Why is global success so unpredictable? Making sense of influence, social contagion, marketing, and stories.

Principles of Complex Systems
CSYS/MATH 300, Spring, 2013 | #SpringPoCS2013

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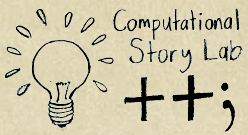

Superstars
Superspreading
References

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Superstars
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References

Outline

Why is global success so unpredictable?

Superstars

Superspreading

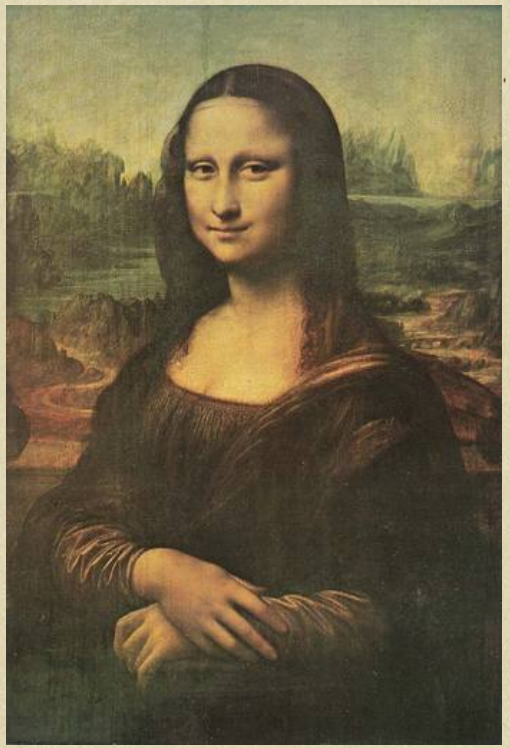
References

Superstars

Superspreading

References

The most famous painting in the world:



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

Superstars
Superspreading
References

Twelve . . .

The completely unpredicted fall of Eastern Europe:

Superstars
Superspreading
References

Timur Kuran:[2] “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.

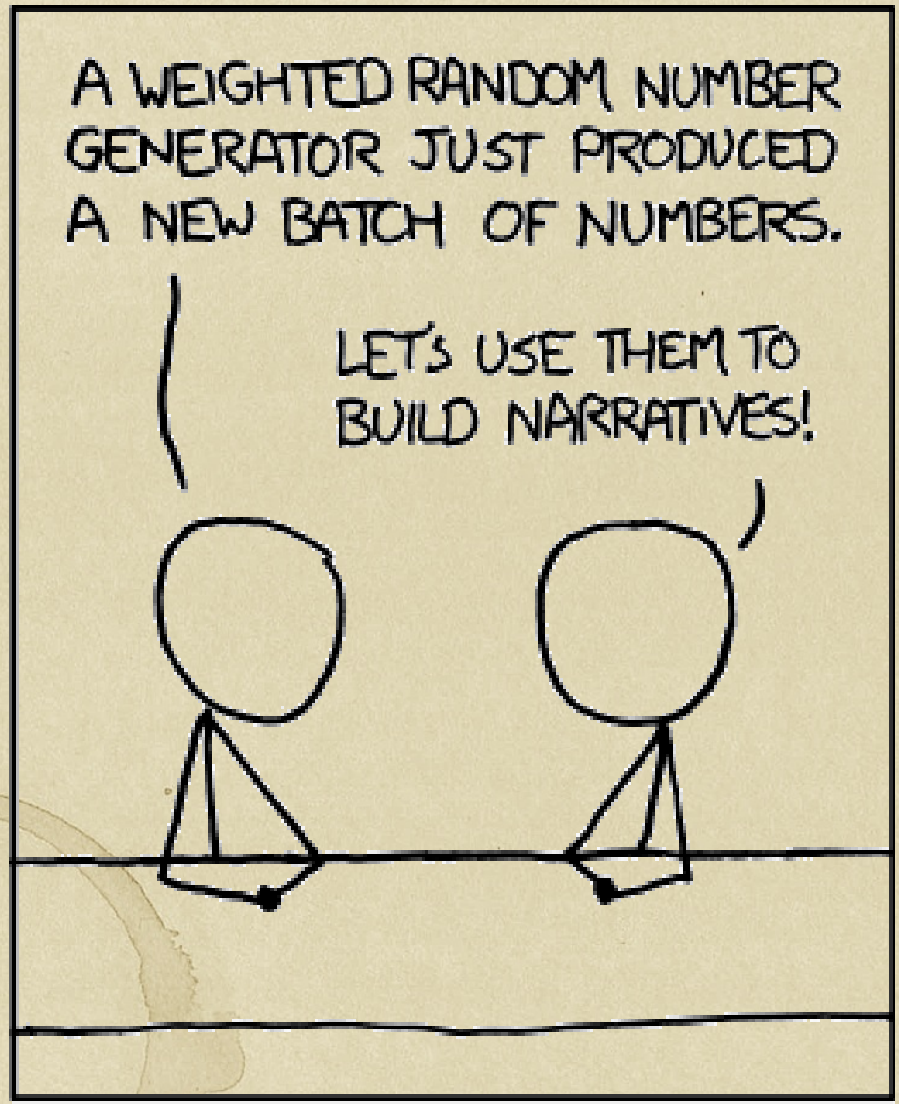
3. But we make two mistakes about Social Fires...

How we want to understand:

‘Tattooed Guy’ Was Pivotal in Armstrong Case [nytimes] (⊞)

- “... Leogrande’s doping sparked a series of events ...”

Reason 1—We are Homo Narrativus:



http://xkcd.com/904/ (⊞)

Reason 2—“We are all individuals”:

Superstars

Superspreading

References

Reason 3—We are spectacular imitators:

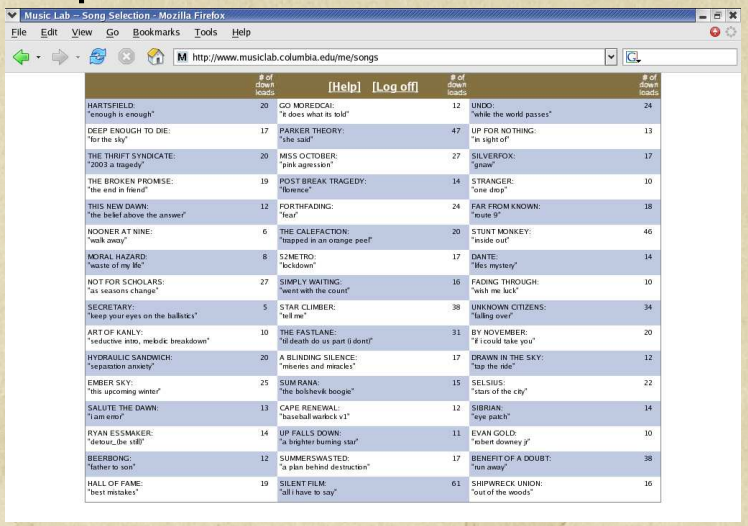
BBC/David Attenborough.

Mistake 1:
Success is due to intrinsic properties

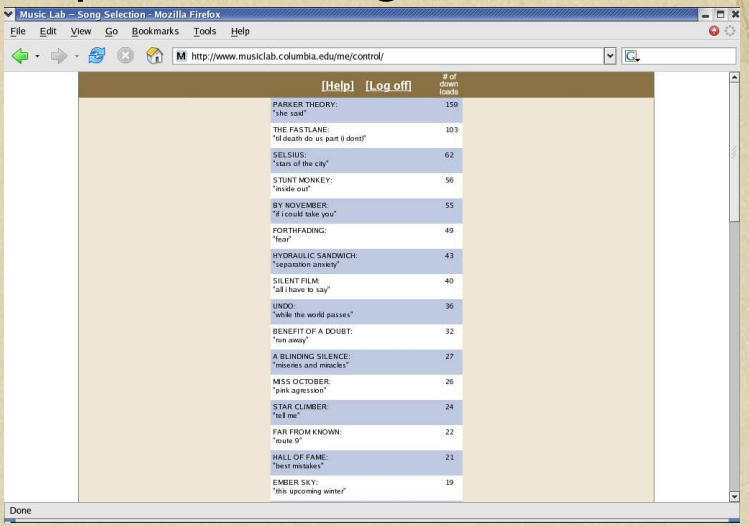
See “Becoming Mona Lisa” by David Sassoon (⊞)

48 songs
30k participants

Exp 1— weak social

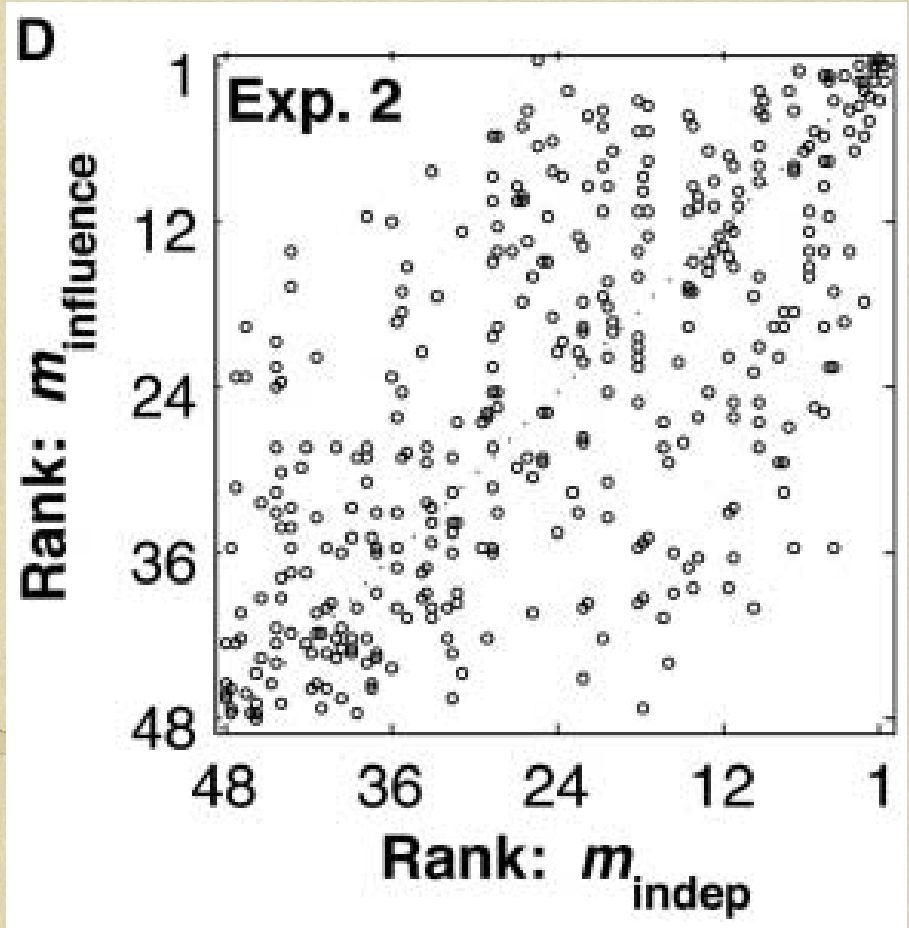


Exp. 2—strong social



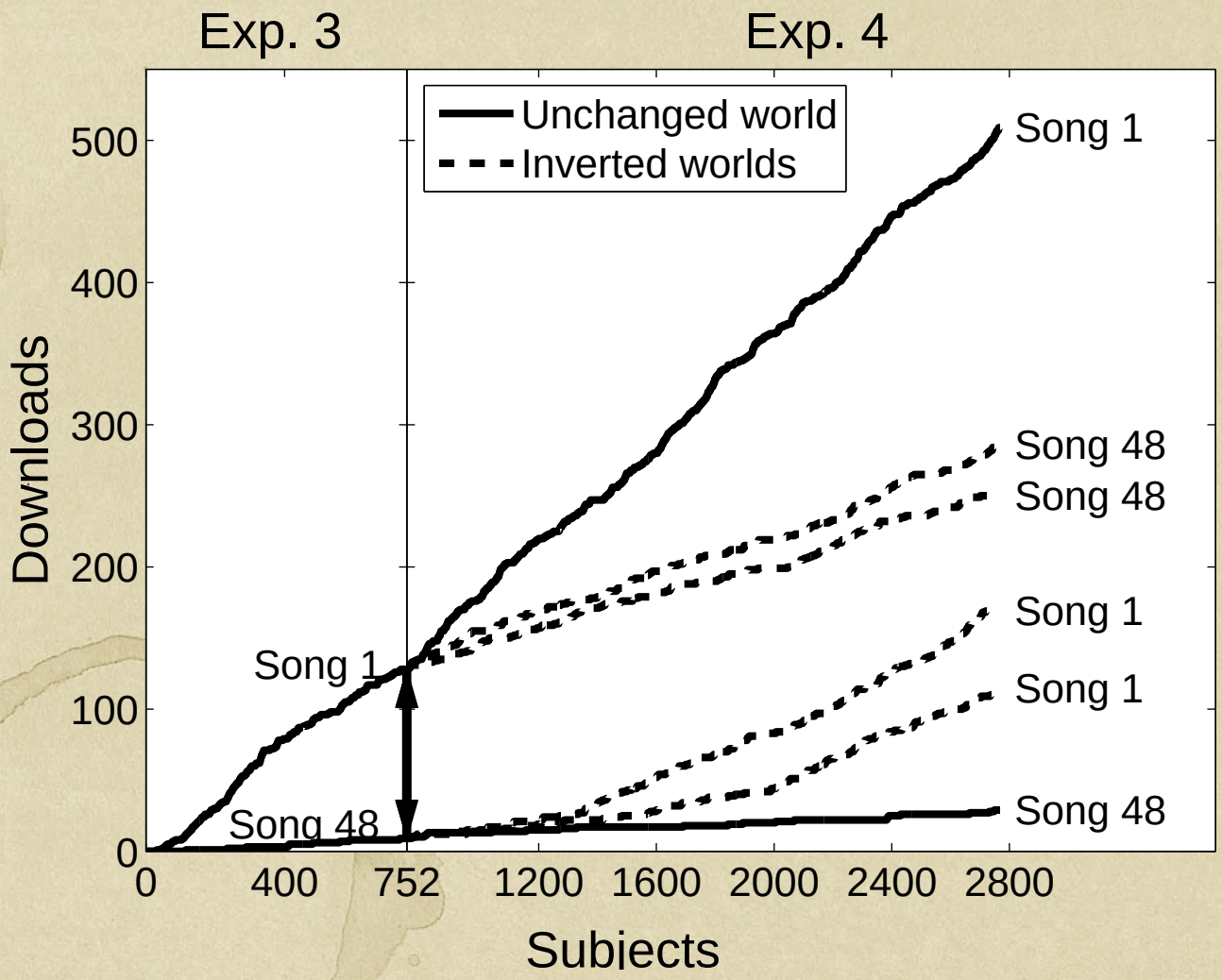
"An experimental study of inequality and unpredictability in an artificial cultural market," [3] Salganik et al., Science, 2006.

Resolving the paradox:



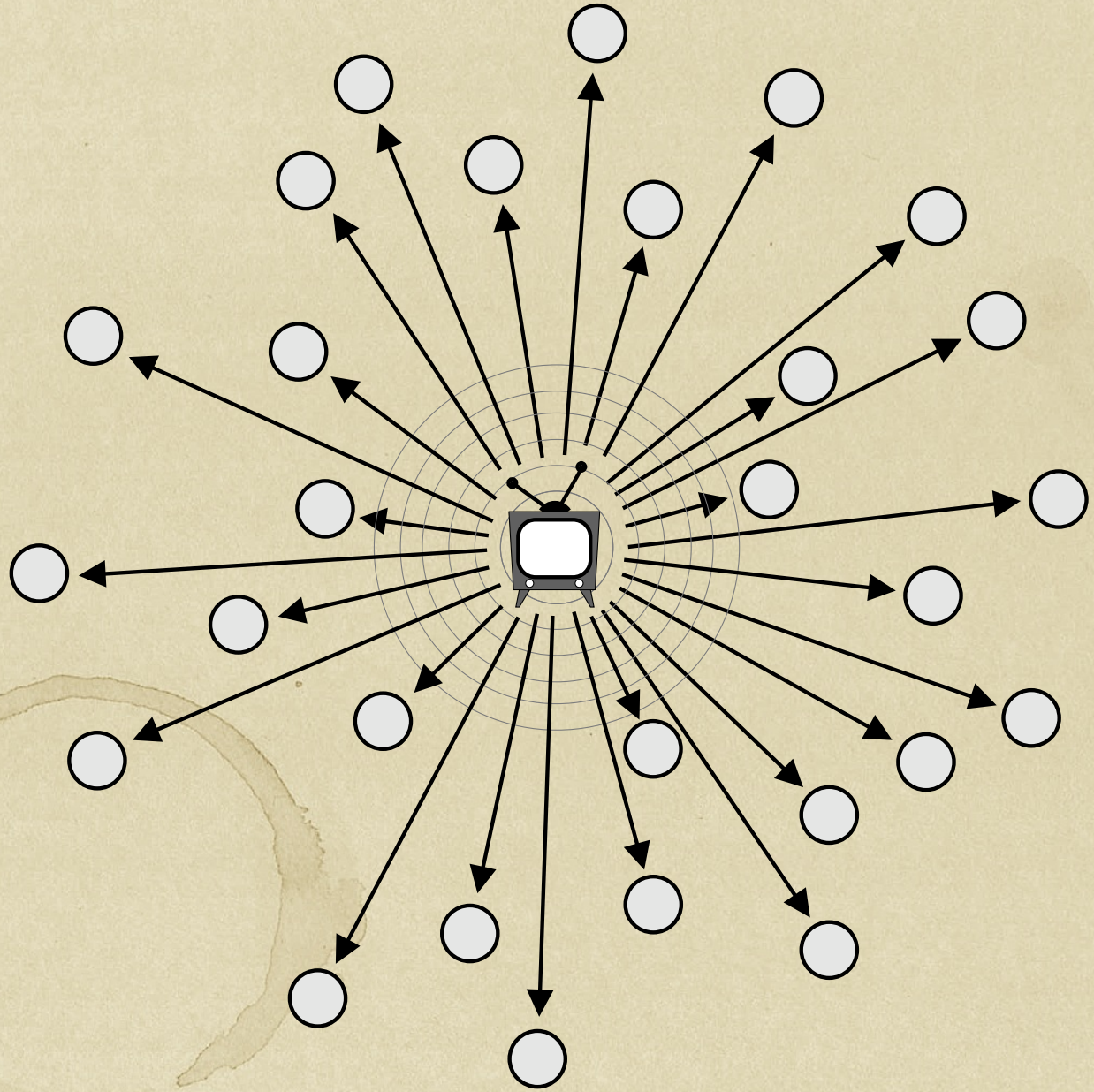
Increased social awareness:
Stronger inequality + Less predictability.

Payola/Deceptive advertising hurts us all:

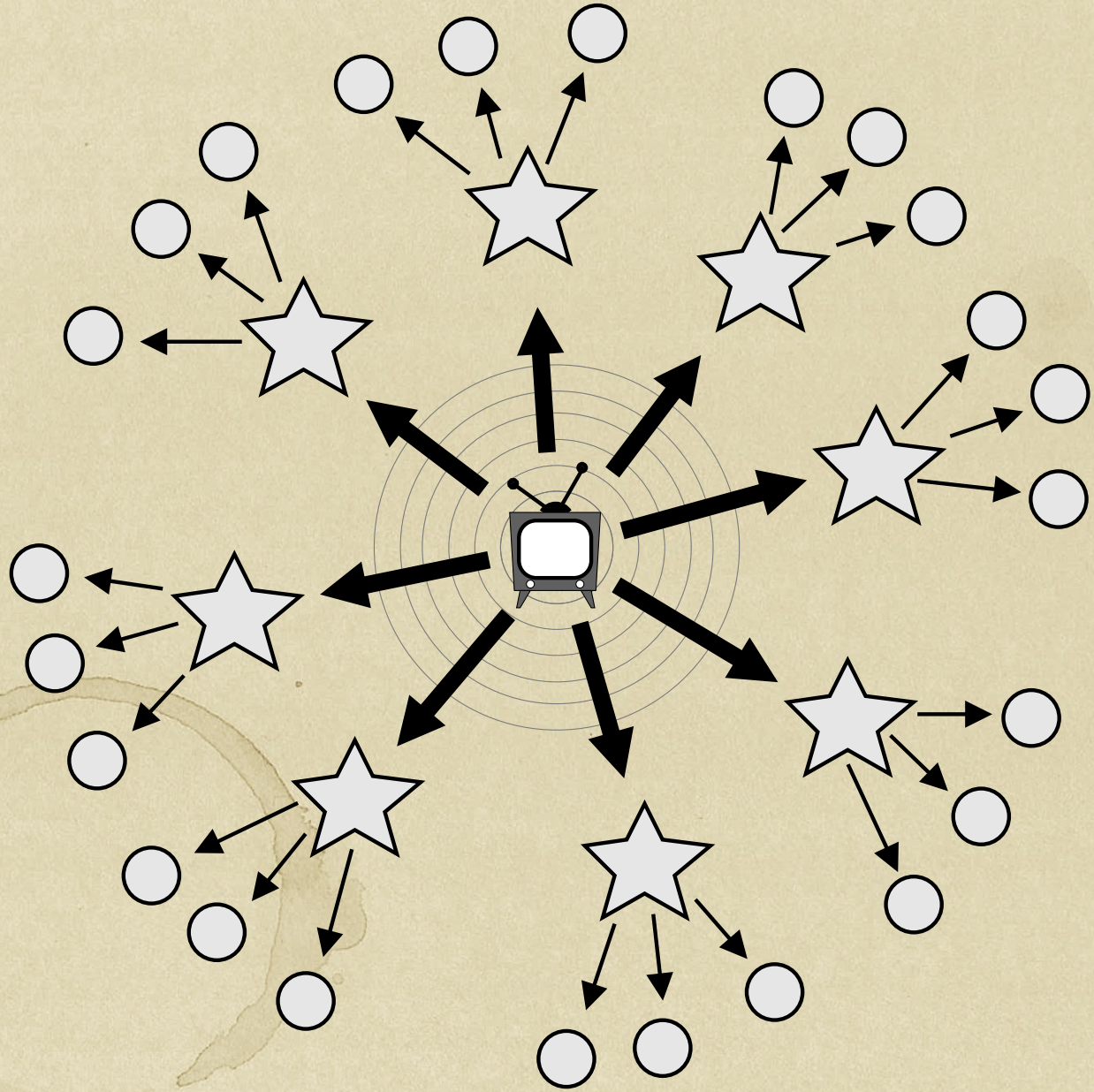


Mistake 2:
Seeing success is ‘due to social’ and wanting to say ‘all your interactions are belong to us’

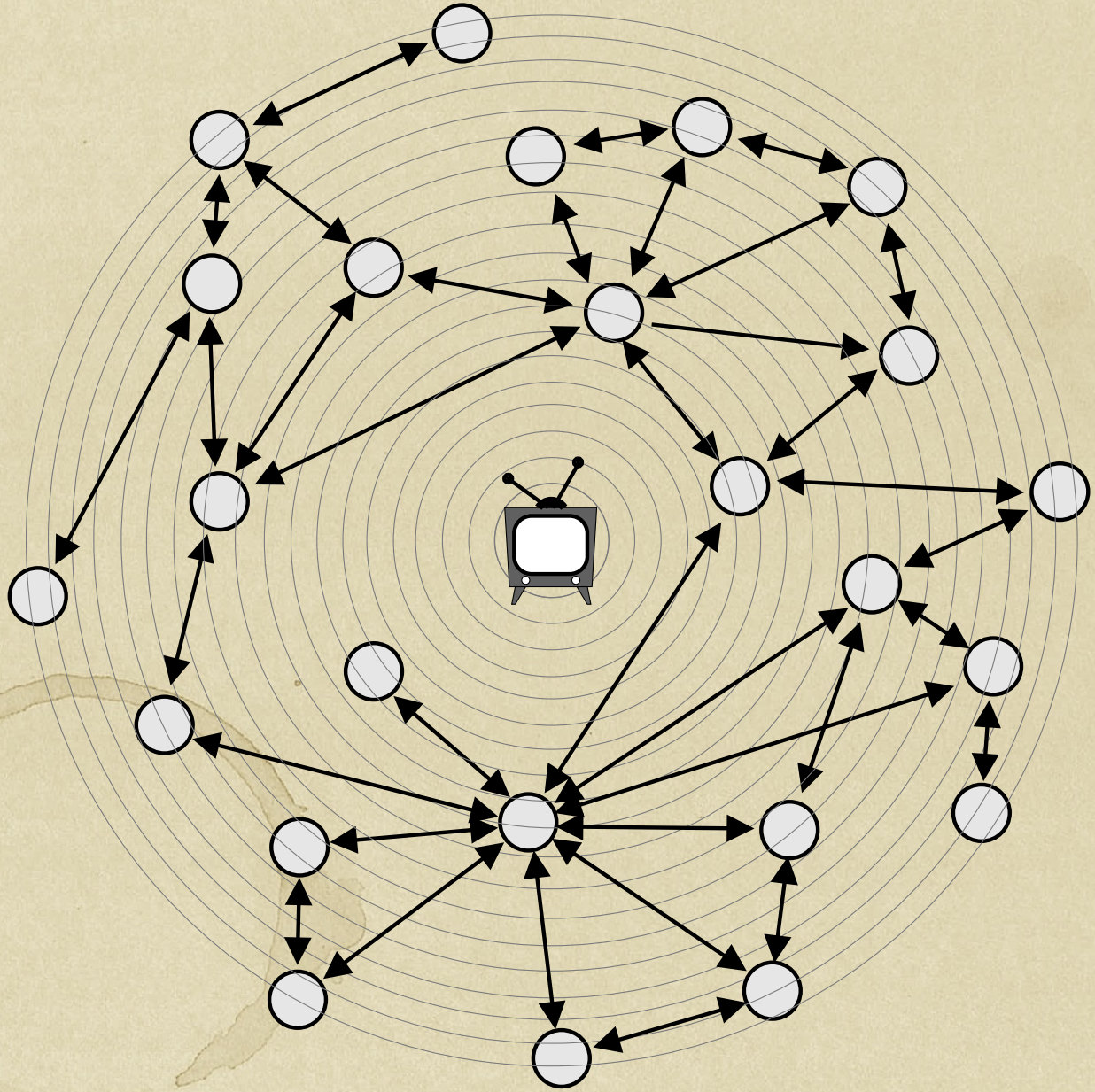
The hypodermic model of influence:



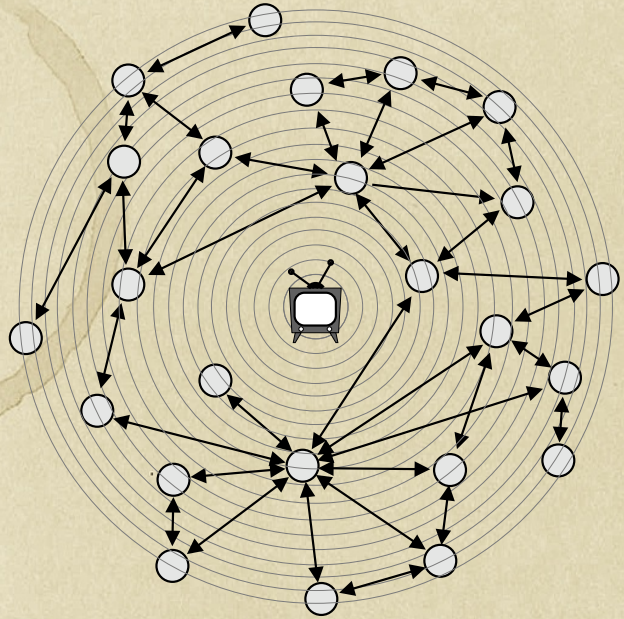
The two step model of influence: [1]



The network model of influence:



The network model of influence:

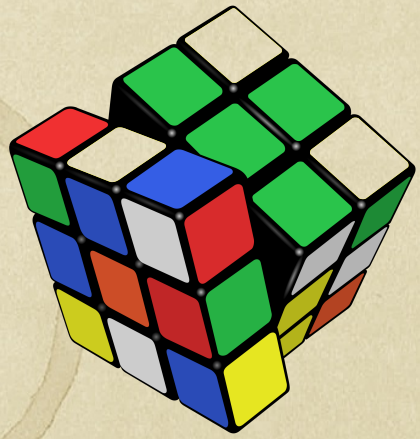


How superspreading works:

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

"Influentials, Networks, and Public Opinion Formation" [4]
Watts and Dodds, J. Cons. Res., 2007.

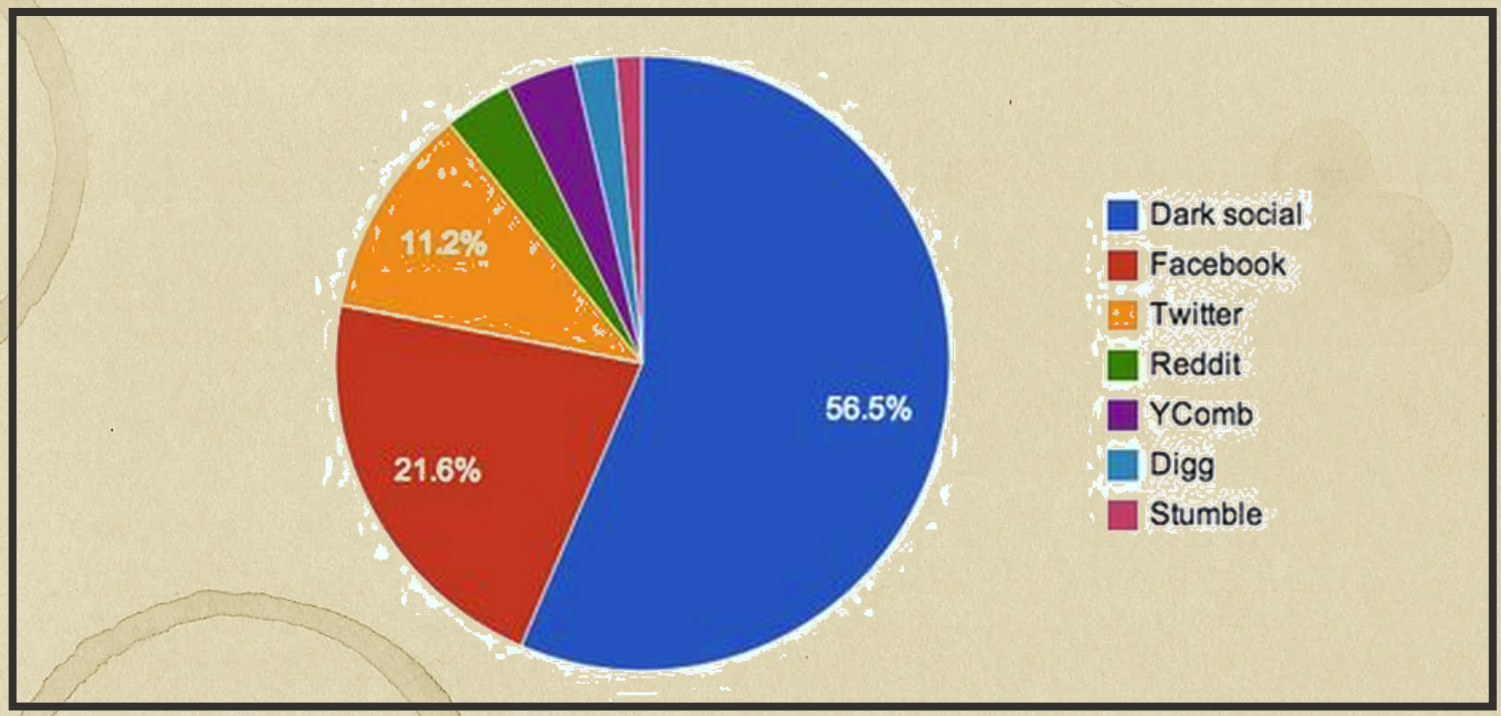
Things that spread quickly:



+ News ...

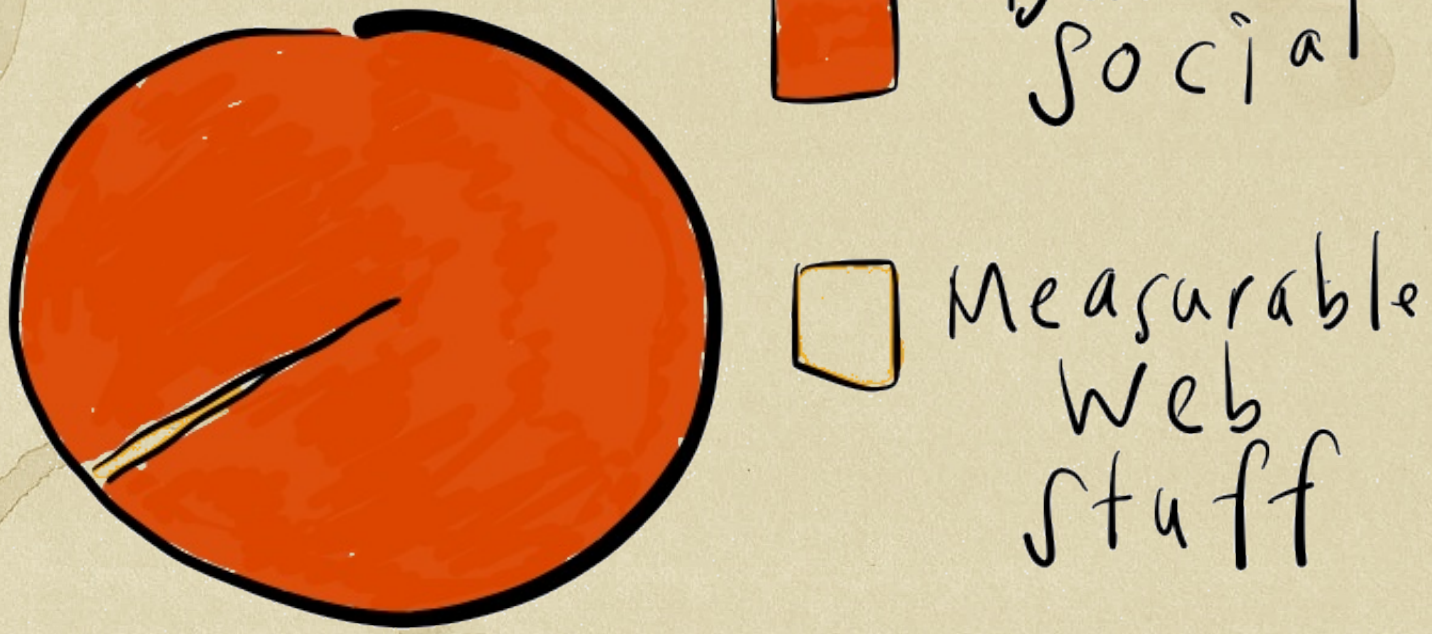
buzzfeed.com (⊞):

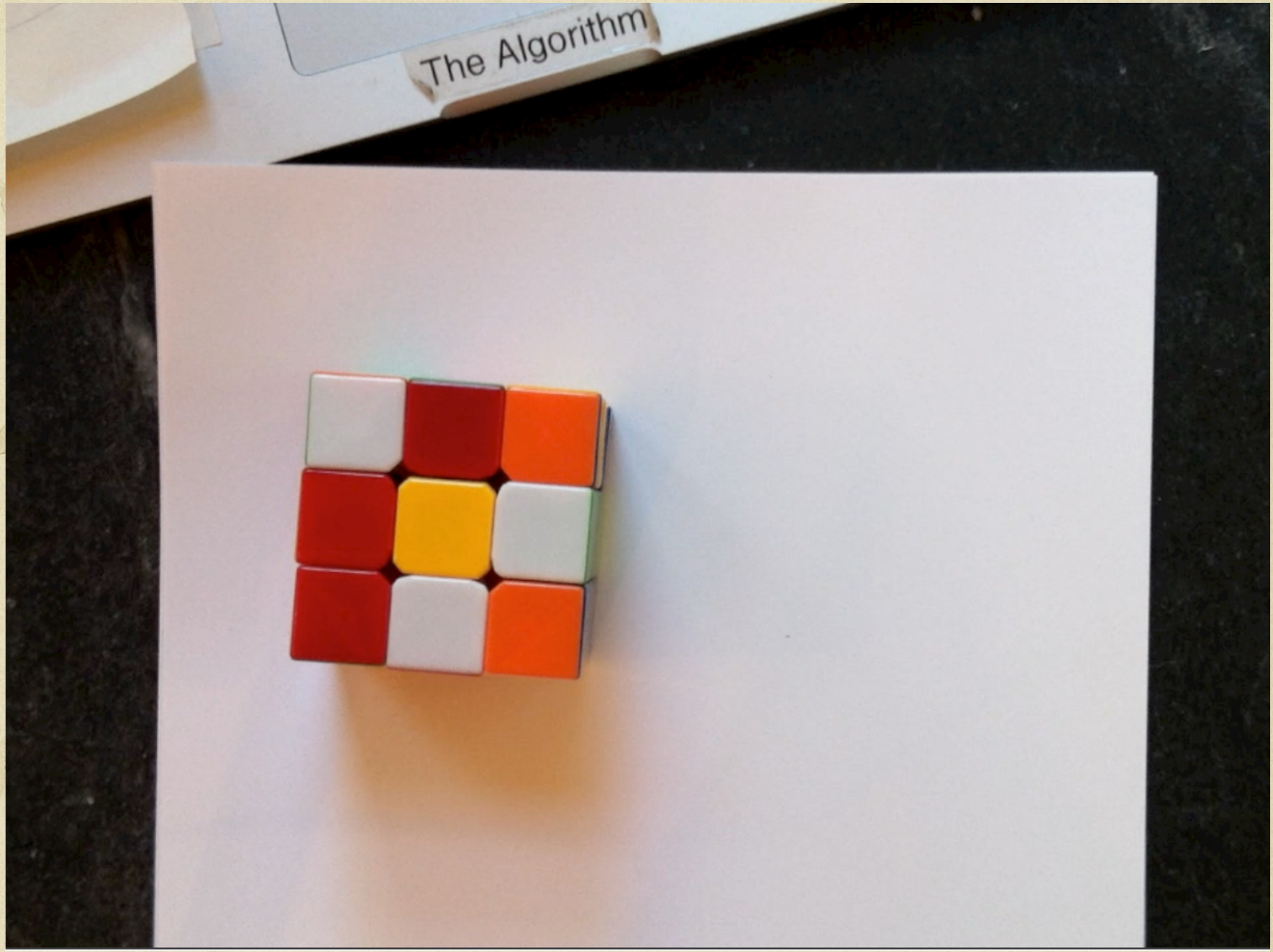
The Dark Social Web



Dark Social: We Have the Whole History of the Web Wrong (⊞) [The Atlantic]

A completely made up pie chart:




The Algorithm

References I

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

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

[3] 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 (⊞)

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