

# **On the Security and Privacy Risks of Browser Extensions**

**Dr.-Ing. Aurore Fass**

Tenured Researcher – Inria Centre at Université Côte d'Azur (since Dec 1, 2025)

# Dr.-Ing. Aurore (/ɔʁɔʁ/) FASS

🇫🇷 2017: Graduated from **TELECOM Nancy (FR)**



🇩🇪 2017–21: PhD Student + Postdoc at **CISPA (DE)**



🇺🇸 2021–23: Visiting Assistant Professor at **Stanford (US)**

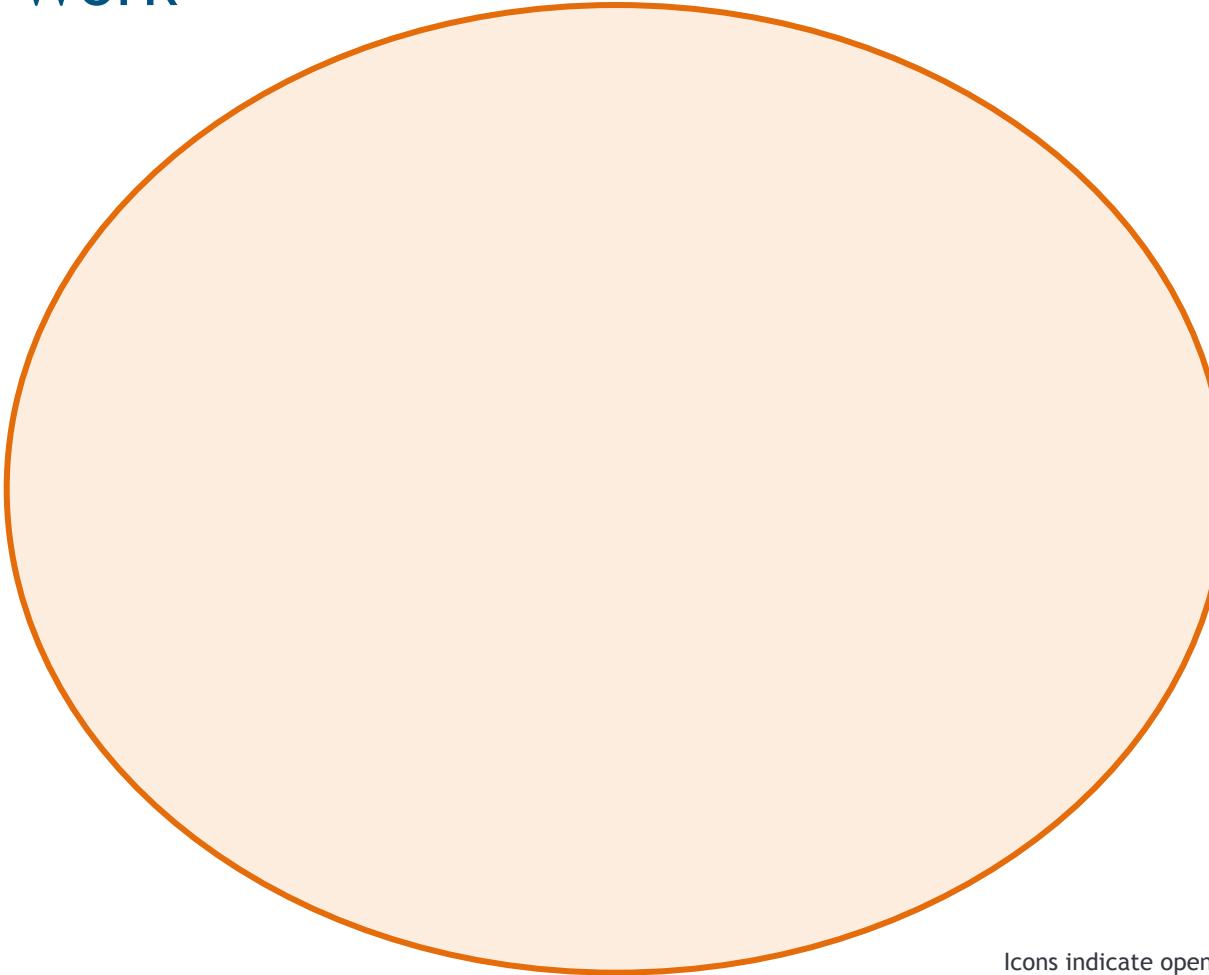
🇩🇪 2023–25: Tenure-Track Faculty W2 at **CISPA (DE)**



🇫🇷 2025–: Tenured Researcher at **Inria (FR)**

# Research Work

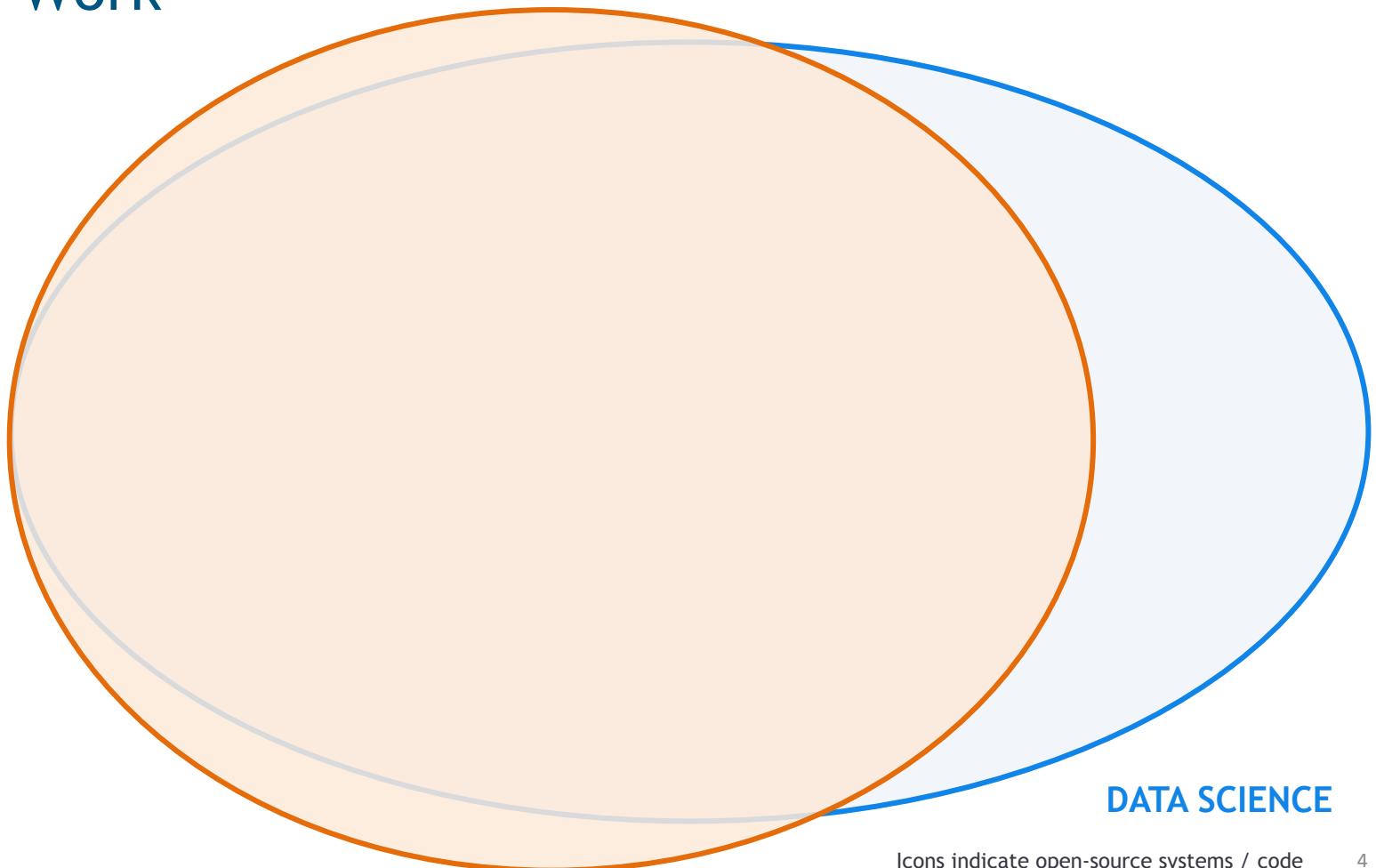
## WEB SECURITY & PRIVACY



Icons indicate open-source systems / code

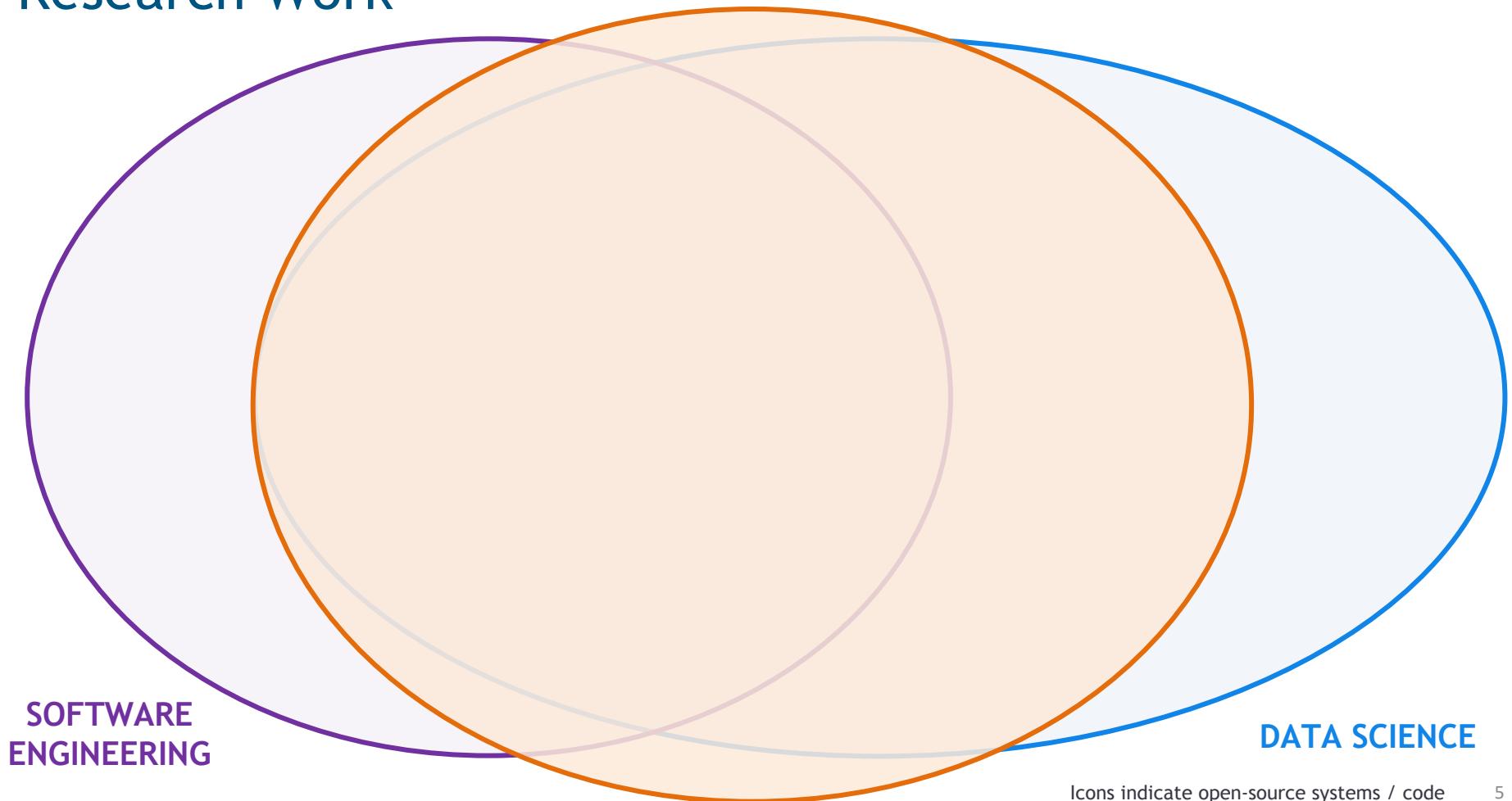
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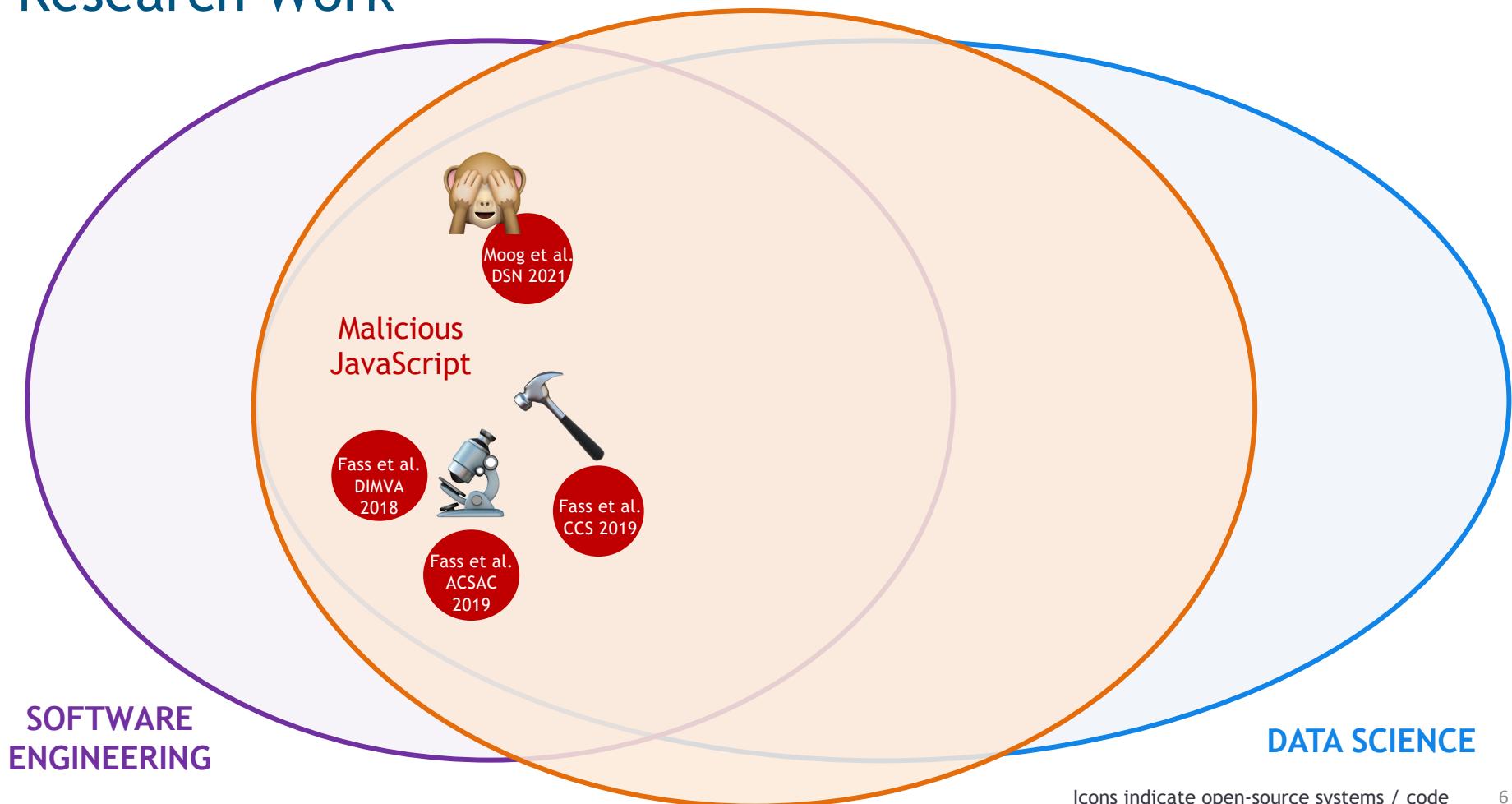
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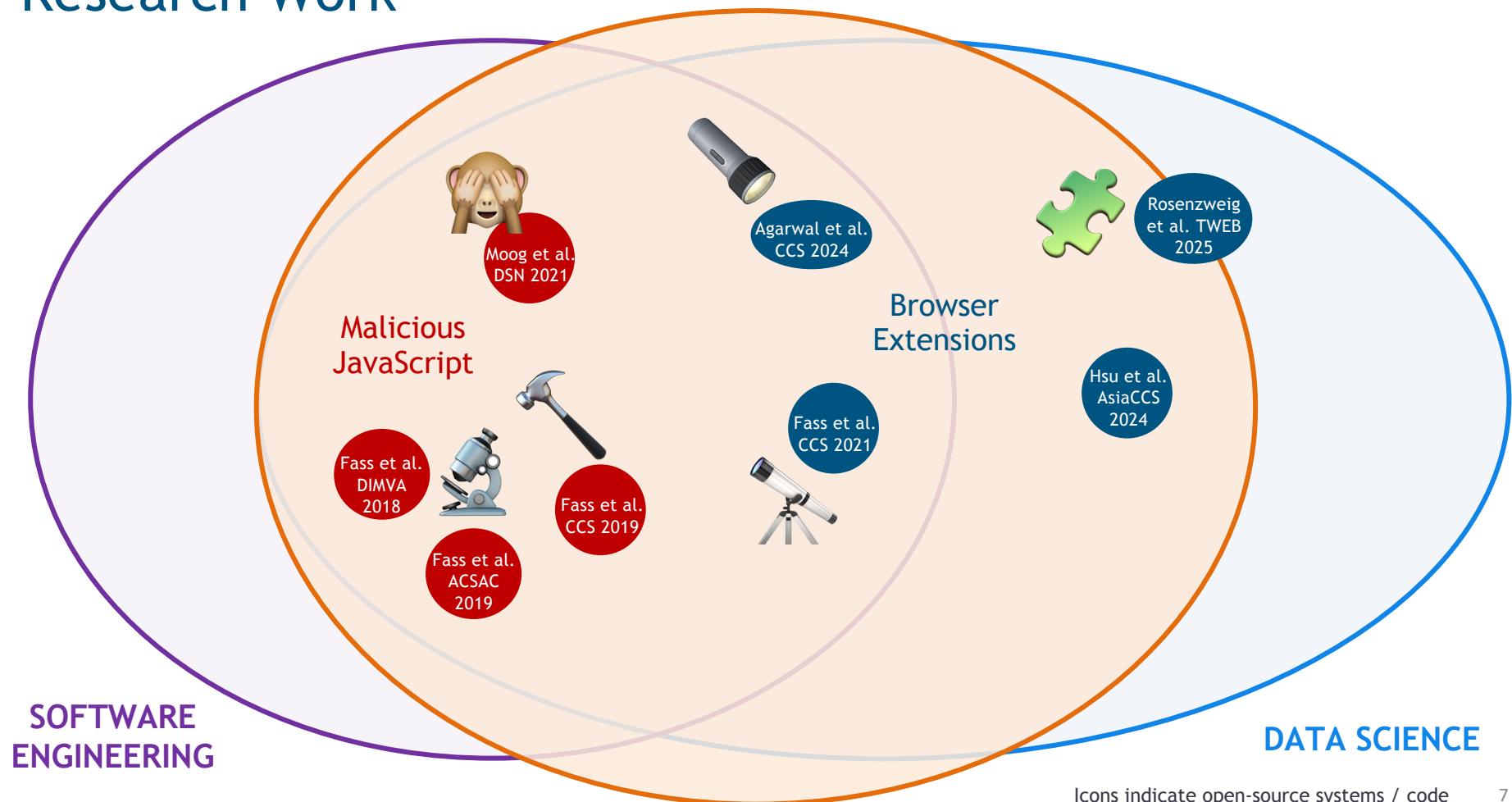
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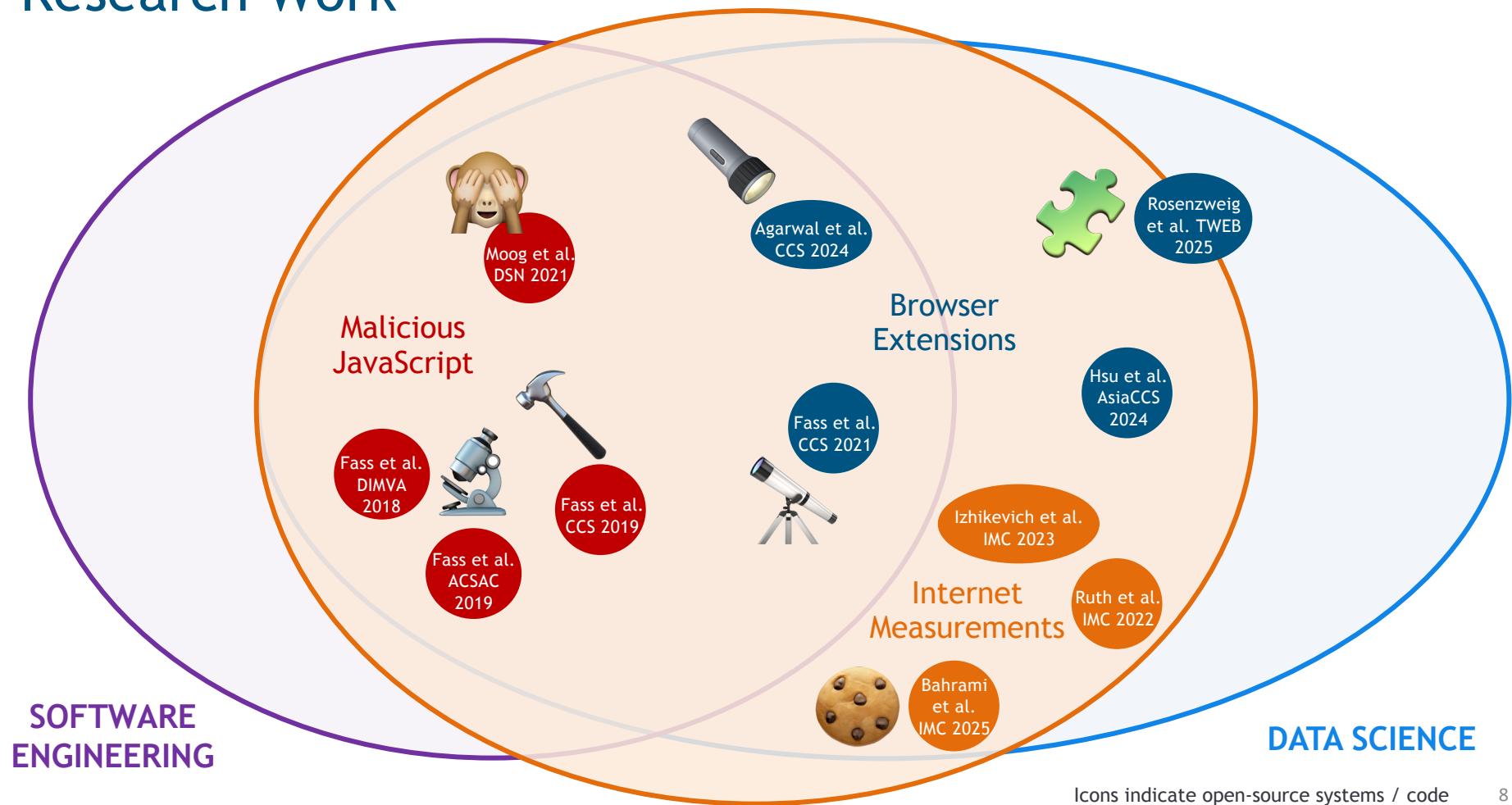
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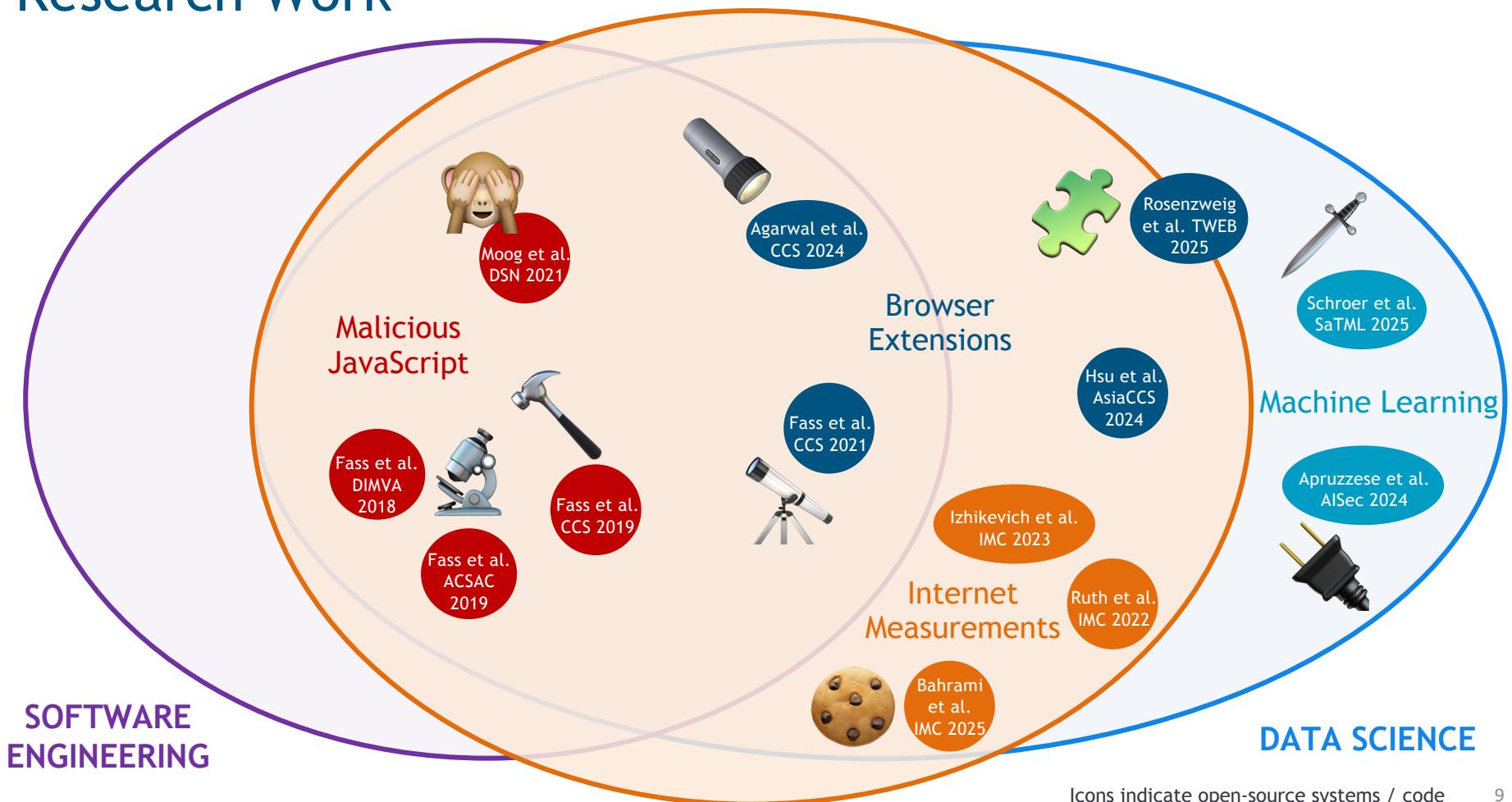
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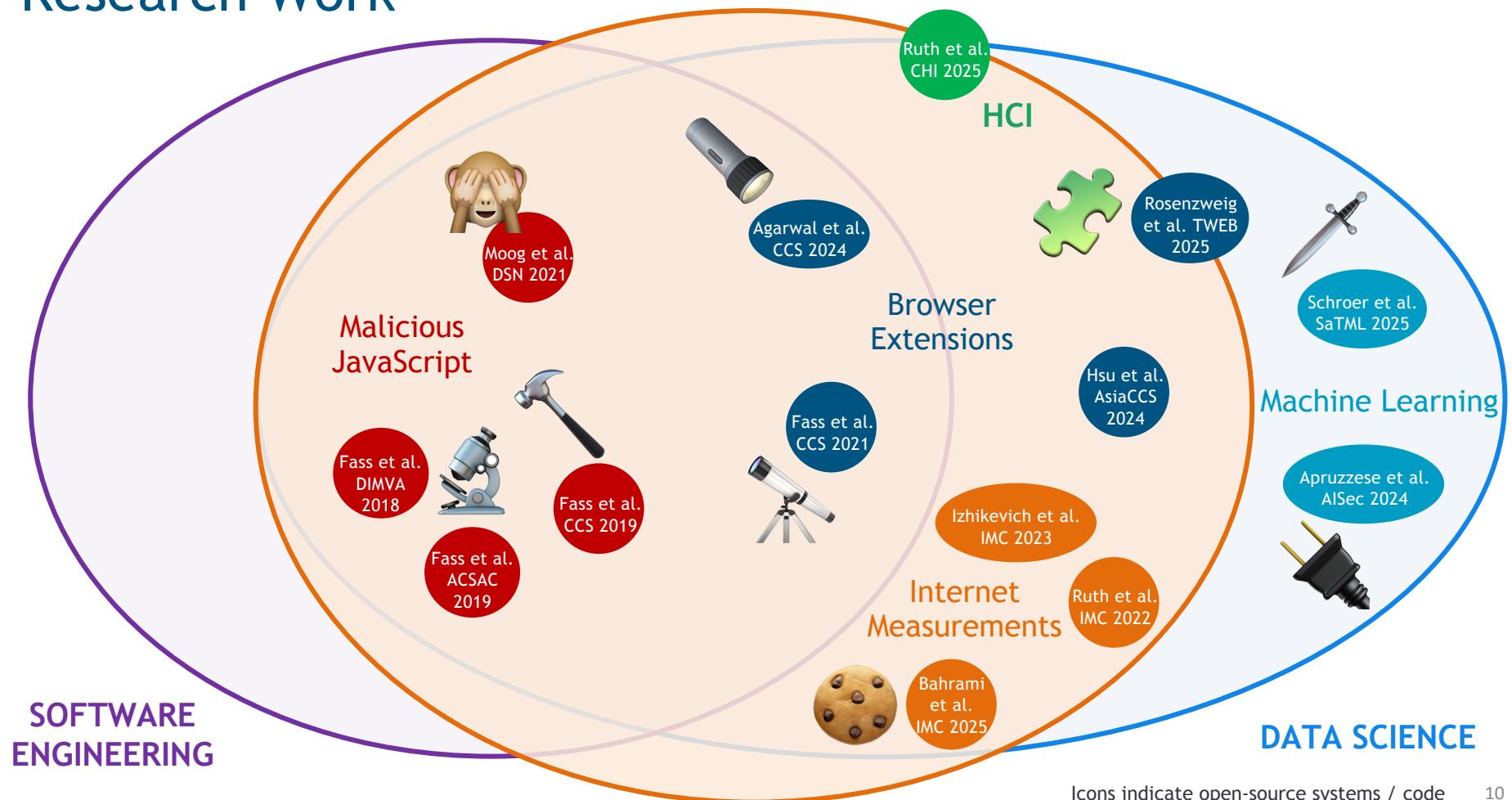


SOFTWARE  
ENGINEERING

DATA SCIENCE

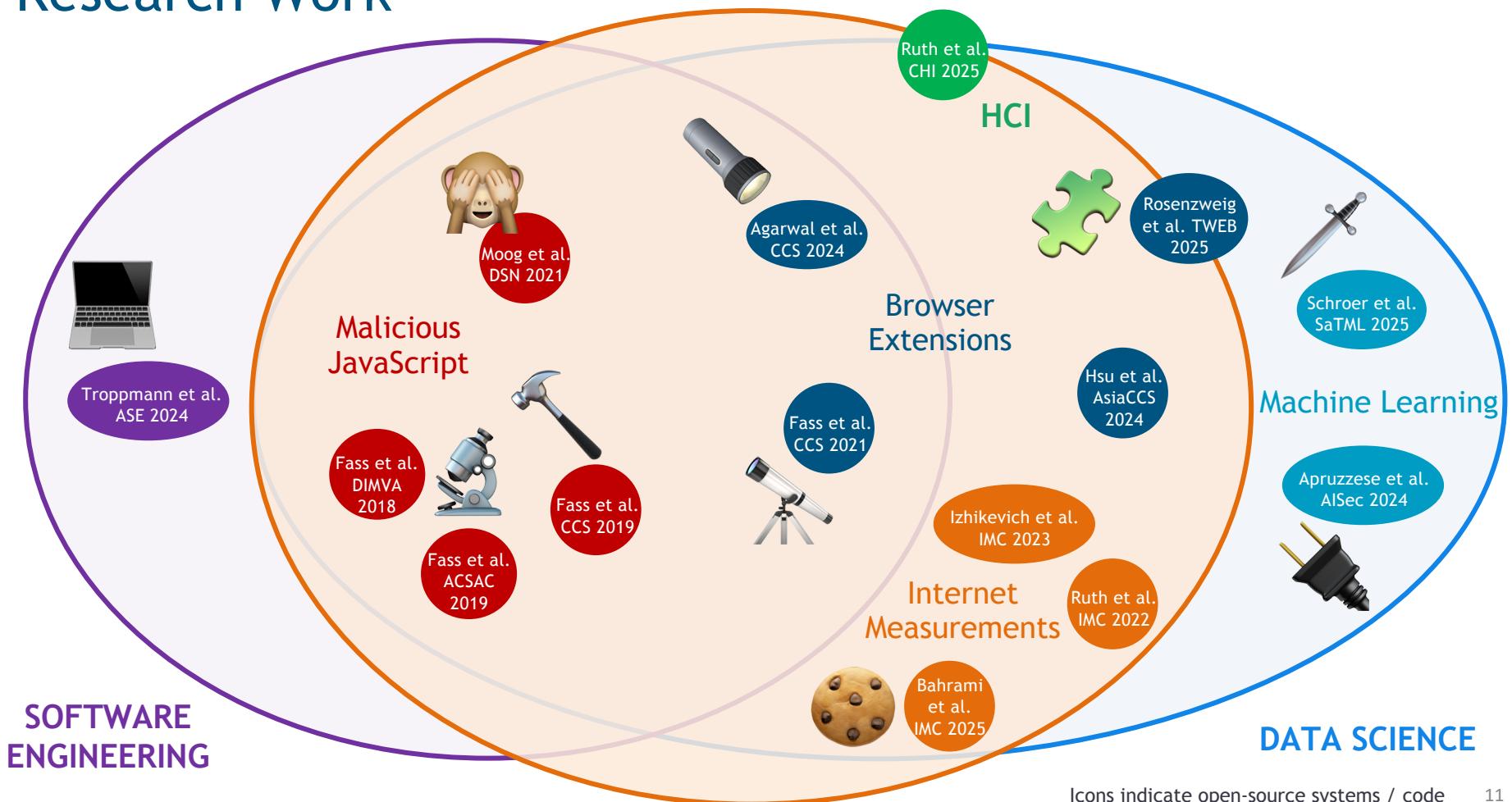
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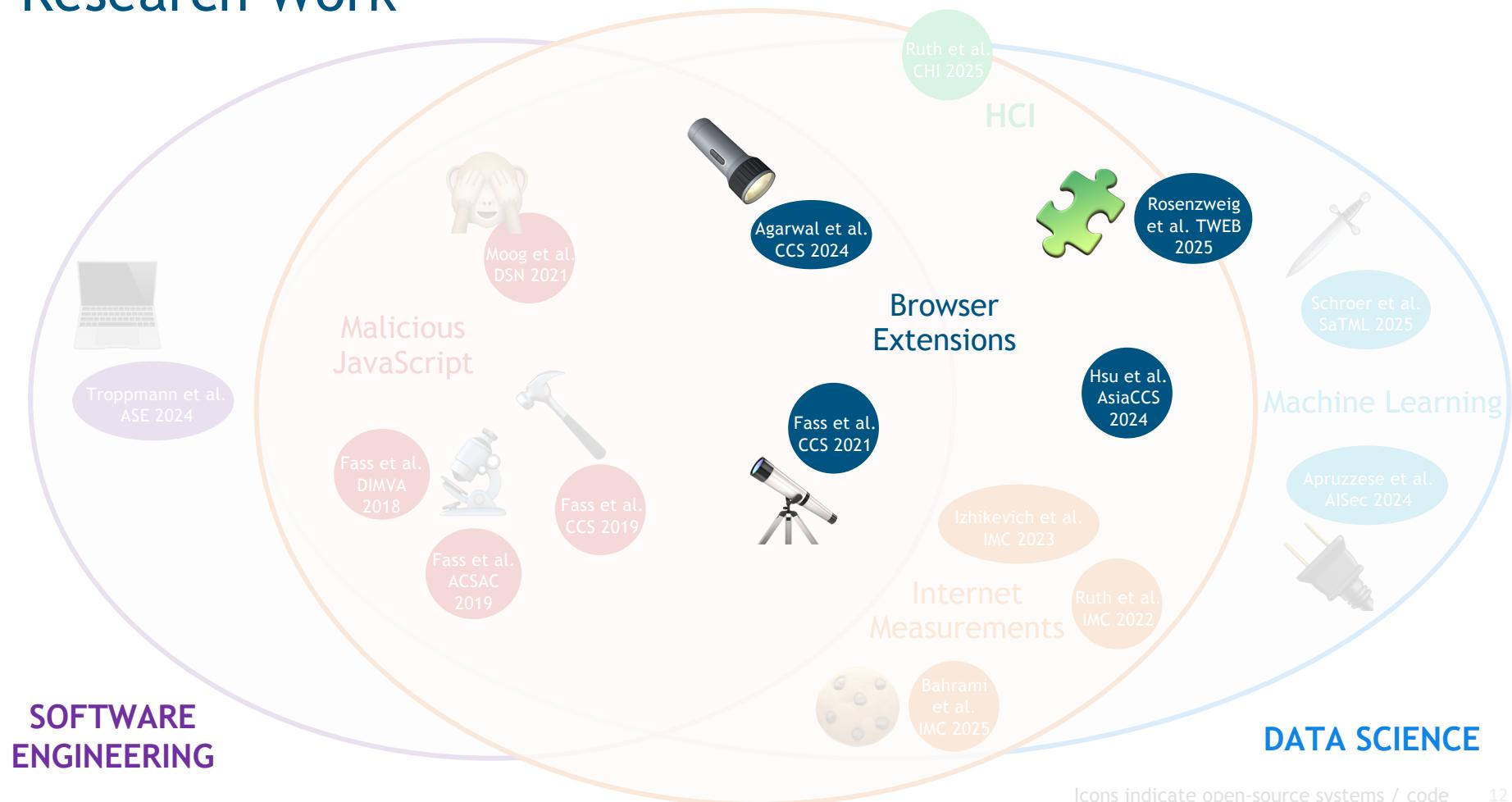
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SOFTWARE  
ENGINEERING

DATA SCIENCE

# Outline

- Background: Browser Extensions
- Investigating Security-Noteworthy Extensions (SNE)
- Detecting Vulnerable Extensions
  - Threat model and automated tool (DOUBLEX)
  - Case studies, results, and potential defense strategies
- Detecting Malicious Extensions
  - Lab setting vs. real world
- Detecting Fingerprintable Extensions
  - Presentation of 3 fingerprinting vectors, results, and potential mitigations

Hsu et al.  
AsiaCCS  
2024



Fass et al.  
CCS 2021



Rosenzweig  
et al. TWEB  
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# What are Browser Extensions?

- Third-party programs to **improve user browsing experience**



Adblock Plus - free ad blocker

Offered by: [adblockplus.org](https://adblockplus.org)



Skype

Offered by: [www.skype.com](https://www.skype.com)



Adobe Acrobat

Offered by: Adobe Inc.



Grammarly for Chrome

Offered by: [grammarly.com](https://grammarly.com)



Honey

Offered by: <https://www.joinhoney.com>



Google Translate

Offered by: [translate.google.com](https://translate.google.com)



LastPass: Free Password Manager

Offered by: LastPass



Cisco Webex Extension

Offered by: [webex.com](https://webex.com)

- ~200k Chrome extensions totaling almost 2B active users

➤ Necessitates a thorough security and privacy assessment

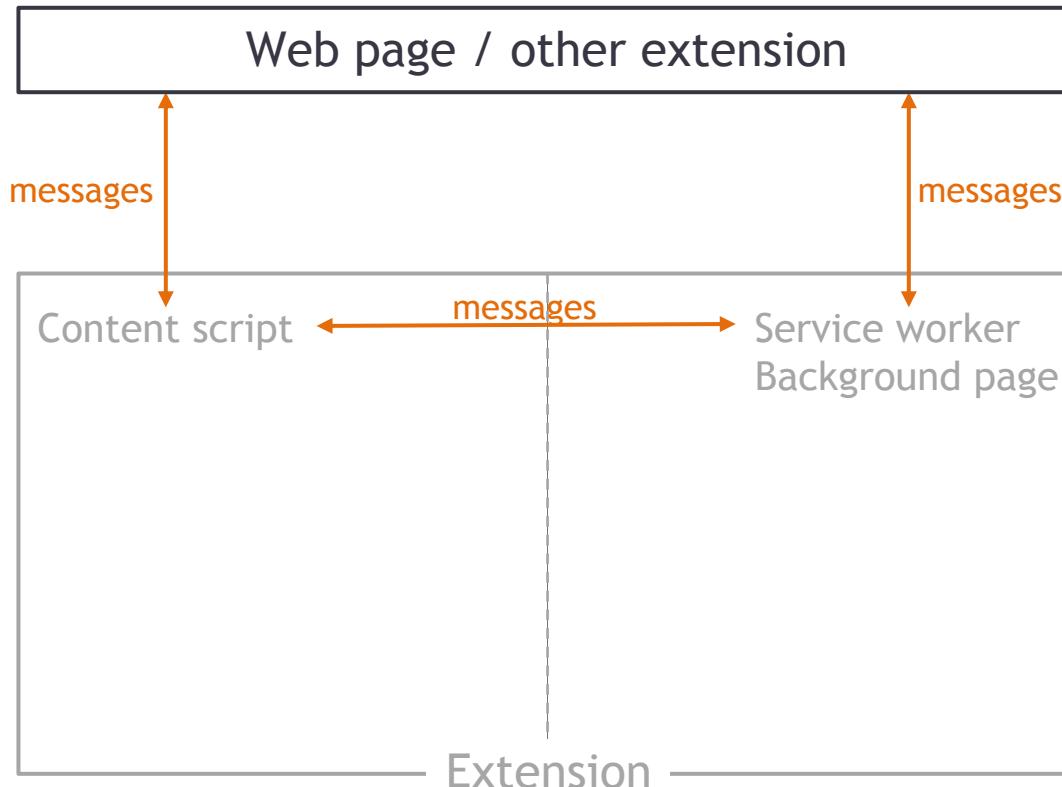
# Background – manifest.json

- Every extension needs a manifest written in JSON, called `manifest.json`, which gives essential information, e.g.,
  - Extension's name, version, and manifest's version
  - Main components of an extension (CS, BP/SW, ...)
  - Permissions of an extension (downloads, history, ...)
  - ...

# Background – Extension Architecture

- Service worker (SW in MV3) / Background page (BP in old MV2):
  - Core logic of an extension
  - Executed independently of the lifetime of a tab / window
  - Privileged part of an extension
- Content scripts (CS):
  - Injected by an extension into (a) web page(s)
  - Can use standard DOM APIs to read / modify a web page
  - Similar to scripts directly loaded by a web page + some more privileges
  - Restricted access to extension APIs

# Background – Extension Architecture & Messages



# Background – Authorized APIs & Permissions

- Extensions only have access to:
  - APIs explicitly declared in the `manifest.json`, e.g.,
    - storage - store/access data from the *extension storage*
    - downloads - download files
    - history - access to a user's browsing history
    - bookmarks, cookies, topSites, ...
  - host declared in the `manifest.json` = web pages an extension can access (read/write), e.g., to do some *cross-origin* requests

- [https://developer.chrome.com/docs/extensions/mv3/declare\\_permissions/](https://developer.chrome.com/docs/extensions/mv3/declare_permissions/)

- <https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Mozilla/Add-ons/WebExtensions/manifest.json/permissions>

# Background – manifest.json -- example

```
{  
  "name": "My Extension",  
  "version": "versionString",  
  "description": "A plain text description",  
  "manifest_version": 3  
  "permissions": ["downloads", "history"],  
  "host_permissions": ["https://example.com/*"],  
  "background": {  
    "service_worker": ["service_worker.js"],  
  },  
  "content_scripts": [{  
    "matches": ["<all_urls>"],  
    "js": ["content_script.js"]  
  }],  
}
```

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# How Secure are Browser Extensions?

- Browser extensions provide **additional functionality**...
  - ... so browser extensions need **additional & elevated privileges** compared to web pages
    - e.g., ad-blockers need to modify web page content or intercept network requests
    - e.g., extensions can download arbitrary files and access cross-domain data; while web pages cannot (blocked by the Same-Origin Policy)
- Browser extensions are an attractive target for attackers 😈

# Dangerous Browser Extensions

→ Extensions can put their users' security & privacy at risk:

- Contain **malware**: designed by malicious actors to harm victims
  - E.g., propagate malware, steal users' credentials, track users [1, 3]
- Contain **vulnerabilities**: designed by well-intentioned developers... but buggy
  - E.g., can lead to user-sensitive data exfiltration [1, 2]
- **Violate the Chrome Web Store policies**
  - E.g., deceive users, promote unlawful activities, lack a privacy policy [1]
- Be **fingerprintable**: can be recognized and uniquely identified
  - E.g., can lead to user tracking or inferring of user personal information [4]

[1] Hsu, Tran, and Fass; AsiaCCS 2024 | [2] Fass, Somé, Backes, and Stock; CCS 2021 | [3] Rosenzweig, Dalla Valle, Apruzzese, and Fass; TWEB 2025 |

[4] Agarwal, Fass, and Stock; CCS 2024

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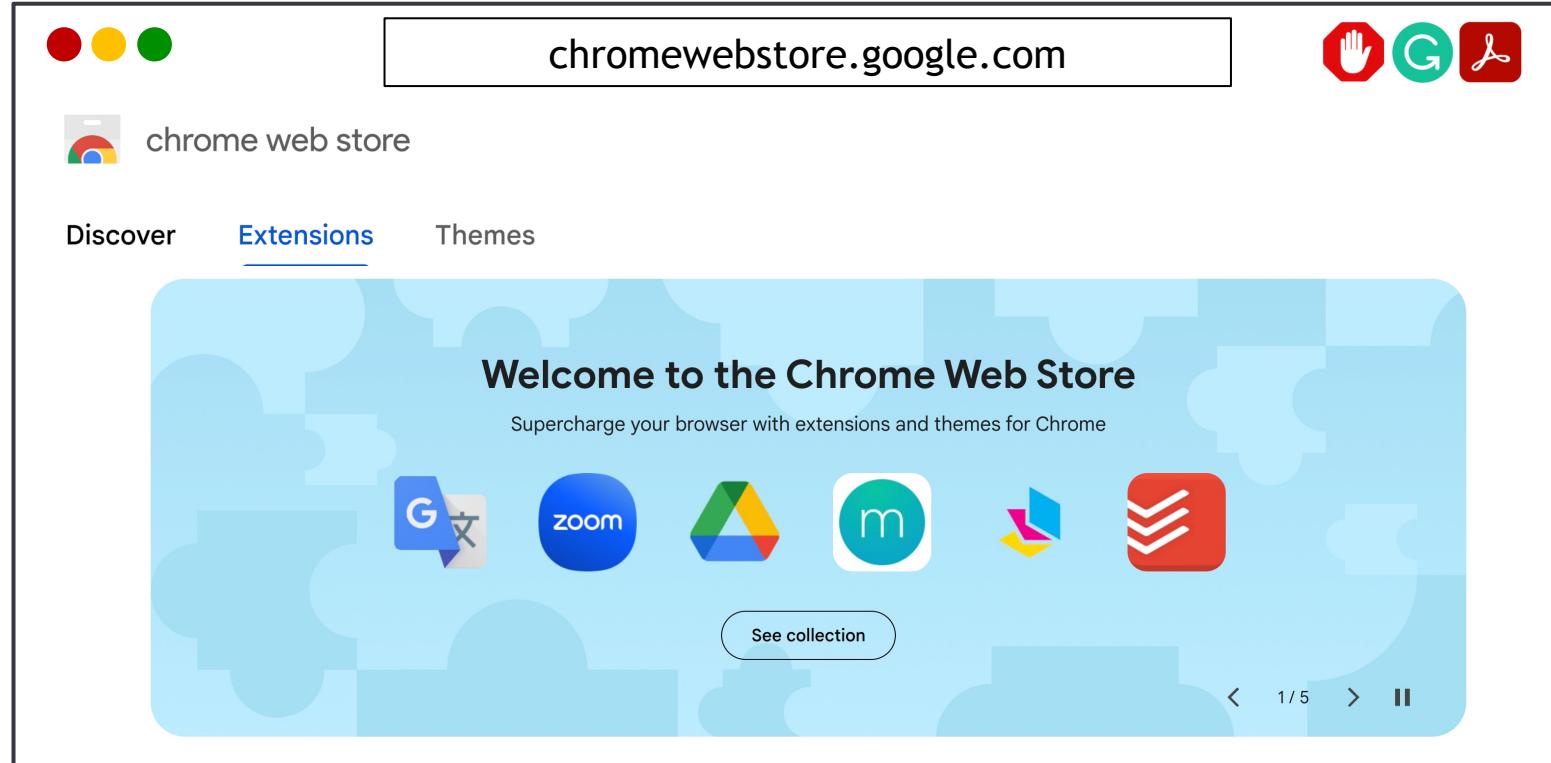
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# How are Security-Noteworthy Extensions (SNE) Installed?



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# Main Findings on the Chrome Web Store

- **350M users** installed **Security-Noteworthy Extensions** in just 3 years
- These dangerous extensions stay in the Chrome Web Store *for years*
- **60%** of extensions have **never received a single update**



## > What is in the Chrome Web Store?

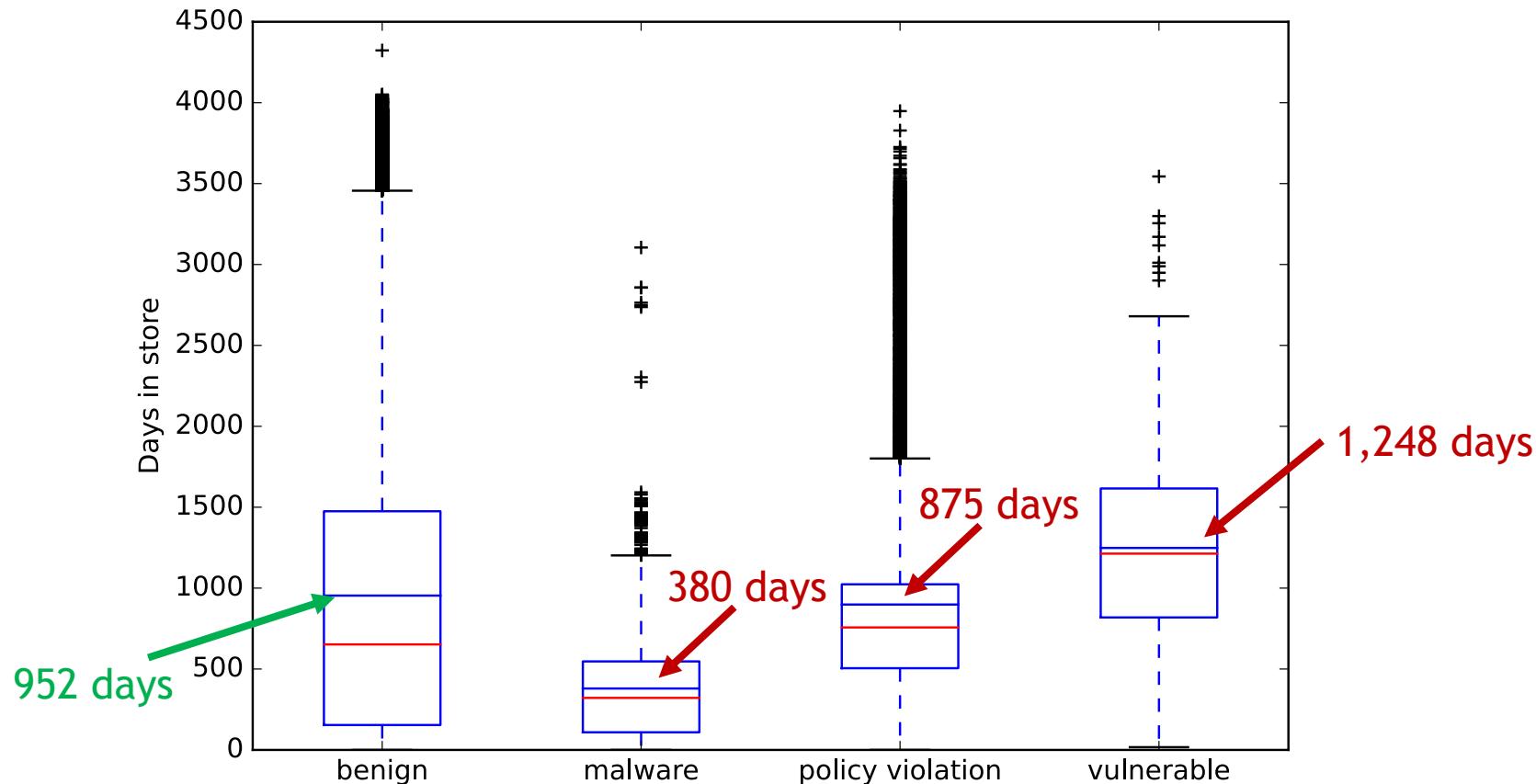
In ACM AsiaCCS 2024. Sheryl Hsu, Manda Tran, and Aurore Fass

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AsiaCCS  
2024

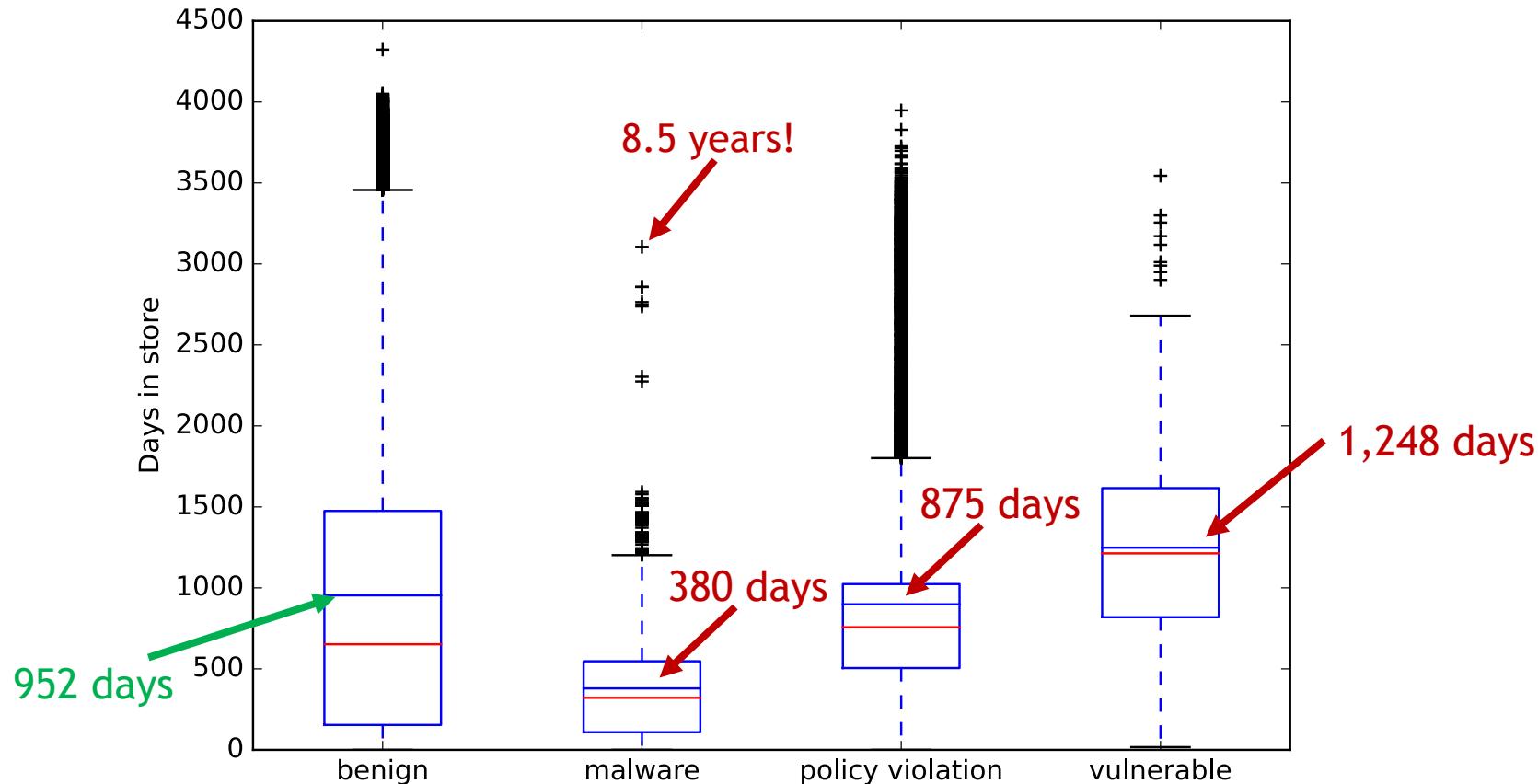
# Browser Extension Collection: Chrome-Stats

Category	#Extensions Metadata collected	#Extensions Code collected	When collected
SNE	26,014	16,377	Before May 1, 2023
- Malware-containing	10,426	6,587	Before May 1, 2023
- Policy-violating	15,404	9,638	Before May 1, 2023
- Vulnerable [2]	184	152	March 16, 2021
Benign extensions	226,762	92,482	Before May 1, 2023

# Number of Days in the CWS



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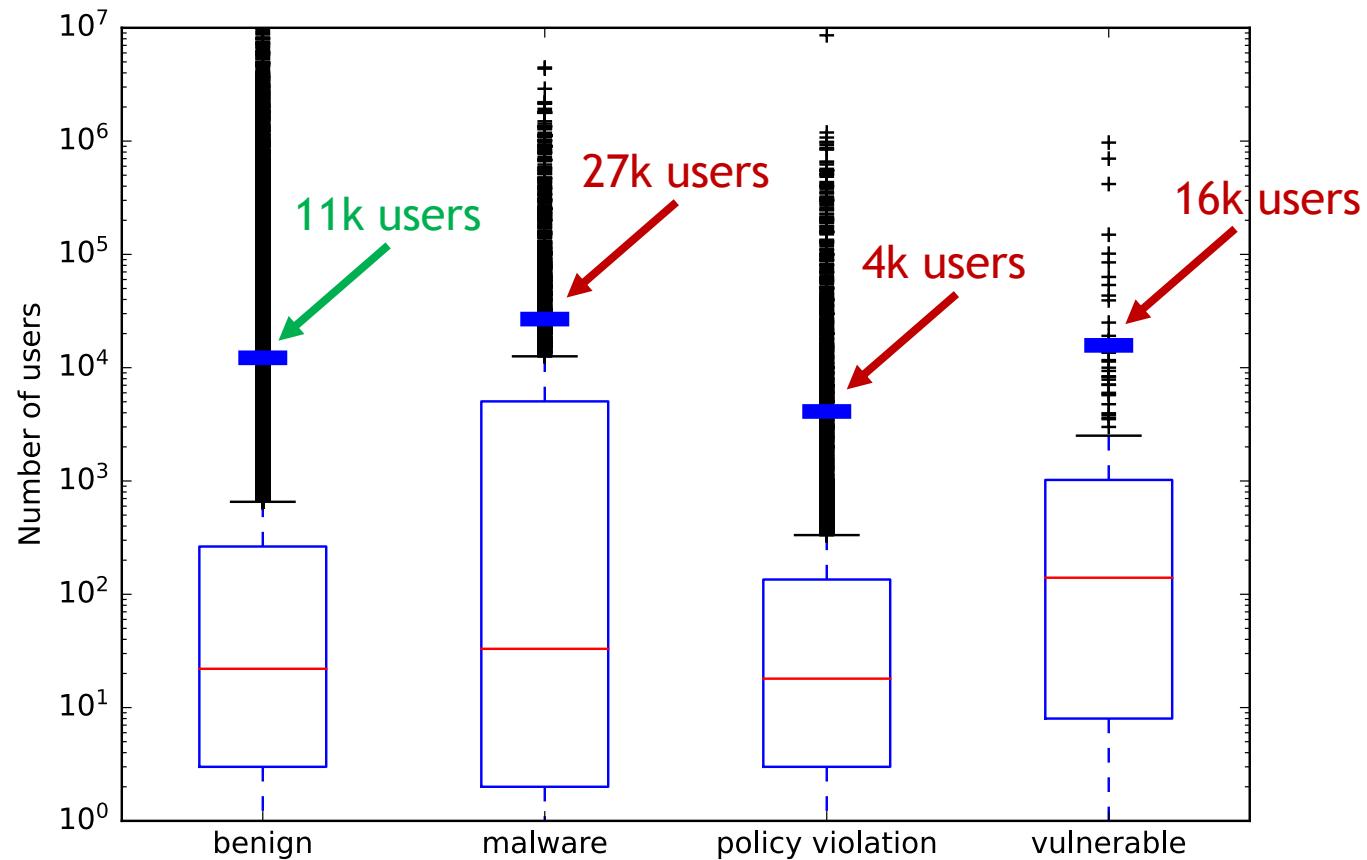
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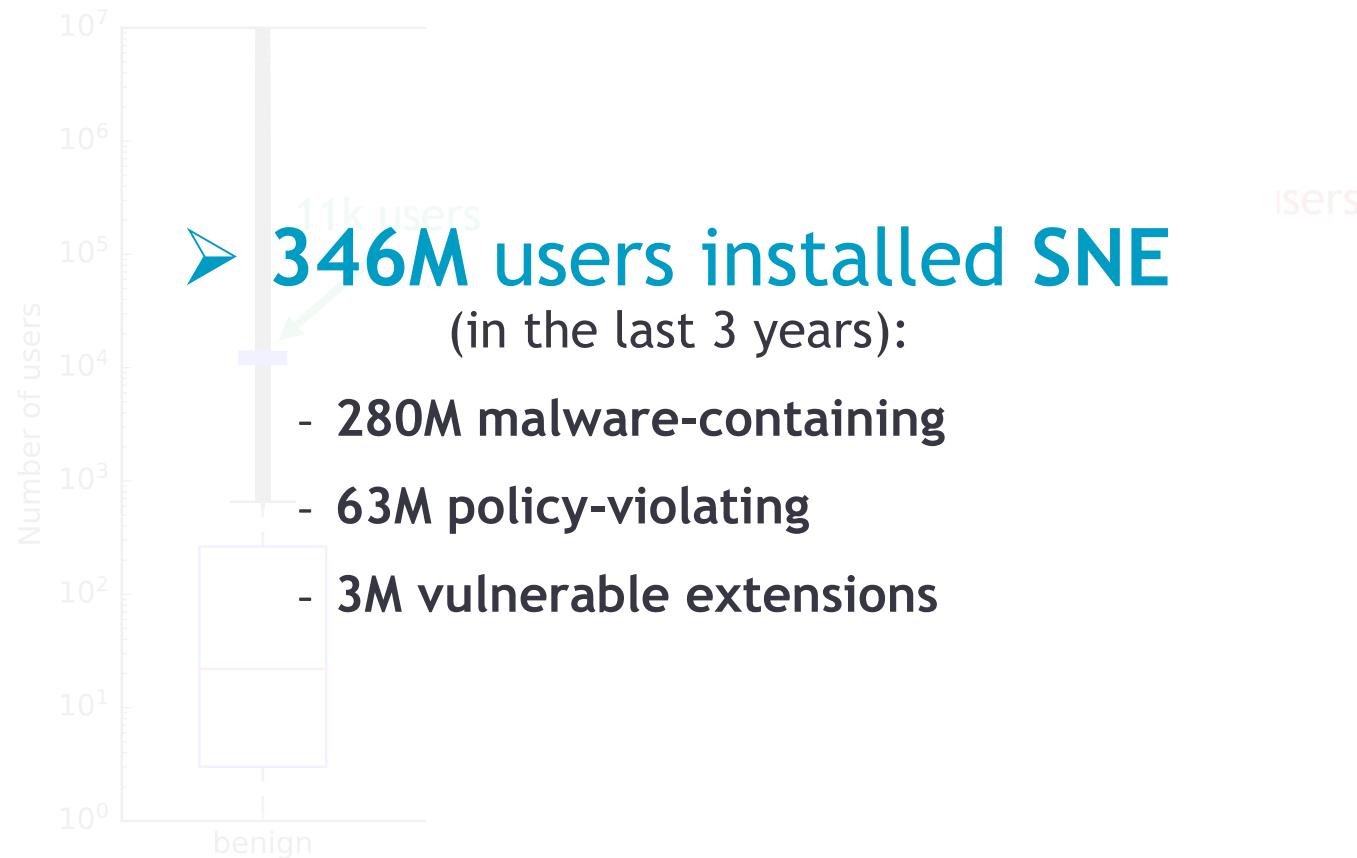
➤ SNE put the security & privacy  
of Web users **at risk *for years***

,248 days

# Number of Users



# Number of Users



# Media Coverage

**Forbes**

FORBES > INNOVATION > CYBERSECURITY

## 280 Million Google Chrome Users Installed Dangerous Extensions, Study Says

Davey Winder Senior Contributor 

Davey Winder is a veteran cybersecurity writer, hacker and analyst.

Jun 24, 2024, 06:57am EDT



How safe are Google Chrome extensions? SOPA IMAGES/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES

[1] Hsu, Tran, and Fass; AsiaCCS 2024



## Risk of installing dodgy extensions from Chrome store way worse than Google's letting on, study suggests

All depends on how you count it – Chocolate Factory claims 1% fail rate

 Thomas Claburn

Sun 23 Jun 2024 // 10:36 UTC

 ADGUARD 

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AdGuard > Blog > Google is failing miserably at weeding out bad extensions, new research indicates

## Google is failing miserably at weeding out bad extensions, new research indicates

July 5, 2024 · 7 min read

Aurore Fass – Web Security & Privacy

TRENDING FEATURES REVIEWS THE BEST DOWNLOADS PRODUCT FINDER FORUMS

 SECURITY  THE WEB  MALWARE  CHROME

Researchers say 280 million people have installed malware-infected Chrome extensions in the last 3 years

Google claims less than 1% of all installs include malware

By Rob Thubron June 24, 2024 at 11:39 AM



# Media Coverage



Forbes

FORBES > INNOVATION > CYBERSECURITY

## 280 Million Google Chrome Users Installed Dangerous Extensions, Study Finds

Davey Winder Senior Contributor  
Davey Winder is a veteran cybersecurity hacker and analyst.

This review process weeds out the overwhelming majority of bad extensions before they even get published. In 2024, less than 1% of all installs from the Chrome Web Store were found to include malware. We're proud of this record and yet some bad extensions still get through, which is why we also monitor published extensions.

<https://security.googleblog.com/2024/06/staying-safe-with-chrome-extensions.html>



## Google is failing miserably at weeding out bad extensions, new research indicates

July 6, 2024 • 7 min read

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# Analysis of Vulnerable Extensions: Threat Model

**Challenging to detect** due to their inherently benign intent (*benign-but-buggy*)



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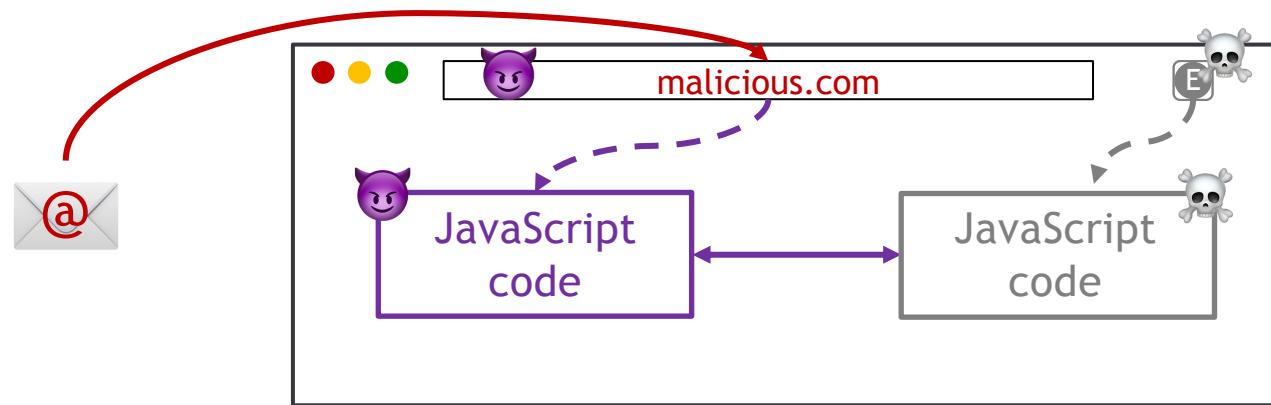
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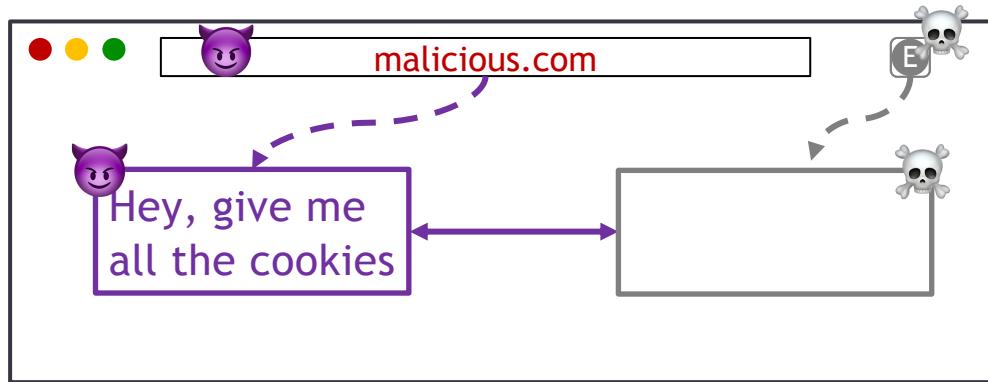
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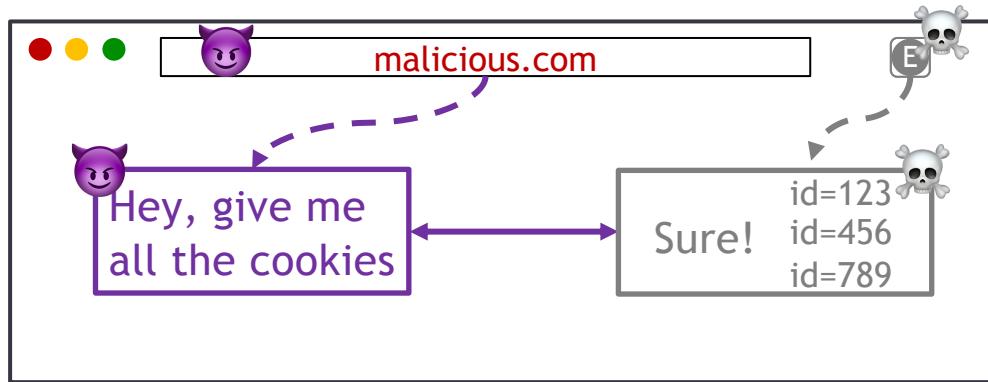
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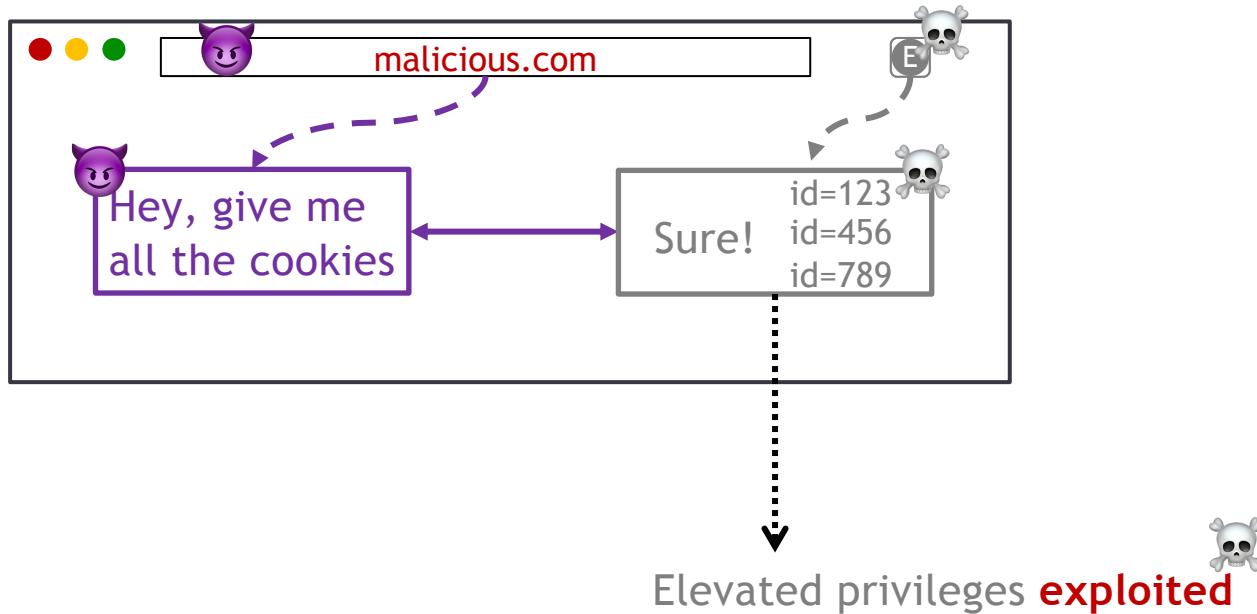
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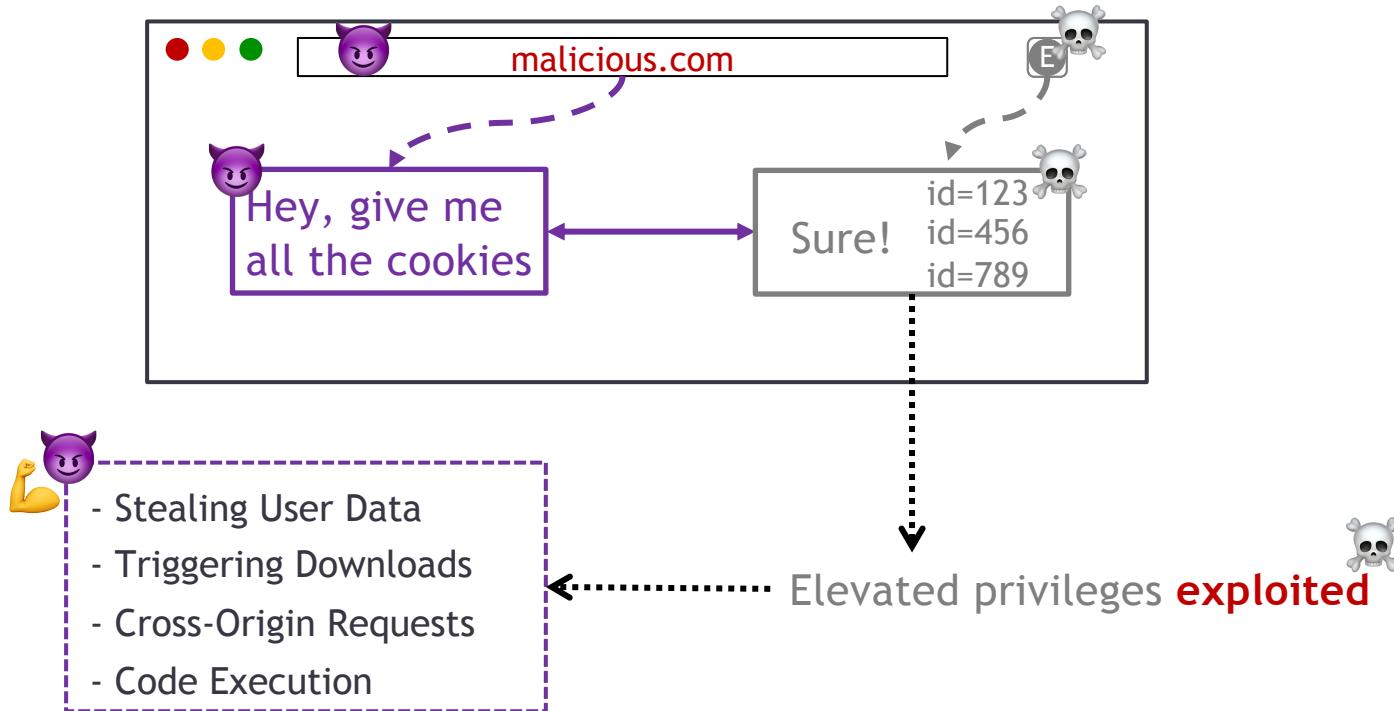
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# Analysis of Vulnerable Extensions: Threat Model

Challenging to detect due to their inherently benign intent (*benign-but-buggy*)

No large-scale automated solution to detect vulnerable browser extensions



- Stealing User Data
- Triggering Downloads
- Cross-Origin Requests
- Code Execution

# Detecting Vulnerable Extensions



> **DOUBLEX: Statically Detecting Vulnerable Data Flows in Browser Extensions at Scale**

In ACM CCS 2021. Aurore Fass, Dolière Francis Somé, Michael Backes, and Ben Stock



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# Detecting Vulnerable Extensions



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Malicious web page

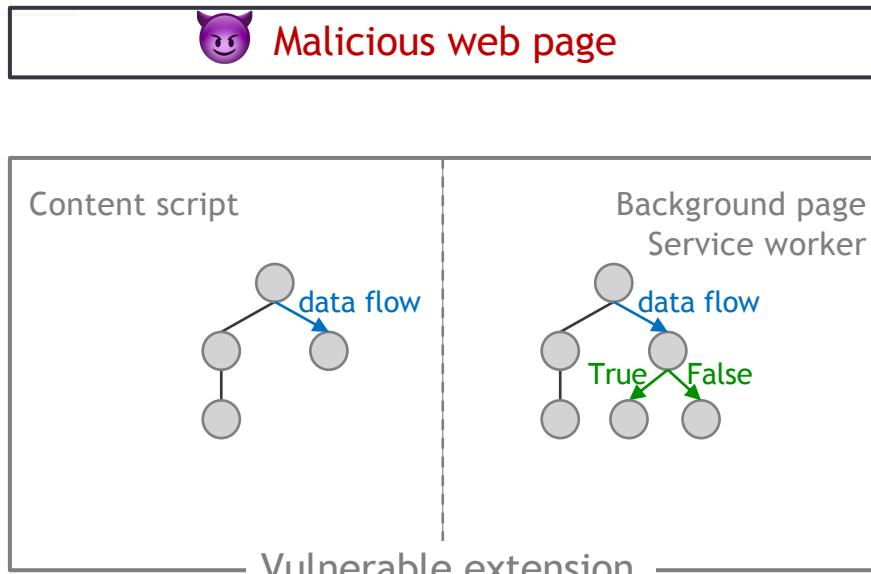


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## Per-component JavaScript code abstraction

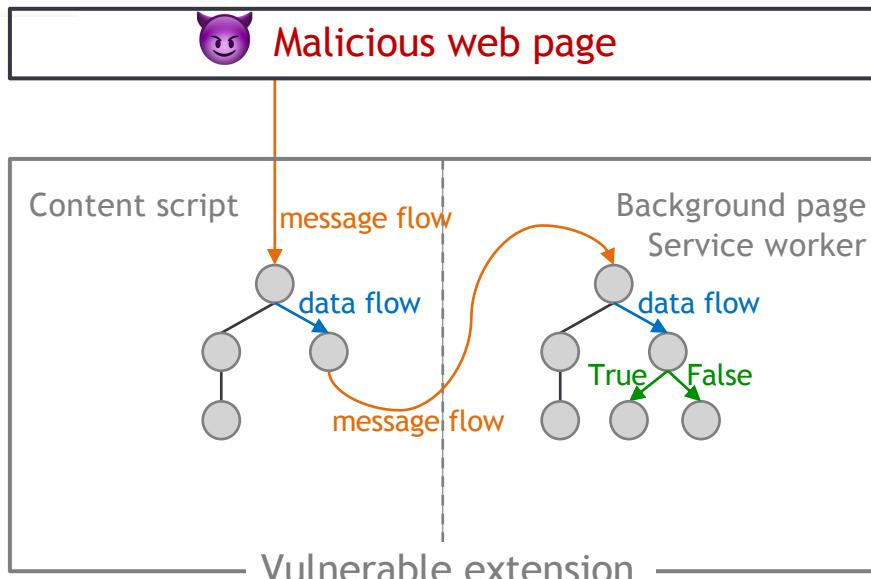
- AST (Abstract Syntax Tree)
- Control flow
- Data flow
- Pointer analysis

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## Per-component JavaScript code abstraction

- AST (Abstract Syntax Tree)
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## Extension Dependence Graph (EDG)

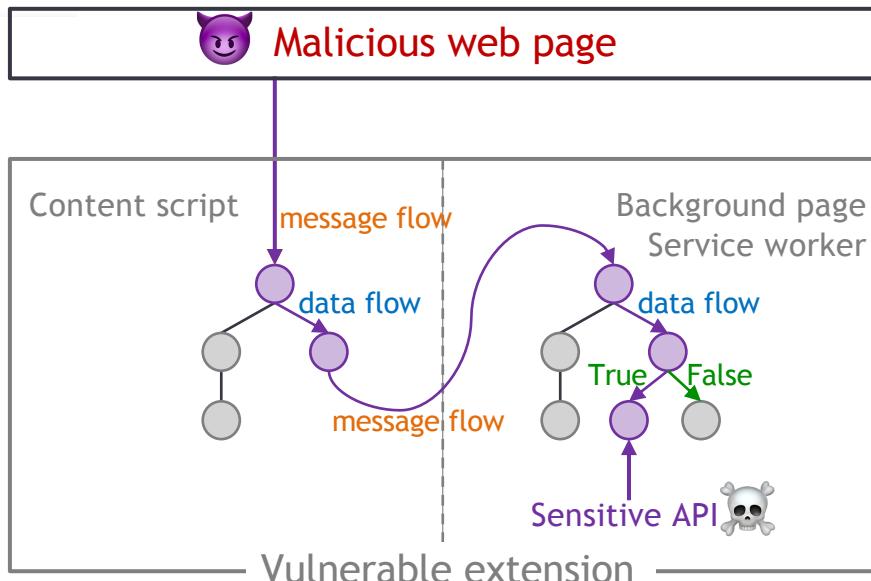
- Message interactions

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### Per-component JavaScript code abstraction

- AST (Abstract Syntax Tree)
- Control flow
- Data flow
- Pointer analysis

### Extension Dependence Graph (EDG)

- Message interactions

### Suspicious data flow tracking

- Detects any path between an attacker & sensitive APIs

# Simplified Example of a Vulnerability

```
1 // Content script code = from the extension  
2 window.addEventListener("message", function(event) {  
3  
4  
5  
6 })
```

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```
// DOUBLEX report 🛡  
{"direct-danger1": "eval",  
"value": "eval(event.data)",  
"line": "4 - 4",  
"dataflow": true, ✓  
"param1": {  
    "received": "event",  
    "line": "2 - 2"}}
```

# Simplified Example of a Vulnerability

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1 // Content script code = from the extension  
2 window.addEventListener("message", function(event) {  
3     if (1 === 1) {  
4         window["e" + "val"](event.data);    Not detected by prior work ✘  
5     }  
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5             ^
6             |
7             eval
8
9     }
10})
```

# Simplified Example of a Vulnerability

```
1 // Content script code = from the extension
2 window.addEventListener("message", function(event) {
3     if (1 === 1) {          Not detected by prior work ✘
4         window["e" + "val"](event.data);
5         eval
6
7     event = {"data": 42};
8     eval(event.data);
9 }
10})
```

// DOUBLEX report 🕴️

```
{"direct-danger1": "eval",
"value": "eval(event.data)",
"line": "4 - 4",
"dataflow": true, ✓
"param1": {
    "received": "event",
    "line": "2 - 2"},

{"direct-danger2": "eval",
"value": "eval(42)",
"line": "8 - 8",
"dataflow": false} ✓
```

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```
// Attacker code = from the targeted web page  
postMessage("alert(1)", "*")
```

(very) malicious payload

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4         window["e" + "val"](event.data);    Not detected by prior work X  
5     }  
6 })
```

developer.chrome.com indique

1

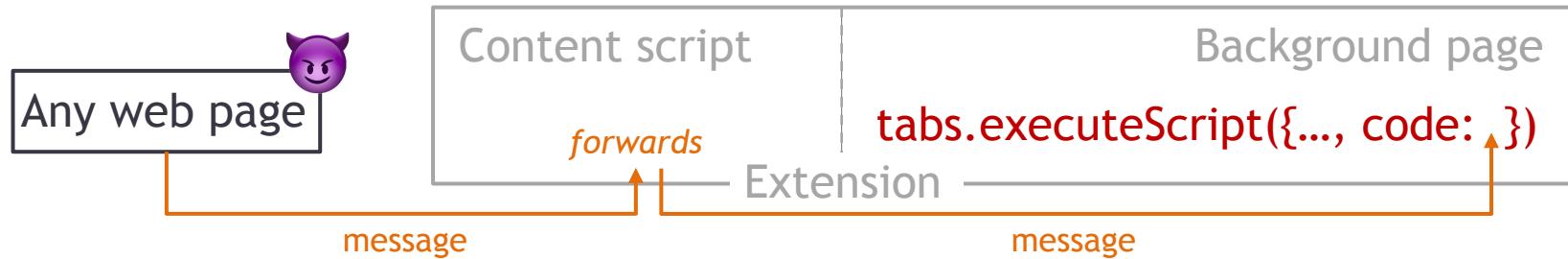
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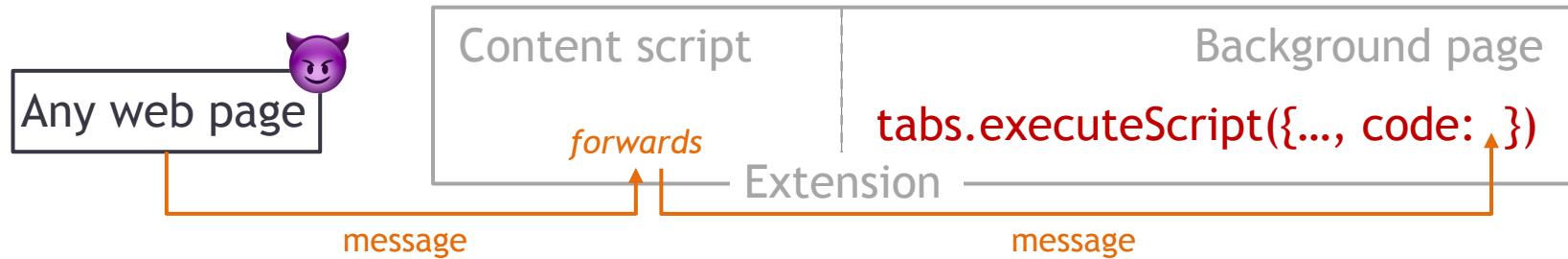
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- Arbitrary code execution (*cdi...*, 4k+ users)

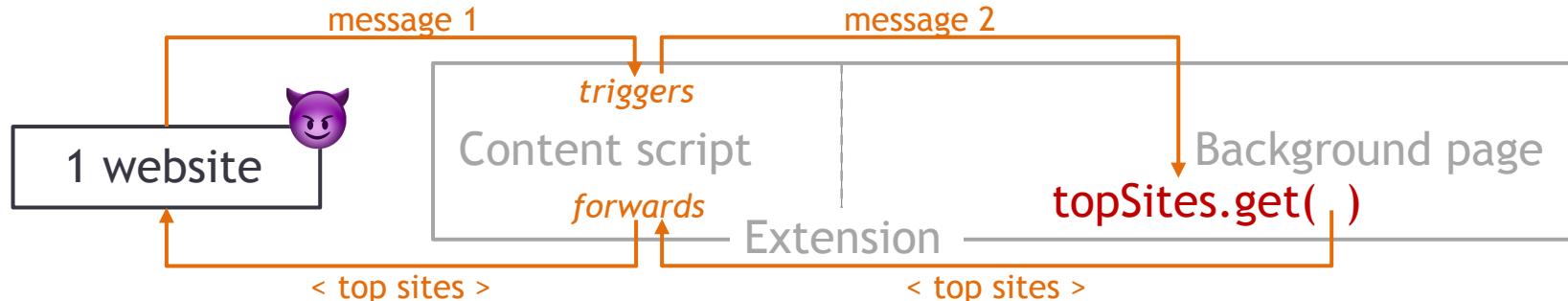


# Case Studies of Vulnerable Chrome Extensions

- Arbitrary code execution (*cdi...*, 4k+ users)



- Most visited website exfiltration (*lkl...*, 700k+ users)



# Detecting Vulnerable Extensions with DOUBLEX

Analyzed 155k Chrome extensions from 2021 with DOUBLEX (takes 2–3s per extension)

- **184 vulnerable Chrome extensions**
- Impacting **3M users\*** (\* based on Google's definition)
- Precision: **89%** of the flagged extensions are vulnerable
- Recall: **93%** of known vulnerabilities [Somé, S&P 2019] are detected

- **Open source**, for developers and Web users

(even in other fields, e.g., mini apps [Wang et al., ICSE 2023])



Aurore54F/DoubleX

# Defenses & Perspectives

- (Migrate an extension to Manifest V3)
- Know that communication with external actors may be dangerous
- Only allow communication with specified extensions or web pages
- Limit code execution by sanitizing messages
- DOUBLEX could provide a feedback channel for developers

# Outline

- Background: Browser Extensions
- Investigating Security-Noteworthy Extensions (SNE)
- Detecting Vulnerable Extensions
  - Threat model and automated tool (DOUBLEX)
  - Case studies, results, and potential defense strategies
- Detecting Malicious Extensions
  - Lab setting vs. real world
- Detecting Fingerprintable Extensions
  - Presentation of 3 fingerprinting vectors, results, and potential mitigations

Hsu et al.  
AsiaCCS  
2024



Fass et al.  
CCS 2021



Rosenzweig  
et al. TWEB  
2025



Agarwal et al.  
CCS 2024

# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Lab Setting



Rosenzweig  
et al. TWEB  
2025

> It's not Easy: Applying Supervised ML to Detect Malicious Extensions in the CWS

In ACM TWEB 2025. Ben Rosenzweig, Valentino Dalla Valle, Giovanni Apruzzese, and Aurore Fass



# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Lab Setting



Rosenzweig  
et al. TWEB  
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> It's not Easy: Applying Supervised ML to Detect Malicious Extensions in the CWS

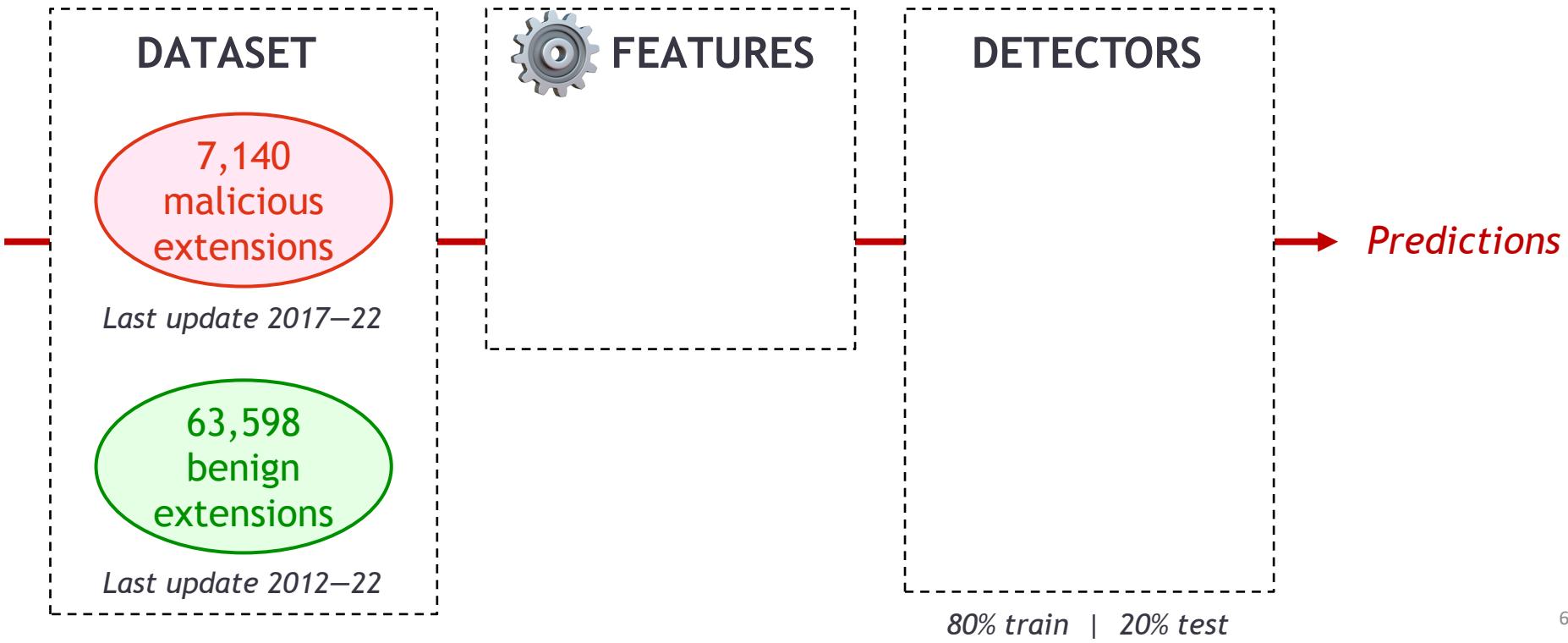
In ACM TWEB 2025. Ben Rosenzweig, Valentino Dalla Valle, Giovanni Apruzzese, and Aurore Fass

**It's Not Easy: Applying Supervised Machine Learning to Detect Malicious Extensions in the Chrome Web Store**

VALENTINA D'ALTO,<sup>1</sup> CARLO BONATI,<sup>1</sup> CHRISTIAN KERSEBAUM,<sup>2</sup> FRANCESCO GELMI,<sup>2</sup> AND GIANLUCA APPEZZI,<sup>1</sup> (✉) *1University of Genoa, Chair of Information Security, Genova, Italy; 2University of Regensburg, Institute for Information Systems, Landshuter Allee 12, 93040 Regensburg, Germany* (✉) *gianluca.appezz@unige.it*

**Abstract.** In this paper we study the problem of detecting malicious extensions in the Chrome Web Store. We first introduce the Chrome Extension API and the extension life cycle. Then, we propose a supervised machine learning approach to detect malicious extensions. We collected a dataset of extensions from the Chrome Web Store and used it to train a classifier. The classifier was evaluated on two datasets: one containing extensions from the Chrome Web Store and another containing extensions from the Mozilla Add-ons repository. Our results show that the classifier can detect malicious extensions with a high accuracy. Finally, we analyzed the reasons why some extensions were flagged as malicious by our classifier. We found that most of the flagged extensions contained malicious code or had been submitted by users who did not follow the submission guidelines. We also found that some extensions were flagged as malicious because they violated the extension API rules. These findings suggest that the extension API rules are not well-enforced and that users should be more careful when submitting extensions to the Chrome Web Store.

**CSCW Concepts:** Security and privacy — Web application security — Social aspects of security and privacy — Privacy and integrity — User behavior — Information systems — Security and privacy — Privacy and integrity — User behavior — Information systems





# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Lab Setting



Rosenzweig  
et al. TWEB  
2025



It's not Easy: Applying Supervised Machine Learning to

Detecting Malicious Extensions in the Chrome Web Store

Ben ROSENZWEIG<sup>1</sup>, VALENTINO DALLA VALLE<sup>2</sup>, GIOVANNI APRUZZESE<sup>3</sup>, AURORE FASS<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of California, San Diego, USA

<sup>2</sup>Cybersecurity Institute, University of Regensburg, Germany

<sup>3</sup>University of Palermo, Italy

<sup>4</sup>University of Regensburg, Germany

Abstract

Malicious extensions are a major threat to the security of the Chrome Web Store (CWS). Detecting them is a challenging task due to the large number of extensions and the complex nature of their behavior. The goal of this work is to detect malicious extensions in the CWS using supervised machine learning. We collected a dataset of 7,140 malicious extensions and 63,598 benign extensions from the CWS. We used two different feature sets: source code and metadata. We trained a classifier on 80% of the dataset and tested it on the remaining 20%. The classifier achieved an accuracy of 90.4% on the test set. This is a significant improvement over previous work, which achieved an accuracy of 78.4%. We also evaluated our classifier on a subset of the dataset that includes only extensions that have been updated in the last year. The classifier still achieves an accuracy of 90.4%. We conclude that our classifier is effective at detecting malicious extensions in the CWS.

Keywords

Machine learning, supervised learning, malware detection, web security, chrome web store

CCS Concepts

Security and privacy → Web application security; Social aspects of security and privacy → User privacy; Security and privacy → Malware detection

Additional Key Words and Phrases

Chrome Web Store, Malicious extensions, Machine learning, Supervised learning

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## DATASET

7,140  
malicious  
extensions

Last update 2017–22

63,598  
benign  
extensions

Last update 2012–22



## FEATURES

Source code [A]

Metadata

[A] Fass et al.; ACSAC 2018

## DETECTORS

Source code  
classifier

Predictions

80% train | 20% test

# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Lab Setting



Rosenzweig  
et al. TWEB  
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It's not Easy: Applying Supervised Machine Learning to Detect Malicious Extensions in the Chrome Web Store

Ben ROSENZWEIG<sup>1</sup>, VALENTINO DALLA VALLE<sup>2</sup>, GIOVANNI APRUZZESE<sup>3</sup>, AURORE FASS<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of California, Berkeley, USA

<sup>2</sup>Cybersecurity Institute, University of Regensburg, Germany

<sup>3</sup>University of Palermo, Italy

<sup>4</sup>Cybersecurity Institute, University of Regensburg, Germany

Abstract

Malicious extensions are a major threat to web users. They can steal sensitive information, install malware, or even damage the system. Detecting them is a challenging task. We propose a supervised machine learning approach to detect malicious extensions. The approach uses two classifiers: a source code classifier and a metadata classifier. The source code classifier takes source code as input and identifies malicious extensions based on their behavior. The metadata classifier takes metadata as input and identifies malicious extensions based on their file size and other characteristics. The two classifiers are trained on a dataset of 7,140 malicious extensions and 63,598 benign extensions. The results show that the proposed approach is effective in detecting malicious extensions.

Keywords

Malicious extensions, supervised machine learning, source code analysis, metadata analysis

CCS Concepts

Security and privacy → Web applications security; Social aspects of security and privacy → User privacy; Software engineering → Software quality and reliability

Additional Key Words and Phrases

Chrome Web Store, Google Chrome, Browser Extension, Classification, Google Drive

Received: May 2024; revised: July 2024; accepted: August 2024

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Published online: October 2025

Editorial handling: Dr. Giovanni Apruzzese

Reviewers: Dr. Valentino Dalla Valle, Dr. Aurore Fass

Copyediting: Dr. Valentino Dalla Valle

Proofreading: Dr. Valentino Dalla Valle

Typesetting: Dr. Valentino Dalla Valle

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# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Lab Setting



Rosenzweig  
et al. TWEB  
2025



It's not Easy: Applying Supervised Machine Learning to

Detecting Malicious Extensions in the Chrome Web Store

Ben ROSENZWEIG<sup>1</sup>, VALENTINO DALLA VALLE<sup>2</sup>, GIOVANNI APRUZZESE<sup>3</sup>, AURORE FASS<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Open University of Catalonia, Spain

<sup>2</sup>Cybersecurity Institute, Italy

<sup>3</sup>University of Palermo, Italy

<sup>4</sup>Cybersecurity Institute, Germany

Abstract

Malicious extensions are a major threat to the security of the Chrome Web Store (CWS). Detecting them is not an easy task. We have collected a dataset of 7,140 malicious extensions and 63,598 benign ones. We have also collected a set of features for each extension, including its source code and metadata. We have used these features to train three classifiers: a source code classifier, a metadata classifier, and a combined classifier. The combined classifier has the best performance, with an accuracy of 88.4%. We have also evaluated the performance of the classifiers on a test set of 1,000 extensions. The results show that the combined classifier has the best performance, with an accuracy of 88.4%.

Keywords

Machine learning, supervised learning, malicious extensions, Chrome Web Store, security, detection, classification.

CCS Concepts

Security and privacy → Web applications security; Social aspects of security and privacy → User behavior analysis; Security and privacy → Malicious software; Security and privacy → Privacy protection.

Additional Key Words and Phrases

Chrome Web Store, Google Chrome, Browser Extension, Classification, Google Web Store.

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Attributed to ACM

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# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Lab Setting



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et al. TWEB  
2025



**It's Not Easy: Applying Supervised Machine Learning to Detect Malicious Extensions in the Chrome Web Store**

DAVID LINDNER,<sup>1</sup> BERNHARD KLEIN,<sup>1</sup> AND CHRISTIAN HÜGEL,<sup>2</sup> Institute for Information Security, Germany  
<sup>1</sup>FRONTIER DAVIDSON, Germany  
<sup>2</sup>CYBERSECURITY, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg and University Park, USA

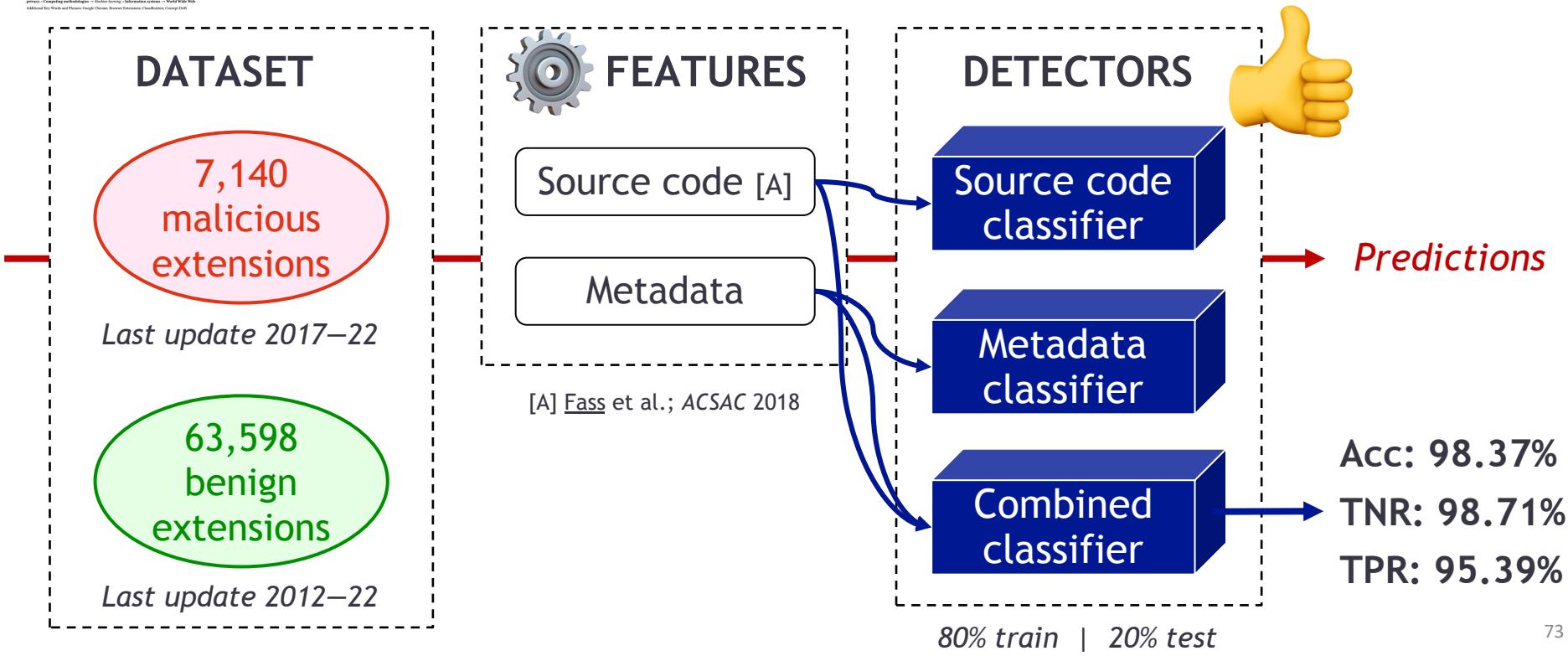
Google Chrome is the most popular browser. Users can customize it with extensions that add functionality to the browser. In this paper, we study the problem of detecting malicious extensions in the Chrome Web Store. Developers can upload their extensions to the CWS, but such extensions are made available to users without any prior review. We collected 10,000 extensions from the CWS and analyzed them. Our analysis shows that, unlike other web stores, the CWS does not provide any information about the developer or the extension itself. This makes it difficult to detect malicious extensions. To address this challenge, we propose a supervised machine learning approach based on feature extraction and classification. We used several machine learning algorithms to classify extensions as benign or malicious. We evaluated our approach using a dataset of 10,000 extensions. The results show that our approach is able to detect malicious extensions with a high accuracy. We also found that our approach can identify malicious extensions that have been flagged by Google. Our results indicate that our approach is able to detect malicious extensions with a high accuracy. This is important because it allows users to protect themselves from malicious extensions.

**Keywords:** Google Chrome, extensions, machine learning, supervised learning, security, malware detection.

**CCS Concepts:** Security and privacy; - Network security; Social aspects of security; Computer security; - Malware analysis; Security risk; - Information security; Cryptographic protocols; - Cryptographic methods.

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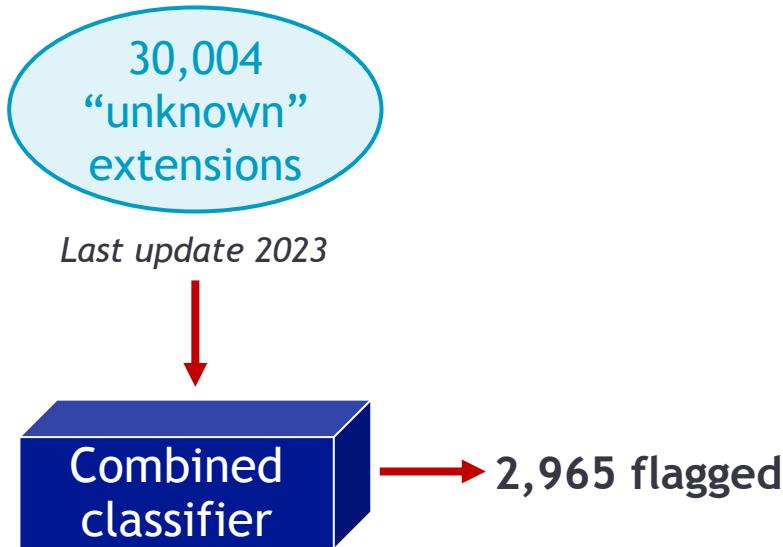
# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Real World

30,004  
“unknown”  
extensions

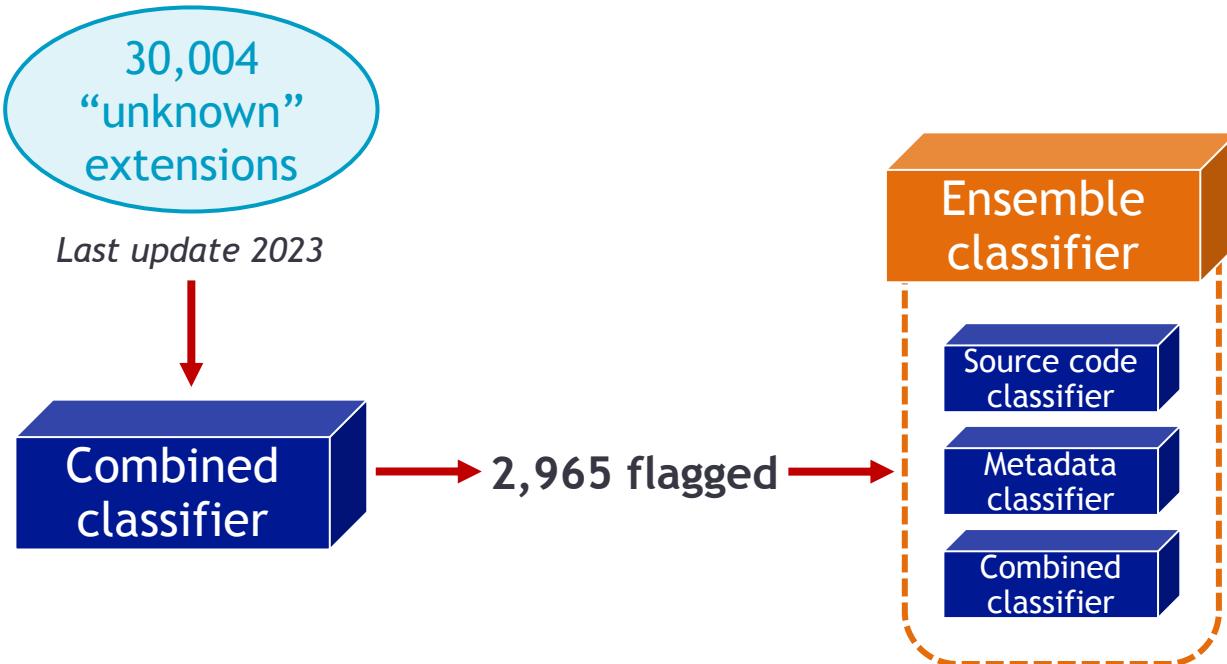
*Last update 2023*



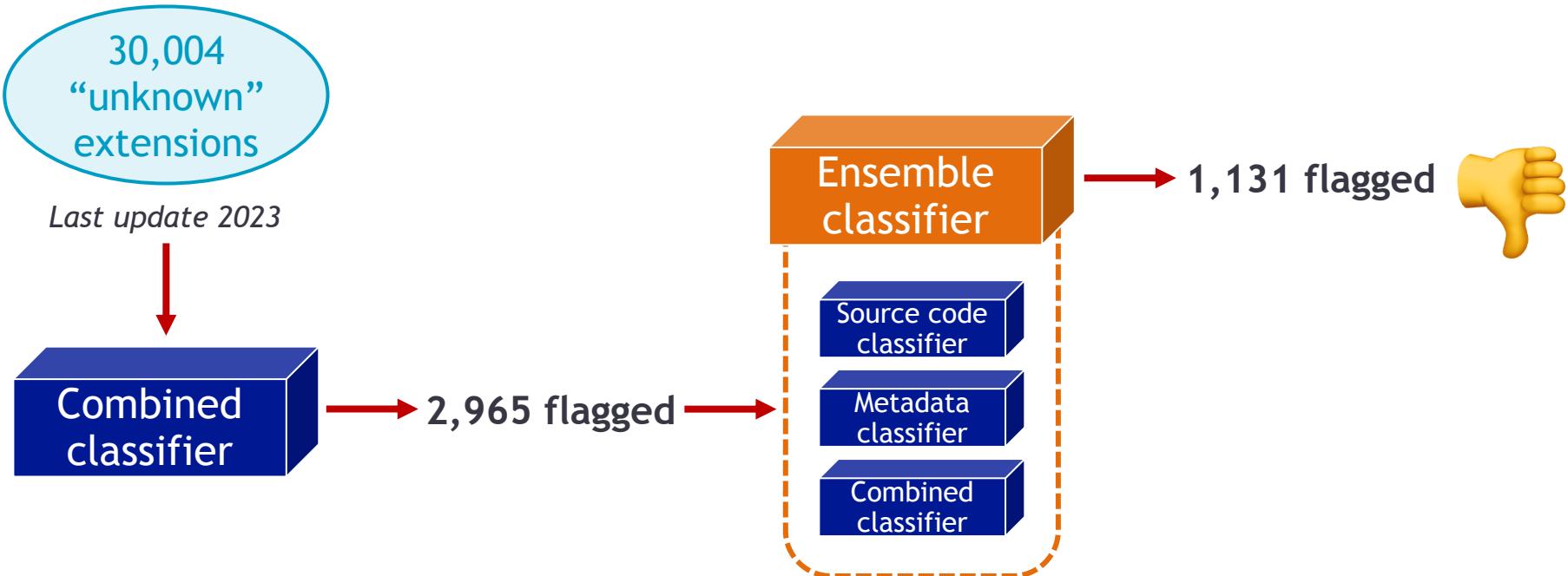
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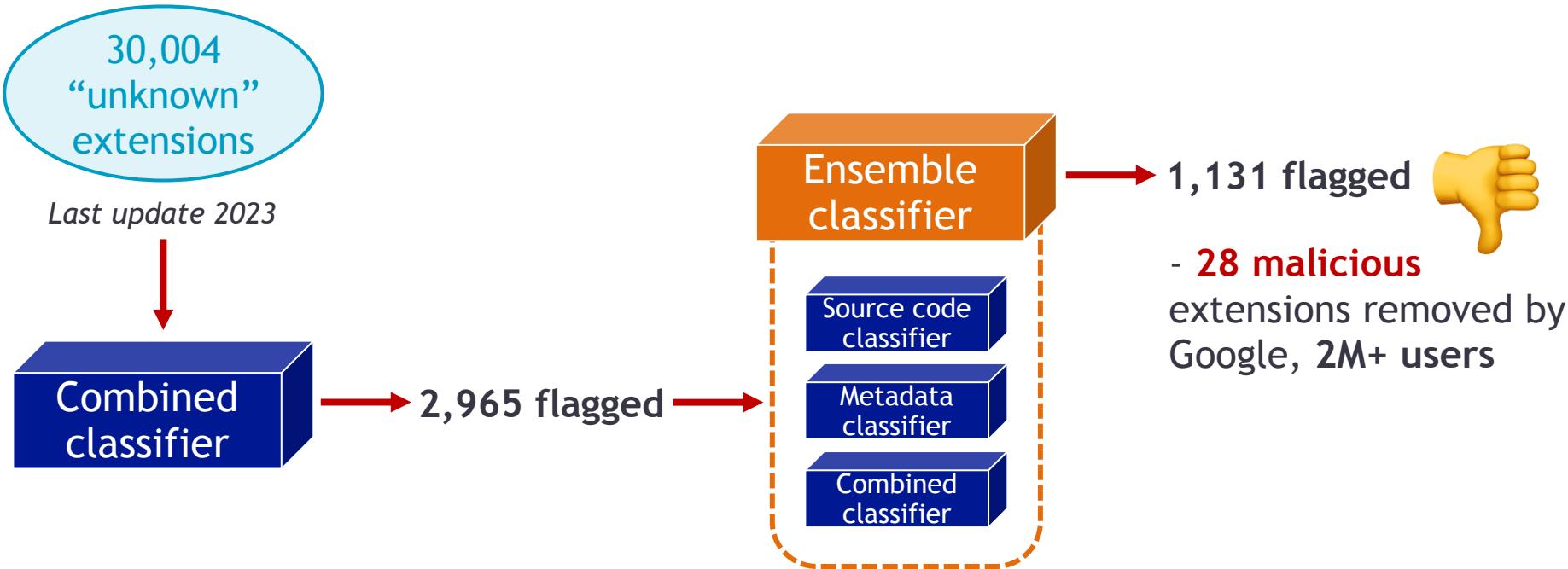
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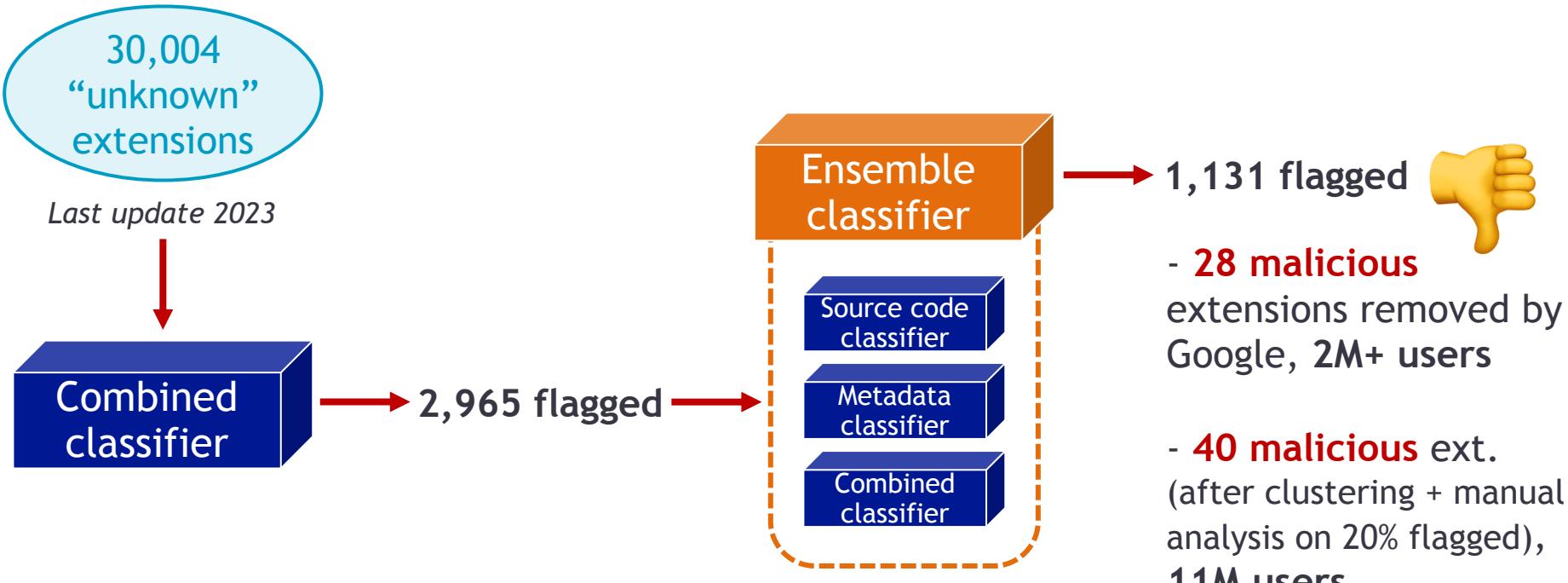
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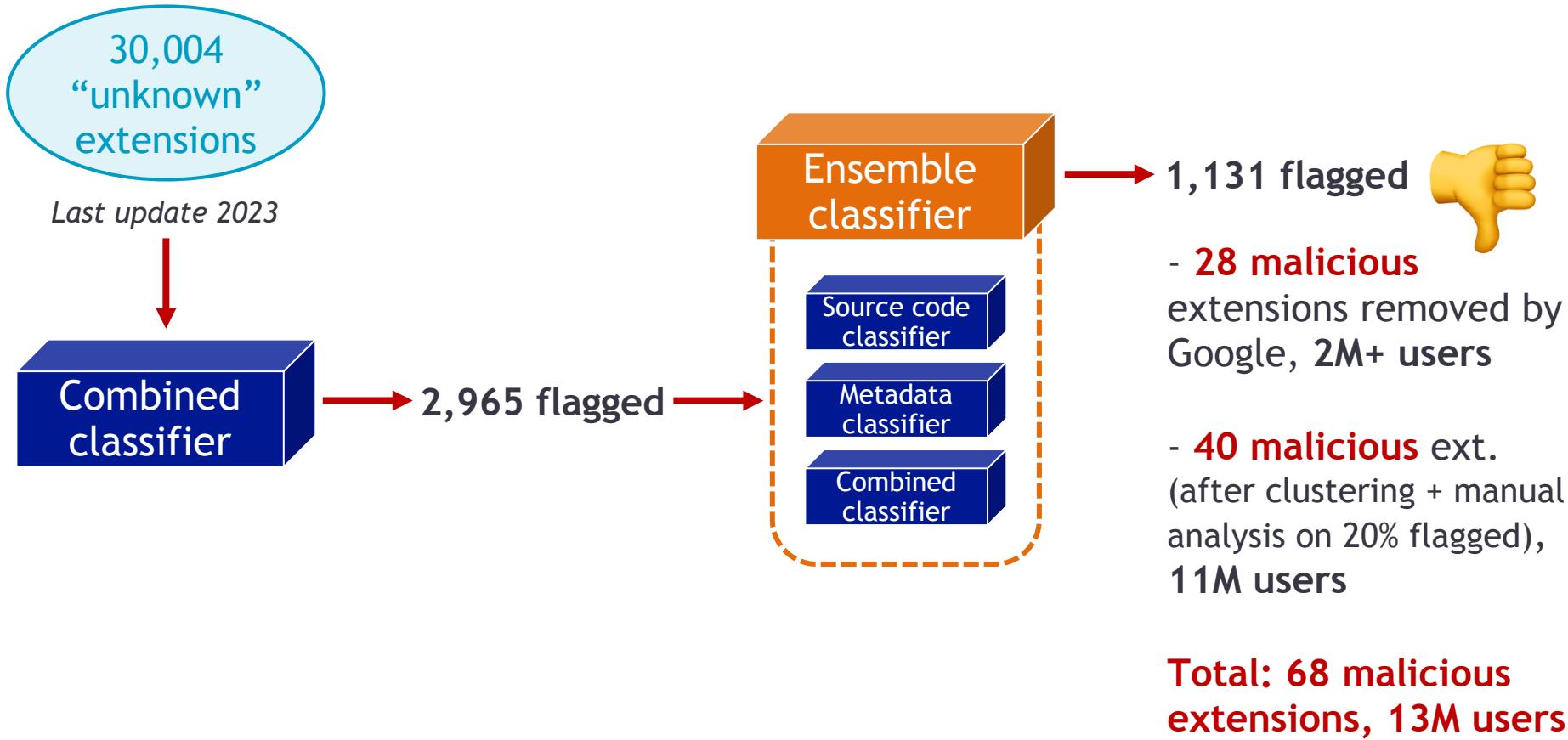
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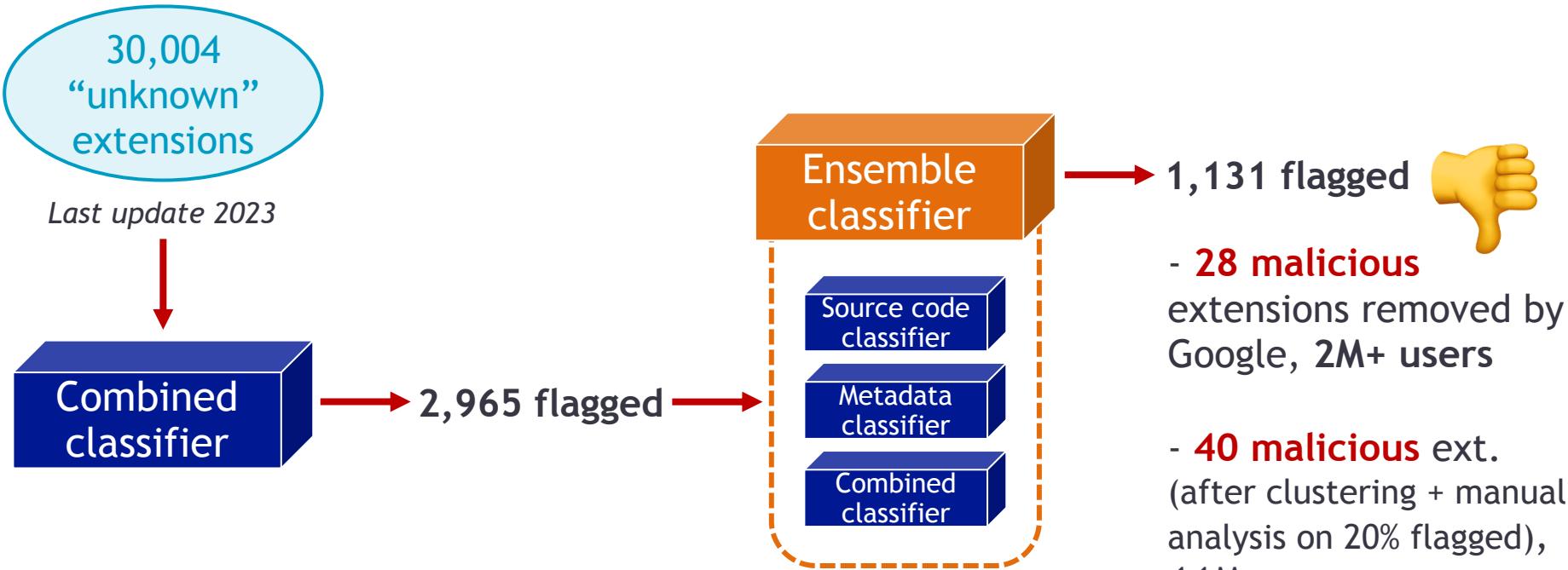
# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Real World



# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Real World



# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Real World



May 2024: disclosure of the 40 extensions to Google, no response  
As of Sept. 2025: 17 / 40 malicious extensions were taken down

# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Lab Setting vs. Real World

- Lab setting: 98.37% accuracy
- Real world: 1,131 / 30,004 extensions flagged | 68 verified malicious extensions

???

# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Lab Setting vs. Real World

- Lab setting: 98.37% accuracy
- Real world: 1,131 / 30,004 extensions flagged | 68 verified malicious extensions

???

- Concept drift
  - Intrinsic evolution of extensions, hard for supervised ML tools to keep a (high) accuracy over time
  - How to validate concept drift? → see experiments in the paper
  - Why are extensions affected? → see paper (study feature importance)

# Detecting Malicious Extensions – Takeaways

- ML evaluations can be **misleading**: detectors performing well in a lab setting are no guarantee of practical applicability in the real world
- Detectors need to be **retrained regularly**
- Investigate **active learning** as a mitigation to concept drift
  - E.g., *uncertainty sampling*: monthly retraining of the detector on X labeled extensions where the detector is the most uncertain

# Outline

- Background: Browser Extensions
- Investigating Security-Noteworthy Extensions (SNE)
- Detecting Vulnerable Extensions
  - Threat model and automated tool (DOUBLEX)
  - Case studies, results, and potential defense strategies
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# Browser Extension Fingerprinting

Browser extensions can interact with web pages...

# Browser Extension Fingerprinting

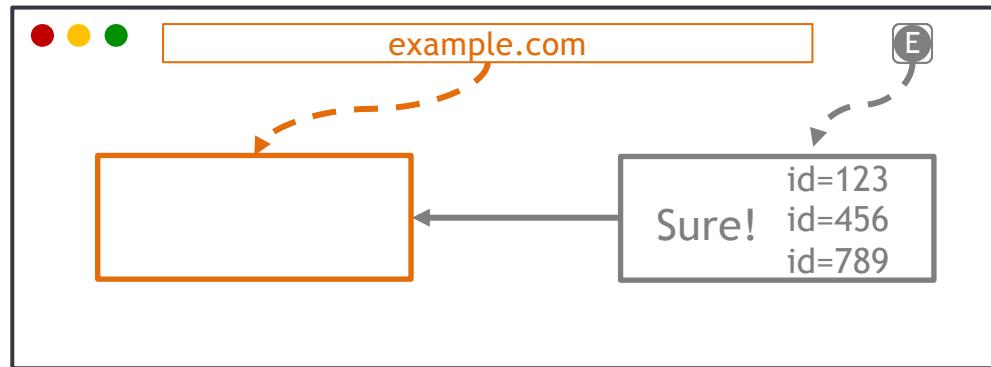
Browser extensions can interact with web pages...

- 1) Extensions send **PostMessage** to web pages

# Browser Extension Fingerprinting

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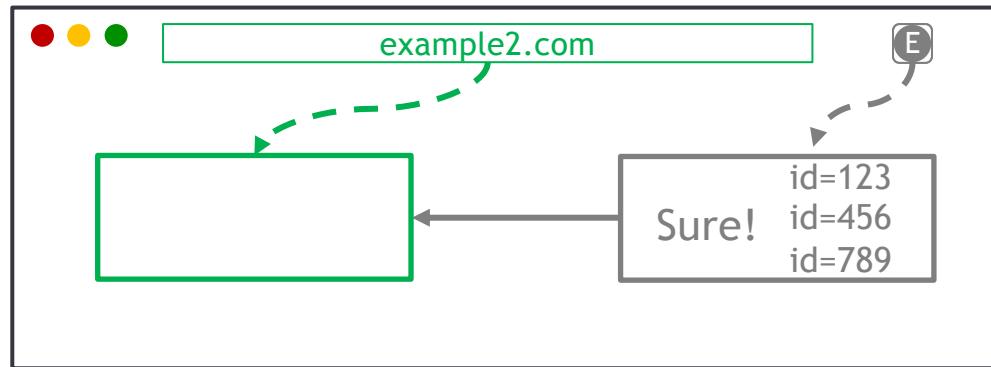
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# Browser Extension Fingerprinting

Browser extensions can interact with web pages...

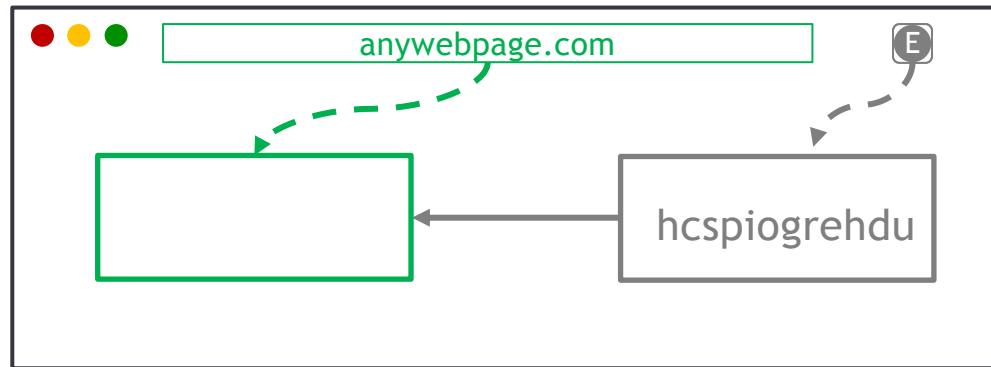
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# Browser Extension Fingerprinting

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# Browser Extension Fingerprinting

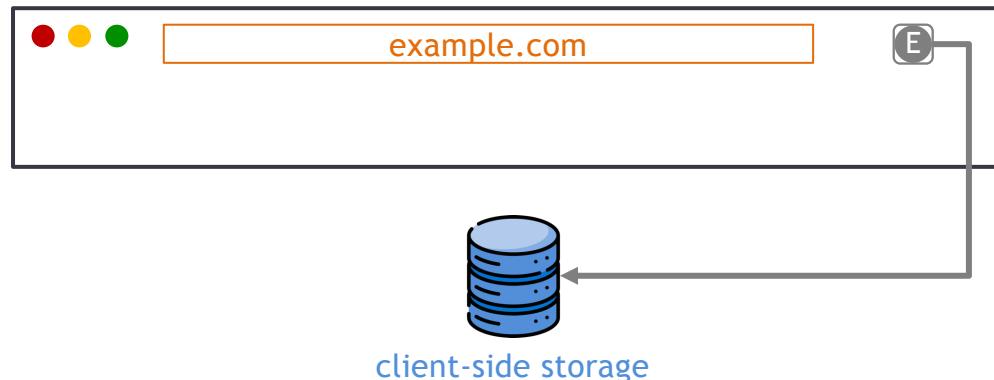
Browser extensions can interact with web pages...

- 1) Extensions send **PostMessage** to web pages
- 2) Extensions store data on the client side through **storage APIs**  
(e.g., cookies, local/session storage, IndexedDB)

# Browser Extension Fingerprinting

Browser extensions can interact with web pages...

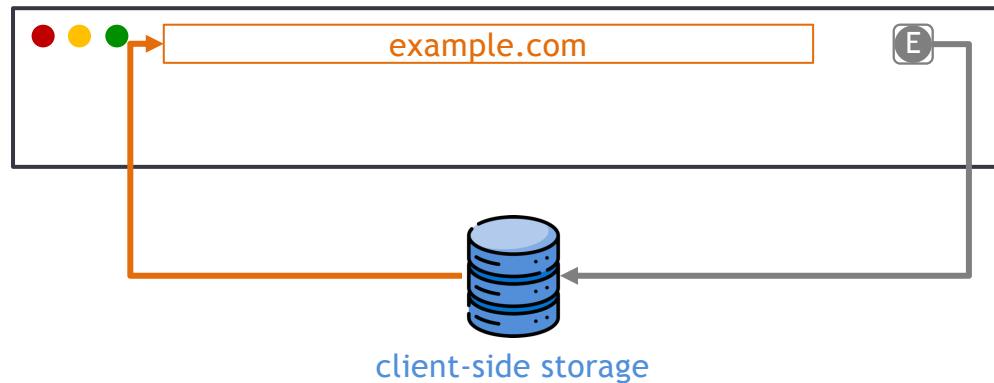
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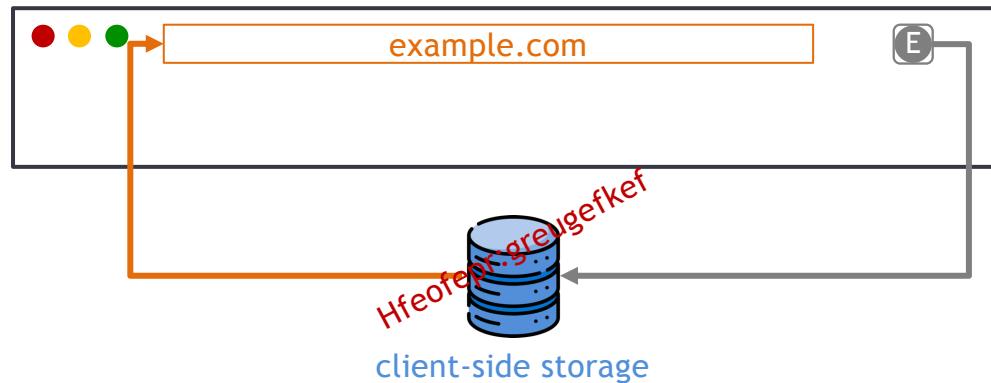
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  - Extensions can reveal **personal user information**, e.g., geolocation, ethnicity, social/personal interests, medical issues, religion, etc. [Karami; NDSS’19]
    - invocation of global APIs and properties

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# Detecting Fingerprintable Extensions

*How many extensions can be **uniquely fingerprinted** through these observable side effects?*

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> Peeking through the window: Fingerprinting Browser Extensions through Page-Visible Execution Traces and Interactions

In ACM CCS 2024. Shubham Agarwal, Aurore Fass, and Ben Stock



# Detecting Fingerprintable Extensions with Raider

Analyzed 38k Chrome extensions from 2024 with Raider

- **2,747 fingerprintable Chrome extensions** (lower bound)
- Impacting **169M users**
- Notified **1,967 developers** about their fingerprintable extension(s)
  - Only 30 (!) replied
  - Of those, only 16 positively acknowledged the issues
    - But: they heavily **rely on our fingerprinting vectors** (e.g., script injection or data storage) **for their extensions' functionality**
- Raider PoC is **available online**



Raider-ext/raider

# Mitigations

- Global APIs:
  - ensure that browser extension code runs before the attacker code (inject at document\_start)
  - ensure that APIs cannot be overwritten (freeze their native definition)
- Global variables: scope appropriately
- Storage: use the chrome.storage API instead

# Summary

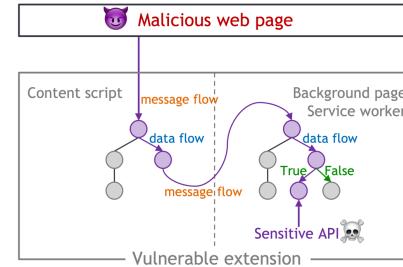
## Dangerous Browser Extensions

→ Extensions can put their users' security & privacy at risk:

- Contain **malware**: designed by malicious actors to harm victims
  - E.g., propagate malware, steal users' credentials, track users
- Contain **vulnerabilities**: designed by well-intentioned developers... but buggy
  - E.g., can lead to user-sensitive data exfiltration
- **Violate the Chrome Web Store policies**
  - E.g., deceive users, promote unlawful activities, lack a privacy policy
- **Be fingerprintable**: can be recognized and uniquely identified
  - E.g., can lead to user tracking or inferring of user personal information

Hsu et al.  
AsiaCCS  
2024

## Detecting Vulnerable Extensions with DOUBLEX



Fass et al.  
CCS 2021

Aurore54F/DoubleX

➤ DOUBLEX detects suspicious data flows in browser extensions

184 vulnerable extensions | Precision: 89% | Recall: 93%

## Detecting Malicious Extensions – Lab Setting vs. Real World

- Lab setting: 98.37% accuracy
- Real world: 1,131 / 30,004 extensions flagged | 68 verified malicious extensions
- **Concept drift**
  - Intrinsic evolution of extensions, hard for supervised ML tools to keep a (high) accuracy over time
  - How to validate concept drift? → see experiments in the paper
  - Why are extensions affected? → see paper (study feature importance)



Rosenzweig  
et al. TWEB  
2025



its-not-easy/tweb25

## Detecting Fingerprintable Extensions with Raider

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Agarwal et al.  
CCS 2024



Raider-ext/raider



[aurore.fass@inria.fr](mailto:aurore.fass@inria.fr)

Aurore Fass – Browser Extension (In)Security



<https://aurore54f.github.io>

# Corresponding Publications

- What is in the Chrome Web Store?

Sheryl Hsu, Manda Tran, and Aurore Fass. In *ACM AsiaCCS 2024*

- DoubleX: Statically Detecting Vulnerable Data Flows in Browser Extensions at Scale

Aurore Fass, Dolière Francis Somé, Michael Backes, and Ben Stock. In *ACM CCS 2021*

- It's not Easy: Applying Supervised Machine Learning to Detect Malicious Extensions in the Chrome Web Store

Ben Rosenzweig, Valentino Dalla Valle, Giovanni Apruzzese, and Aurore Fass. In *ACM TWEB 2025*

- Peeking through the window: Fingerprinting Browser Extensions through Page-Visible Execution Traces and Interactions

Shubham Agarwal, Aurore Fass, and Ben Stock. In *ACM CCS 2024*