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Hoax vs Fact Checking

Understanding and predicting the diffusion of low quality information on communication networks

Lugano, September 10th, 2019

PAN

Fictional background

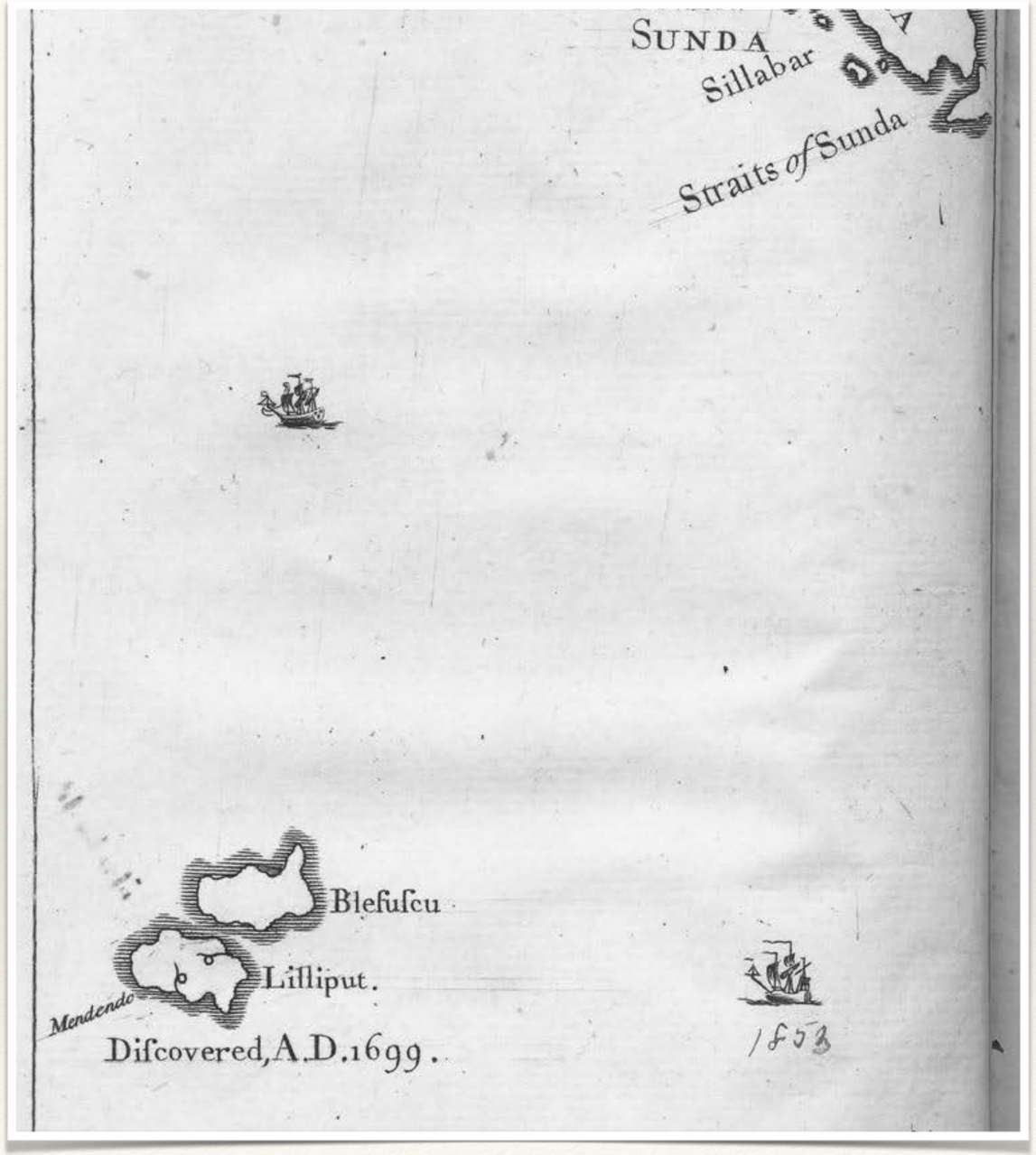
Jonathan Swift

Lilliput and Blefuscu

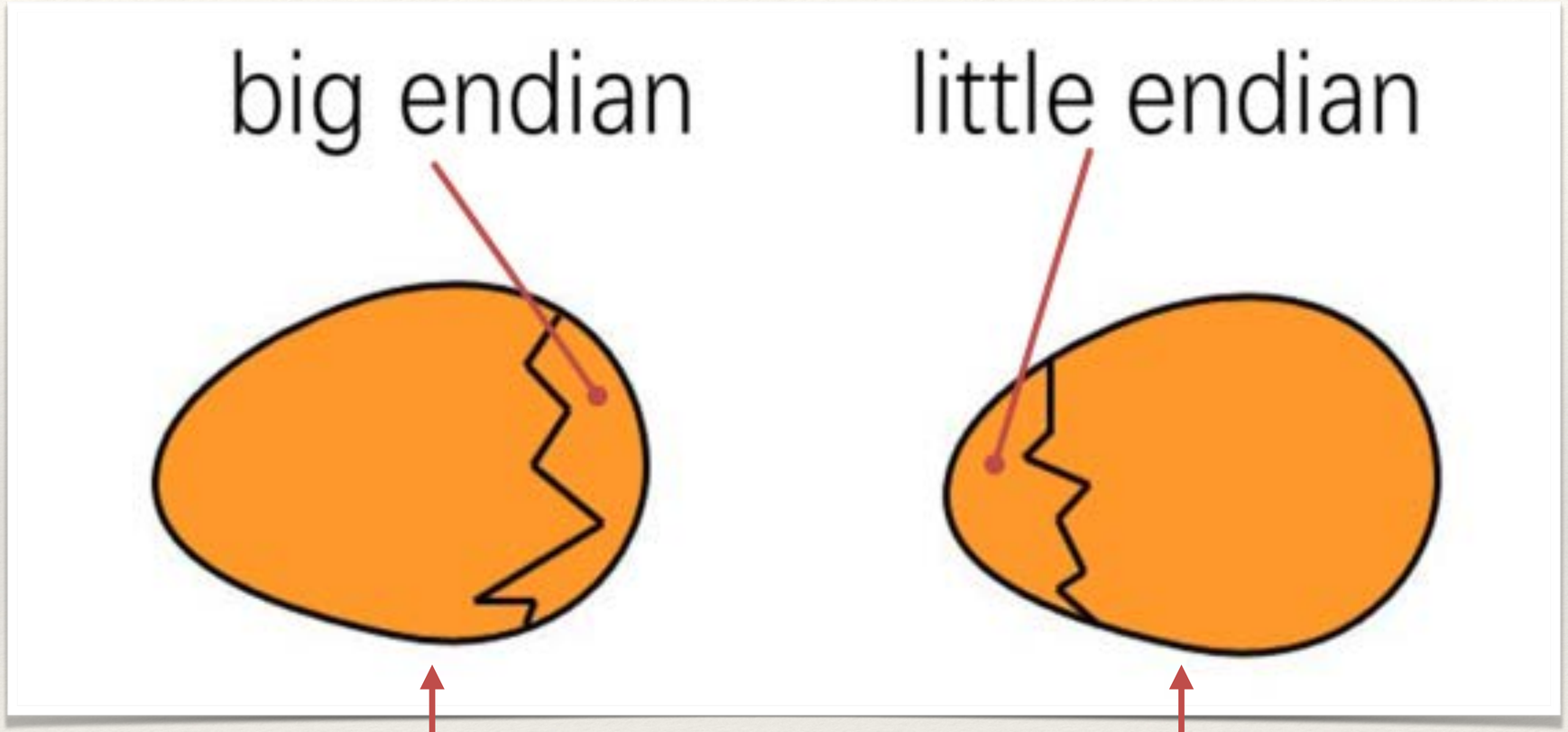
According to "*Gulliver's Travels*", they are two islands in the *South Indian Ocean*

Two *different kingdoms* inhabited by tiny people

Even if similar in nature and in religious belief, they have a long lasting debate called the *"egg war"*



Big-Endians/Little-Endians



Holy Scriptures: *"Always break the egg on the most convenient side"*, that is the larger in **Lilliput**

The way Lilliputians always broke their eggs

The way the emperor ordered them to break their eggs.

"Little endian" interpretation of holy scriptures was adopted in **Blefuscu**

Satirical interpretation

- **Eggs wars**: Catholic England (Big-Endian) and conversion to Protestantism of most of the country (Little-Endian) after Queen Elisabeth I conversion
- **Lilliput and Blefuscu**: Kingdom of Great Britain and Kingdom of France
- **Internal politics in Lilliput:** the Whigs and the Tories
- In perspective: human beings divide themselves because of what may appear a futile reason to an alien
- It contains the intuition of the interplay between (structural) **segregation** and (opinion) **polarization**

Agenda of the talk

- The strange case of **Lajello**
- Modeling the spread of **misinformation**
- The role of **segregation**
- Evaluating debunking **strategies**
- **Language** and network structure
- Discussion and **Conclusion**

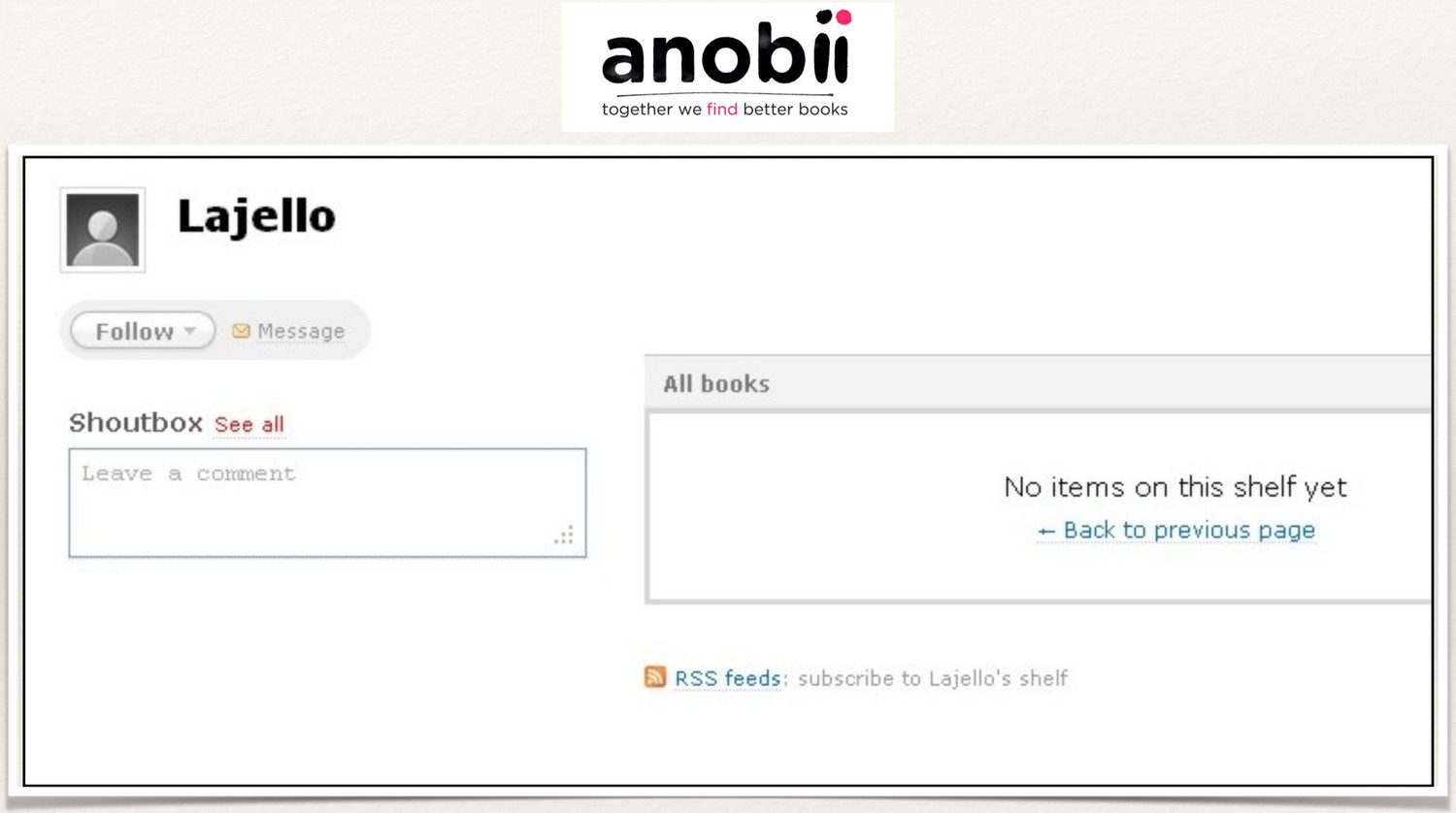
The strange case of Lajello

Analyzing social network with a bot

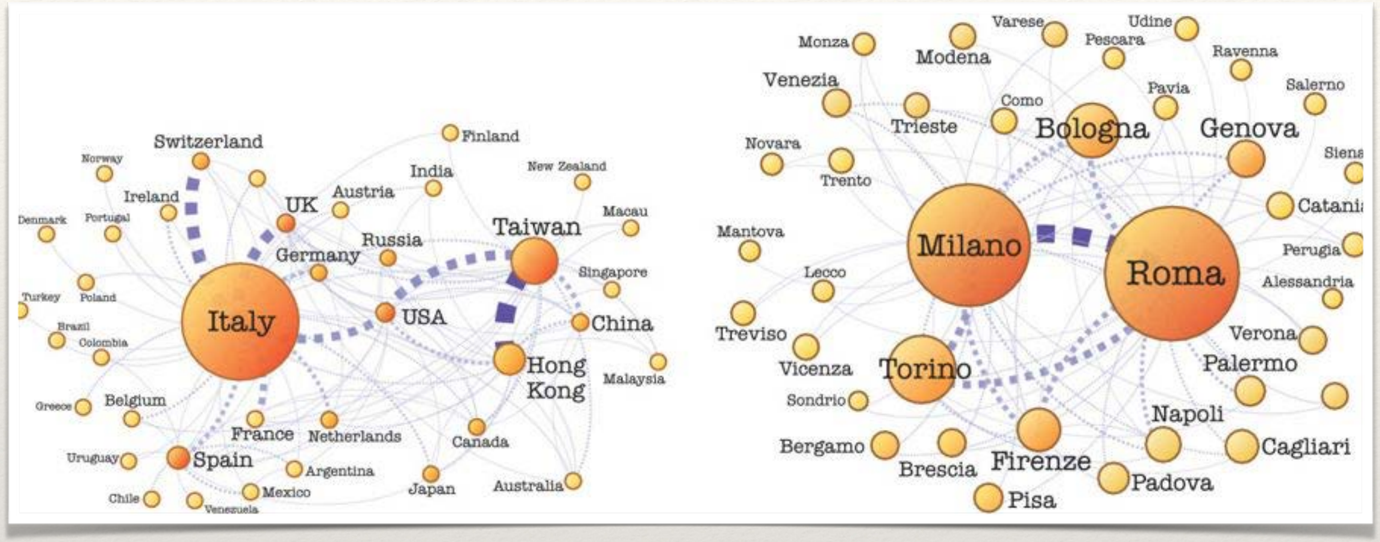
- Anobii was a social networks for book lovers
- Scraping users' profiles from the Web was admitted
- Users' libraries and their links were collected periodically

Analyzing social network with a bot

- Anobii was a social networks for book lovers
- Scraping users' profiles from the Web was admitted
- Users' libraries and their links were collected periodically
- **The bot "Lajello" used to silently navigate Anobii twice a month for one year**

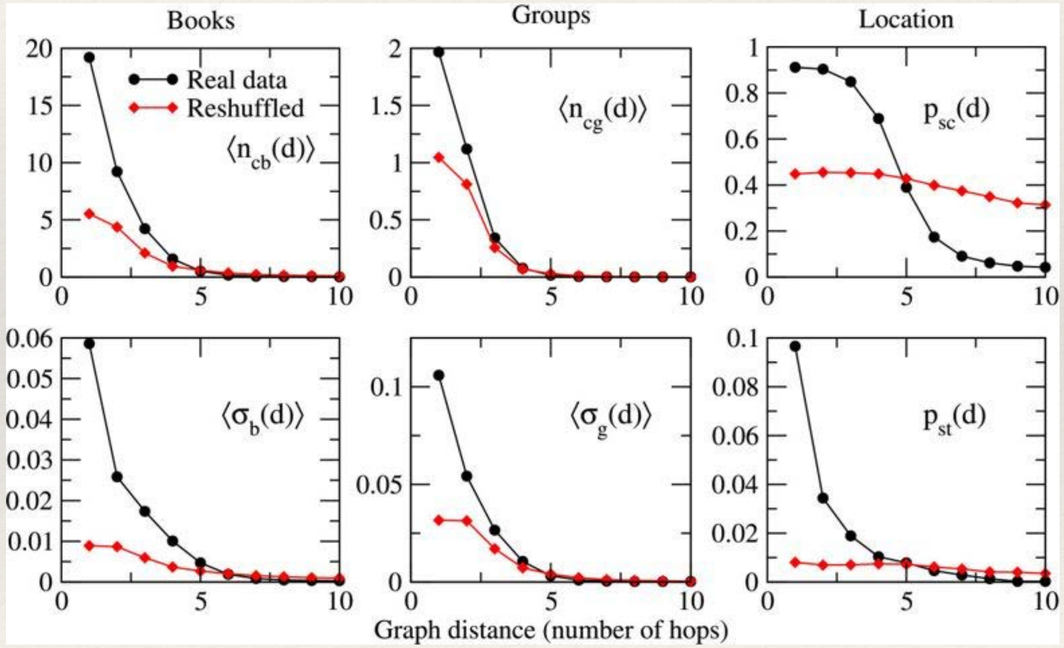


Analysis of Anobii's structure



strong signals of geographical, cultural and topical homophily by **selection**

profiles alignment



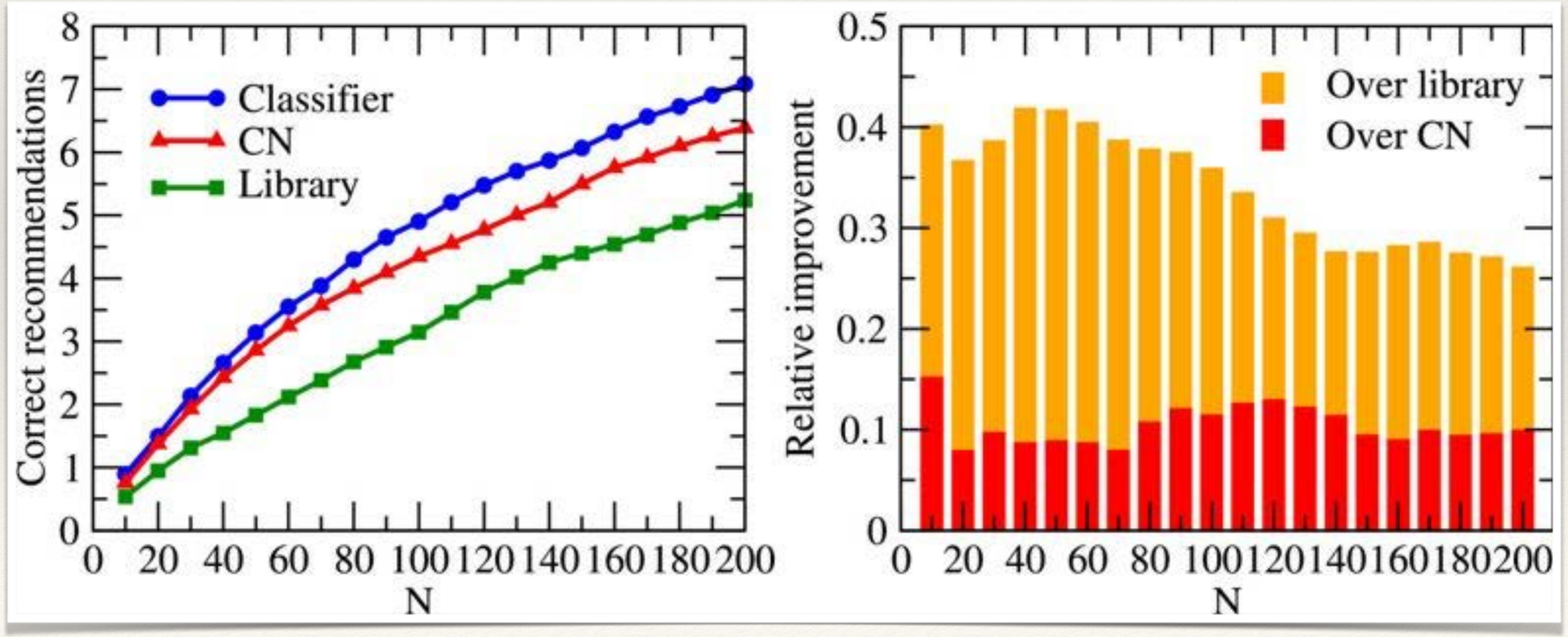
… and other interesting stuff on **influence**:

LM Aiello, A Barrat, C Cattuto, G Ruffo, R Schifanella, Link creation and profile alignment in the aNobii social network, 2010 IEEE 2nd Int.. Conf. on Social Computing, 249-256

LM Aiello, A Barrat, C Cattuto, G Ruffo, R Schifanella, Link creation and information spreading over social and communication ties in interest based online social network, EPJ Data Science 1 (1), 12

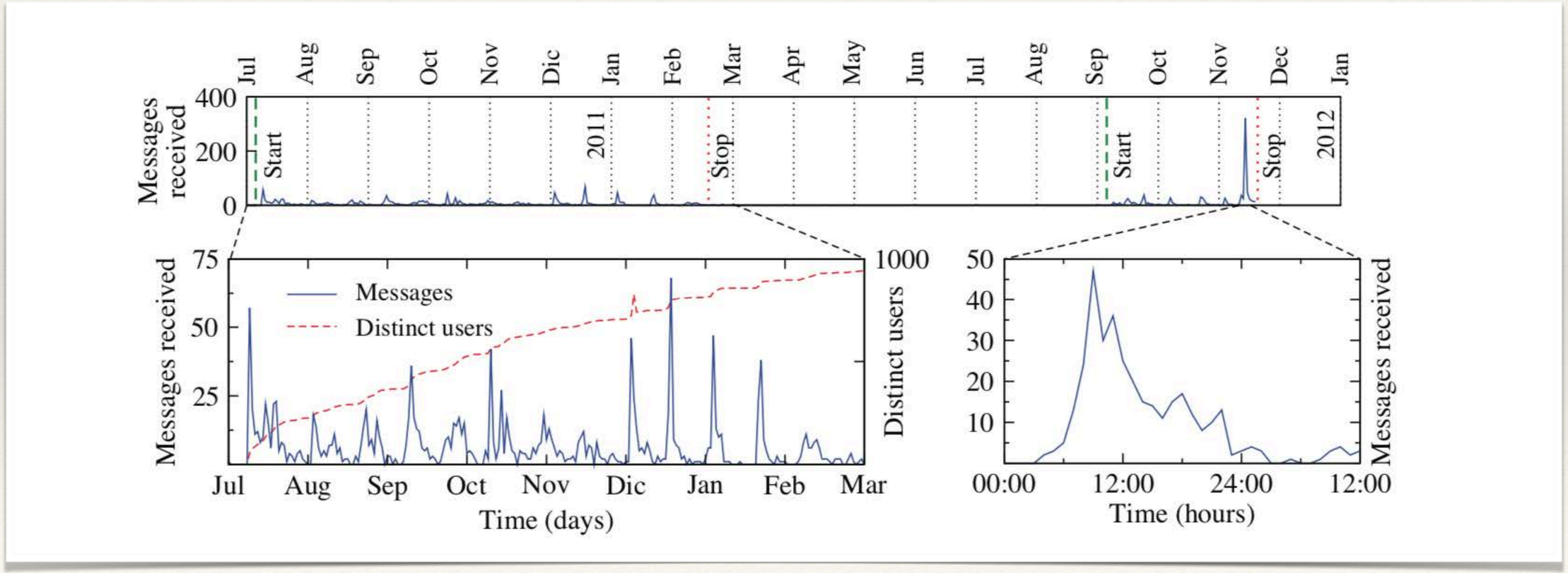
Application: a link recommendation algorithm

- A link recommendation algorithm based on prediction of profile similarities was proposed and tested
- Results showed an improvement w.r.t. the baselines



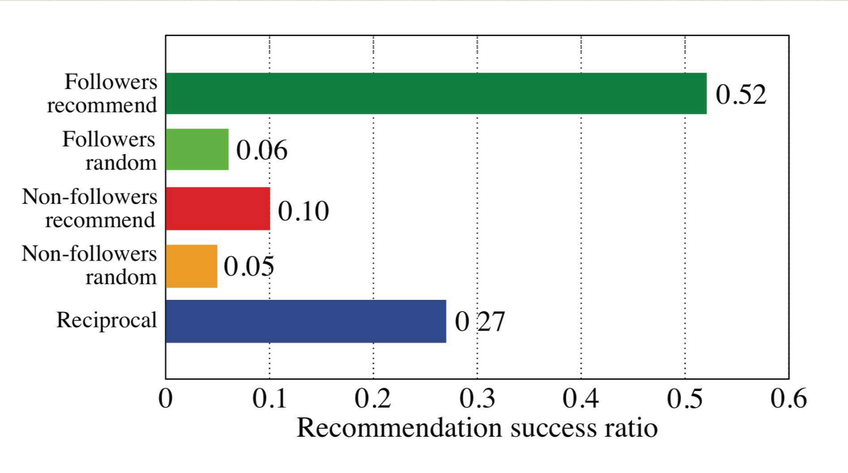
What happened to Lajello?

Lajello, incidentally, became the second most popular user in Anobii in terms of messages from distinct users



Exploiting Lajello popularity

- Lajello started to introduce users to each other according our link recommendation algorithm
- First result: users acceptance of the recommendation skyrocketed if they previously wrote in Lajello's wall



LM Aiello, M. Deplano, R Schifanella, G Ruffo, People are Strange when you're a Stranger: Impact and Influence of Bots on Social Networks, in Proc. of the 6th Intern. AAAI Conf. on Weblogs and Social Media (ICWSM'12), Dublin, Ireland, 2012

Influence of bots

COMMUNICATIONS OF THE ACM

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Home / Magazine Archive / July 2016 (Vol. 59, No. 7) / The Rise of Social Bots / Full Text

REVIEW ARTICLES

The Rise of Social Bots

By Emilio Ferrara, Onur Varol, Clayton Davis, Filippo Menczer, Alessandro Flammini
Communications of the ACM, Vol. 59 No. 7, Pages 96-104
10.1145/2818717
Comments (1)

nature COMMUNICATIONS

Article | Open Access | Published: 20 November 2018

The spread of low-credibility content by social bots

Chengcheng Shao, Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia, Onur Varol, Kai-Cheng Yang, Alessandro Flammini & Filippo Menczer

Nature Communications **9**, Article number: 4787 (2018) | Download Citation

Incidentally, we created an “egg war”

- After our initial experiment, Lajello remained silent for one year and then he “talked”. The recommendations changed the net structure and lajello account was banned after 24 hours. This ignited a “war”
- Two polarized opinions emerged: Anobii users created immediately two thematic groups: “the (not requested) suggestions of Lajello” and “Hands-off Lajello”
- A large portion of users that were contacted by Lajello joined to one of these groups
- We observed a strong interplay between the existing relationships in the social network and the opinion that emerged from the users at the end of the links: “**echo chamber**” effect?

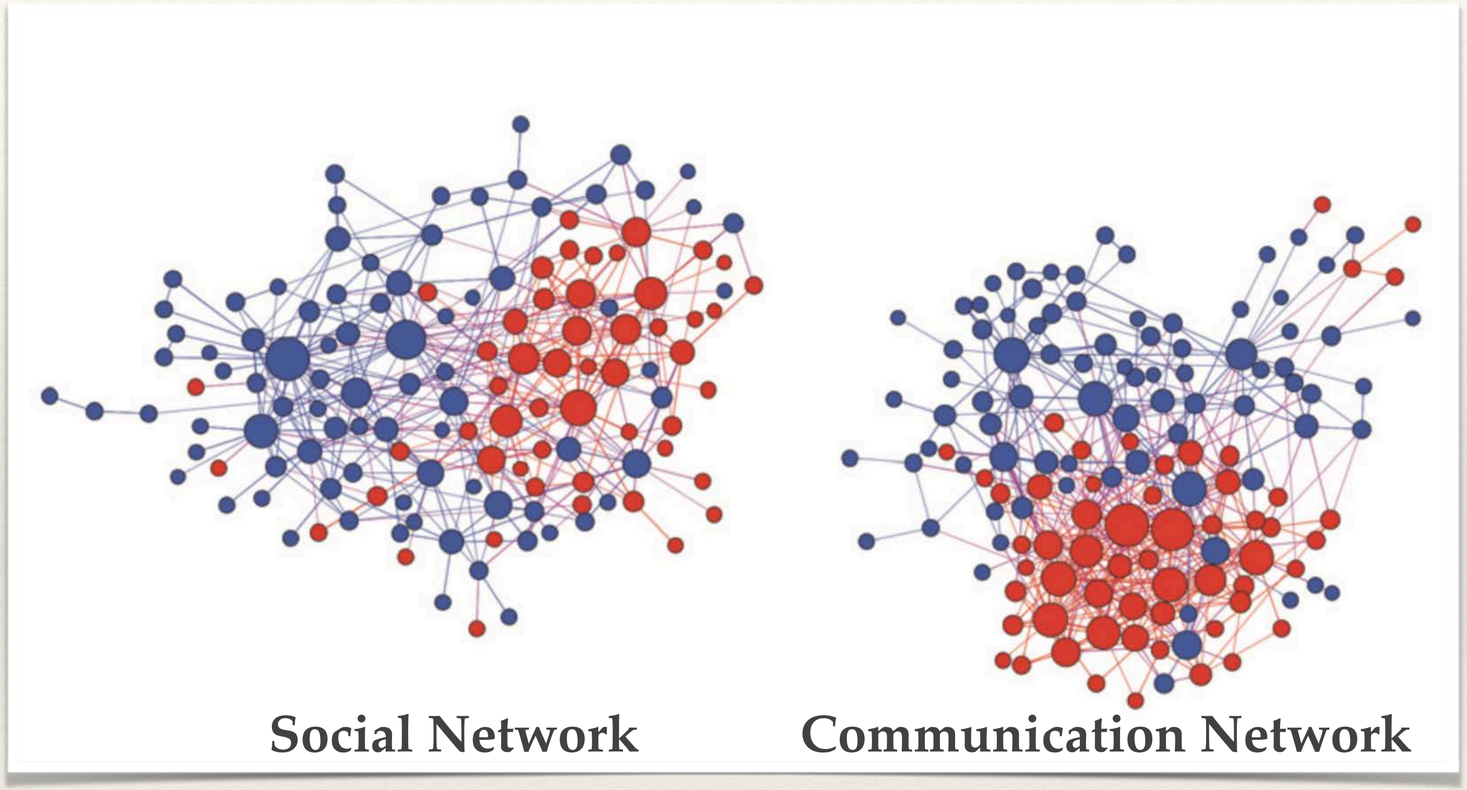
Social polarization and emotional reaction

red dots are lajello **supporters**

blu dots are lajello **haters**

links are existing
social connections
or **direct messages**
(graph is directed)

bigger dots are
users with more links



Automatic network-based community detection algorithm (OSLOM) accurately finds clusters (80% - Social network, 72% - Communication network), confirming a signal of **segregation** between the two groups before link recommendations

LAJELLO... HAI STUFATO..NON SE NE PUO' PIU'...STA ATTENTO/A CHE SONO CAPACE DI ASSOLDARE UN HACKER PER VEDERE CHI SEI..E PO' SONO C...TUOI

Tre settimane fa

ahahahhahahaha tu sei un genio!!!!! sei davvero un genio!!! insomma ma quante visualizzazioni hai???? sei un grande!!!!! riesci a farti visitare e a farti scrivere pur non avendo libri!!! ti adoro sei grandissimo :P

Aug 13, 2010

chi sei?

un grande.
continua così. Grazie delle visite, si vede che ti sto simpatica....

P.S: propongo di aprire un gruppo the Lajellos fans...

3 giorni fa

chapeau!!

già che mi ritrovo qui mi faccio pubblicità! Venite a vedere la mia libreria è la più bella -del mondo-. (l'ultima parte andava sottolineata..)

Due set

ahahahaahah tu sei un genio!!

Le tue visite cominciano ad essere inquietanti....

Grazie Lajello, mi sono divertita un sacco a leggere i commenti degli altri anobiani. Sembra un esperimento di psicologia sociale, se non ti dispiace ti aggiungo come vicino! e resisti eh...non pubblicare un libro! ;)

Due settimane fa

Lessons learned and observations

- Handle **experiments in social media** with care :)
- A simple **spambot can take power** in a social network
- A seed of **polarization** found in pre-existing network **structure** (Lilliput and Blefuscu were two different islands…)
- **Network and Sentiment analysis** provide tools and measures, when we have data
- What if the real identity and motivations of Lajello were fact-checked?

MIT Technology Review

Connectivity

How a Simple Spambot Became the Second Most Powerful Member of an Italian Social Network

The surprising story of how an experiment to automate the creation of popularity and influence became successful beyond all expectation.

by **Emerging Technology from the arXiv** Aug 5, 2014

Modeling the spread of misinformation

Questions

- Is fact-checking effective against the diffusion of fake-news?

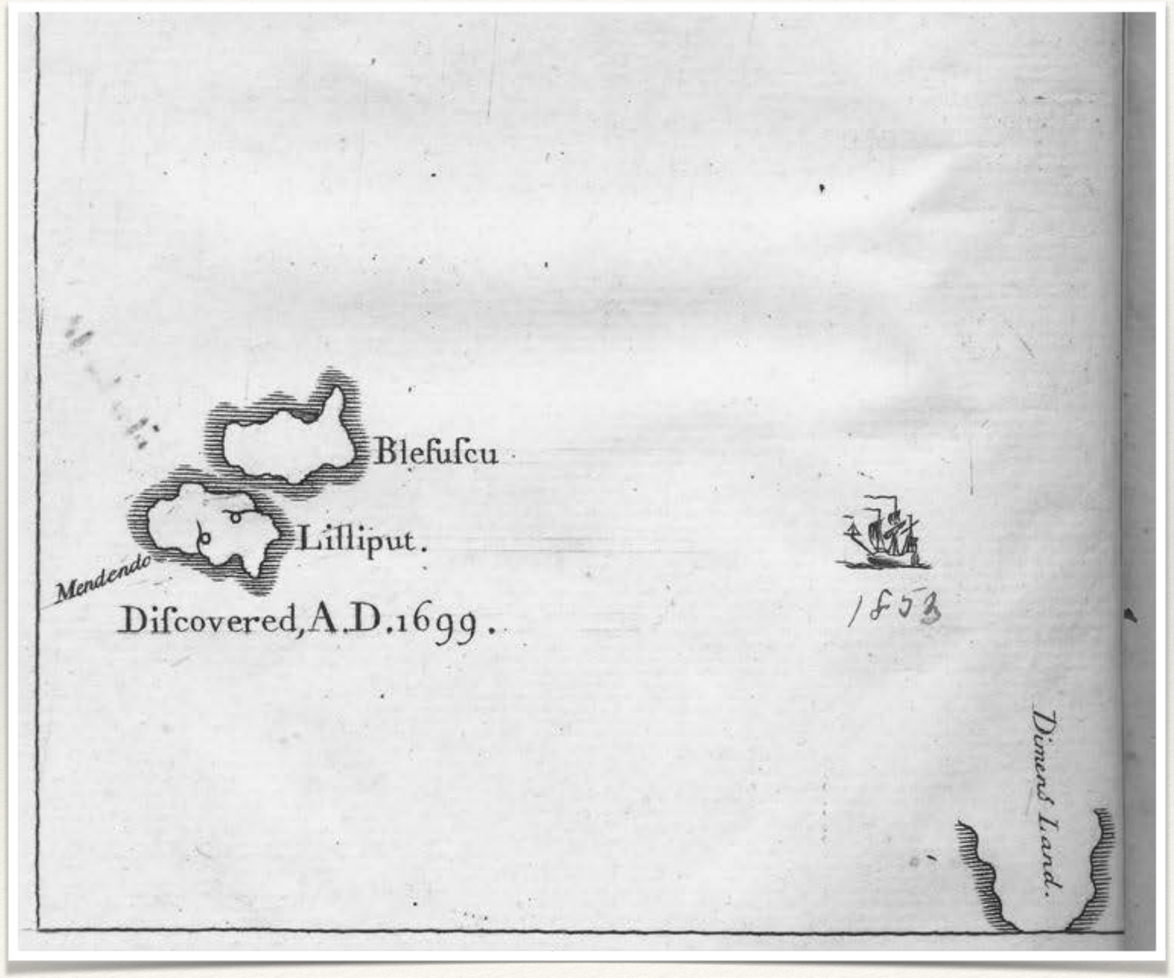
POLITIFACT

FACTCHECK.ORG

Snopes.com
Rumor Has It

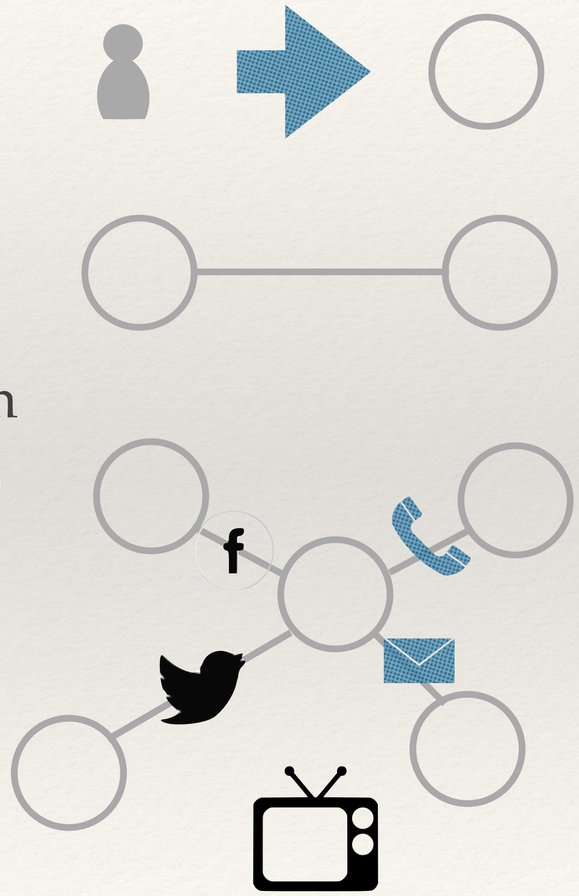
Emergent
A real-time rumor tracker.

- Do “echo-chambers” and “islands” play a role as inhibitors or facilitators of fake-news spreading?



Networks and their context

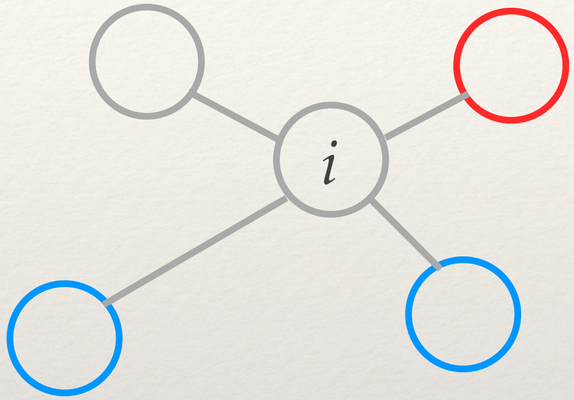
- nodes are **actors** involved in a **generic** social network (no assumption is given)
- links are **social relationships**
- nodes can be exposed to news from both **internal and external sources** and via different communication devices



- **network topologies** can be created artificially or built from real data
- The **news is factually false** (can be debunked or someone else has already debunked it)
- We need a **model** for predictions and what-if analysis; data for validation and tuning only

Node states in the SBFC model

- Susceptible
- Believer
- Fact-Checker

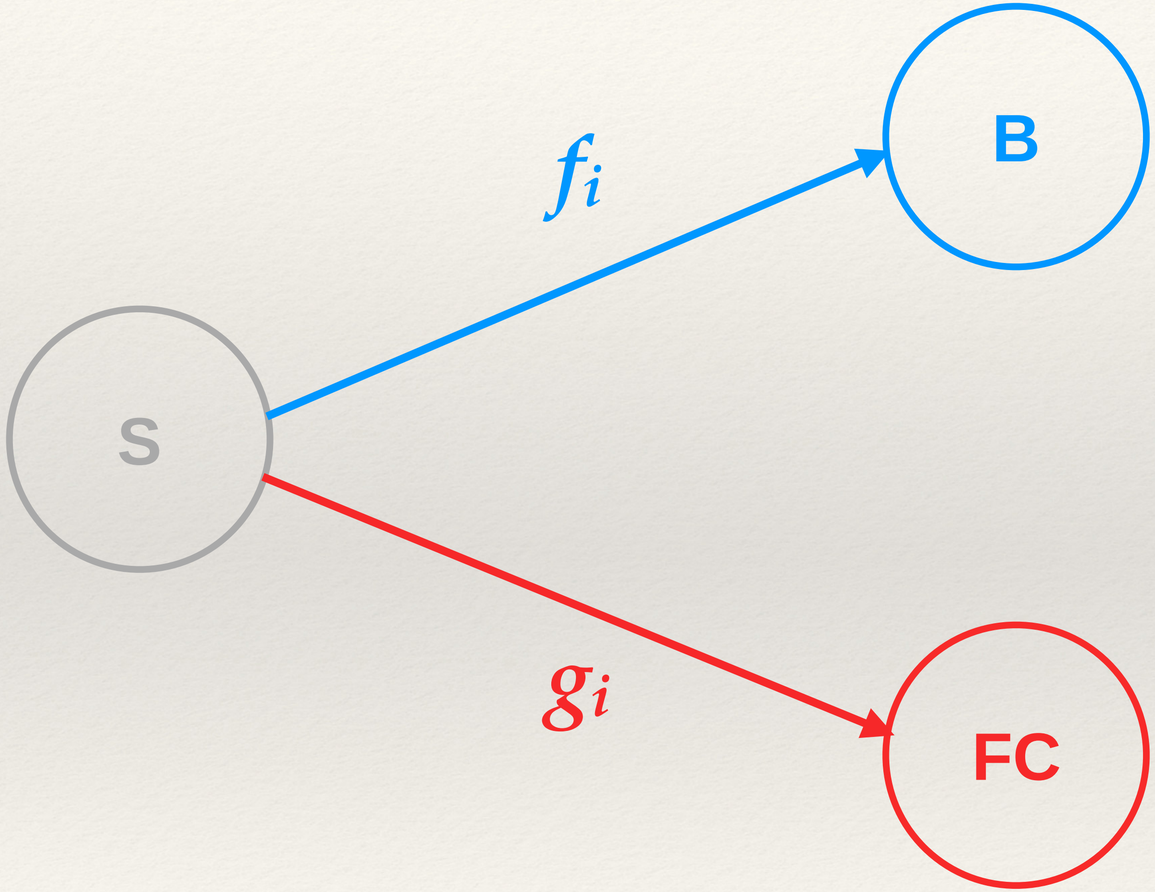


neighbors of i: n_i

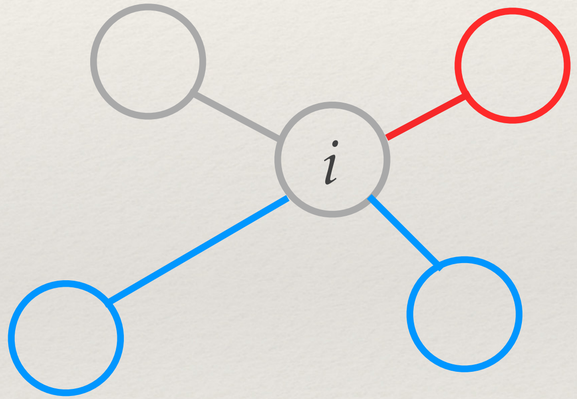
credibility of the hoax: α

spreading rate: β

From Susceptible to Believer/Fact-Checker



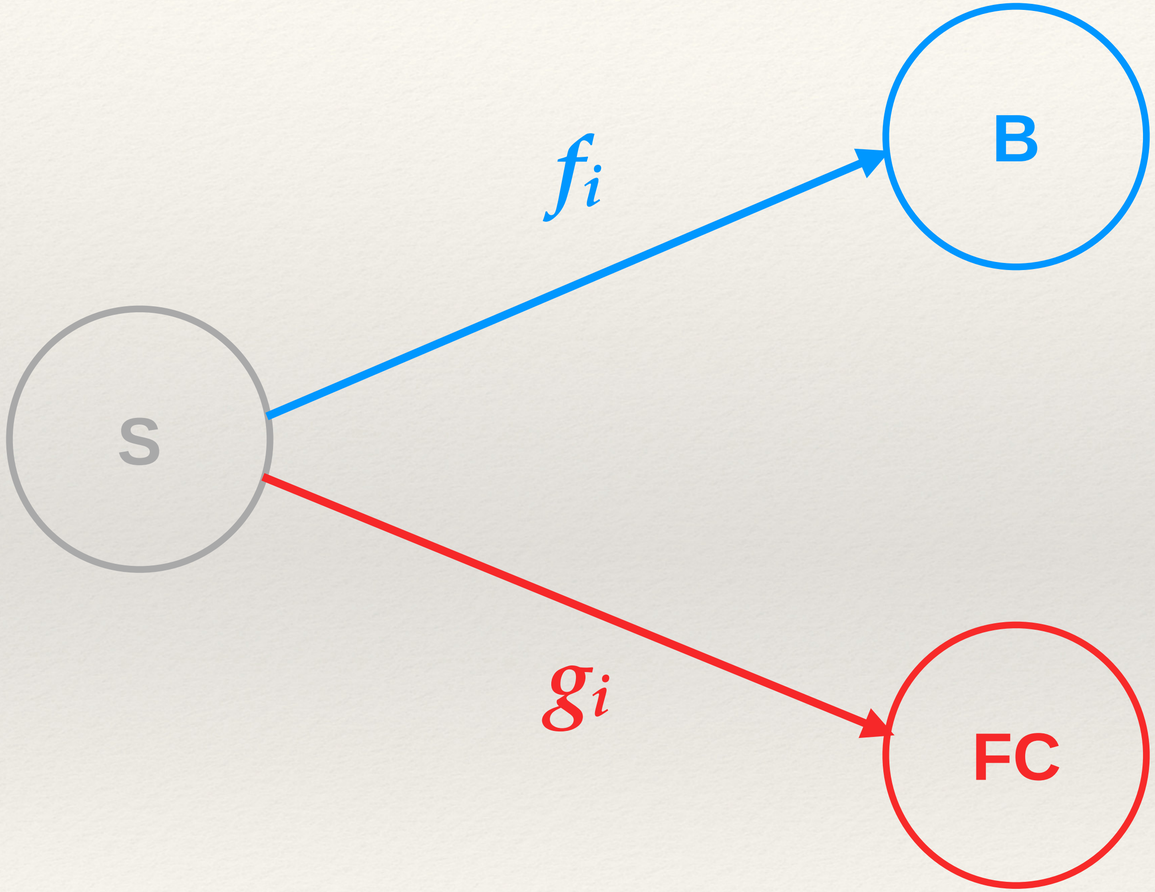
$$f_i(t) = \beta \frac{n_i^B(t)(1+\alpha)}{n_i^B(t)(1+\alpha) + n_i^F(t)(1-\alpha)}$$



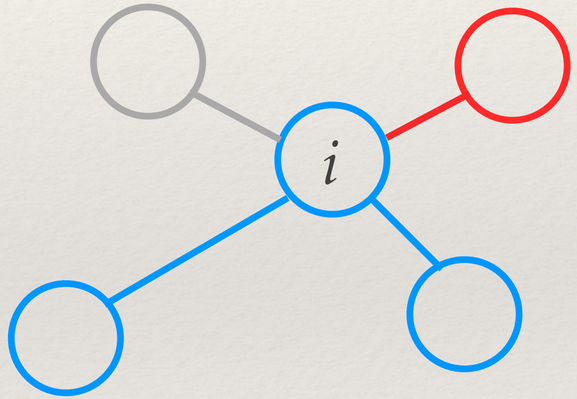
time t

$$g_i(t) = \beta \frac{n_i^F(t)(1-\alpha)}{n_i^B(t)(1+\alpha) + n_i^F(t)(1-\alpha)}$$

From Susceptible to Believer/Fact-Checker



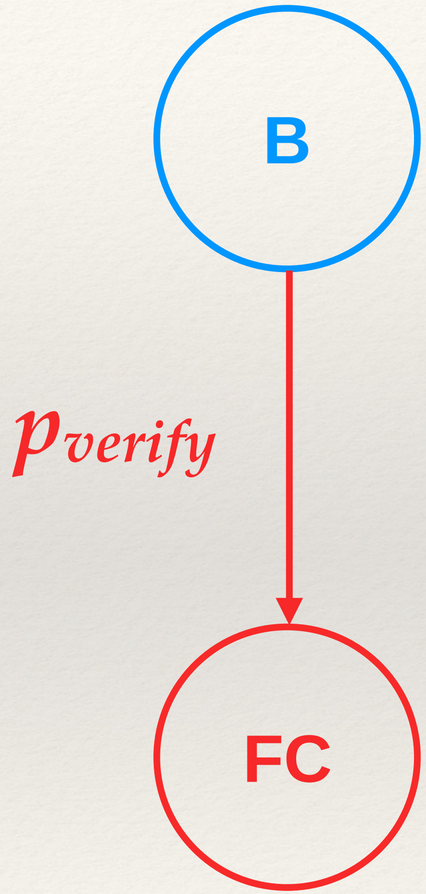
$$f_i(t) = \beta \frac{n_i^B(t)(1+\alpha)}{n_i^B(t)(1+\alpha) + n_i^F(t)(1-\alpha)}$$



time t+1

$$g_i(t) = \beta \frac{n_i^F(t)(1-\alpha)}{n_i^B(t)(1+\alpha) + n_i^F(t)(1-\alpha)}$$

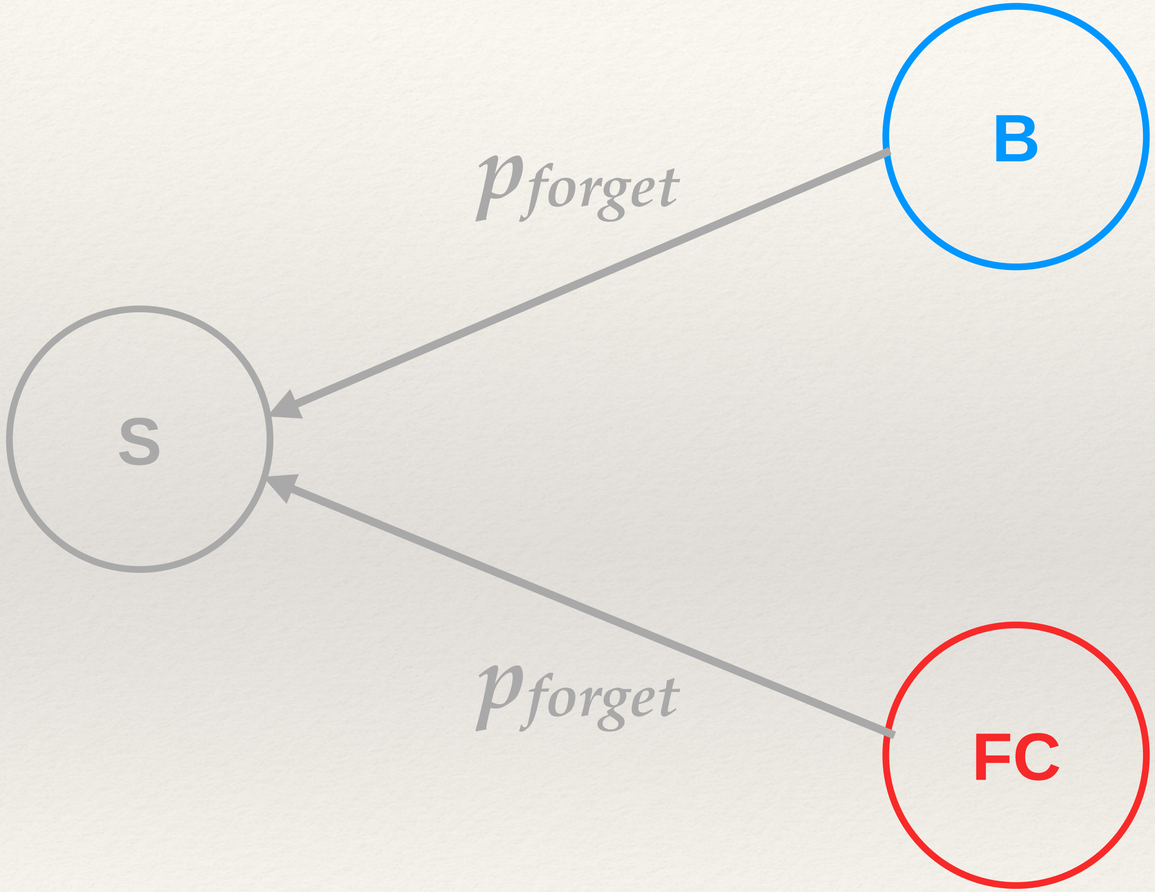
From Believer to Fact-Checker



VERIFYING

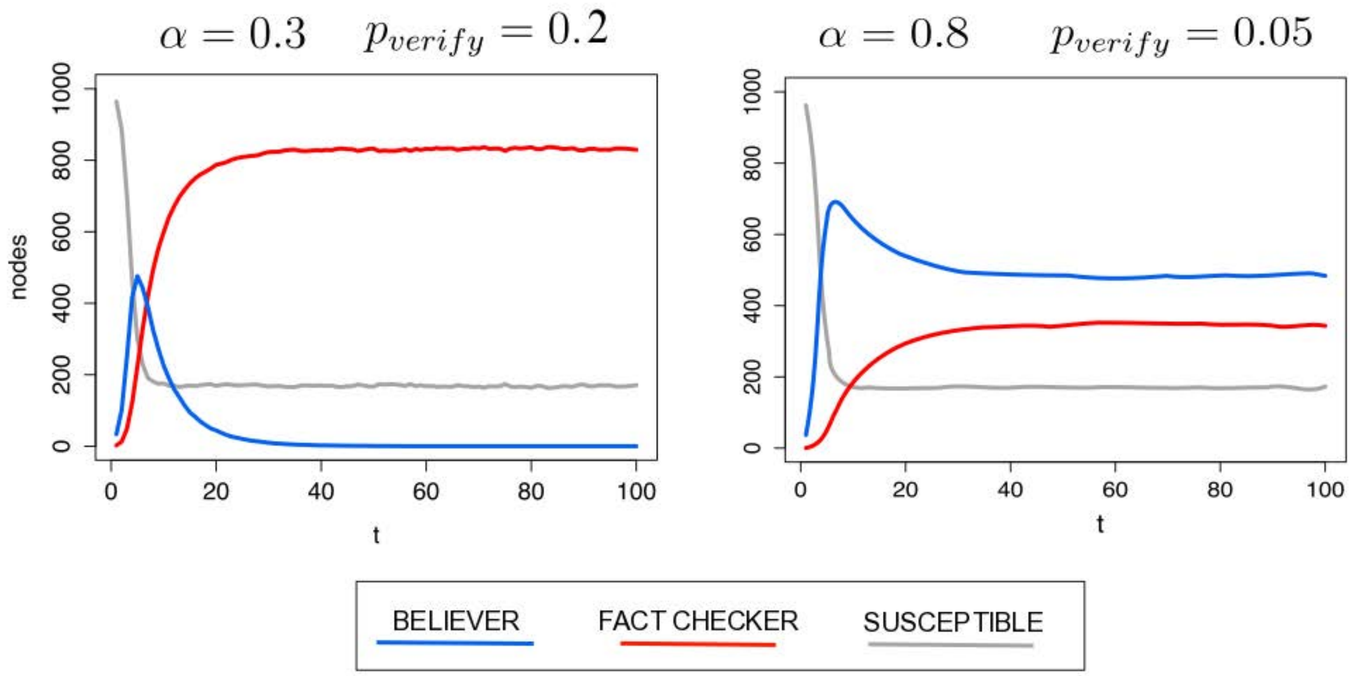
probability of fact-checking (or just deciding not to believe)

From Believer/Fact-Checker to Susceptible



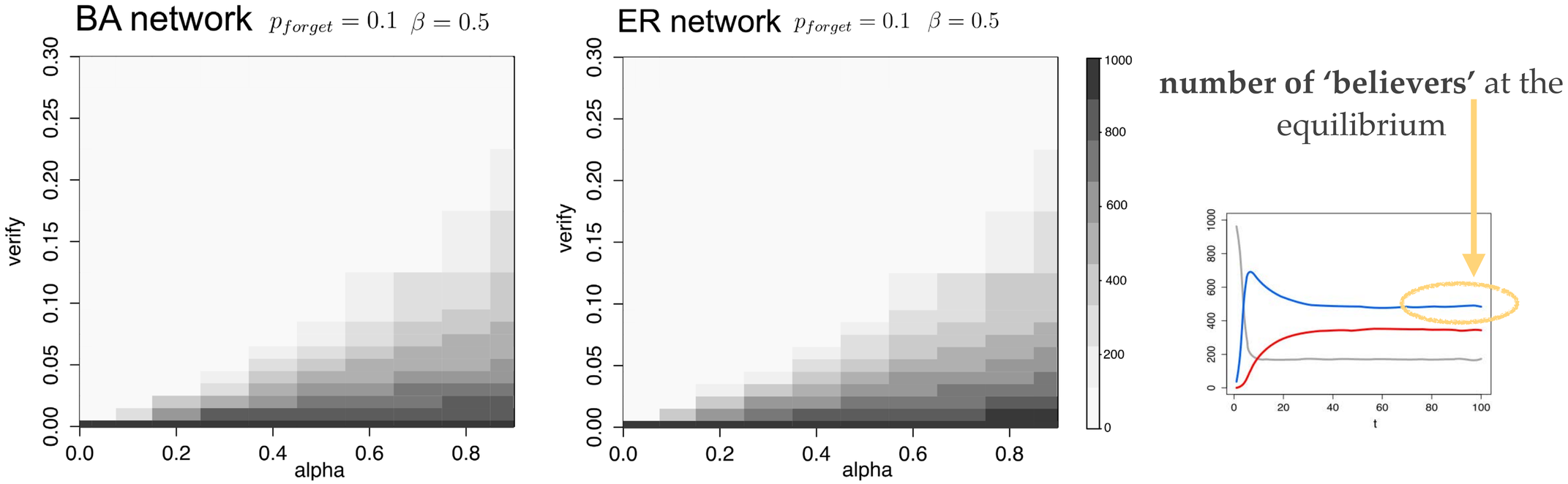
FORGETTING

Dynamics (agent-based simulations)



hoax **credibility** and **fact-checking probability** rule hoax persistence in the network

Dynamics (agent-based simulations)

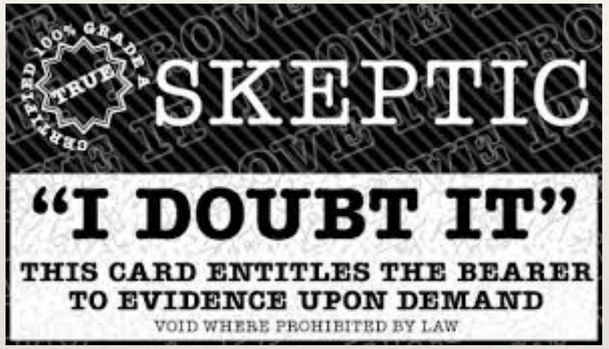


threshold on verifying probability: this provides an idea of how many believers we need to convince to guarantee the removal of the hoax

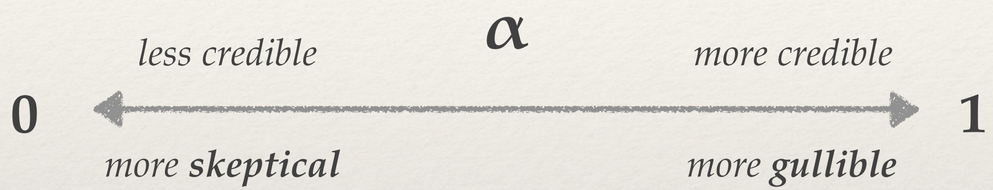
M Tambuscio, G Ruffo, A Flammini, and F Menczer. 2015. Fact-checking Effect on Viral Hoaxes: A Model of Misinformation Spread in Social Networks. In Proc. of the 24th Int. Conf. on World Wide Web (WWW '15 Companion)

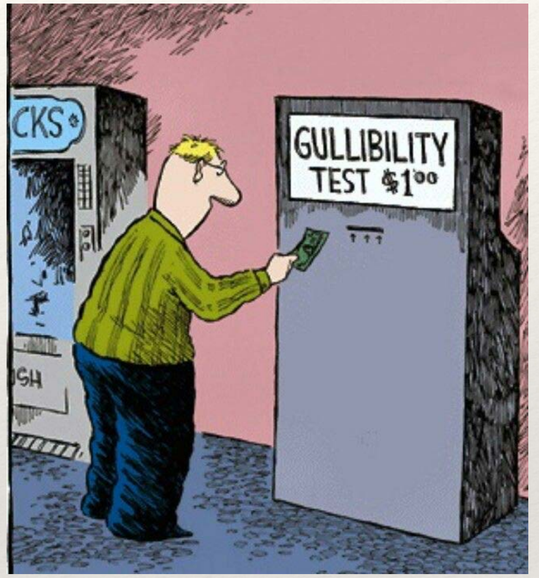
The role of segregation

Skeptical and gullible agents



let's tune **credibility** accordingly





the propensity to believe is also a property of the node (**gullibility**)

What does it happen when a skeptics and gullible agent are segregated?

Modeling two segregated communities

Skeptic

α small

size $(0 < \gamma < N)$

nodes in the gullible community

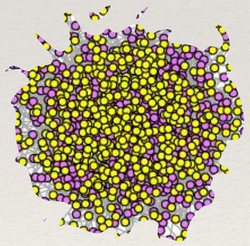
segregation $(0.5 < s < 1)$

fraction of edges within same community

[Gu-Gu, Sk-Sk]

Gullible

α large

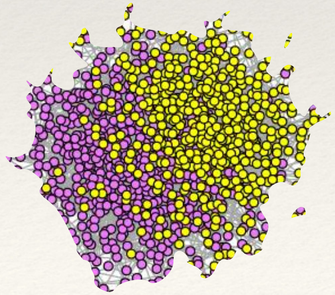


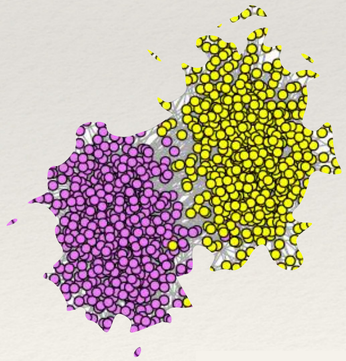
s=0.55

γ=500

s=0.8

γ=500

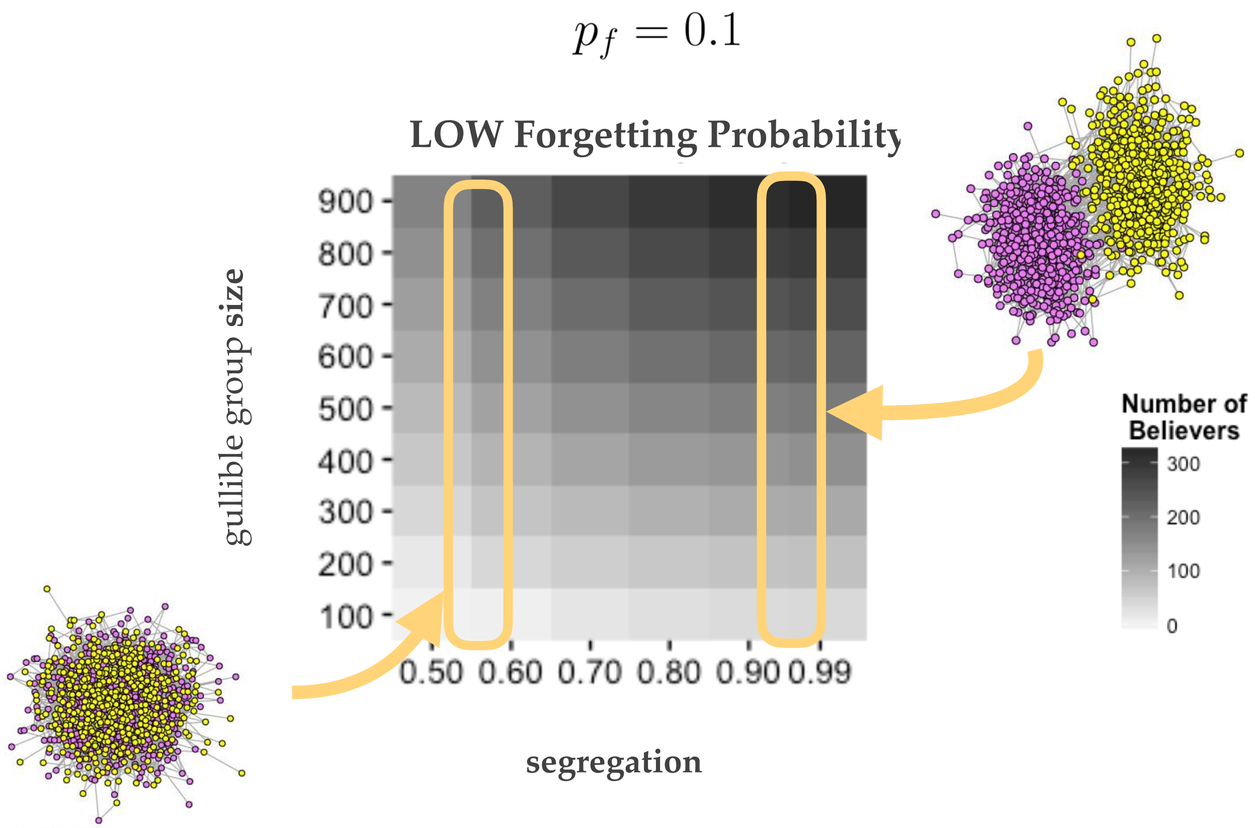




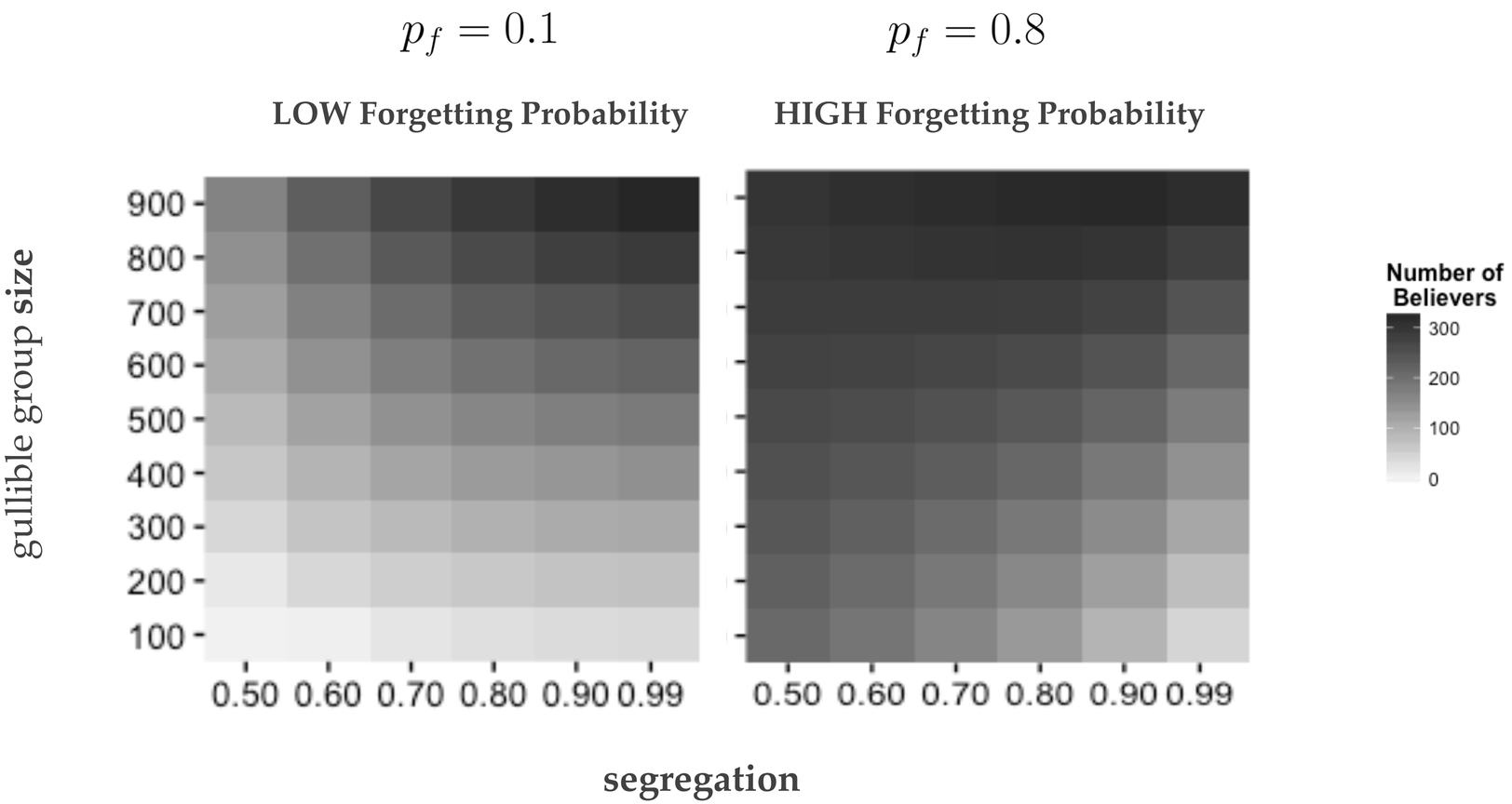
s=0.95

γ=500

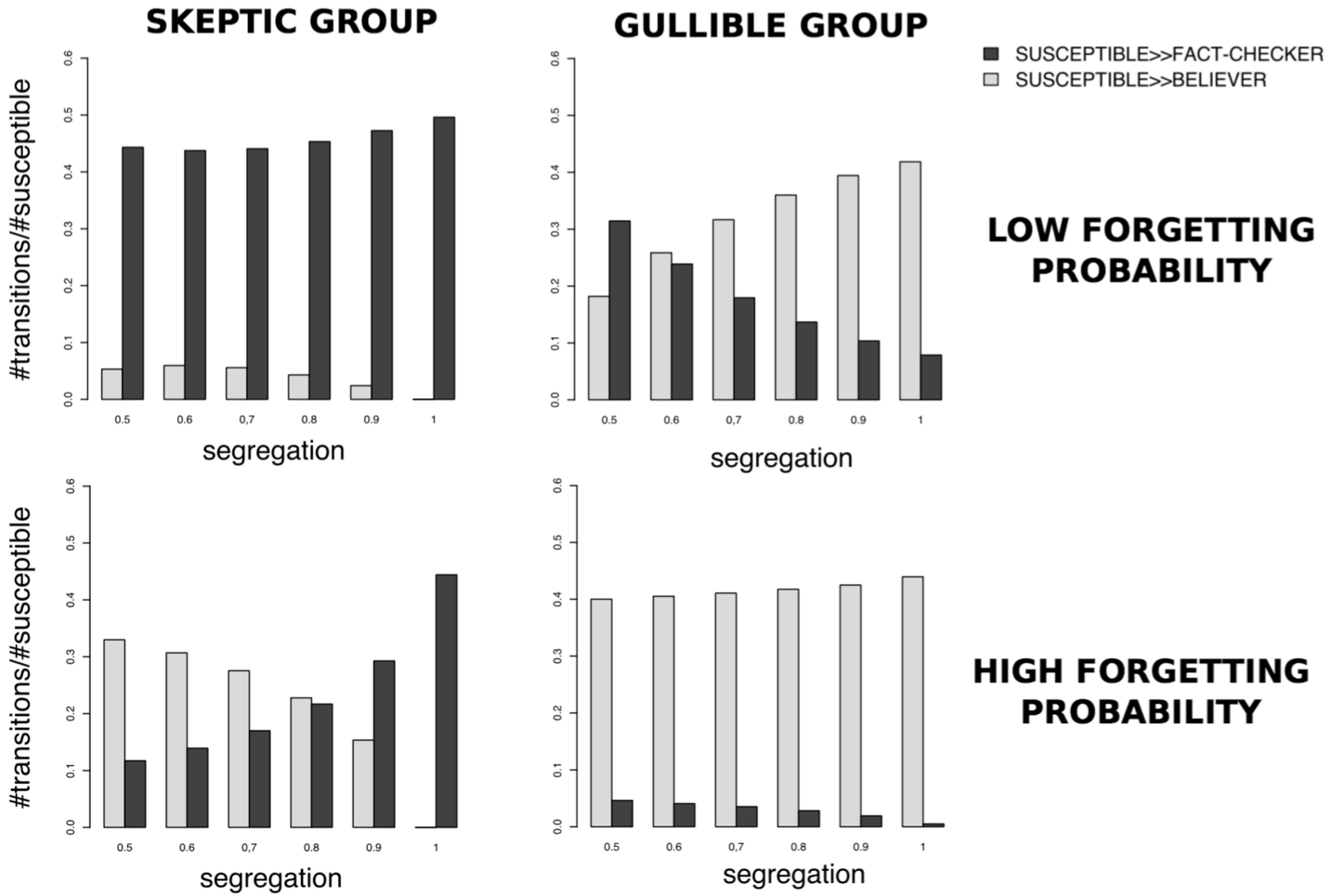
Size vs segregation



Size vs segregation



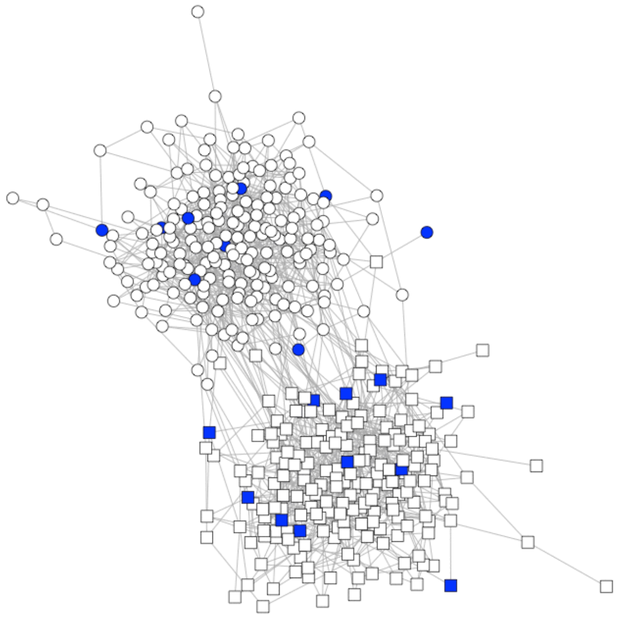
Transitions



Role of forgetting

LOW Forgetting Rate

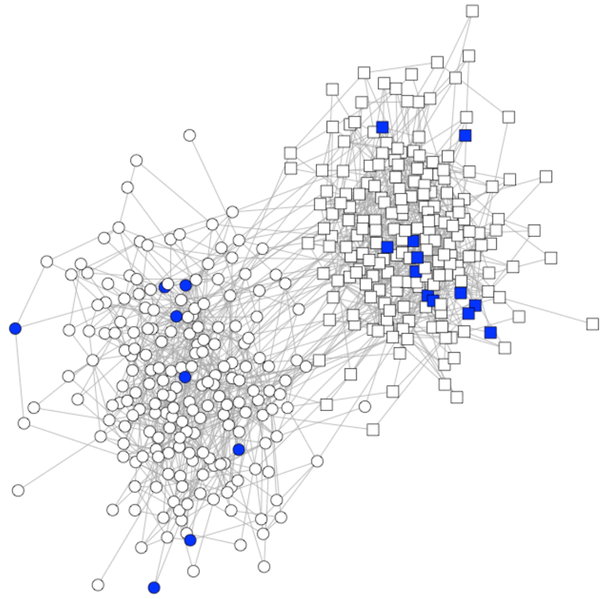
$p_f = 0.1$



Time = 1

HIGH Forgetting Rate

$p_f = 0.8$



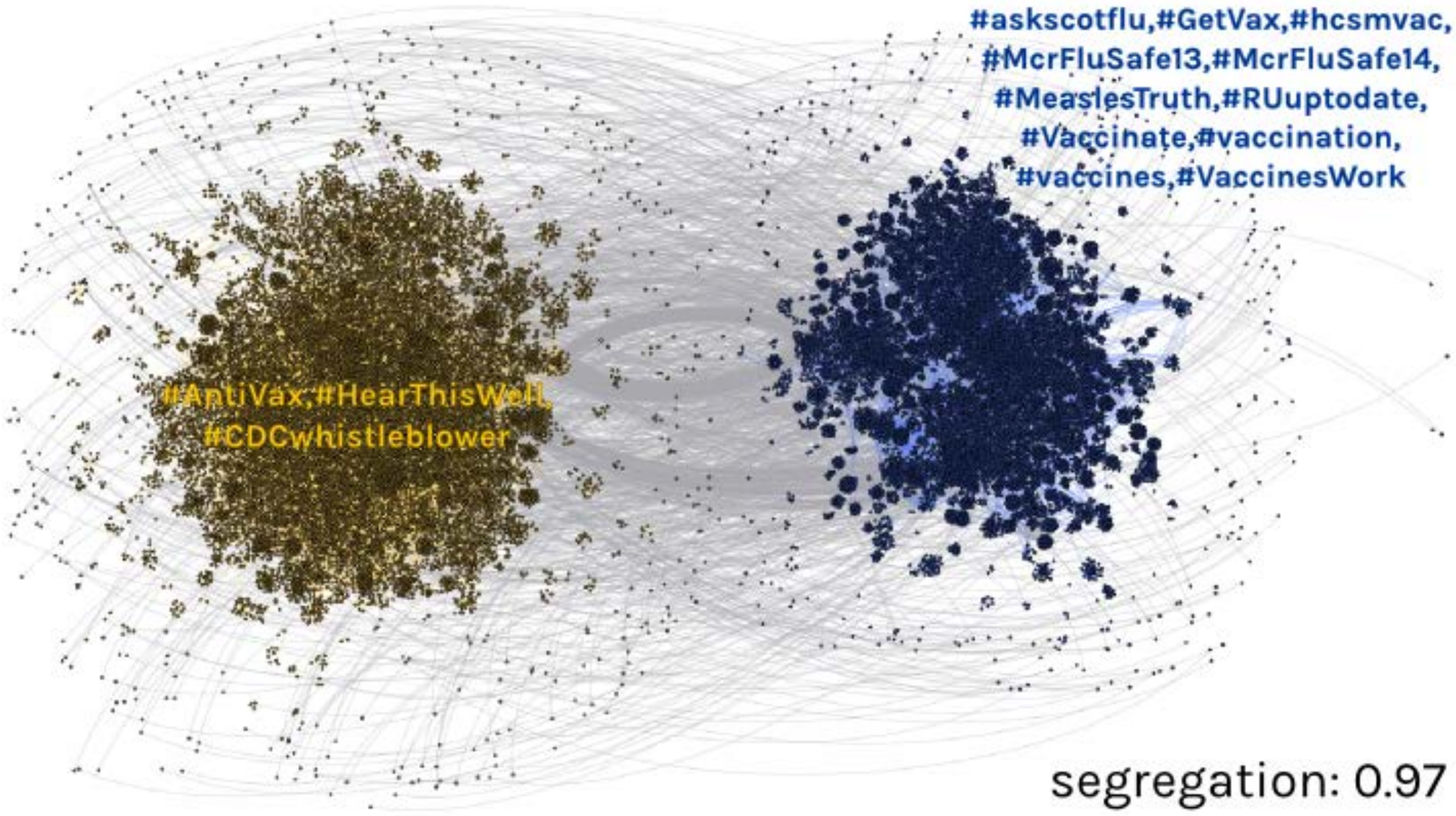
Time = 1

Lessons learned and observations

- We can use our model to study the fake-news diffusion process in **segregated community**
- **Complex contagion** is observed: interplay and not trivial outcomes
- **Forgetting** probability becomes relevant as well as the **level of segregation:**
  - **high forgetting** probability (e.g., just `normal' unfounded gossip) vanishes soon in **segregated communities**
  - **low forgetting** probability (e.g., conspiracy theories or partisanship beliefs) requires **low segregation**

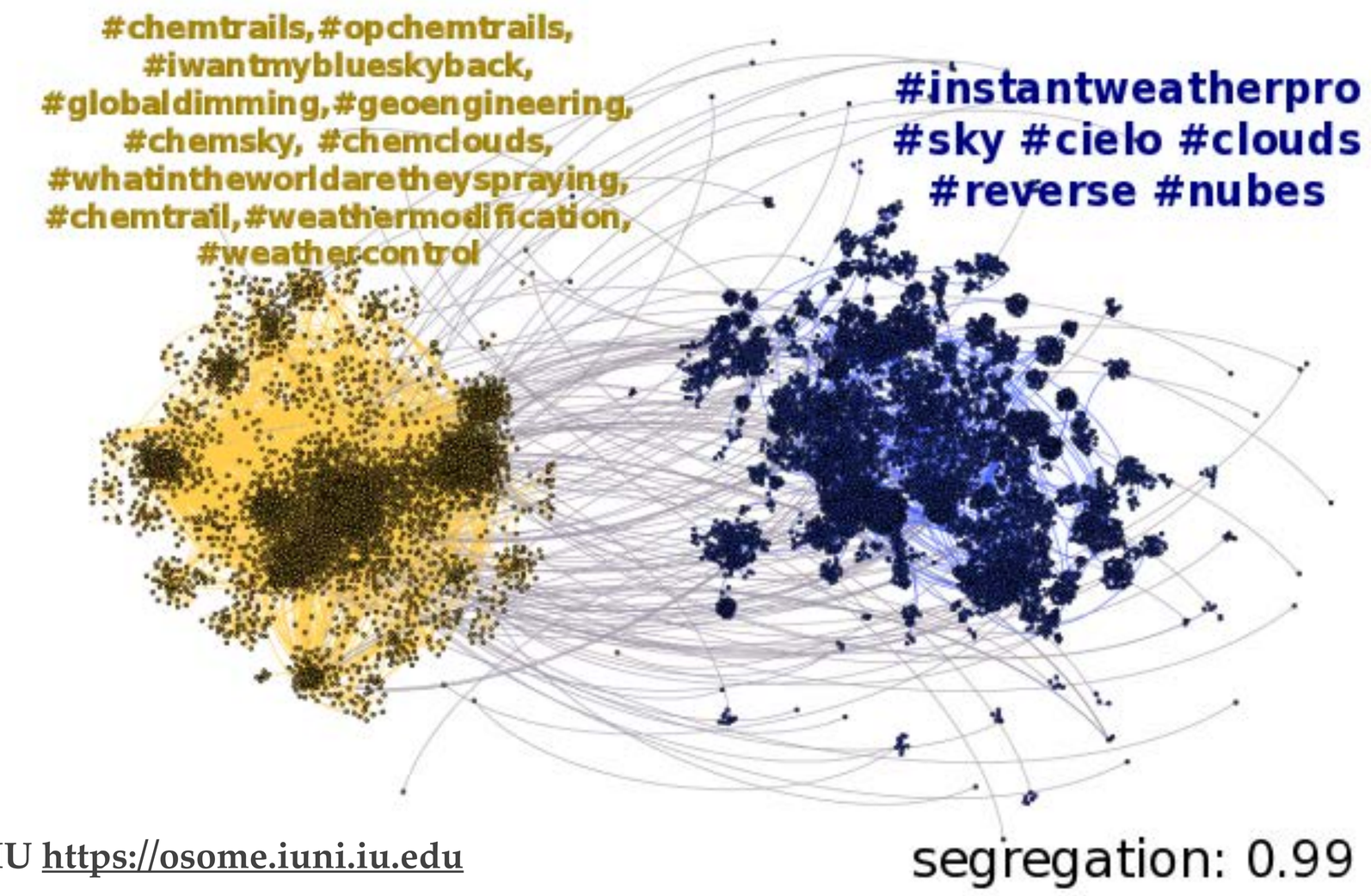
M Tambuscio, D F M Oliveira, G L Ciampaglia, G Ruffo, Network segregation in a model of misinformation and fact-checking, Journal of Computational Social Science (2018) 1: 261.

real data: vaccines



twitter data from IU https://osome.iuni.iu.edu

real data: chemtrails



twitter data from IU https://osome.iuni.iu.edu

Evaluating debunking strategies

What-if analysis

- We live in a **segregated** society: let's accept it!
- "Egg wars" can last for a long time: **low forgetting** probability
- **Computational epidemiology**: immunization works better if some node in the network (e.g., hubs, bridges) is vaccinated first
- **Where** to place fact-checkers?
- Stronger hypothesis: a believer do not verify ($\mathbf{p_{verify} = 0}$)
  - they can still forget
  - we can accept to leave half of the population breaking the egg on the wrong side, but we want at least to protect the skeptics!

Basic settings with no verification

Setting

segregation: 0.92 (high)

forgetting: 0.1 (low)

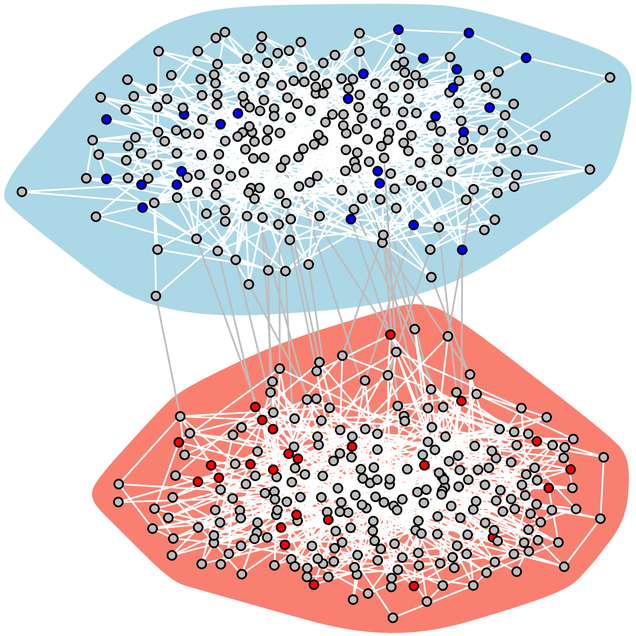
gullible group:

- α: 0.8
- seeders B: 5%

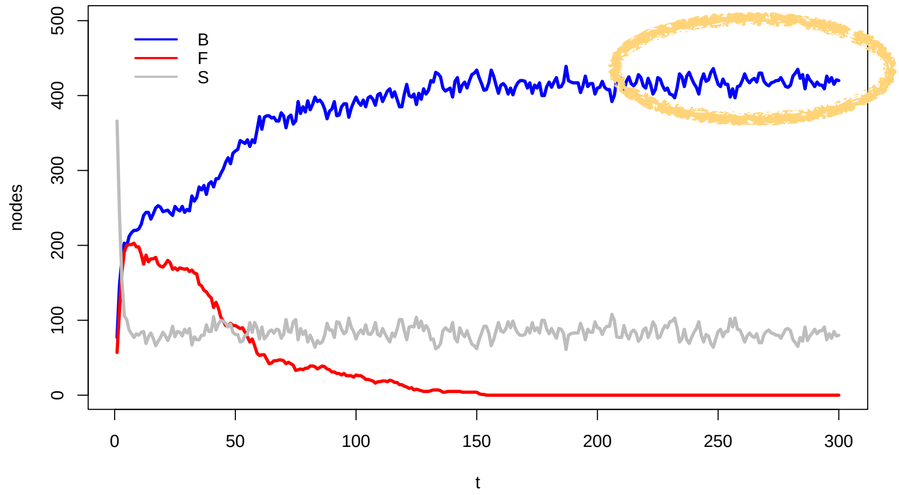
skeptical group:

- α: 0.3
- seeders FC: 5%

Simulation start



Simulation results



As expected: very **bad**!

Hubs as fact-checkers

Setting

segregation: 0.92 (high)

forgetting: 0.1 (low)

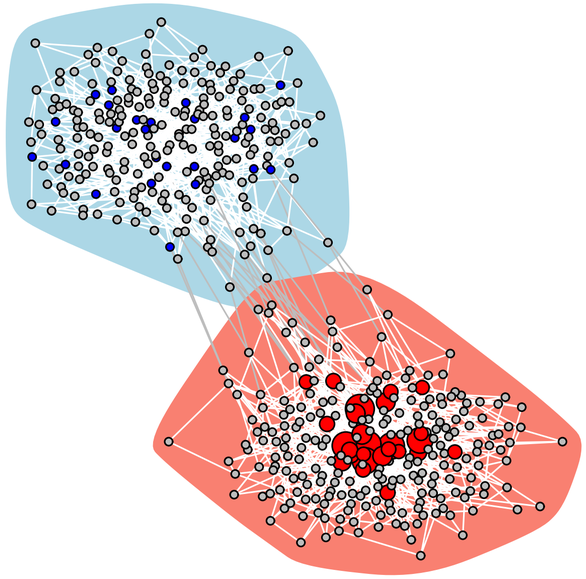
gullible group:

- α: 0.8
- seeders B: 5%

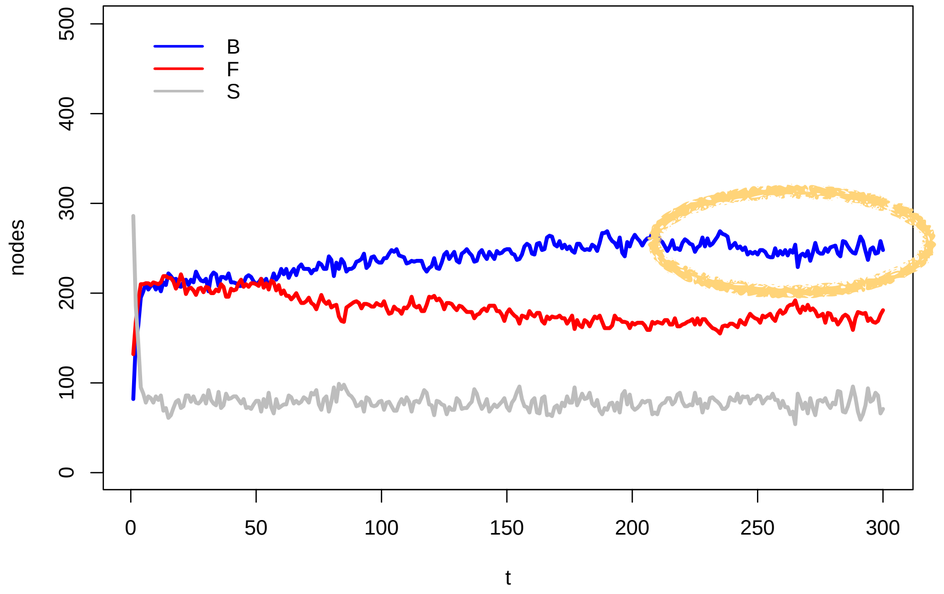
skeptical group:

- α: 0.3
- ~~seeders FC: 5%~~
- **seeders are HUBS!**

Simulation start



Simulation results



better, but still…

MORE hubs as fact-checkers

Setting

segregation: 0.92 (high)

forgetting: 0.1 (low)

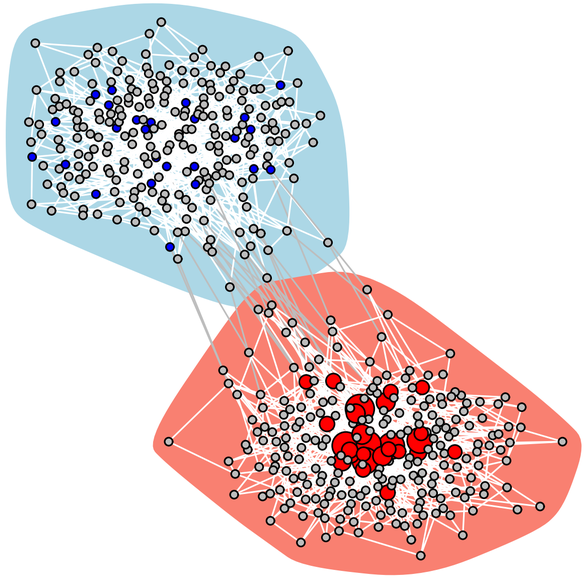
gullible group:

- α: 0.8
- seeders B: 5%

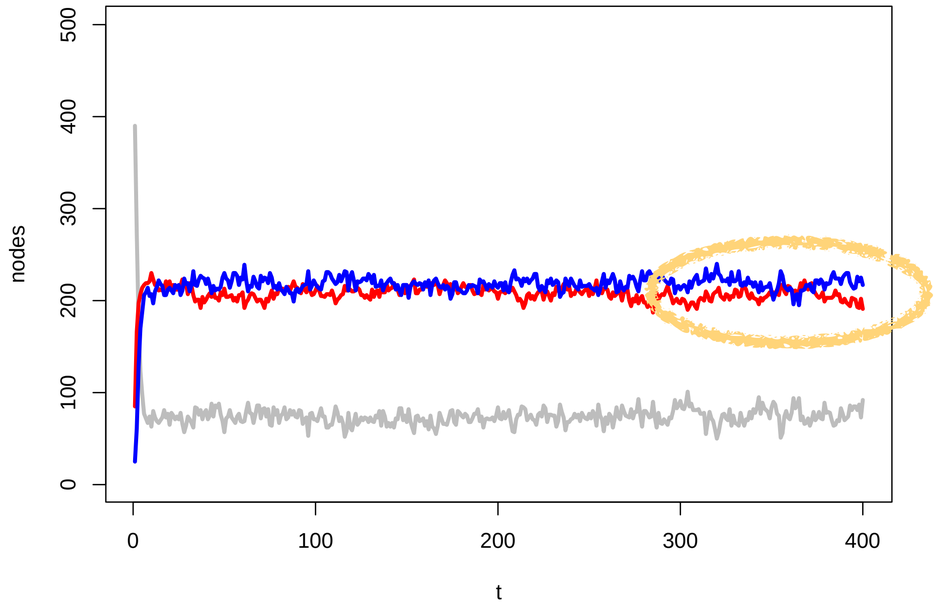
skeptical group:

- α: 0.3
- seeders FC: **10%**
- seeders are HUBS!

Simulation start



Simulation results



better, but still…

MORE hubs as fact-checkers

Setting

segregation: 0.92 (high)

forgetting: 0.1 (low)

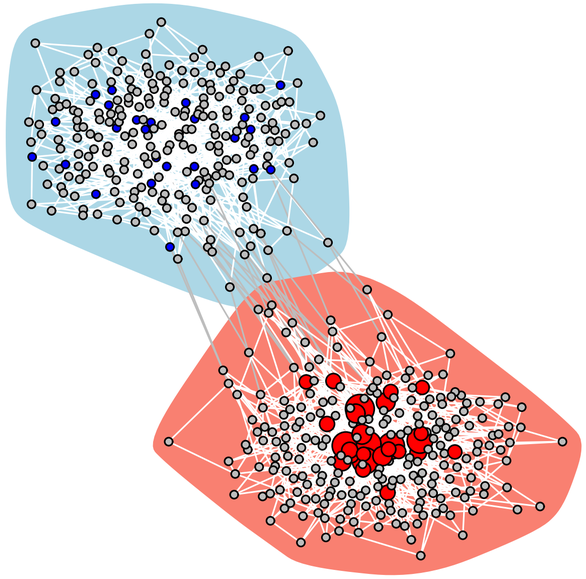
gullible group:

- α: 0.8
- seeders B: 5%

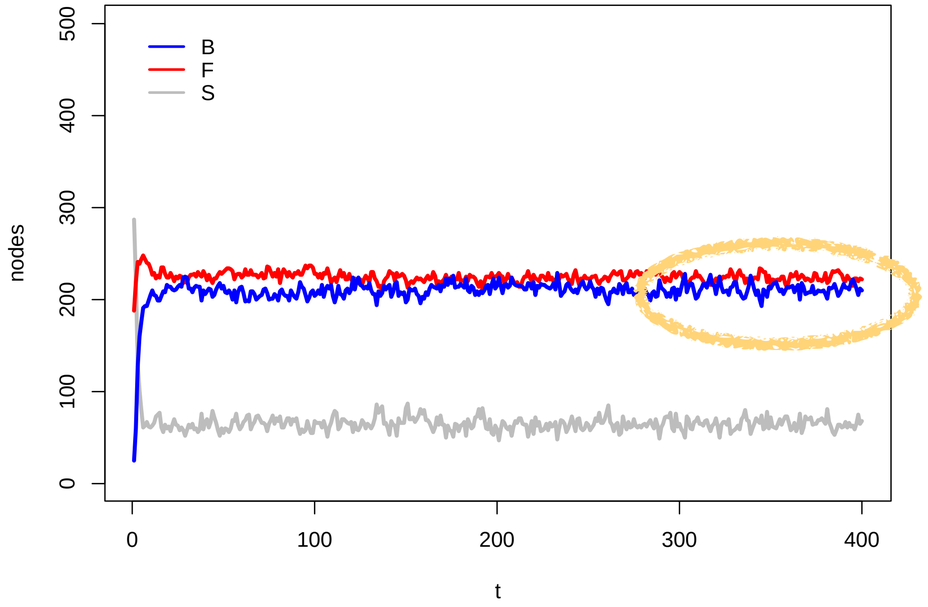
skeptical group:

- α: 0.3
- seeders FC: 20%
- seeders are HUBS!

Simulation start



Simulation results



finally, more FC than B!

MORE hubs as fact-checkers

Setting

segregation: 0.92 (high)

forgetting: 0.1 (low)

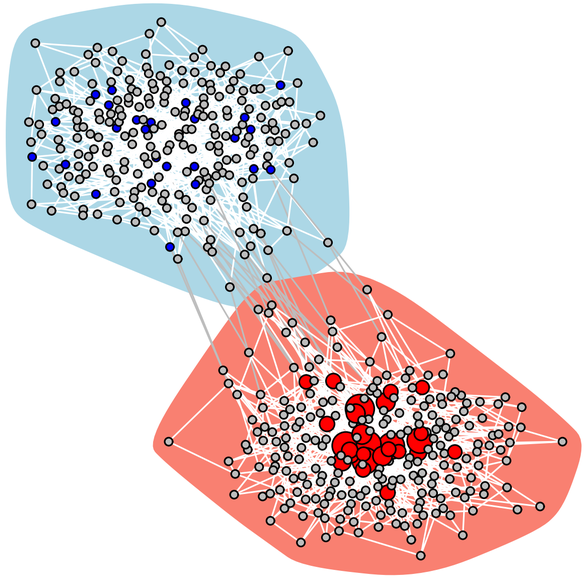
gullible group:

- α: 0.8
- seeders B: 5%

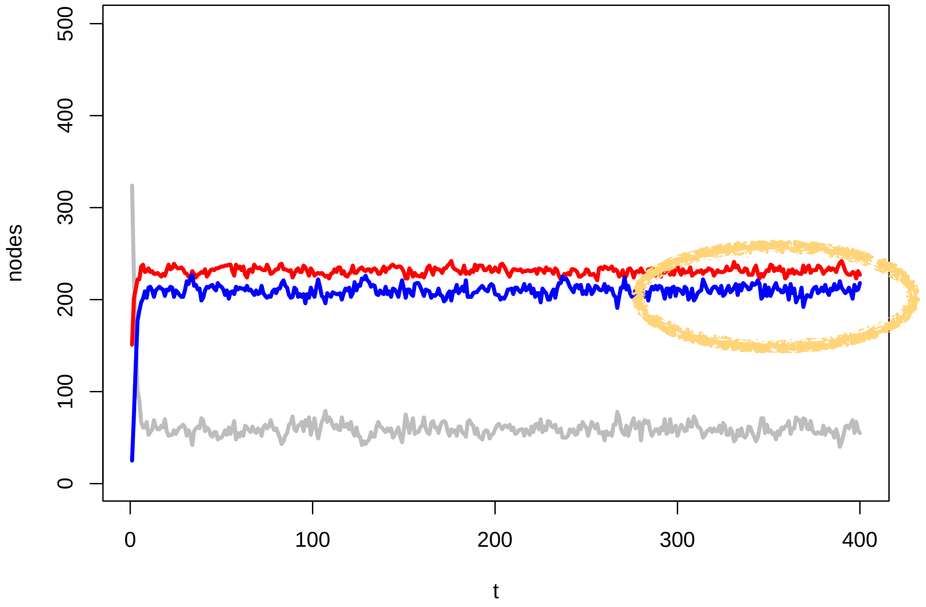
skeptical group:

- α: 0.3
- seeders F[illegible] 30%
- seeders are [illegible]S!

Simulation start



Simulation results



slightly better, but unrealistic

Bridges as Fact-Checker

Setting

segregation: 0.92 (high)

forgetting: 0.1 (low)

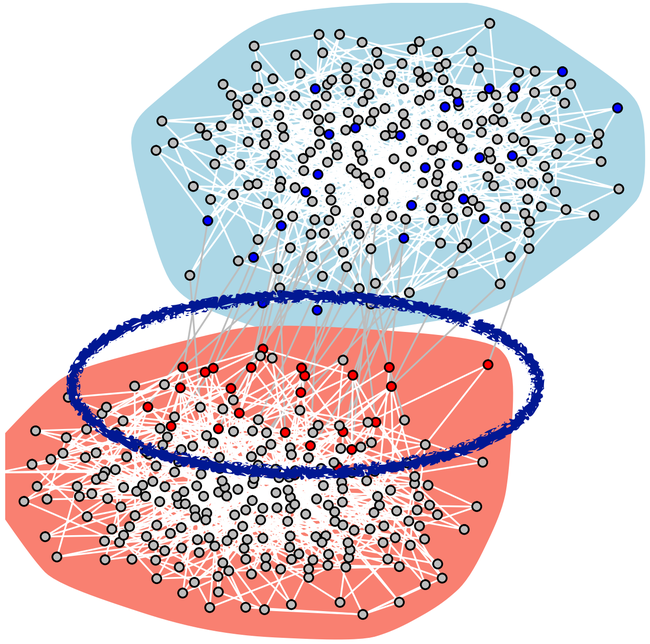
gullible group:

- α: 0.8
- seeders B: 5%

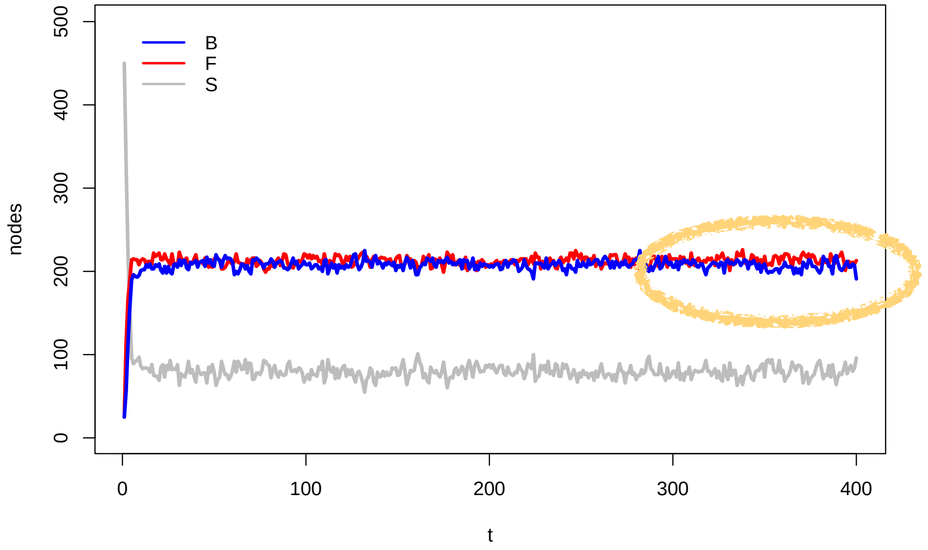
skeptical group:

- α: 0.3
- seeders FC: 5%
- **BRIDGES!**

Simulation start



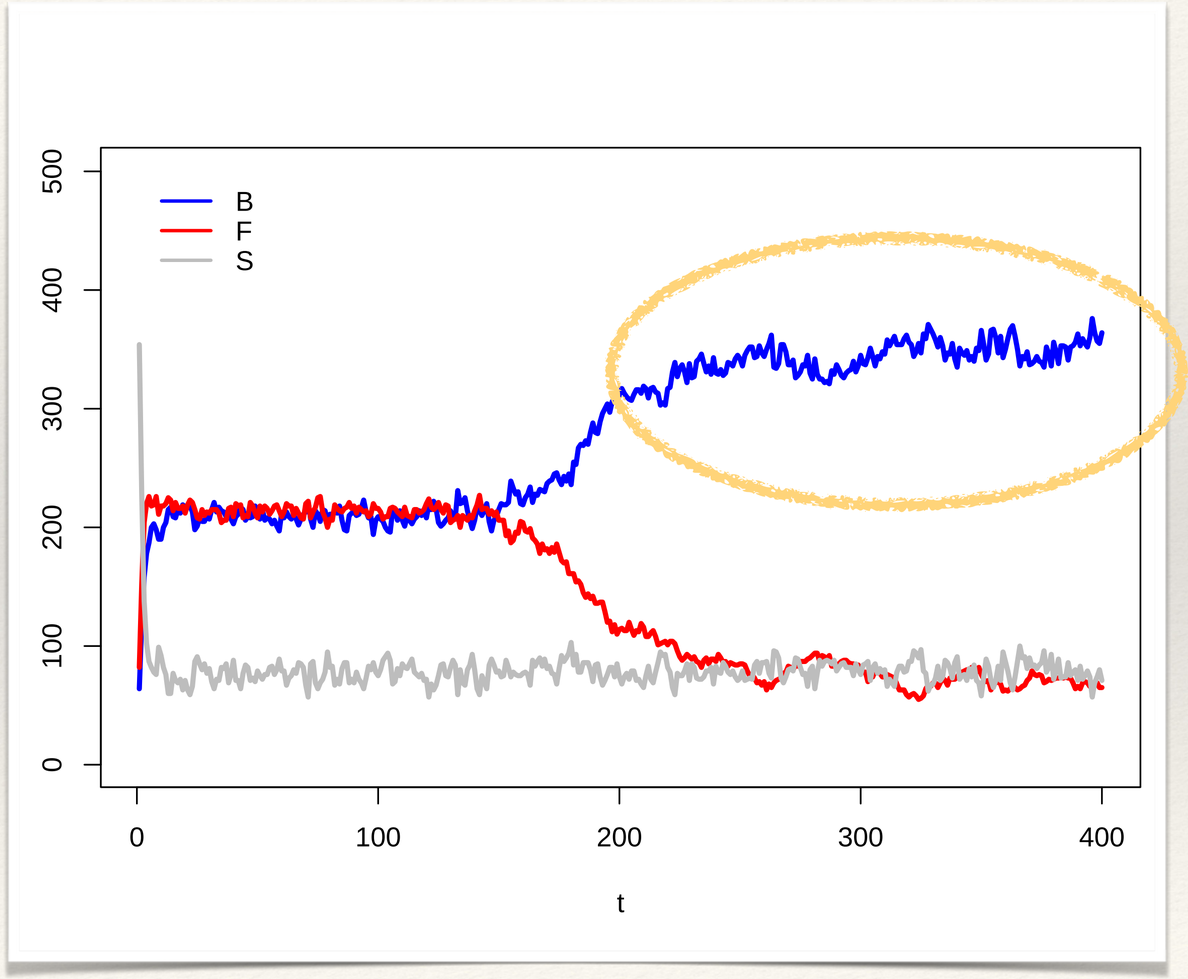
Simulation results



pretty good, and realistic

Beware of results based on realizations!

- Simulations results are based on many different stochastic realizations of the model
- Plots show (statistically significant) averages
- That means that **some** realizations may diverge
- Realizations as are unlikely, but still possible!



Lessons learned and observations

- **Debunking activism** is often considered useless or **counterproductive**
- However, a world without fact-checking is harmless against fake-news circulation: **skeptics exposed to misinformation** will turn into **believers** because of **social influence**
- **Skeptics with links to gullible subjects** should be the first to be exposed to the fact-checking: misinformation will survive in the network, but their communities can be 'protected' by such **gatekeepers**
- Note: no socio-psychological assumption so far. Real world is much more complicated

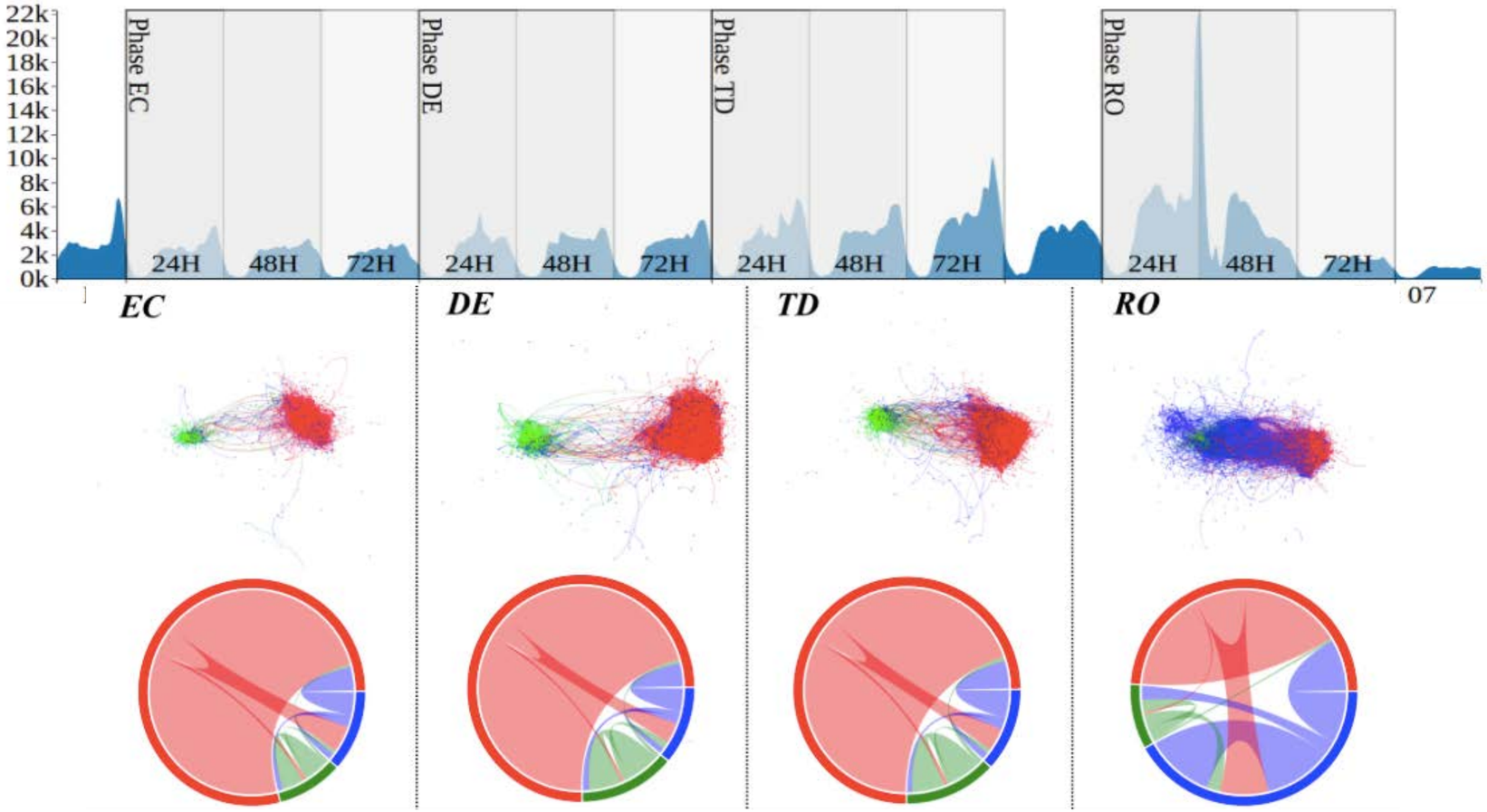
M Tambuscio, G. Ruffo, Fact-checking strategies to limit urban legends spreading in a segregated society, to appear in Applied Network Science Journal, Springer

Language and network structure

Links to NLP

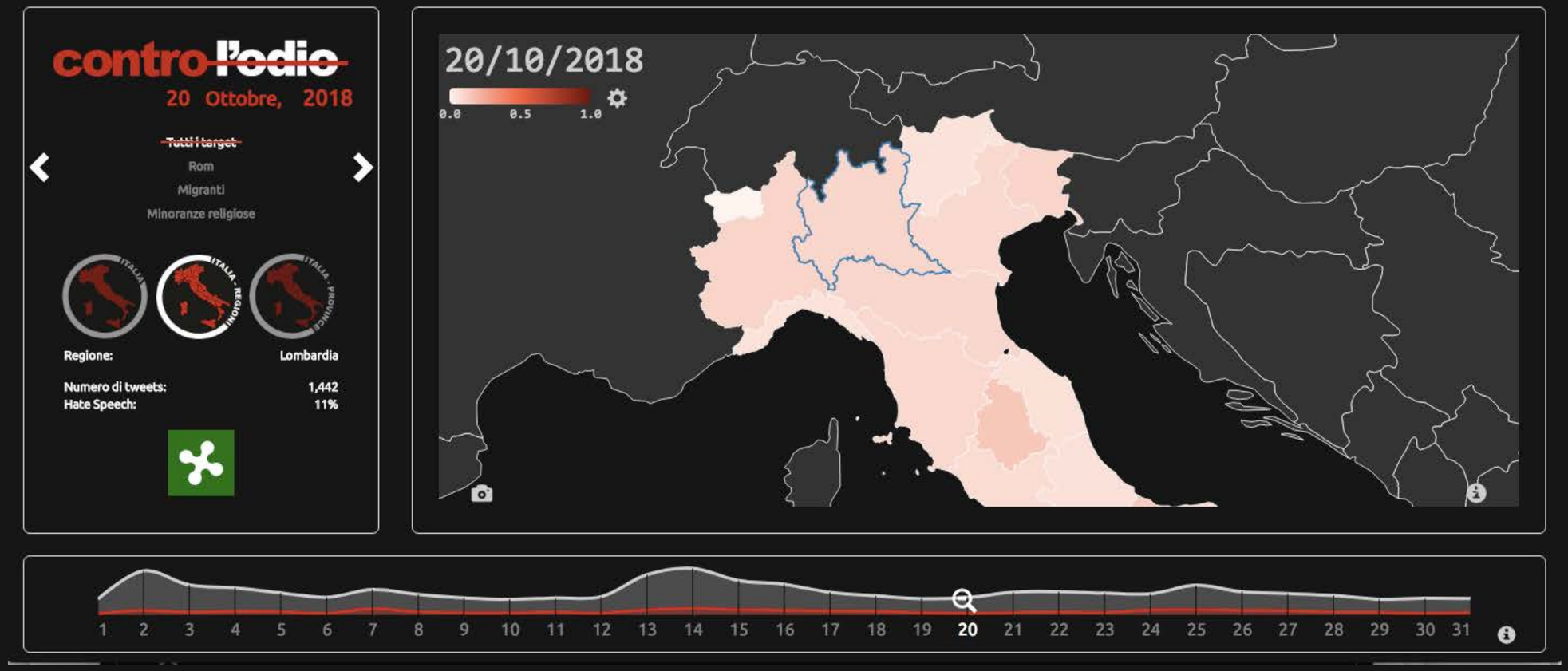
- Individual's opinions are often hidden
- Social Media provide much data for stance detection, emotion analysis, and so on
- Communication styles can be another trigger or just a reaction to news exposition and partisanships
- Relationships between structural segregation and opinion formation and polarization should be explored further by a joint effort between our scientific communities

Italian 2016 Constitutional Referendum



M Lai, M Tambuscio, V Patti, P Rosso, G. Ruffo, Stance Polarity in Political Debates: a Diachronic Perspective of Network Homophily and Conversations on Twitter, submitted

Hate speech monitoring (Contro l'Odio)



A T E Capozzi, V Patti, G Ruffo, and C Bosco. 2018. A Data Viz Platform as a Support to Study, Analyze and Understand the Hate Speech Phenomenon. In Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Web Studies (WS.2 2018), ACM

Discussion and conclusion

Recap

- **Structural segregation** (as in Lilliput and Blefuscu islands) may be one of the main triggers of opinion **polarization**
- **Fake-news spreading**, especially when partisanship and antagonistic behavior reinforce the debate, is **facilitated** in segregated networks
- Fact-checking is needed and skeptics with links to more gullible (vulnerable) contacts can be recruited as **gatekeepers**
- **Network Analysis** and **NLP** are great tools for modeling and analyzing data in this domain
- Beware of the **interplay**: segregation causes polarization and vice-versa

di.unito.it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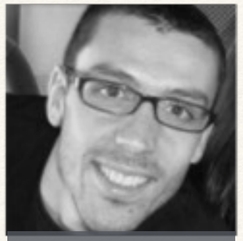
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André Panisson


Luca Aiello


Viviana Patti

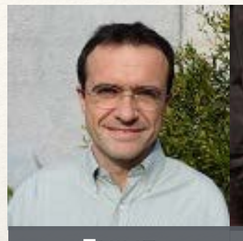

Arthur Capozzi

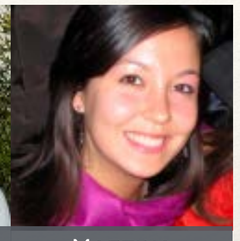

EDoardo Galimberti


Alfonso Semeraro


Alessandra Urbinati


Salvatore Vilella


Emilio Sulis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Thanks!

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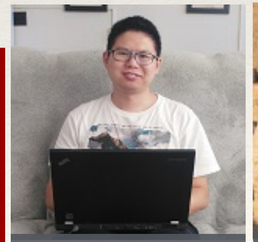
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