

Fame and fate: Why is global success so unpredictable?

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Superstars
Superspreading
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Outline

Superstars

Superspreading

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

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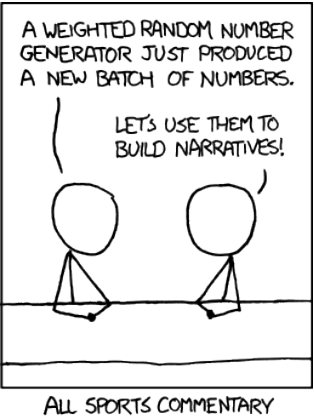
We understand bushfire stories:

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

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Twelve ...

Reason 1—We are Homo Narrativus.



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Mistake 1:
Success is due to intrinsic properties

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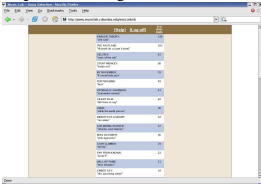
48 songs
30k participants

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Exp 1— weak social

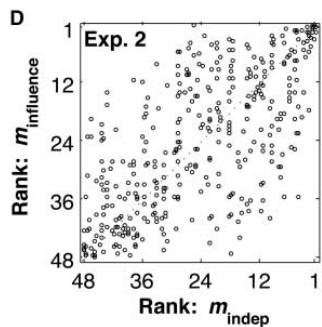


Exp. 2—strong social

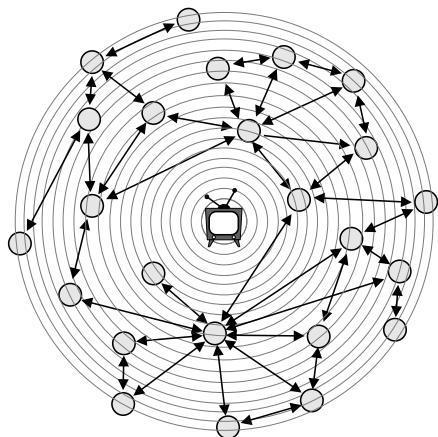


“An experimental study of inequality and unpredictability in an artificial cultural market” [↗](#)
Salganik, Dodds, and Watts,
Science, **311**, 854–856, 2006. ^[4]

Increased social awareness leads to **Stronger inequality + Less predictability.**

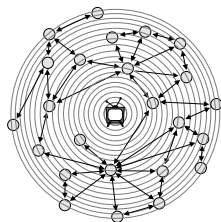
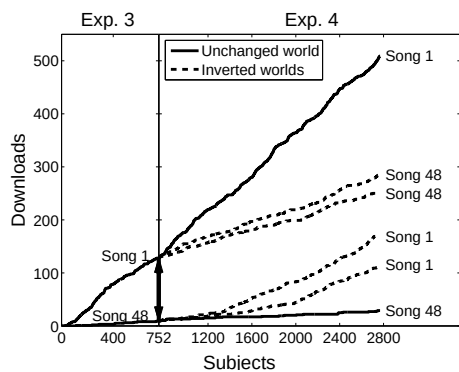


The network model of influence:



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The network model of influence:



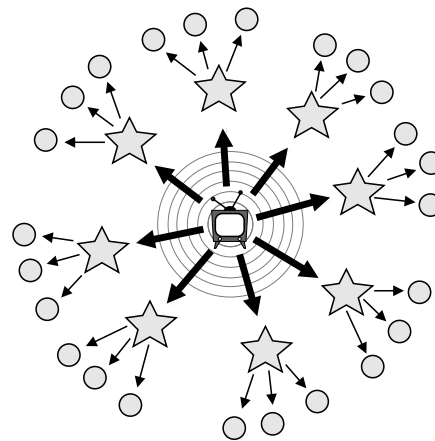
Many interconnected, average, trusting people must benefit from both receiving and sharing a message far from its source.

“Influentials, Networks, and Public Opinion
Formation” 
Watts and Dodds,
J. Consum. Res., 34, 441–458, 2007. ^[5]

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Things that spread quickly:

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



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LOL win omg cute geeky trashy fail wtf

+ News ...

buzzfeed.com ↗:



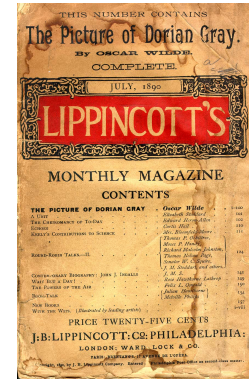
“The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge”
by Berger and Luckmann (1991).^[1]

- 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 probabilistic.
- Fame**—from the Latin *fama*: 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”.

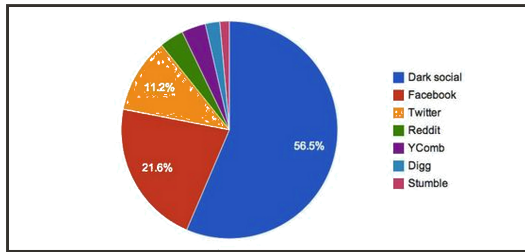
Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray



“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:

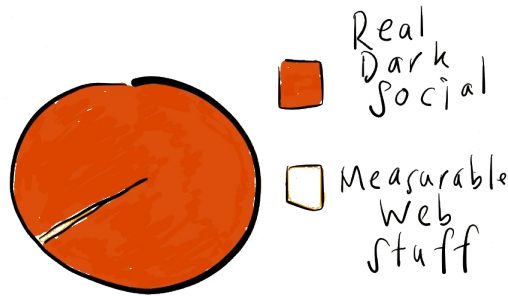
The Dark Social Web



“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 Wrong
[Alexis Madrigal, The Atlantic, 2012-10-12]

A completely made up pie chart:



Story wars:

Shareworthy content:

- Build entities/messages/stories that have intrinsic and social value out in the **Social Wild**.
- Advertise but lay off the social interactions.
- Just keep trying.

Stopping bad shareworthy content:

- The truth is against an infinitude of adjacent narratives.
- Build better spreading true stories.
- Defend social interactions (“do you know who¹ your friends have been imitating?”)
- Just keep trying.

¹The whomists are followers of MGGA

References I

- P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann.
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Penguin UK, 1991.
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World Politics, 44:7–48, 1991. pdf
- M. J. Salganik, P. S. Dodds, and D. J. Watts.
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- D. J. Watts and P. S. Dodds.
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