Why is global success so unpredictable?

Making sense of influence, social contagion, marketing, and stories.

Principles of Complex Systems
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Outline

Superstars

Superspreading

References

The most famous painting in the world:

The dismal predictive powers of editors . . . . .

The completely unpredicted fall of Eastern Europe:

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:

Reason 2—“We are all individuals”:

Reason 3—We are spectacular imitators:

Mistake 1: Success is due to intrinsic properties

See “Becoming Mona Lisa” by David Sassoon (✉)
Our results support the hypothesis that social influence, which here is restricted only to information regarding the choices of others, contributes both to inequality and unpredictability. This is true in both the artificial cultural market and in real-world cultural markets.

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’
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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.

"Influentials, Networks, and Public Opinion Formation"[4]

The Dark Social Web

A completely made up pie chart:

Things that spread quickly:

"Influentials, Networks, and Public Opinion Formation"[4]
References

   Personal Influence. 

   Now out of never: The element of surprise in the east 
   european revolution of 1989. 

   An experimental study of inequality and 
   unpredictability in an artificial cultural market. 

   Influentials, networks, and public opinion formation. 