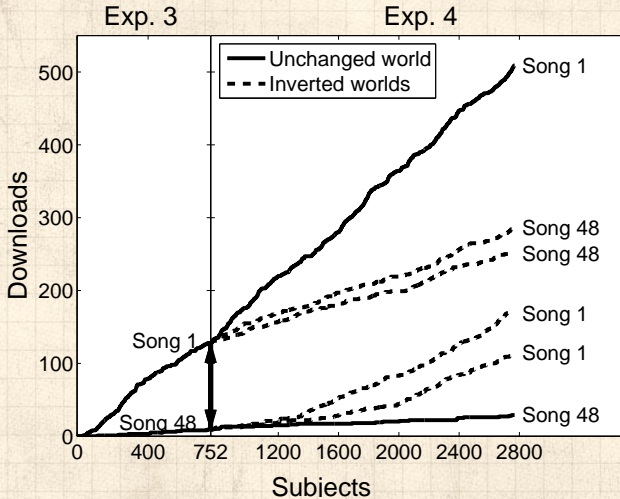Stronger inequality + Less predictability.

Payola/Deceptive advertising hurts us all:

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Exp. 3 Exp. 4

Legend:
— Unchanged world
--- Inverted worlds

Song 1
Song 48
Song 48
Song 1
Song 1
Song 48
Song 1

Downloads (y-axis): 0, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500
Subjects (x-axis): 0, 400, 752, 1200, 1600, 2000, 2400, 2800

Mistake 2:
Seeing success is 'due to social' and wanting to say 'all your interactions are belong to us'

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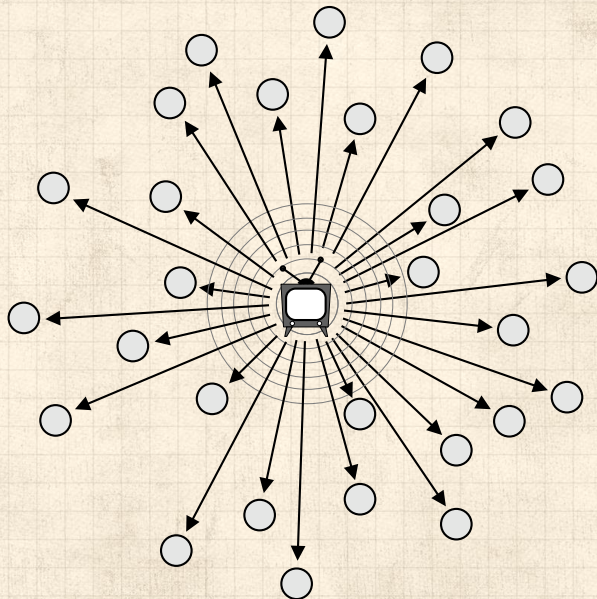Why is global
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The hypodermic model of influence:

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The two step model of influence: [2]

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The network model of influence:

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The network model of influence:

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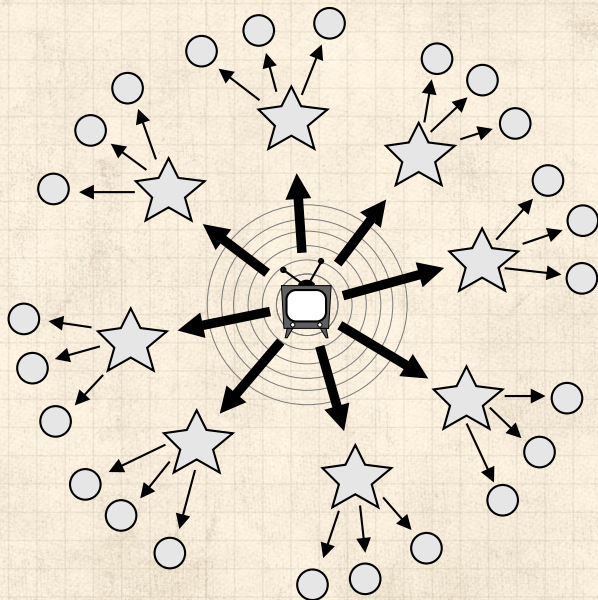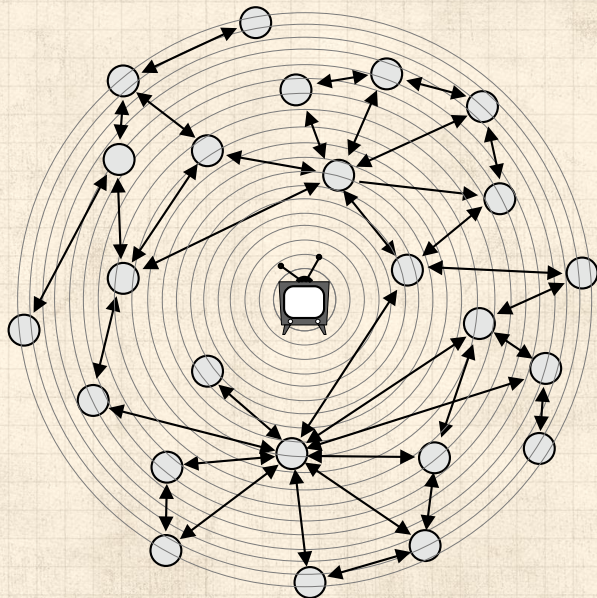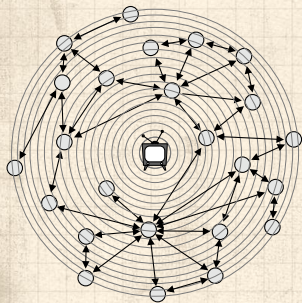Fame and fate:
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How superspreading works:

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

"Influentials, Networks, and Public Opinion
Formation"☐
Watts and Dodds,
J. Consum. Res., **34**, 441–458, 2007. [5]

Things that spread quickly:

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Why is global
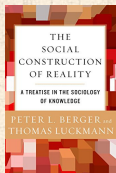success so
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:-p

LOL win omg cute geeky trashy fail wtf

+ News …

buzzfeed.com:

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"The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge" **a**, ☑
by Berger and Luckmann (1991). [1]

- Reality is socially constructed ☑,
  to some hard-to-measure degree.

- People do and don't see this: Fate versus Fortune.

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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.
- "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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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."

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Spreading in the social wild:

The Dark Social Web
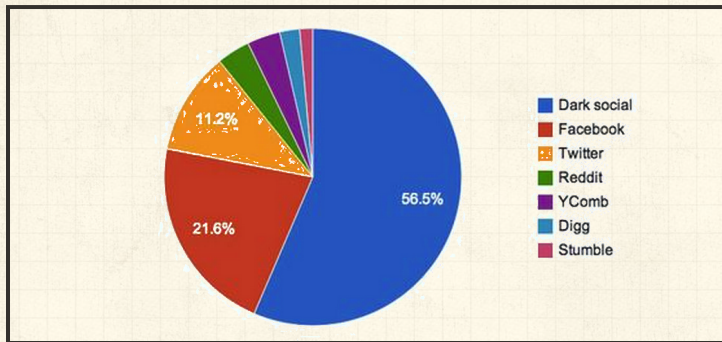
"The only real way to optimize for social spread is in the nature of the content itself. There's no way to game email or people's instant messages. There's no power users you can contact. There's no algorithms to understand. This is pure social, uncut. [sic]"

Dark Social: We Have the Whole History of the Web

A completely made up pie chart:
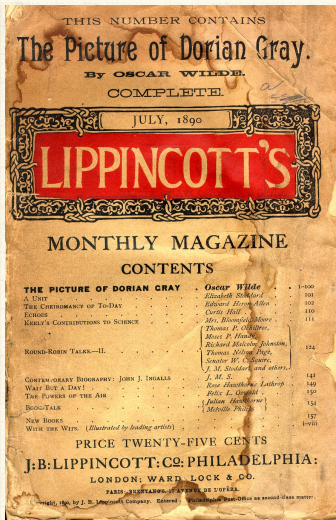
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Real
Dark
Social

Measurable
Web
stuff

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How to make things spread deeply 🎞️☑️

And how to stop things spreading?

Story wars:

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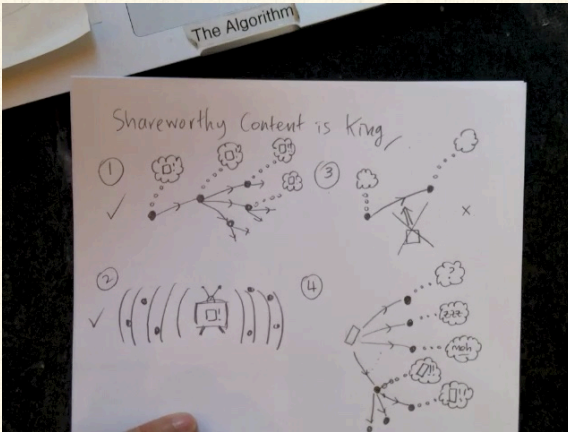
1. Build entities/messages/stories that have intrinsic and social value out in the Social Wild.

2. Advertise but lay off the social interactions.

3. Just keep trying.

Stopping bad shareworthy content:

1. The truth is against an infinitude of adjacent narratives.

2. Build better spreading true stories.

3. Defend social interactions ("do you know who[1] your friends have been imitating?")

4. Just keep trying.

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[1] The whomists are followers of MGGA

References I

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References

[1] P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann.
The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge.
Penguin UK, 1991.

[2] E. Katz and P. F. Lazarsfeld.
Personal Influence.
The Free Press, New York, 1955.

[3] T. Kuran.
Now out of never: The element of surprise in the east european revolution of 1989.
World Politics, 44:7–48, 1991. pdf

[4] M. J. Salganik, P. S. Dodds, and D. J. Watts.
An experimental study of inequality and unpredictability in an artificial cultural market.
Science, 311:854–856, 2006. pdf

References II

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References

[5] D. J. Watts and P. S. Dodds.
Influentials, networks, and public opinion
formation.
Journal of Consumer Research, 34:441–458, 2007.
pdf ☑