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Fame and fate:
Why is global
success so
unpredictable?

Fame and fate: Why is global success so unpredictable?

Principles of Complex Systems | @pocsvox
CSYS/MATH 300, Fall, 2017

Prof. Peter Dodds | @peterdodds

Dept. of Mathematics & Statistics | Vermont Complex Systems Center
Vermont Advanced Computing Core | University of Vermont

The University of Vermont

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Complex Systems
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What's the Story?

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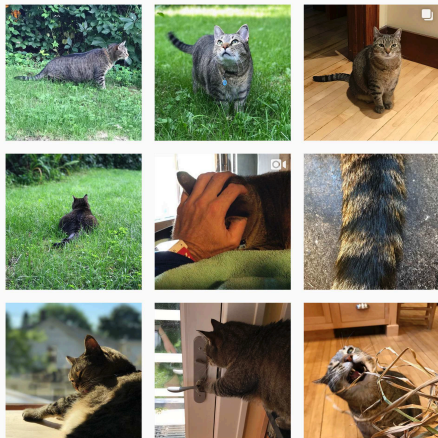

Sealie & Lambie
Productions
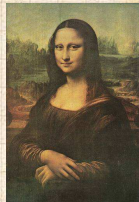
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Superstars

Superspreading

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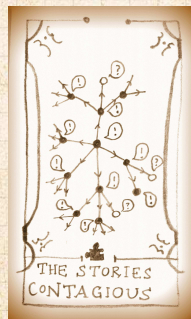
Outline

Superstars

Superspreading
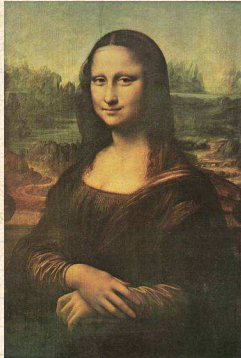
References

THE STORIES CONTAGIOUS

The most famous painting in the world:

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

Twelve ...

The completely unpredicted fall of Eastern Europe:

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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.

We understand bushfire stories:

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Why is global
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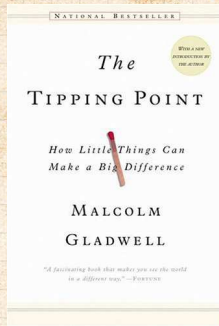Superstars

Superspreading

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3. But we make two mistakes about Social Fires...
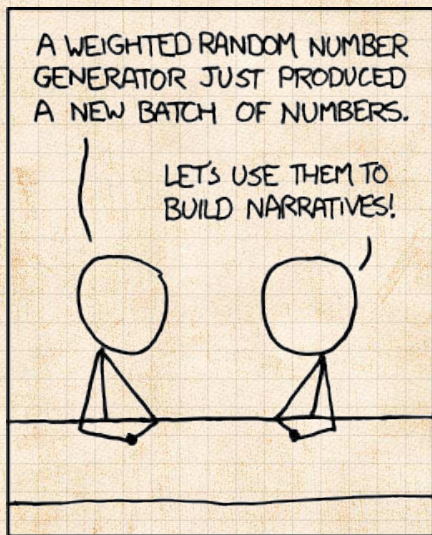
Reason 1—We are Homo Narrativus.

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Reason 2—"We are all individuals." 🔗

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Archival footage:

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

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Reason 3—We are spectacular imitators.

BBC/David Attenborough.

Mistake 1:
Success is due to intrinsic properties

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See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon ⧉

Mistake 1:
Success is due to intrinsic properties

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it's just so disappointingly small

See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon ☐

Mistake 1:
Success is due to intrinsic properties

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Stolen in 1913, recovered in 1915.

See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon ⌕

Mistake 1:
Success is due to intrinsic properties
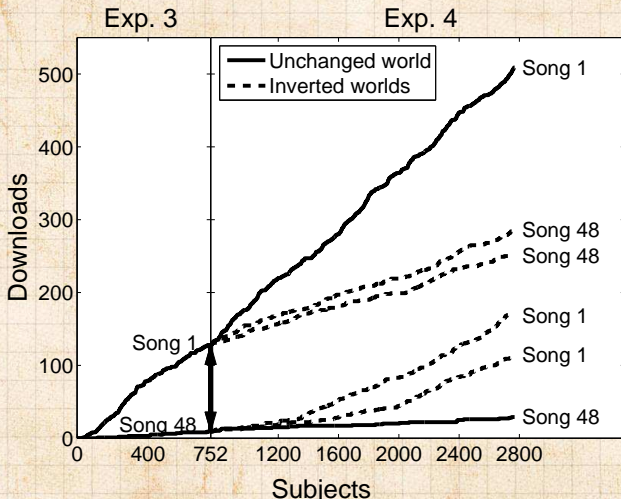
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Hidden during WWII.

See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon

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Repeatedly vandalised and attacked. 🗗

See "Becoming Mona Lisa" by David Sassoon 🗗

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48 songs
30k participants

Exp 1— weak social

Exp. 2—strong social

"An experimental study of inequality and unpredictability in an artificial cultural market" 🔗
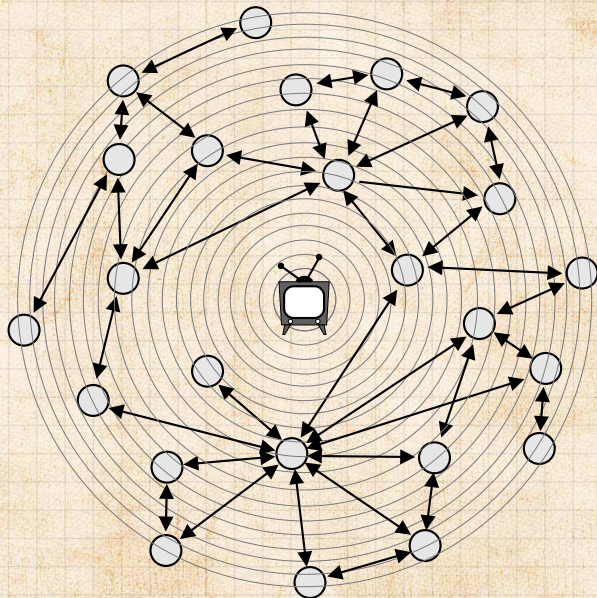Salganik, Dodds, and Watts,
Science, **311**, 854–856, 2006. [3]

Resolving the paradox:

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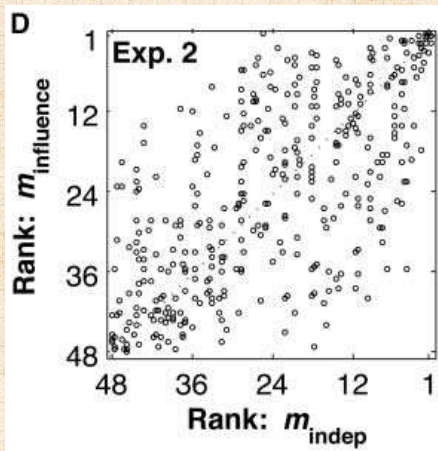
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Increased social awareness leads to
Stronger inequality + Less predictability.

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'

The hypodermic model of influence:

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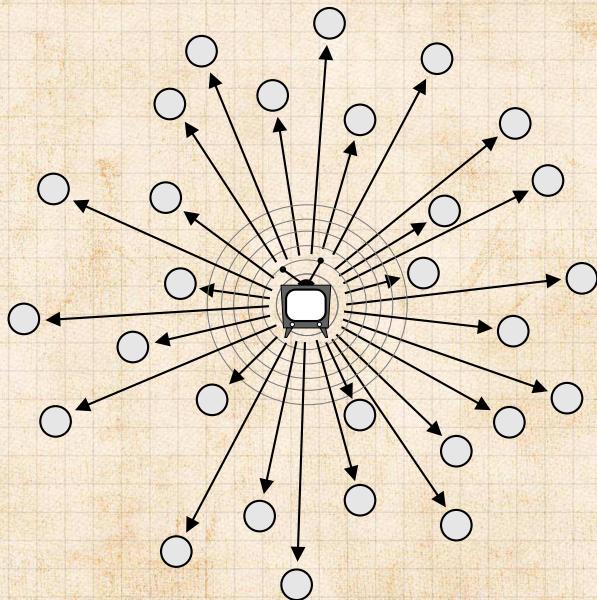
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The two step model of influence: [1]

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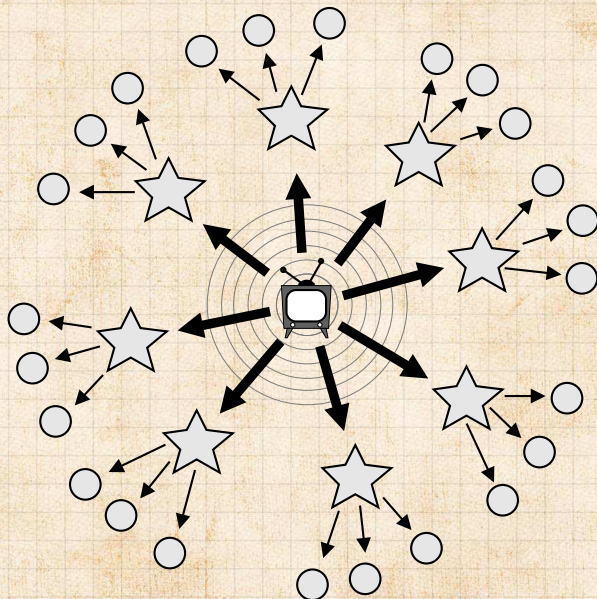
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The network model of influence:

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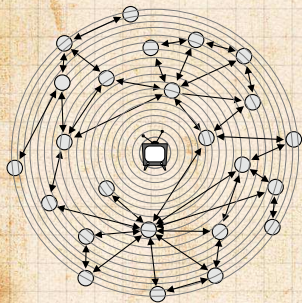
References

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. [4]

Things that spread quickly:

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:-p

+ News ...

buzzfeed.com :

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Fame and fate:
Why is global
success so
unpredictable?

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").

Reclamo 🔗. "Clamo"—Proto-Indo-European: "to shout" (again).

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Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray

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"There is only one
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Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray

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worse than being
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Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray
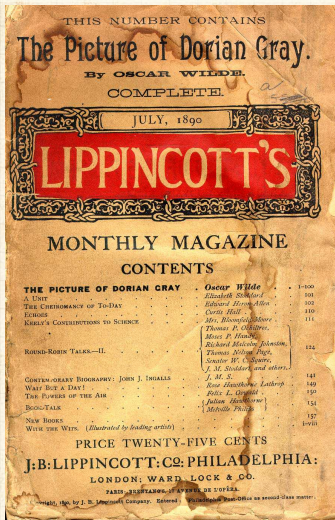
"There is only one
thing in the world

worse than being
talked about,

and that is

not being talked
about."

Spreading in the social wild:

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The Dark Social Web
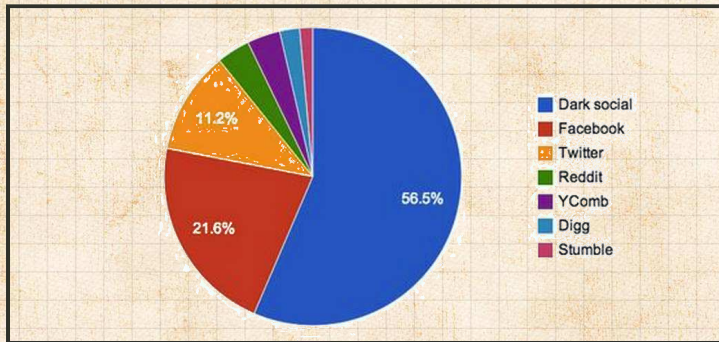
Dark Social: We Have the Whole History of the Web
Wrong ☐ [The Atlantic]

A completely made up pie chart:
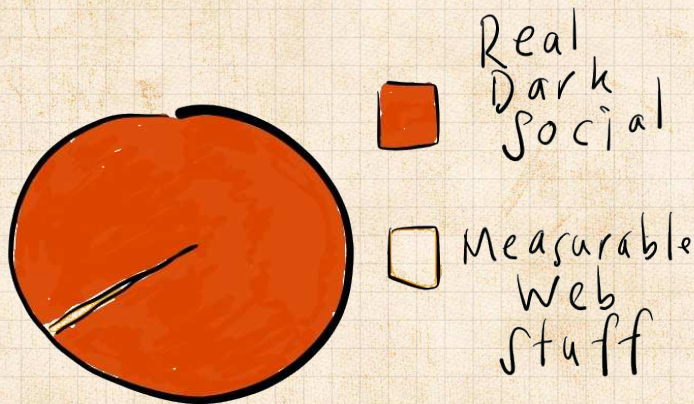
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Real
Dark
Social

Measurable
Web
Stuff

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How to make things spread (maybe):

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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.

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References I

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

[2] T. Kuran.
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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
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Science, 311:854–856, 2006. pdf☑

References II

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[4] D. J. Watts and P. S. Dodds.
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Journal of Consumer Research, 34:441–458, 2007.
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