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

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

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



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# Outline

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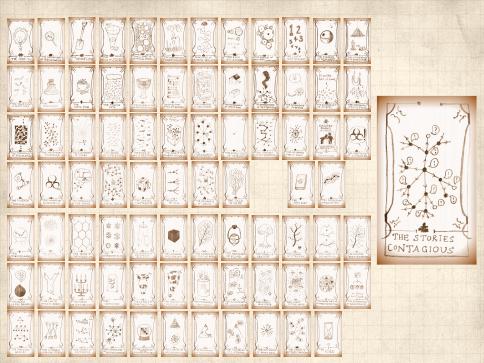
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# The most famous painting in the world:

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

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# The completely unpredicted fall of Eastern Europe:

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

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# 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.

A WEIGHTED RANDOM NUMBER GENERATOR JUST PRODUCED A NEW BATCH OF NUMBERS.

> LET'S USE THEM TO BUILD NARRATIVES!

ALL SPORTS COMMENTARY

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http://xkcd.com/904/

## Reason 2—"We're all individuals!" 🖽 🖸



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#### 🚳 Archival footage.

Individual narratives do not describe distributed, networked minds.



## Reason 3—We are spectacular imitators 🖽 🖸



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References

**BBC/David Attenborough** 



# Mistake 1: Success is due to intrinsic properties

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See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon 🗹



#### 48 songs 30k participants

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#### Exp 1— weak social

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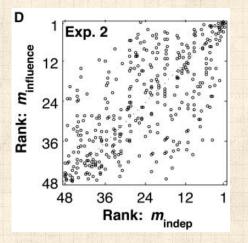
Exp 2-strong social



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



# Resolving the paradox:



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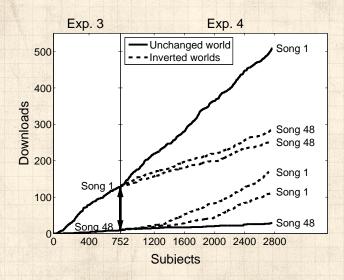
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Increased social awareness leads to Stronger inequality + Less predictability.



## 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'

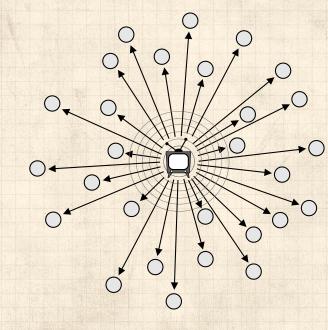


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# The hypodermic model of influence:



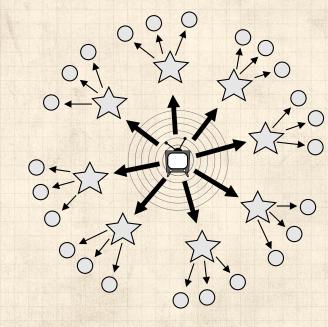
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# The two step model of influence: [2]



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# The network model of influence:

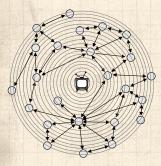
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# The network model of influence:



#### 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" C Watts and Dodds, J. Consum. Res., **34**, 441–458, 2007. <sup>[5]</sup>



## Things that spread quickly:







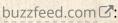
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cute geeky trashy fail

# + News ...





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"The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge" **3**, **2** by Berger and Luckmann (1991). <sup>[1]</sup> Superstars Superspreading

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Reality is socially constructed C, 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".

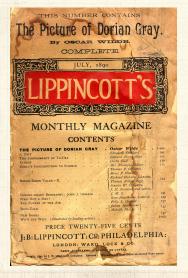
- Fate is talk that has been done."It is written", fore-tell, pre-dict.
- "There is no such thing as fate, only the story of fate."
- 🚳 Destiny is probablistic.
- Fame—from the Latin fāma: meaning "to talk."
- Fame is inherently the social discussion about the thing, not the thing itself.
- Renown C: 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." The PoCSverse Fame and fate: Why is global success so unpredictable? 25 of 31

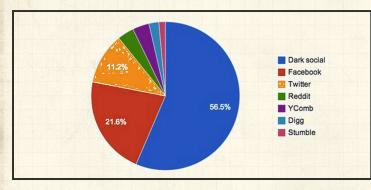
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## Spreading in the social wild:

### **The Dark Social Web**



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"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]"

loark Social: We Have the Whole History of the Web



# A completely made up pie chart:

Real Dark Social

Measurable Web Stuff

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## How to make things spread deeply 🖽 🖸

The Algorithm Shareworthy Content is King 

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And how to stop things spreading?



## Story wars:

#### 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.
- Defend social interactions ("do you know who<sup>1</sup>your friends have been imitating?")
- 4. Just keep trying.

<sup>1</sup>The whomists are followers of MGGA

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

#### [3] T. Kuran.

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[4] M. J. Salganik, P. S. Dodds, and D. J. Watts. An experimental study of inequality and unpredictability in an artificial cultural market. <u>Science</u>, 311:854–856, 2006. pdf C The PoCSverse Fame and fate: Why is global success so unpredictable? 30 of 31

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## References II

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

