

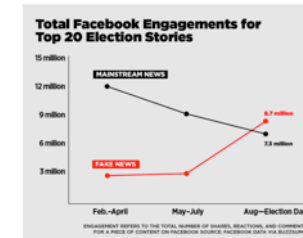
# Beware of the Trending Bubbles

## On Online Attention Hyper-Synchronization

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[www.tommasoventurini.it](http://www.tommasoventurini.it)

1

[https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/viral-fake-election-news-outperformed-real-news-on-facebook?utm\\_term=.qnG0mJyJb#.ximDd5y5B](https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/viral-fake-election-news-outperformed-real-news-on-facebook?utm_term=.qnG0mJyJb#.ximDd5y5B)



The "Fake News crisis"

2

[publicdatalab.org](http://publicdatalab.org)

[fakenews.publicdatalab.org](http://fakenews.publicdatalab.org)



Public Data Lab and the "Fake News crisis"

3

According to the literature, the notion of fake news is

1. Vague
2. Undistinguishable from past forms of misinformation
3. Charged with a simplistic idea of journalistic truth
4. Politically dangerous

4 reasons to stay clear of "fake news"

4

**TABLE 1**  
A typology of fake news definitions

Level of facticity	Author's immediate intention to deceive	
	High	Low
High	Native advertising Propaganda Manipulation	News satire
Low	Fabrication	News parody

Tandoc, E.C., Lim, Z.W. & Ling, R. (2017) Defining 'Fake News'. *Digital Journalism*. 811

Wardle, Claire  
Fake news. It's complicated (2017). First Draft  
[medium.com/1st-draft/fake-news-its-complicated-d0f773766c79](https://medium.com/1st-draft/fake-news-its-complicated-d0f773766c79)

	Satire	False Connection	Misleading Content	False Context	Imposter Content	Manipulated Content	Fabricated Content
Poor Journalism		✓	✓	✓			
To Parody	✓				✓		✓
To Provide or to 'punch'					✓	✓	✓
Passion				✓			
Partisanship			✓	✓			
Profit		✓			✓		✓
Political Influence			✓	✓		✓	✓
Propaganda			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

1. Vague

5

863.956 The World 863.956  
WORLD ORIGINALLY TESTIFIED  
WORLD OF THE EAST TESTIFIED

**MAINE EXPLOSION CAUSED BY BOMB OR TORPEDO?**  
Capt. Sigbee and Consul-General Lee Are in Doubt—The World Has Sent a Special Tug. With Submarine Divers, to Havana to Find Out—Lee Asks for an Immediate Court of Inquiry—Capt. Sigbee's Suspicion.

CAPT. SIGBEE, IN A SUPPRESSED DESPATCH TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT, SAYS THE ACCIDENT WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY AN ENEMY.  
Dr. F. C. Prediction, Just Arrived from Havana, Says He Overheard Talk There of a Plot to Blow Up the Ship—Capt. Zabalza, the Dynamic Agent, and Other Experts Report to The World That the Shock Was Not Accidental—Washington Officials Ready for Vigorous Action if Spanish Responsibility Can Be Shown—Germans to Be Sent Down to Make Careful Examinations.



2. Undistinguishable from past misinformation

6

Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*. New York: The Free Press.

Schudson, M. (1989). The sociology of news production. *Media, Culture & Society*. 11 (3). pp. 263–282

Social scientists who study the news speak a language that journalists mistrust and misunderstand. They speak of 'constructing the news', of 'making news', of the 'social construction of reality'. 'News is what newspapermen make it' (Gieber, 1964: 173). 'News is the result of the methods newsmen employ' (Fishman, 1980: 14). News is 'manufactured by journalists' (Cohen and Young, 1973: 97). Even journalists who are critical of the daily practices of their colleagues and their own organizations find this talk offensive. I have been at several conferences of journalists and social scientists where such language promptly pushed the journalists into a fierce defence of their work, on the familiar ground that they just report the world as they see it, the facts, facts, and nothing but the facts, and yes, there's occasional bias, occasional sensationalism, occasional inaccuracy, but a responsible journalist never, never, never fakes the news.

That's not what we said, the hurt scholars respond. We didn't say journalists *fake* the news, we said journalists *make* the news:

To say that a news report is a story, no more, but no less, is not to demean the news, not to accuse it of being fictitious. Rather, it alerts us that news, like all public documents, is a constructed reality possessing its own internal validity. (Tuchman, 1976: 97)

**Making News**  
*A Study in the Construction of Reality*  
GAYE TUCHMAN

3. Charged with a simplistic idea of journalistic truth

7

Claire, W. & Derakhshan, H. (2017). Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking (Report to the Council of Europe).

The term "fake news" has also begun to be appropriated by politicians around the world to describe news organisations whose coverage they find disagreeable. In this way, it's becoming a mechanism by which the powerful can clamp down upon, restrict, undermine and circumvent the free press. It's also worth noting that the term and its visual derivatives (e.g., the red 'FAKE' stamp) have been even more widely appropriated by websites, organisations and political figures identified as untrustworthy by fact-checkers to undermine opposing reporting and news organizations" (p.16)

4. Politically dangerous

8

<http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/archive/fake%20news/ttff>

Twitter Archive search through all of Trump's tweets

594 fake news

Export + Options + 1 dd/mm/yyyy dd/mm/yyyy Any time 2 All devices 2

Nov 18, 2019 08:52:32 AM Our Crazy, Our Nothing (here's) (S&P), Infrastructure, lower drug pricing & much more? Speaker of the House, Nervous Nancy Pelosi, who is petrified by her Radical Left knowing she will soon be gone (they & fake news media are her BOSS), suggested on Sunday) DEFACE THE NATION... [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 18, 2019 07:20:38 AM Never has the Republican Party been so united as it is now. S&P A.B. This is a great fraud being played out against the American people by the fake news media & their partners, the Do Nothing Democrats. The rules are rigged by Pelosi & Schiff, but we are winning, and we will win! [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 17, 2019 08:09:33 AM Dowd never understood the pulse of the Republican Party, present or past. He's just a 3rd rate hit job for fake news. @ABC https://t.co/M0Mh0d0g7s [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 17, 2019 08:09:37 AM So with one rally by me at the end of the campaign, I'll get the poll numbers of Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin by 10 points, he just misses, every other Republican in the Commonwealth wins big, and the fake news media on for a bad night! (M) By the way, Wisconsin won everything! [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 3, 2019 07:46:07 PM But the fake news will never show this. Thank you! https://t.co/7qg10d0g7s [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 3, 2019 07:46:09 PM RT @RockyMountain: Alabama loves President @realDonaldTrump. This is what the fake news media won't show you. #MAGA https://t.co/qyqat0f4 [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 3, 2019 06:43:21 AM fake news is reporting that I am talking to Mark Burnett about doing a big show, perhaps, The Apprentice, after the presidency, which I would assume they mean in 5 years. This is not true, never had such a conversation, don't even have time to think about it. (fake reporting) [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 2, 2019 10:27:27 AM The Amazon Washington Post and three health reporters, Matt Zapach, Josh Dawsey, and Carol Leeming, wrote another fake news story, without any sources (pure fiction), about Bill Barr & myself. We both deny this story, which they knew before they wrote it. A garbage newspaper! [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 2, 2019 10:08:40 AM The story in the Amazon Washington Post, of course picked up by fake news CNN, saying "President Trump asked for AG Barr to host a news conference clearing him on Ukraine," is totally untrue and just another fake news story with anonymous sources that don't exist... [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 2, 2019 10:08:49 PM @FoxNews Work 5 out of 6 elections in Kentucky, including 3 great candidates that I spoke for and introduced last night. @MattBevin picked up at least 10 points in last days, but perhaps not enough fake news will blame Trump's. Winning in Wisconsin Governor went [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 2, 2019 09:54:32 PM RT @realDonaldTrump Florida county denies story subscription to the New York Times because it's fake news https://t.co/5d0g0f0g7s [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 2, 2019 07:25:02 AM RT @realDonaldTrump All-Time High for Stock Market and all the fake news wants to talk about the impeachment hoax! [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 2, 2019 10:09:33 AM All-Time High for Stock Market and all the fake news wants to talk about the impeachment hoax! [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 2, 2019 09:50:30 PM The fake news media is working hard so that information about the White House's identity, which may be very bad for them and their Democrat partners, never reaches the Public. [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 2, 2019 10:45:08 AM The White House got it now wrong that it'll read come forward. The fake news media knows who he is but, being an arm of the Democrat Party, don't want to read him because there would be hell to pay. Reveal the White House and the impeachment hoax! [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Nov 3, 2019 09:30:45 AM Wrong, never even discussed that with Katherine Conway or Steve Wozniak, just more fake news https://t.co/qyqat0f4 [Twitter for iPhone] [36]

Oct 22, 2019 10:43:38 PM

4. Politically dangerous

9

?

What is "fake news" about if it is not about fakeness?

10

Venturini, Tommaso. 2019. "From Fake to Junk News, the Data Politics of Online Virality." In Data Politics: Worlds, Subjects, Rights, eds. Didier B., Engin A., and Evelyn R. Routledge.

"spread, rather than fakeness, is the birthmark of these contents that should be called "viral news" or possibly "junk news" for, just as junk food, they are consumed because they are addictive, not because they are appreciated"

Junk news as junk food

11

Cunningham, C. A., and Howard E. 2018. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/10/171026135327.htm>

The Capture of Attention by Entirely Irrelevant Pictures of Calorie-Dense Foods

Psychonomic Bulletin & Review: 586–95.

Junk food almost twice as distracting as healthy food

Date: October 26, 2017

Source: Johns Hopkins University

Summary: When we haven't eaten, junk food is twice as distracting as healthy food or non-food items.

Share: f t g+ p in

RELATED TOPICS

Mind & Brain

- Nutrition Research
- Dieting and Weight Control
- Perception
- Child Psychology
- Behavior
- Psychology
- Educational Psychology
- Tinnitus

FULL STORY

What Distracts Us?

When we haven't eaten, junk food is twice as distracting as healthy food or non-food items.

Credit: Greg Stanley/UHJ

Junk news as junk food

12

"junk news" or "trending bubbles"  
are contents that attracts a large share  
of online attention but are incapable  
to sustaining it for a long time

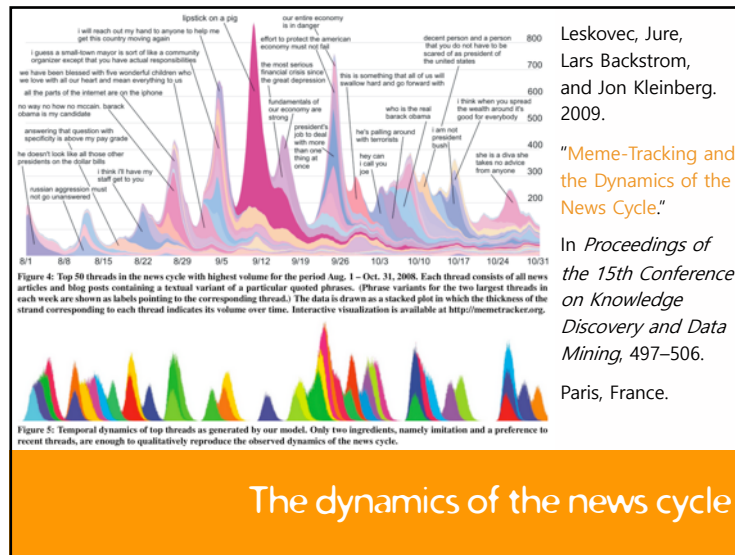
13

Eli Pariser, 2011. *The Filter Bubble*



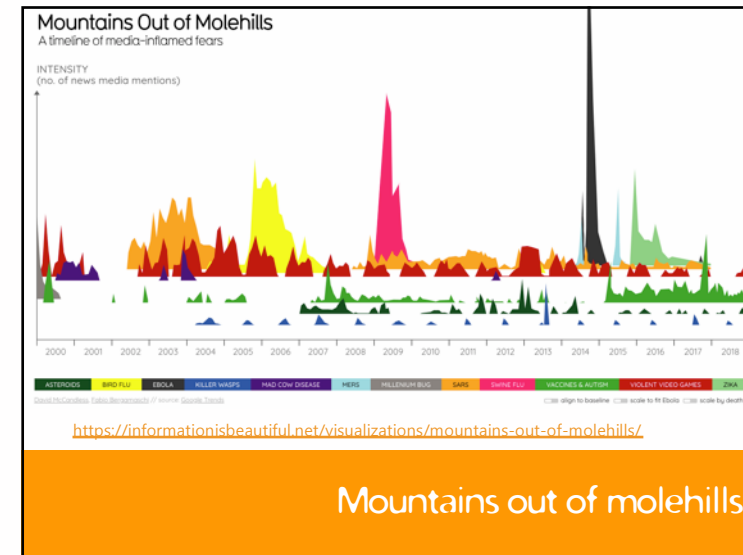
The trending bubble of junk contents

14



The dynamics of the news cycle

15



Mountains out of molehills

16

### Up and down with ecology—the “issue-attention cycle”

**A**merican public attention rarely remains sharply focused upon any one domestic issue for very long—even if it involves a continuing problem of crucial importance to society. Instead, a systematic “issue-attention cycle” seems strongly to influence public attitudes and behavior concerning most key domestic problems. Each of these problems suddenly leaps into prominence, remains there for a short time, and then—though still largely unresolved—gradually fades from the center of public attention.

A problem must be dramatic and exciting to maintain public interest because news is “consumed” by much of the American public (and by publics everywhere) largely as a form of entertainment. As such, it competes with other types of entertainment for a share of each person’s time. Every day, there is a fierce struggle for space in the highly limited universe of newspaper and television viewing time.

Downs, A. 1972  
Up and down with Ecology:  
The ‘Issue-Attention Cycle’  
*Public Interest* 28

### The Rise and Fall of Social Problems A Public Arenas Model<sup>1</sup>

Carrying Capacity

- Each arena has a *carrying capacity* that limits the number of social problems it can entertain during a given period.
- The population of potential social problems (i.e., putative situations or conditions that could be considered problems) is huge.
- The carrying capacity of the public arenas is much too small to accommodate all potential social problems.
- Therefore, social problems must compete for space in the public arenas. This competition is ongoing; problems must compete both to enter and to remain on the public agenda.
- The number of social problems is a function not of the number of harmful or dangerous conditions facing society but of the carrying capacity of public arenas.
- The amount of attention received by a given social problem varies dynamically over time:
  - problems that have achieved some success are constantly in danger of undergoing a decline and being displaced; and
  - while some problems may rise, decline, and reemerge, very few maintain a high level of attention over many years.
- Except to the extent that the carrying capacities of the public arenas are changing, the ascent of one social problem will tend to be accompanied by the decline of one or more others.

Hilgartner, S. & Bosk, C. 1988  
The Rise and Fall of Social Problems:  
A Public Arenas Model  
*American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1)

17

modern media enhanced and extended the range and scope of those processes of invention and imitation that for him [Gabriel Tarde] constituted the essence of economic life (p.11)

... [but also] ...

caused the processes of individuation that connect psychic and social life to be short-circuited, resulting in the destructive hegemony of the short term over the long term (p.12)

Terranova, Tiziana. 2012.  
“Attention, Economy and the Brain.” *Culture Machine* 13: 1–19.


The dark side of Tarde’s attention economy

19

What we are considering here, however, are the psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns as they amplify or accelerate existing processes. For the “message” of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.

The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure.

McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.



“It isn’t that I don’t like current events. There have just been so many of them lately.”

McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. 1967. *The Medium Is the Message*. Gingko Press.

Media acceleration & amplification

18

- an economy of ephemeral attention that sustains micro-transactions on infinitesimal attention spans
- technologies that track & push the shallow forms of media engagement
- social media metrics that nudge users to seek and share trending contents
- memes-oriented subcultures whose identity is defined by the capacity to spread Internet memes
- the political exploitation of trolling strategies to disrupt and divert online debate

Five overlapping sources of hyper-synchronisations

20

# 1

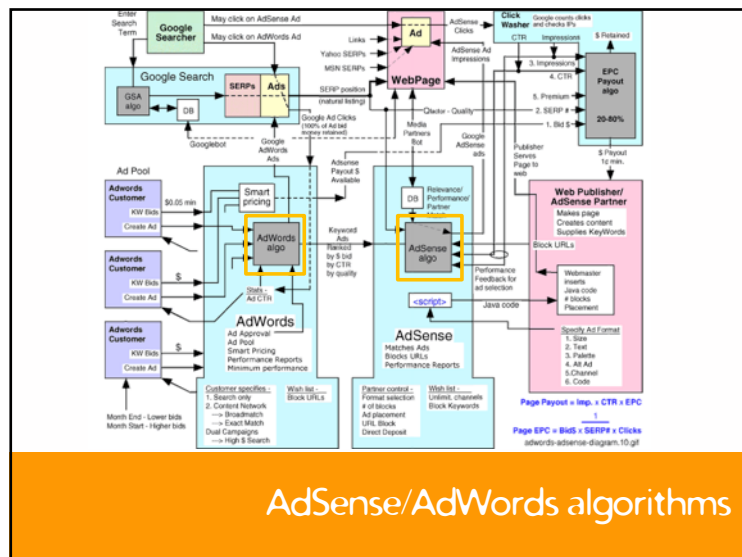
## economy of ephemeral attention automatization of the online attention market

21

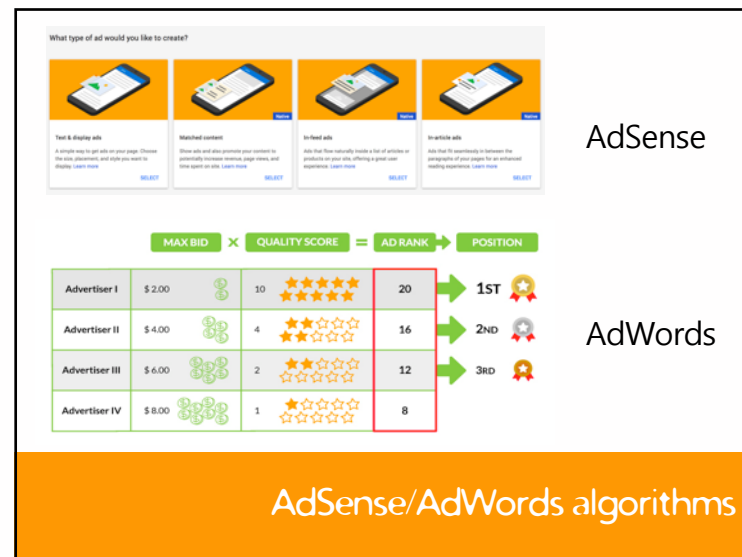
Tim O'Reilly, 2005. *What Is Web 2.0 - O'Reilly Media*.

Google's success came from an understanding of what Chris Anderson refers to as "the long tail," the collective power of the small sites that make up the bulk of the web's content... **The Web 2.0 lesson: leverage customer self-service and algorithmic data management to reach out to the entire web, to the edges and not just the center, to the long tail and not just the head** (p.21)

22



23



24



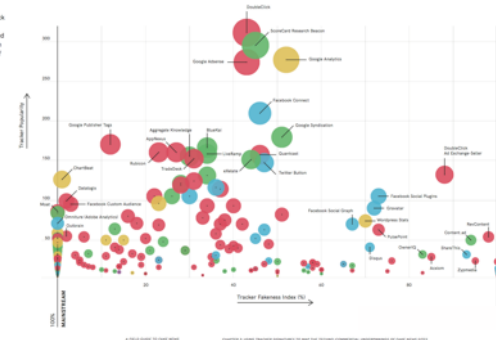
# 2

track & push technologies  
trends-oriented algorithms

25

## DO MAINSTREAM MEDIA AND FAKE NEWS WEBSITES SHARE THE SAME TRACKER ECOLOGIES?

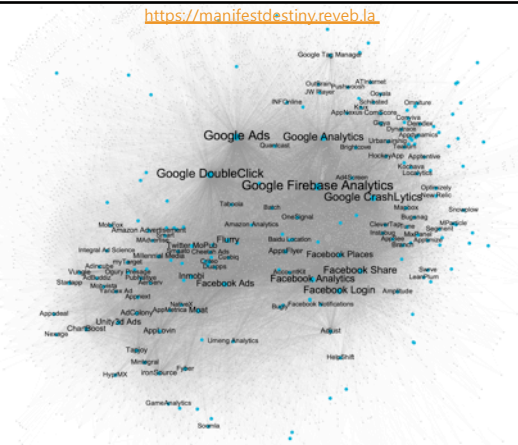
Scatterplot representing tracker usage on a series of fake news and mainstream media sites. While fake news sites and mainstream media sites share popular tracker services such as Google AdSense, DoubleClick and Google Analytics, mainstream media sites appear more mature and sophisticated in its use of trackers in terms of the number and diversity of trackers that it uses.



Attention trackers & attention markets

26

<https://manifestdestiny.reverb.la>



Apps count	Permission
16051	ACCESS
8838	READ
7436	WRITE
6866	INTERNET
5711	WAKE
3819	(blank)
3691	VIBRATE
3347	RECEIVE
3204	GET
1969	CHANGE
1647	USE
1088	RECORD
1013	ALERT
965	FOREGROUND
847	MANAGE
779	MODIFY
733	ADMIN
663	INSTALL
657	SET
637	REQUEST
629	AUTHENTICATE
560	CALL
407	STATS
341	BROADCAST

A technical ecosystem  
for tracking and pushing

27

Covington, P., Jay A., and Emre S., 2016  
*Deep Neural Networks for YouTube  
Recommendations*  
*Proceedings of the 10th ACM Conference  
on Recommender Systems*

Many hours worth of videos are uploaded each second to YouTube. Recommending this recently uploaded ("fresh") content is extremely important for YouTube as a product.

We consistently observe that users prefer fresh content, though not at the expense of relevance. In addition to the first-order effect of simply recommending new videos that users want to watch, there is a critical secondary phenomenon of bootstrapping and propagating viral content.

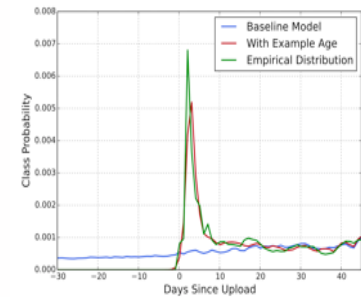


Figure 4: For a given video [26], the model trained with example age as a feature is able to accurately represent the upload time and time-dependent popularity observed in the data. Without the feature, the model would predict approximately the average likelihood over the training window.

Trends-oriented algorithms

28

3

social media metrics  
nudging self-branding

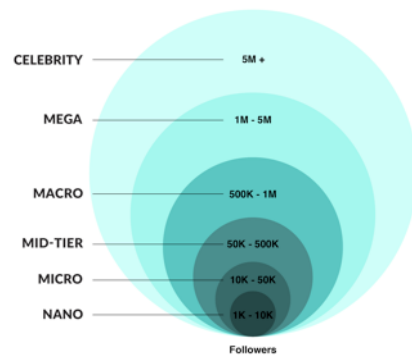
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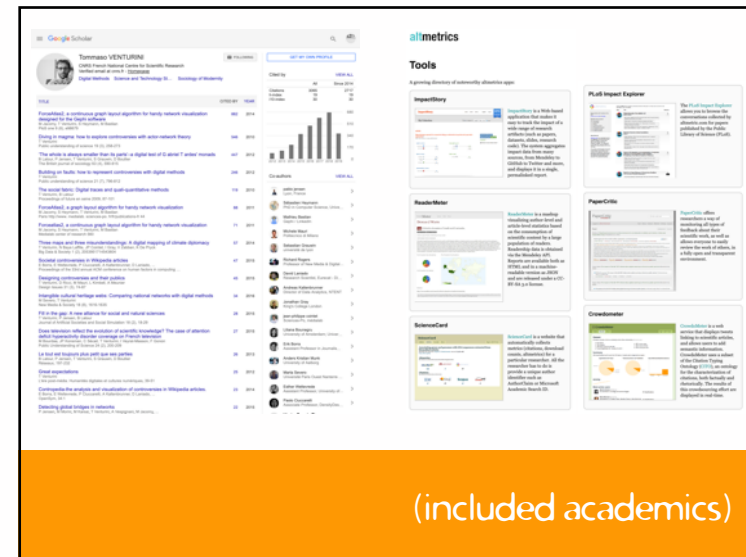
The rise of social/vanity metrics  
(and how they nudge personal branding)

### Influencer Tiers



Everyone is a (nano)celebrity

31



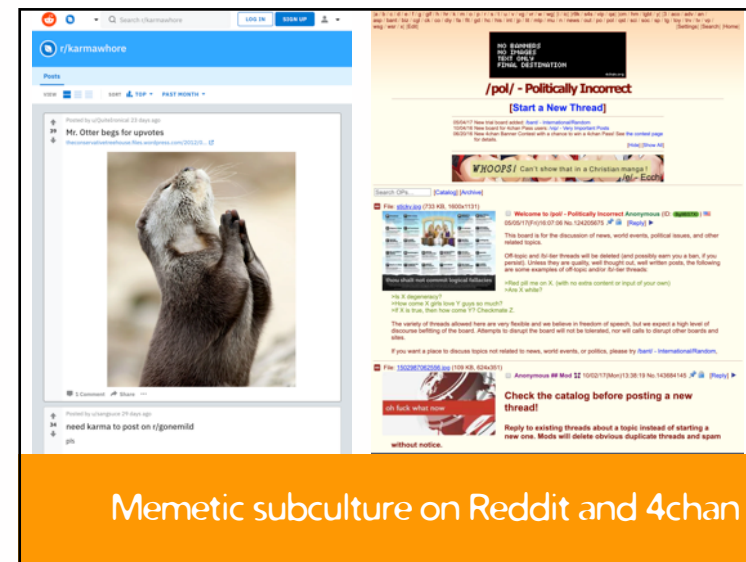
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(included academics)





33



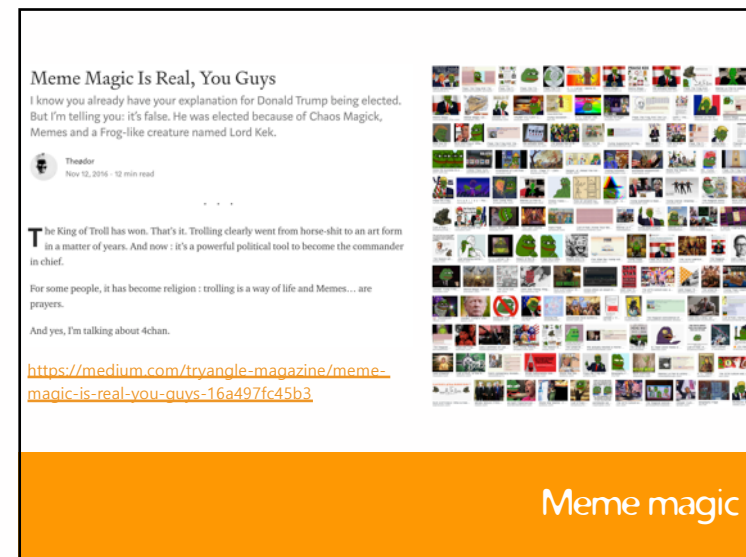
Memetic subculture on Reddit and 4chan

34



Trendiness as a subcultural game

35



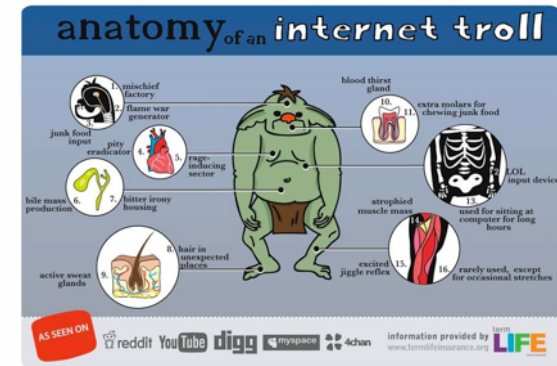
Meme magic

36

# 5

political trolling  
disrupting and diverting  
online debate

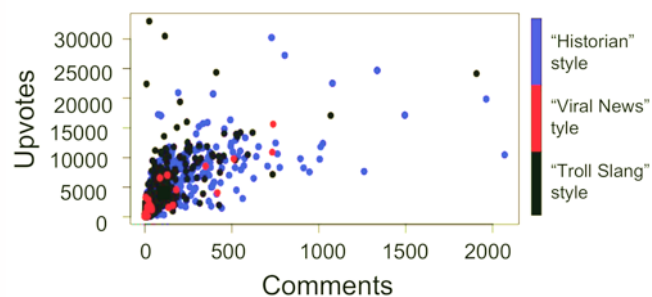
37



Internet trolling

38

Flores-Saviaga, Claudia, Brian C. Keegan, and Saiph Savage. 2018.  
"Mobilizing the Trump Train: Understanding Collective Action in a Political Trolling Community"  
ICWSM: 82-91. <http://arxiv.org/abs/1806.00429>



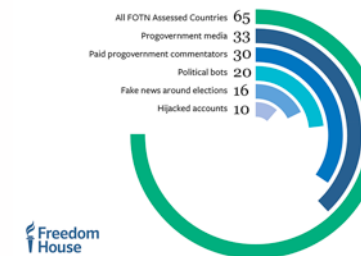
Trump trolling

39

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2017>

**Bots drown out activists with nonsense and hate speech**

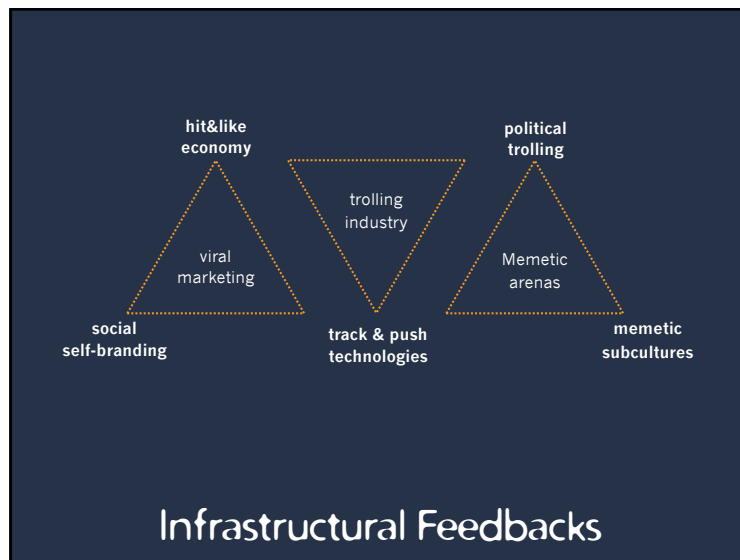
Prevalence of Manipulation Tactics  
in 65 Countries



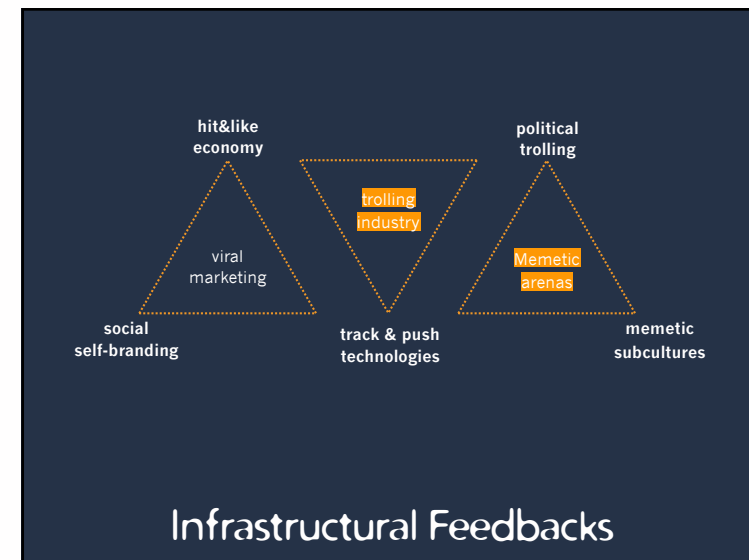
The 65 countries covered in Freedom on the Net represent 87 percent of the world's internet user population.

Political trolling VS fake news

40



41



42

**The Macedonian Teens Who Mastered Fake News**

Boris fed the beast with diligence. "At night I would make four or five posts to share the next day. When I woke up, I shared them. I went to drink coffee, came back home, found new articles, posted those articles on the website, and shared them."

"The young Macedonians who run these sites say they don't care about Donald Trump. They are responding to straightforward economic incentives... Several teens and young men who run these sites told BuzzFeed News that they learned that ... the best way to generate shares on Facebook is to publish sensationalist and often false content that caters to Trump supporters"

Silverman, C. & Lawrence A. (BuzzFeedNews, 2016)  
 "How Teens In The Balkans Are Duping Trump Supporters With Fake News"  
[www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/how-macedonia-became-a-global-hub-for-pro-trump-misinfo?utm\\_term=.cro1F9mve#hemMKOgmV](http://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/how-macedonia-became-a-global-hub-for-pro-trump-misinfo?utm_term=.cro1F9mve#hemMKOgmV)

## Trolling industry

43

OCCRP, BuzzFeed News, and the Investigative Reporting Lab Macedonia can now reveal that **Veles' political news industry was not started spontaneously by apolitical teens**. Rather, it was launched by a well-known Macedonian media attorney, Trajche Arsov — who worked closely with two high-profile American partners for at least six months during a period that overlapped with Election Day...

**the powerful forces of Facebook, digital advertising revenue, and political partisanship gave rise to an unlikely global alliance that increased the spread of misleading and false news** in the critical months before Election Day.

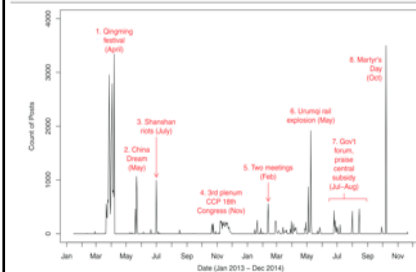
Cvetkovska, S., Belford, A. Silverman, C. and Feder, L.  
 (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2018)  
 "The Secret Players Behind Macedonia's Fake News Sites"  
[www.occrp.org/en/spooksandspin/the-secret-players-behind-macedonias-fake-news-sites](http://www.occrp.org/en/spooksandspin/the-secret-players-behind-macedonias-fake-news-sites)

## Trolling industry

44

King, G., Pan, J. & Roberts, M.E. (2017). How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument. *American Political Science Review*. 111 (3). pp. 484–501.

FIGURE 2. Time Series of 43,757 Known 50c Social Media Posts with Qualitative Summaries of the Content of Volume Bursts

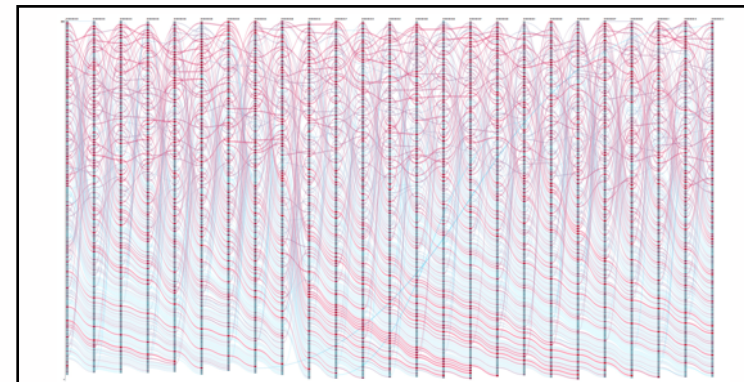


The most important finding in this graph is that the posts are far from randomly or uniformly distributed, instead being highly focused into distinct volume bursts...

the most influential patterns in most social media are the bursts that occur naturally when discussions go viral. The government's manufactured bursts mirror these naturally occurring influential patterns, but at times of the government's choosing. Bursts are also much more likely to be effective at accomplishing specific goals than a strategy of randomly scattering government posts in the ocean of real social media.

Political trolling

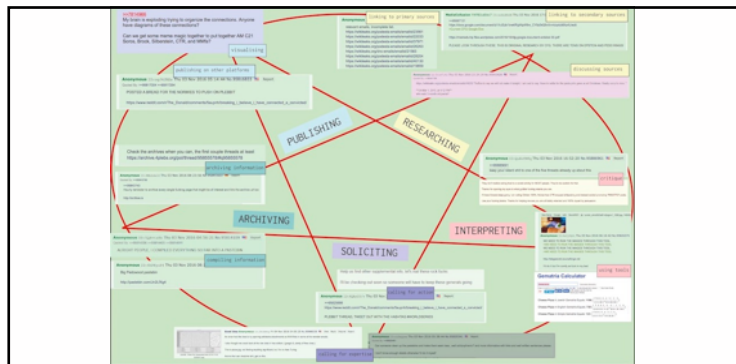
45



Hagen, Sal. 2018. "Rendering Legible the Ephemerality of 4chan/Pol." Open Intelligence Lab <http://oilab.eu/rendering-legible-the-ephemerality-of-4chanpol/>.

Memetic arenas

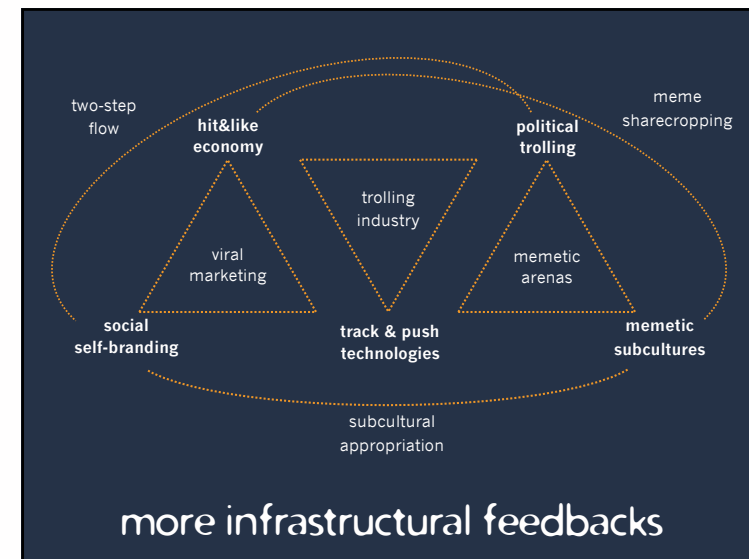
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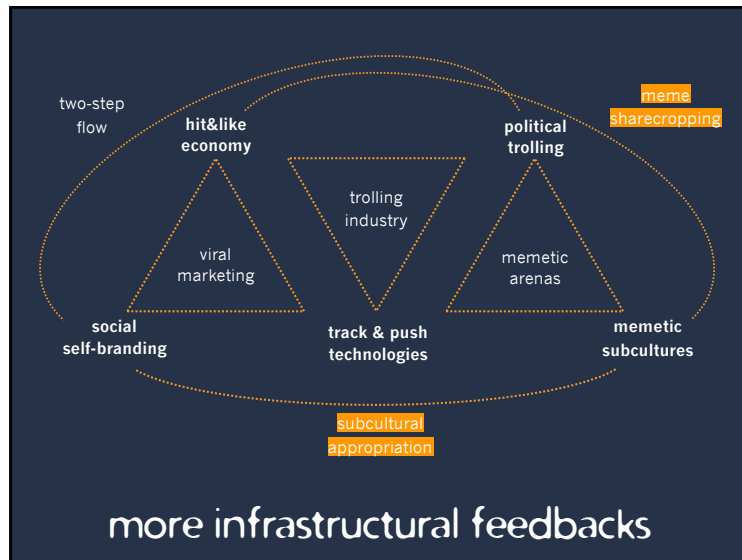
Tuters, Marc, Emilija Jokubauskaitė, and Daniel Bach. 2018. "Post-Truth Protest: How 4chan Cooked-up the Pizzagate Bullshit Introduction." *M/C Journal* 21 (3).

Memetic arenas

47



48




49

Hebdige, Dick. 1979.  
*Subcultures: The Meaning of Style.*

the safety pins... are indeed open to a double inflection: to 'illegitimate' as well as 'legitimate' uses.

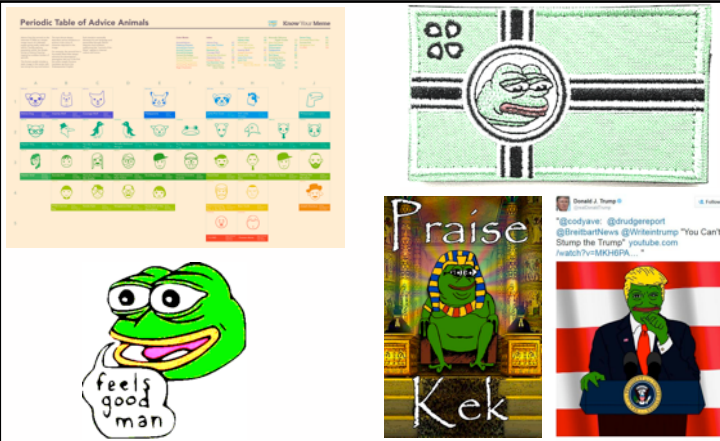
These 'humble objects' can be magically appropriated; 'stolen' by subordinate groups and made to carry 'secret' meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination...

As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority', which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus.



Subcultural appropriation

50



Subcultural appropriation

51

Google, 2016. *How Google Fight Piracy*  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwxyRPFduTN2d91LXJ0YjYVSjA/view>

Rightsholders can choose between several actions when an upload matches their content, including:

1. make money from it;
2. leave it up and track viewing statistics; or
3. block it from YouTube altogether."

Thanks to the different options that Content ID gives to copyright owners, it's not just an anti-piracy solution but also a copyright management tool. Through Content ID, rightsholders can earn money when their content hasn't been properly licensed by the uploader—in fact, over 90% of all Content ID claims result in monetization. As a result of monetization, Content ID accounts for roughly 50% of the music industry's revenue from YouTube and has generated \$2 billion for rightsholders." Its size and effectiveness are unparalleled in the industry—Content ID now boasts over 50 Million active reference files.

**98% ISSUES RESOLVED**

the percentage of copyright issues on YouTube that were resolved via Content ID, which gives rightsholders a new way to manage and control their content without having to send takedown notices. Over 90% of all Content ID claims result in monetization, which generates significant revenue for YouTube partners.

**\$3 Billion+**  
the amount YouTube has paid to the music industry to date.

**\$2 Billion+**  
the amount YouTube's Content ID system alone has generated for rightsholders since being launched. Two-uploaded content claimed through Content ID accounts for roughly 50% of the music industry's revenue from YouTube.

Meme sharecropping

52



Soha, Michael, and Zachary J. McDowell. 2016.  
 "Monetizing a Meme: YouTube, Content ID, and the Harlem Shake."  
*Social Media + Society* 2(1):

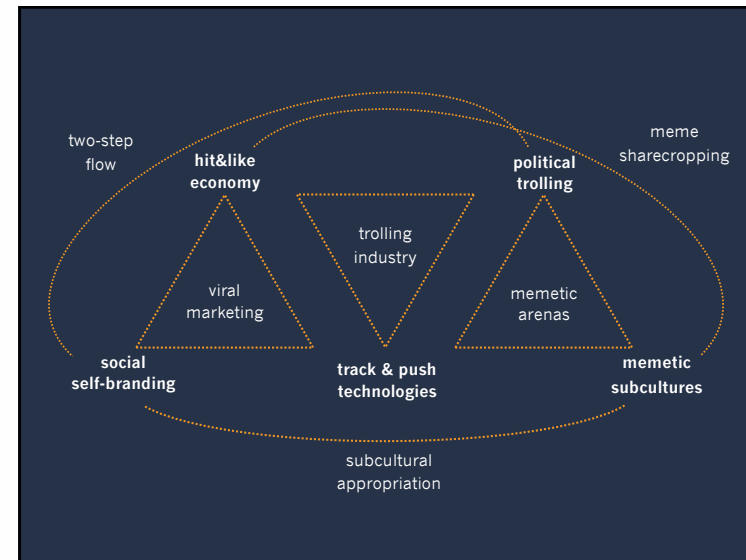
[Nicholas] Carr's notion [of digital sharecropping] lacked a coercive analog to actual sharecropping, but now, with systems like YouTube's Content ID system, the licensing option could coerce users to either sign over their rights or lose access.

YouTube's own frequently asked questions (FAQ) on Content ID makes it clear: "In most cases, you can't monetize a video that has a Content ID claim. Instead, the copyright owners can choose to monetize your video."



Meme sharecropping

53



54

Thank you!

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55



56