Fame and fate: Why is global success so unpredictable?

Last updated: 2021/12/06, 23:34:14 EST

Principles of Complex Systems, Vols. 1 & 2
CSYS/MATH 300 and 303, 2021–2022 | @pocsvox

Prof. Peter Sheridan Dodds | @peterdodds

Computational Story Lab | Vermont Complex Systems Center
Vermont Advanced Computing Core | University of Vermont

Outline

The most famous painting in the world:

PoCS
@pocsvox
Fame and fate:
Why is global
success so
unpredictable?

Superstars
Superspreading
References

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

Twelve …

The completely unpredicted fall of Eastern Europe:

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

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…

Reason 1—We are Homo Narrativus.

http://xkcd.com/904/
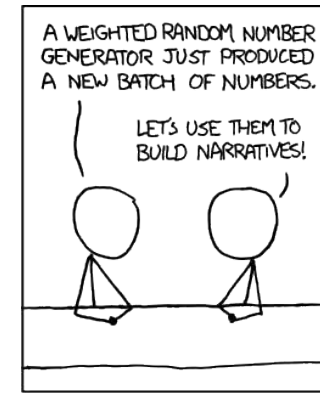
Reason 2—"We are all individuals."

Archival footage:

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

Reason 3—We are spectacular imitators.

BBC/David Attenborough.

Mistake 1:
Success is due to intrinsic properties

See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon ⬈

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:

Increased social awareness leads to
Stronger inequality + Less predictability.

PoCS
@pocsvox
Fame and fate:
Why is global
success so
unpredictable?

Superstars
Superspreading
References

Payola/Deceptive advertising hurts us all:
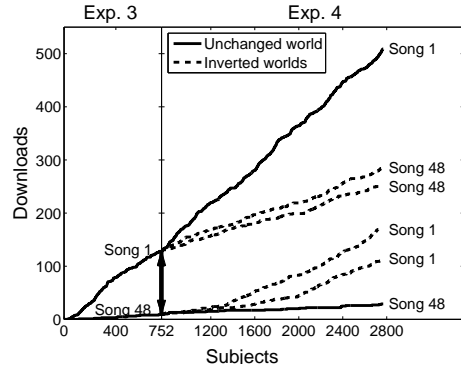
PoCS
@pocsvox
Fame and fate:
Why is global
success so
unpredictable?

Superstars
Superspreading
References

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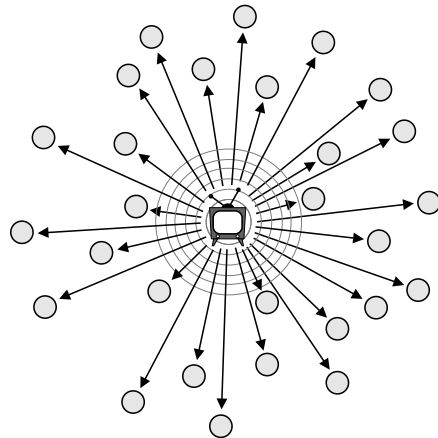## Seeing success is 'due to social' and wanting to say 'all your interactions are belong to us'

PoCS
@pocsvox
Fame and fate:
Why is global
success so
unpredictable?

Superstars
Superspreading
References

The hypodermic model of influence:

PoCS
@pocsvox
Fame and fate:
Why is global
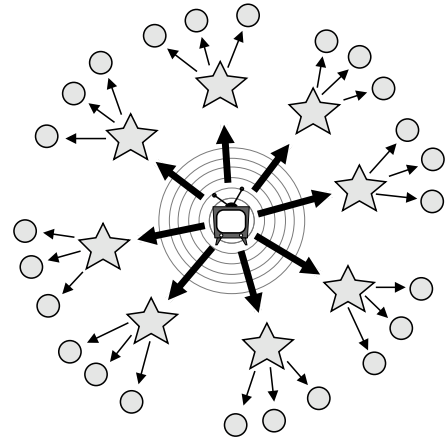success so
unpredictable?

Superstars
Superspreading
References

The two step model of influence: [2]

PoCS
@pocsvox
Fame and fate:
Why is global
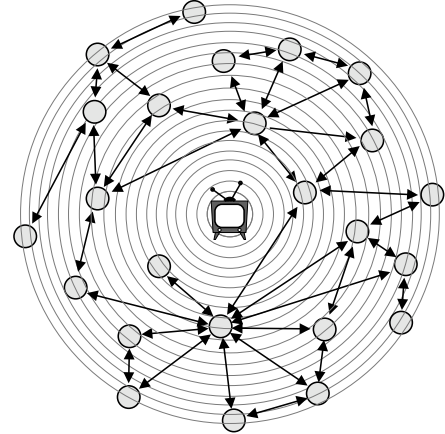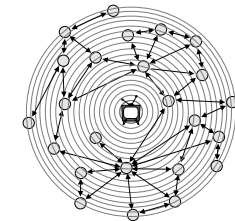success so
unpredictable?

Superstars
Superspreading
References

The network model of influence:

PoCS
@pocsvox
Fame and fate:
Why is global
success so
unpredictable?

Superstars
Superspreading
References

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.

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

Things that spread quickly:

:-p

LOL win omg cute geeky trashy fail wtf

+ News ...

"The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge" 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.

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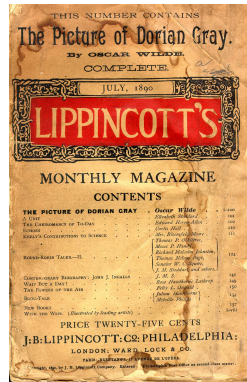- Réclame. "Clamo"—Proto-Indo-European: "to shout" (again). Connected to "lowing".

PoCS
@pocsvox
Fame and fate:
Why is global
success so
unpredictable?

Superstars
Superspreading
References

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."

Spreading in the social wild:

The Dark Social Web

Dark social	56.5%
Facebook	21.6%
Twitter	11.2%
Reddit	
YComb	
Digg	
Stumble	

"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:

Real Dark Social

Measurable Web Stuff

How to make things spread (maybe):

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.

References I

[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

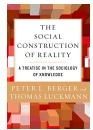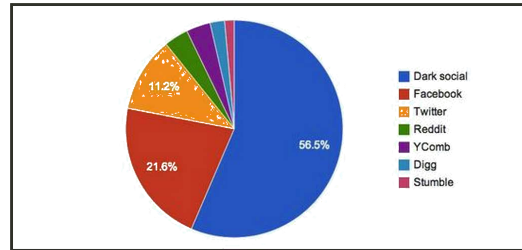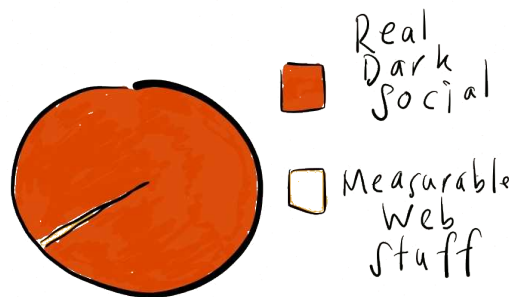
References II

PoCS
@pocsvox
Fame and fate: Why is global success so unpredictable?

Superstars

Superspreading

References

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