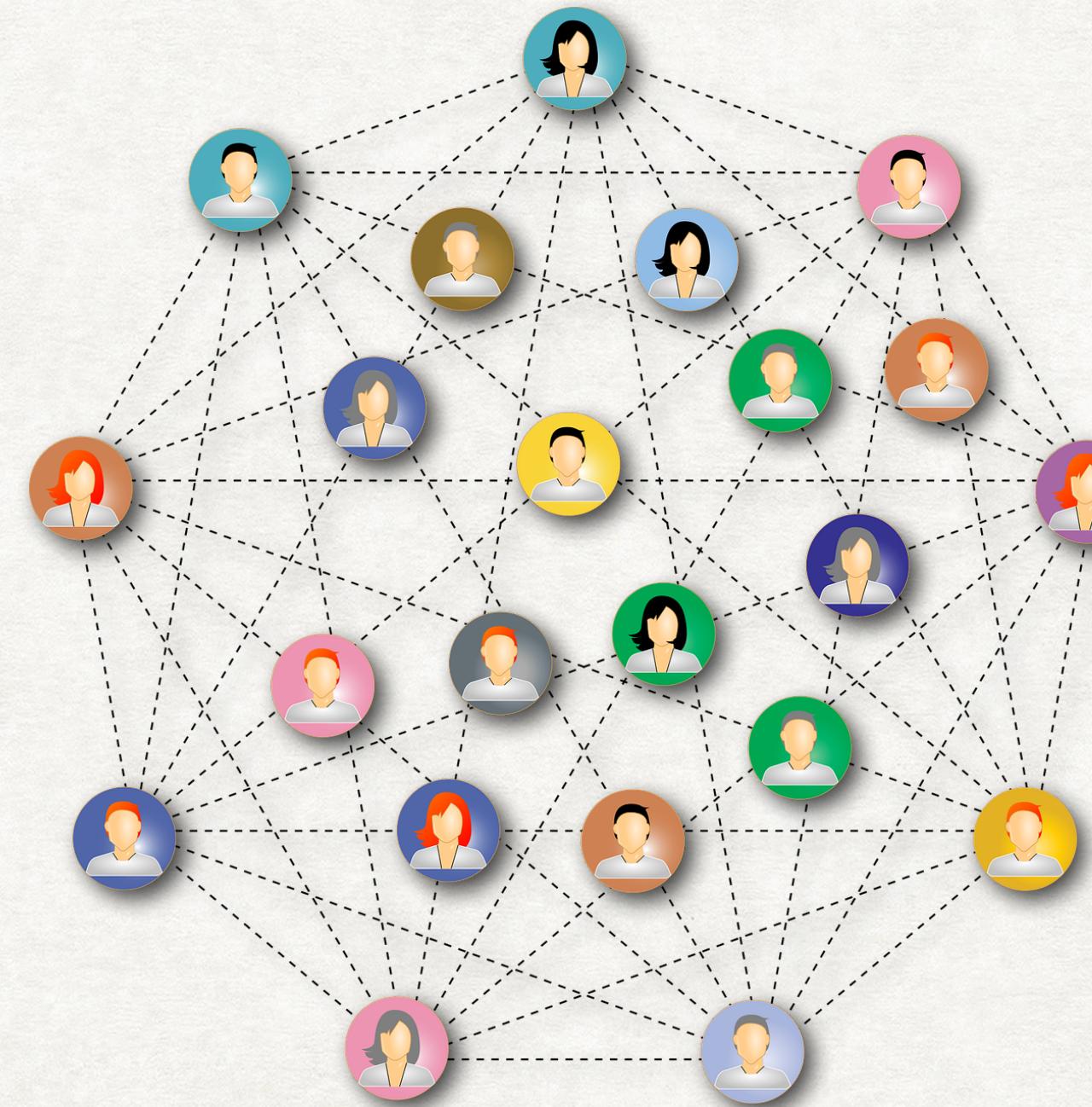


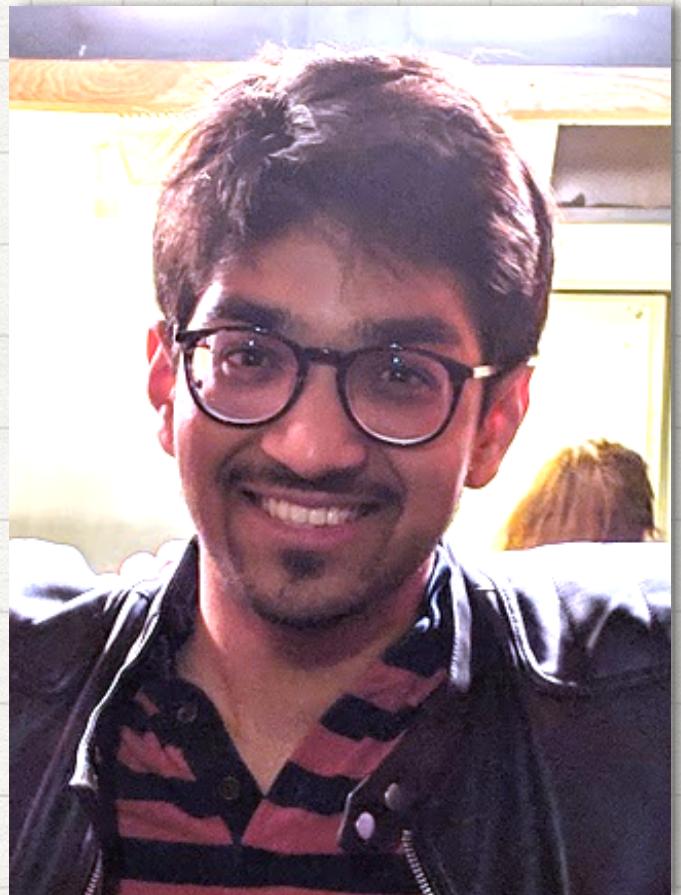
USING SIMULATIONS TO STUDY ONLINE DISINFORMATION



MISINFOCON '22

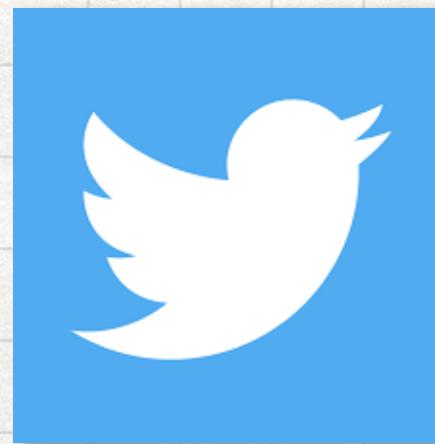
**S. MEHTA, B. STATE, R. BONNEAU,
J. NAGLER, P.H. TORR, A.G. BAYDIN**

ABOUT ME



- 2019 - 23** Ph.D. @ NYU Data Science, Center for Social Media + Politics
Social Networks, Probabilistic Inference, Causal Discovery
- 2022** Ph.D. ML Engineering Intern at Twitter
Civic Integrity, Misinformation
- 2020 - 21** Data Science Research Intern at Adobe
Trending Hashtag Recommendation for Videos
- 2018 - 19** ML + Physics at the European Org. for Nuclear Research

swapneelm.github.io



COORDINATED INAUTHENTIC BEHAVIOR

- Inauthentic behavior is defined as the use of assets (accounts, Pages, Groups, or Events), **to mislead people.**
- There are global coordinated networks of accounts promoting disinformation on social networks.



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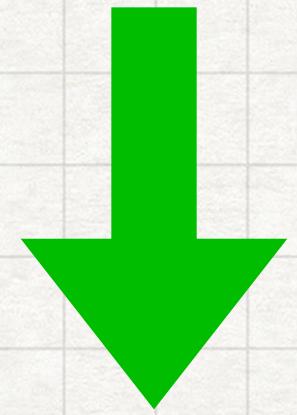
COORDINATED INAUTHENTIC BEHAVIOR

- Inauthentic behavior is defined as the use of assets (accounts, Pages, Groups, or Events), **to mislead people.**
- There are global coordinated networks of accounts promoting disinformation on social networks.
- Meta and Twitter release transparency reports about them a while after taking them down.
- No real-time solution nor verified damage assessment because effects are hard to quantify externally!



(COST TO)
MITIGATE THESE INFLUENCE OPS!

**MEASURING THE HARMS DUE TO
COORDINATED INAUTHENTIC BEHAVIOR**



**(COST TO)
MITIGATE THESE INFLUENCE OPS!**

RESEARCH GOALS

- RQ: Quantify the relative impact of different algorithmic choices that a platform makes, for instance:

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- RQ: Quantify the relative impact of different algorithmic choices that a platform makes, for instance:
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 - Dealing with “controversial” opinions?
 - Are penalties fair — what about false positives?

SIMULATE A SOCIAL NETWORK

- Reddit is a pseudonymous social network comprising users who are part of like-minded groups or subreddits
- It has a community-based structure

The screenshot shows the Reddit homepage with the following details:

- Header:** reddit, Home, Search bar (Search Reddit), various icons (Free, etc.).
- Post:** Upvotes (1592), Downvotes (1), by u/dhpw2, posted 4 hours ago. Subreddit: r/stocks.
- Content:** "Elon Musk offers to buy Twitter for \$54.20 per share" (Company Discussion).

Tesla founder Elon Musk is offering to buy Twitter for \$54.20 per share in cash, Bloomberg reported Thursday.

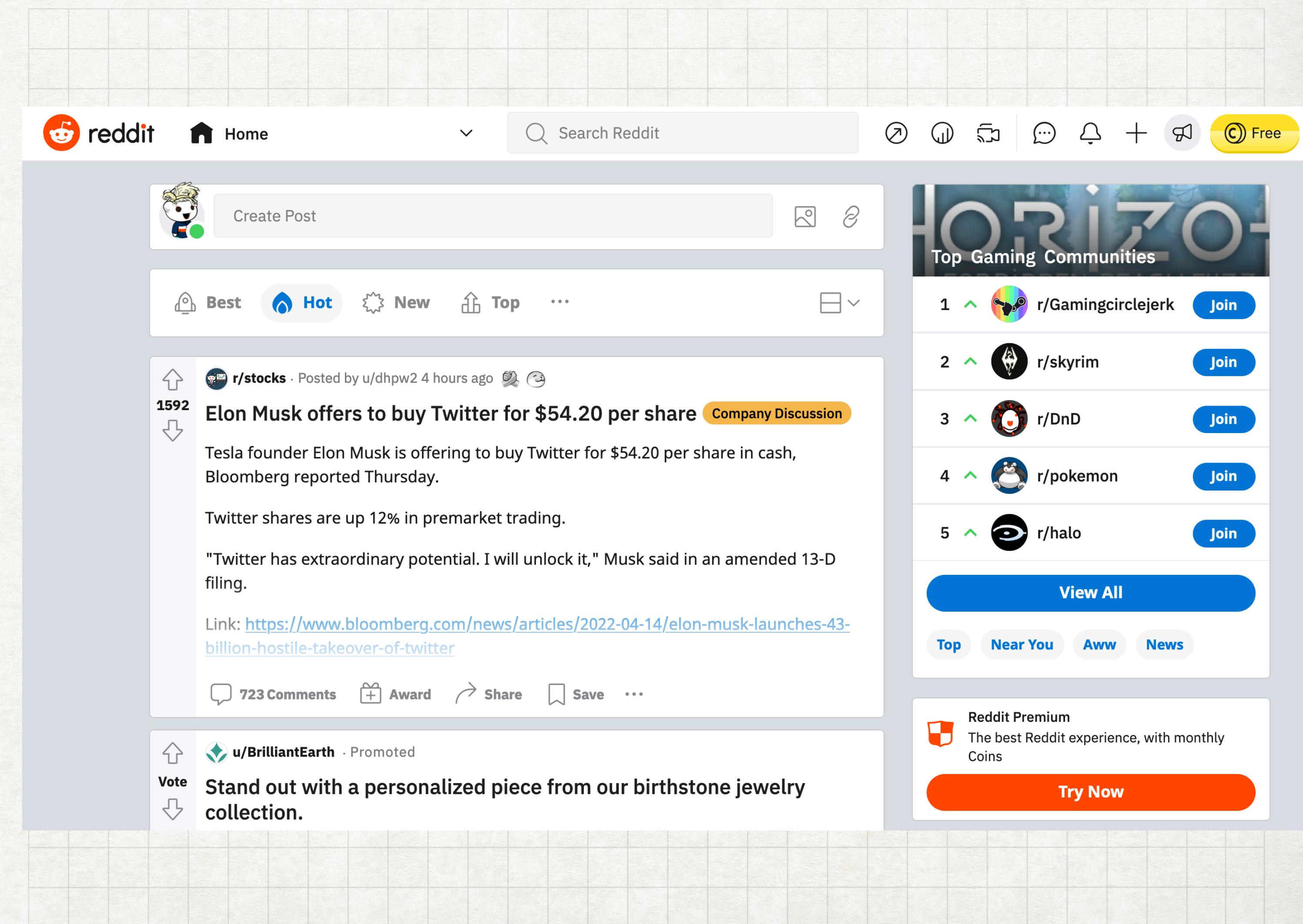
Twitter shares are up 12% in premarket trading.

"Twitter has extraordinary potential. I will unlock it," Musk said in an amended 13-D filing.

Link: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-14/elon-musk-launches-43-billion-hostile-takeover-of-twitter>
- Post Options:** 723 Comments, Award, Share, Save, ...
- Advertisement:** u/BrilliantEarth - Promoted. Text: "Stand out with a personalized piece from our birthstone jewelry collection."
- Sidebar:** Top Gaming Communities (r/Gamingcirclejerk, r/skyrim, r/DnD, r/pokemon, r/halo), View All, Top, Near You, Aww, News.
- Bottom:** Reddit Premium (The best Reddit experience, with monthly Coins), Try Now.

SIMULATE A SOCIAL NETWORK

- Reddit is a pseudonymous social network comprising users who are part of like-minded groups or subreddits
- It has a community-based structure
- The state-action space for a user includes:
 - Create a post/comment
 - Upvote a post/comment
 - Downvote a post/comment
 - Cross-post an existing post



SIMULATING SOCIAL NETWORKS

REDDIT

- Developing a model for a user's posting behavior
- Creating a story of how a user interacts with Reddit

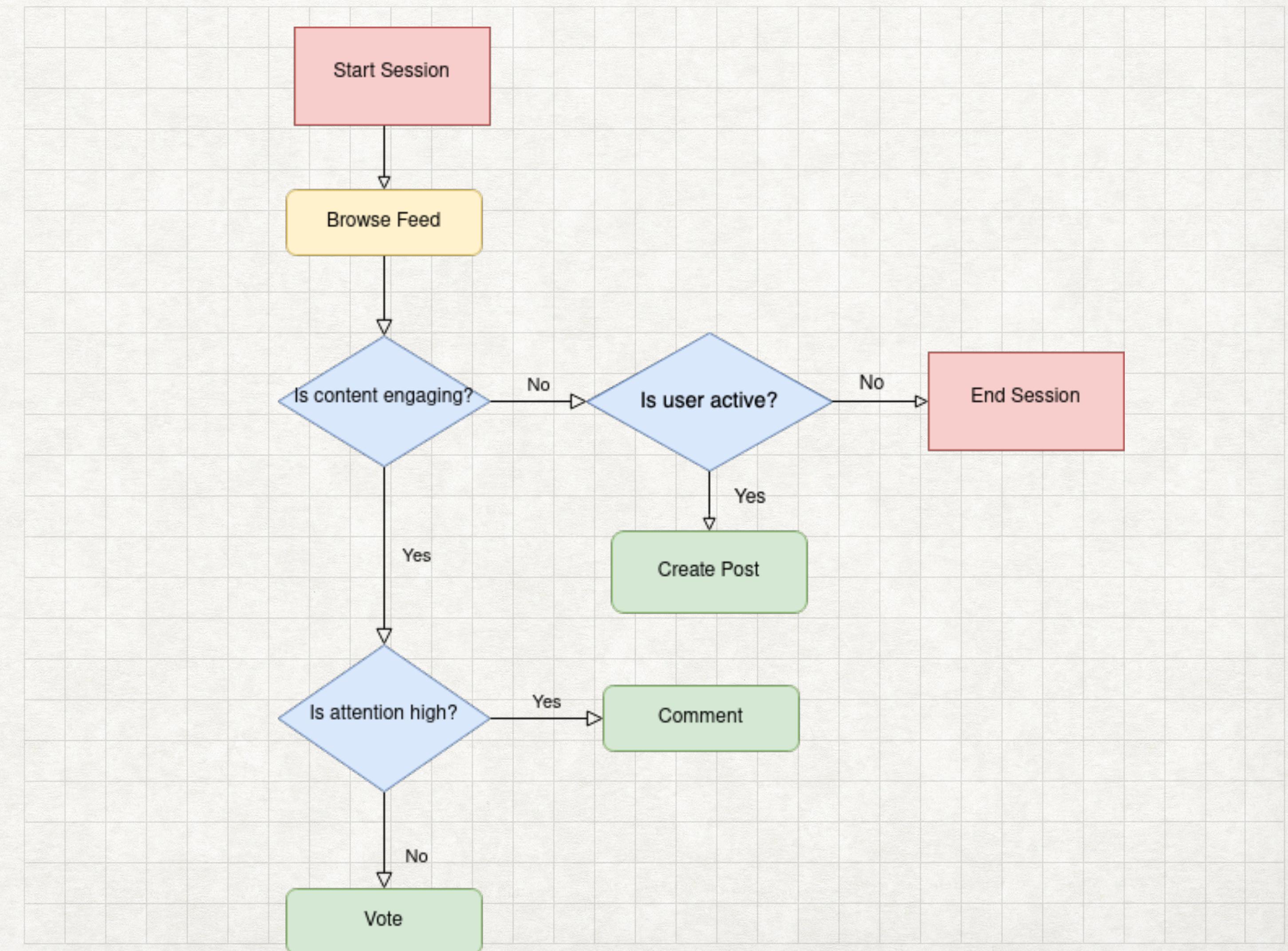
Algorithm 6: Simulating User Activity on Reddit

```
 $N \in \mathbb{N}$ : Number of users  
 $T \in \mathbb{N}$ : Time steps  
 $S \in \mathbb{N}$ : Number of sub-reddit categories  
 $\{\pi_i \in \text{Uniform}(0, 1)\}_{i=1,j=1}^{N,S}$  ▷ Interaction frequency  
1: procedure REDDIT  
2: Sample latents:  
3:  $v \leftarrow \{v_i \sim \text{Uniform}(0, 1)\}_{i=1,j=1}^{N,S}$  ▷ Interaction propensity over subreddit categories  
4: Simulate:  
5:    $\Phi_{1:N} \leftarrow \langle \rangle$  ▷ User Activity  
6:   for  $t = 1 : T$  do  
7:     for  $i = 1 : N$  do  
8:        $\gamma \sim \text{Categorical}(\pi_i)$  ▷ Choose Subreddit (category)  
9:        $\tau \sim \text{Bernoulli}(v_{i,\gamma})$  ▷ Interact with Subreddit (category)  
10:       $\Phi_i \leftarrow \Phi_i + \langle \tau \rangle$  ▷ Append to user's activity  
11:     return  $\Phi_{1:N}$  ▷ All user activity
```

SIMULATING SOCIAL NETWORKS

REDDIT

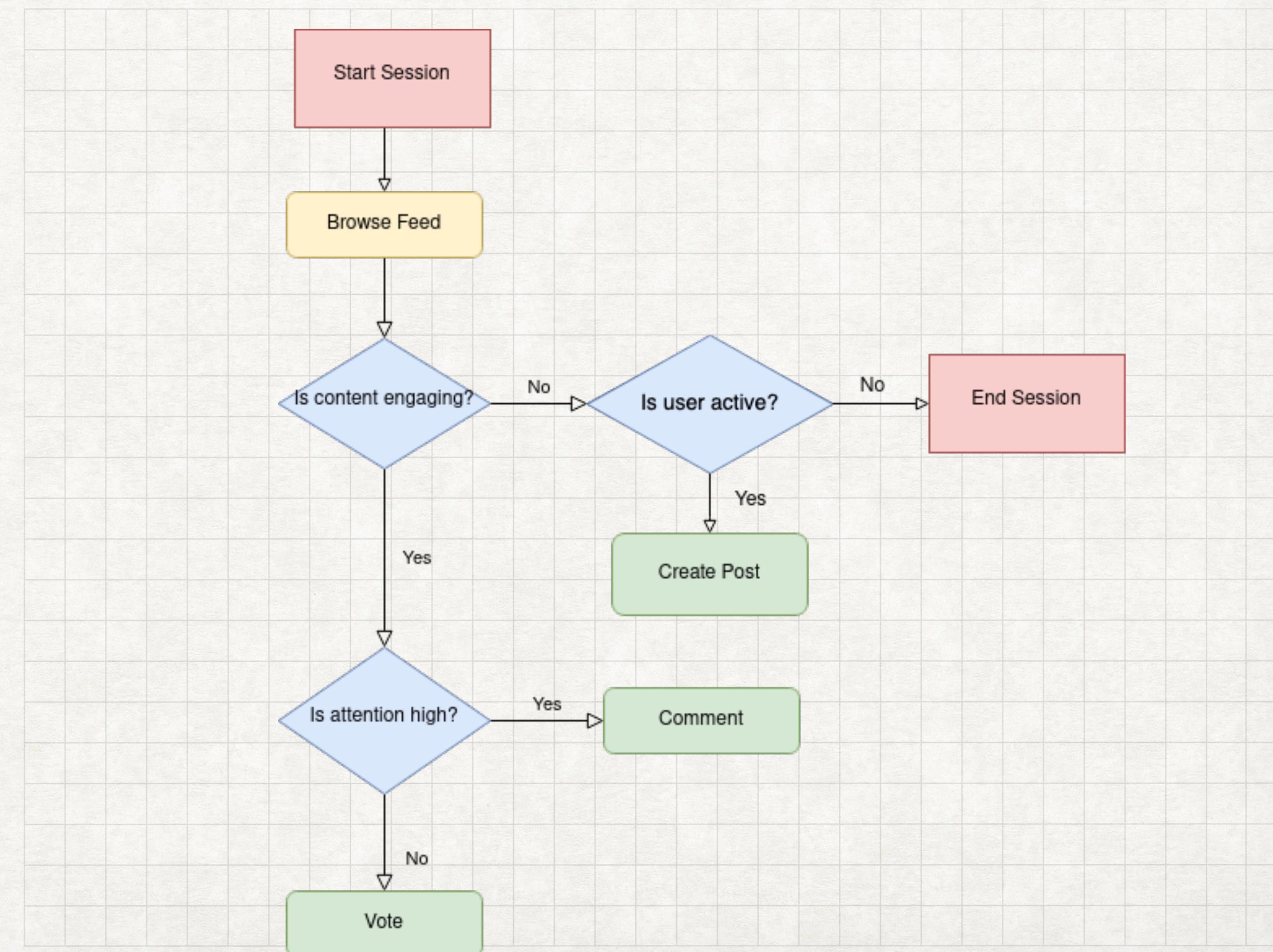
- Developing a model for a user's posting behavior
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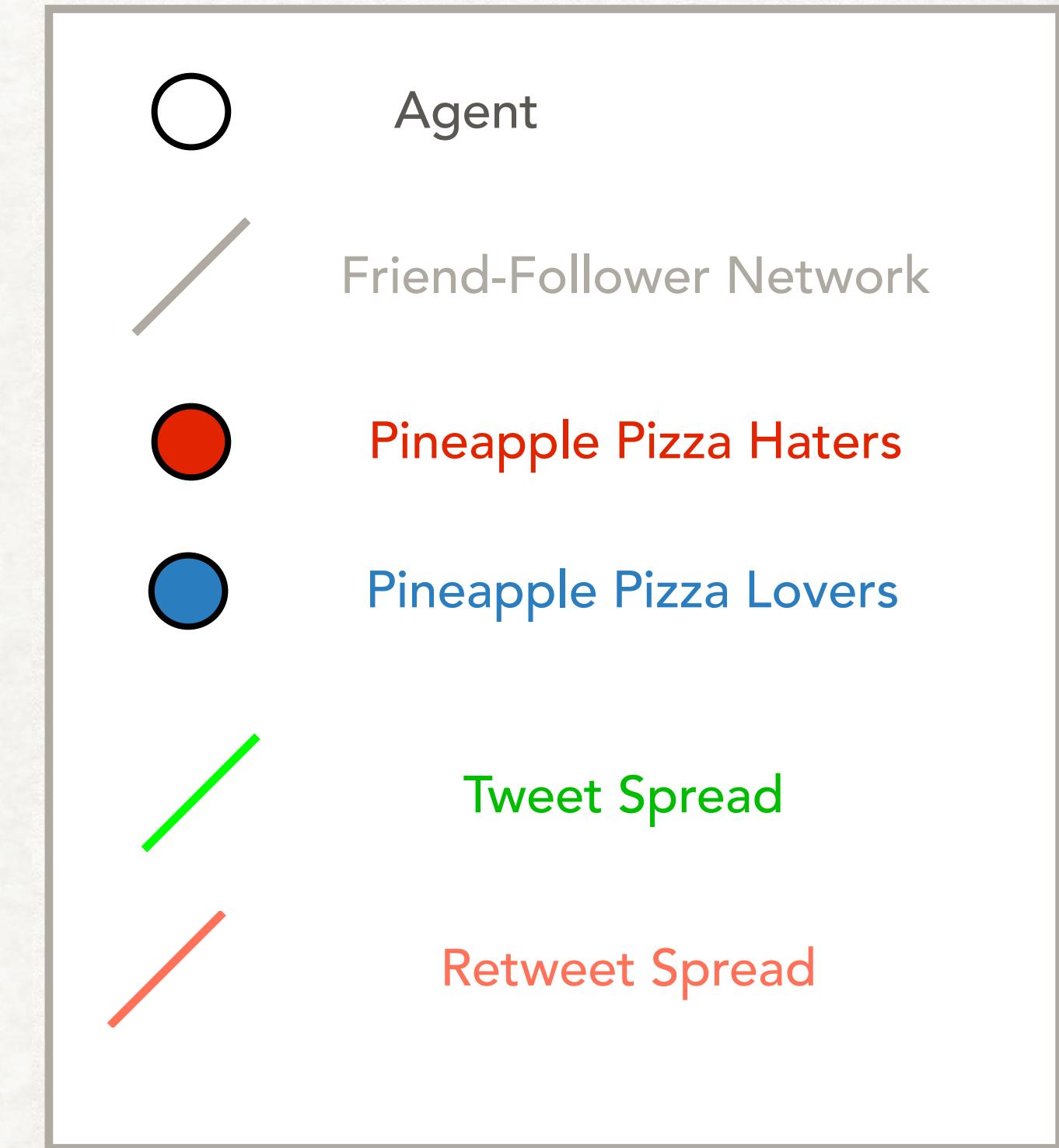
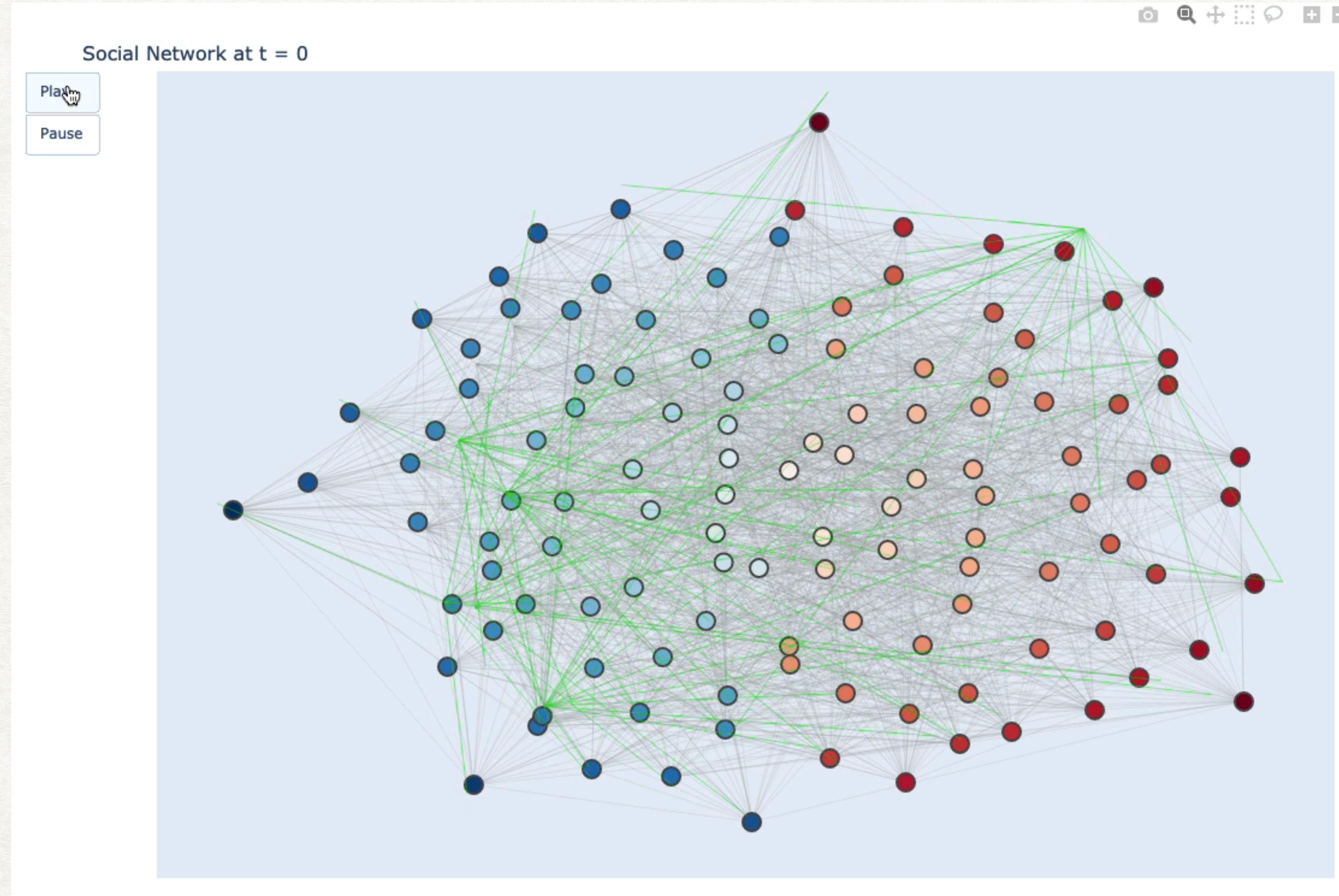
SIMULATING SOCIAL NETWORKS

REDDIT

- Developing a model for a user's posting behavior
- Creating a story of how a user interacts with Reddit
- Use the data to set priors on interaction frequency
- Simulate counterfactual outcomes!

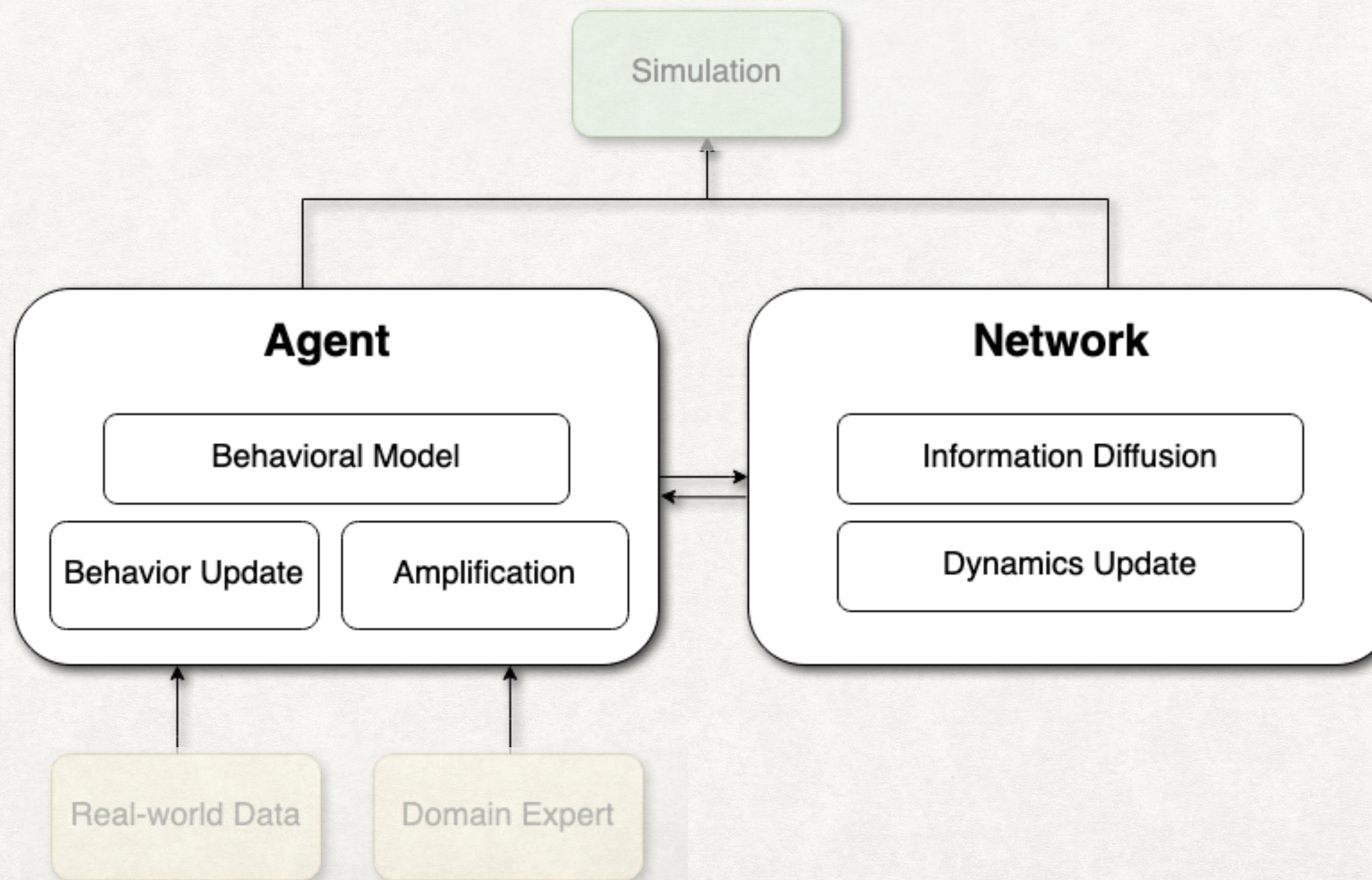


SIMULATING SOCIAL NETWORKS

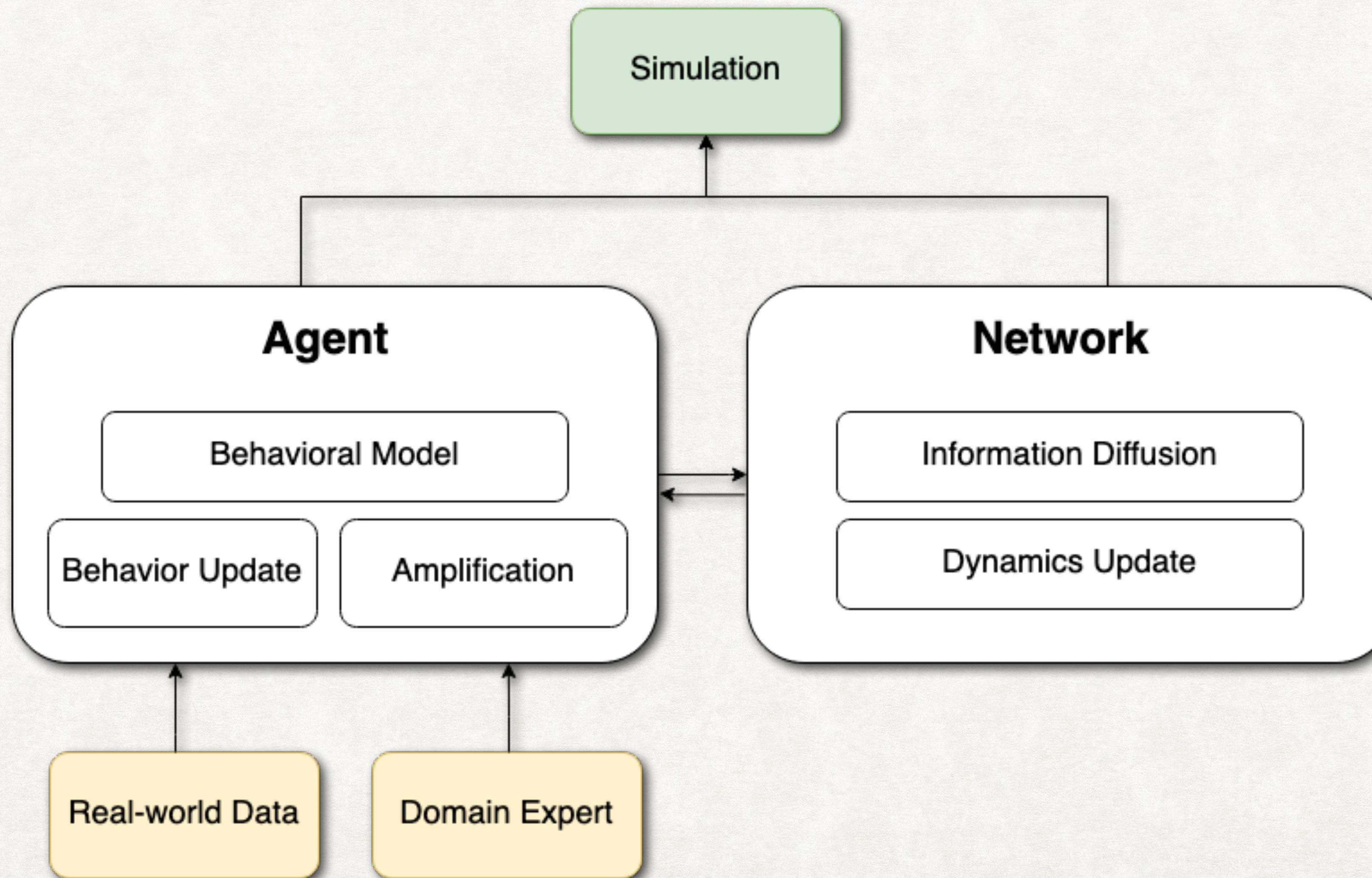


<https://youtu.be/GV5XuftiD7s>

SIMPPL



SIMPPL



DISINFORMATION MANOEUVRES

	Manipulating the narrative		Manipulating the social network	
Positive	Engage	Messages that bring up a related but relevant topic	Back	Actions that increase the importance of the opinion leader or create a new opinion leader
	Explain	Messages that provides details on or elaborate the topic	Build	Actions that create a group or the appearance of a group
	Excite	messages that elicit a positive emotion such as joy or excitement	Bridge	Actions that build a connection between two or more groups
	Enhance	Messages that encourage the topic-group to continue with the topic	Boost	Actions that grow the size of the group or make it appear that it has grown
Negative	Dismiss	Messages about why the topic is not important	Neutralize	Actions decrease the importance of the opinion leader
	Distort	Messages that alter the main message of the topic	Nuke	Actions that lead to a group being dismantled or breaking up, or appearing to be broken up
	Dismay	Messages that elicit a negative emotion such as sadness or anger	Narrow	Actions that lead to a group becoming sequestered from other groups or marginalized
	Distract	Discussion about a totally different topic and irrelevant	Neglect	Actions that reduce the size of the group or make it appear that the group has grown smaller

K. Carley, 2020

REDDIT RECOMMENDER SYSTEMS

The screenshot shows the Reddit homepage with a search bar and various navigation icons at the top. Below the header, there's a 'Create Post' button and a navigation bar with links for 'Best', 'Hot', 'New', and 'Top'. A red circle highlights the 'Hot' link, which is currently active. To the right of the main content area, there's a sidebar titled 'Top Gaming Communities' featuring a list of subreddits with their respective logos and 'Join' buttons.

Hot Sort Algorithm Example:

A post from the r/stocks subreddit is displayed, titled "Elon Musk offers to buy Twitter for \$54.20 per share". The post has received 1592 upvotes. The text of the post discusses Elon Musk's offer to buy Twitter for \$54.20 per share, mentioning that Tesla founder Musk is offering to buy Twitter for \$54.20 per share in cash, Bloomberg reported Thursday. It also notes that Twitter shares are up 12% in premarket trading and quotes Musk as saying "Twitter has extraordinary potential. I will unlock it," in an amended 13-D filing. A link to the Bloomberg article is provided: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-14/elon-musk-launches-43-billion-hostile-takeover-of-twitter>.

Post statistics: 1592 upvotes, 723 comments.

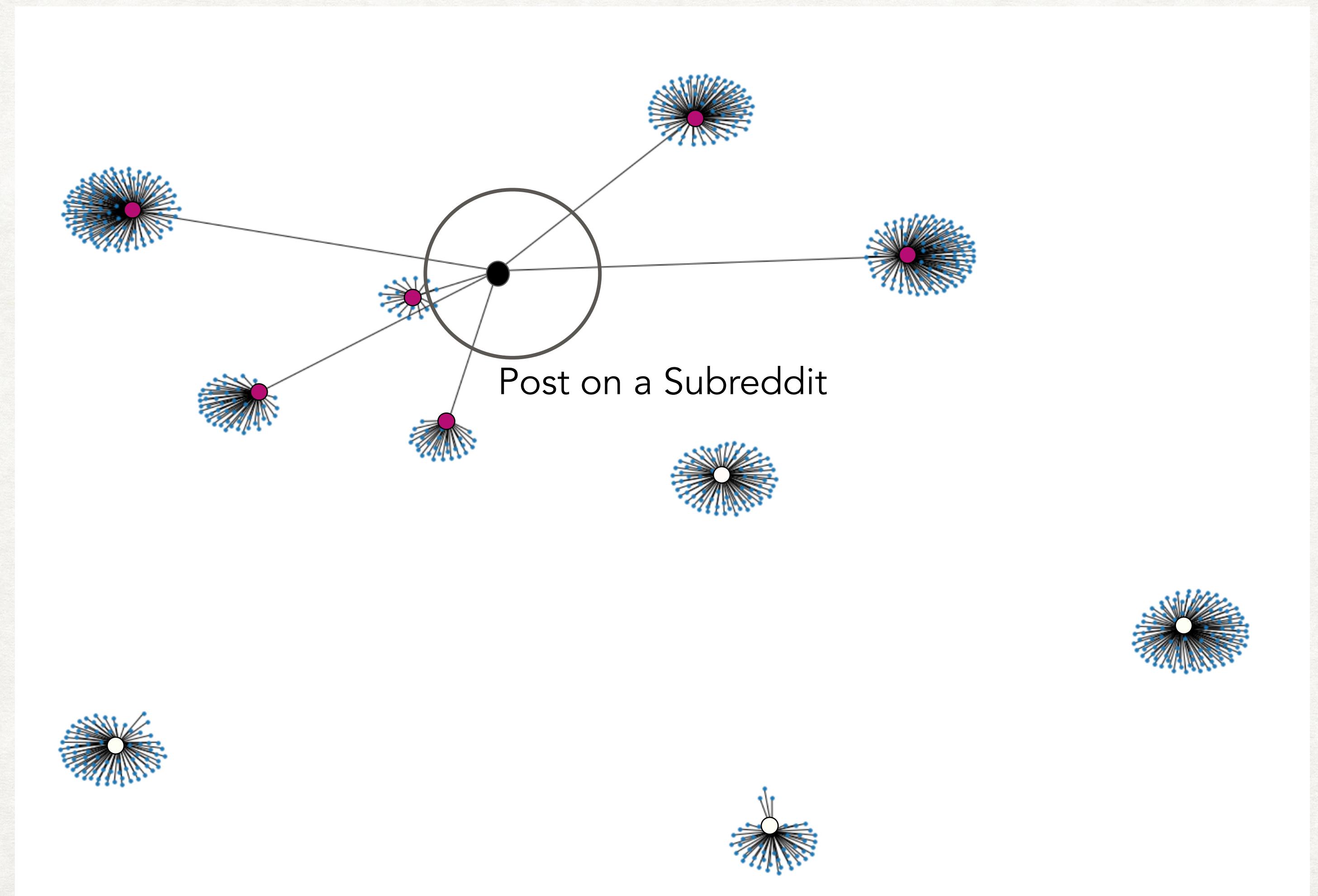
Reddit Premium logo is visible at the bottom right.

RANKING AND RECOMMENDATION ALGORITHMS

New	Top	Rising	Controversial	Best (Personalized)
Age of Post	Age of Post			Age of Post
	# of Upvotes	# of Upvotes	# of Upvotes	# of Upvotes
			# of Downvotes	
		Age of Votes		
		Age of Comments		
				Relevance to User
				Subreddit Membership

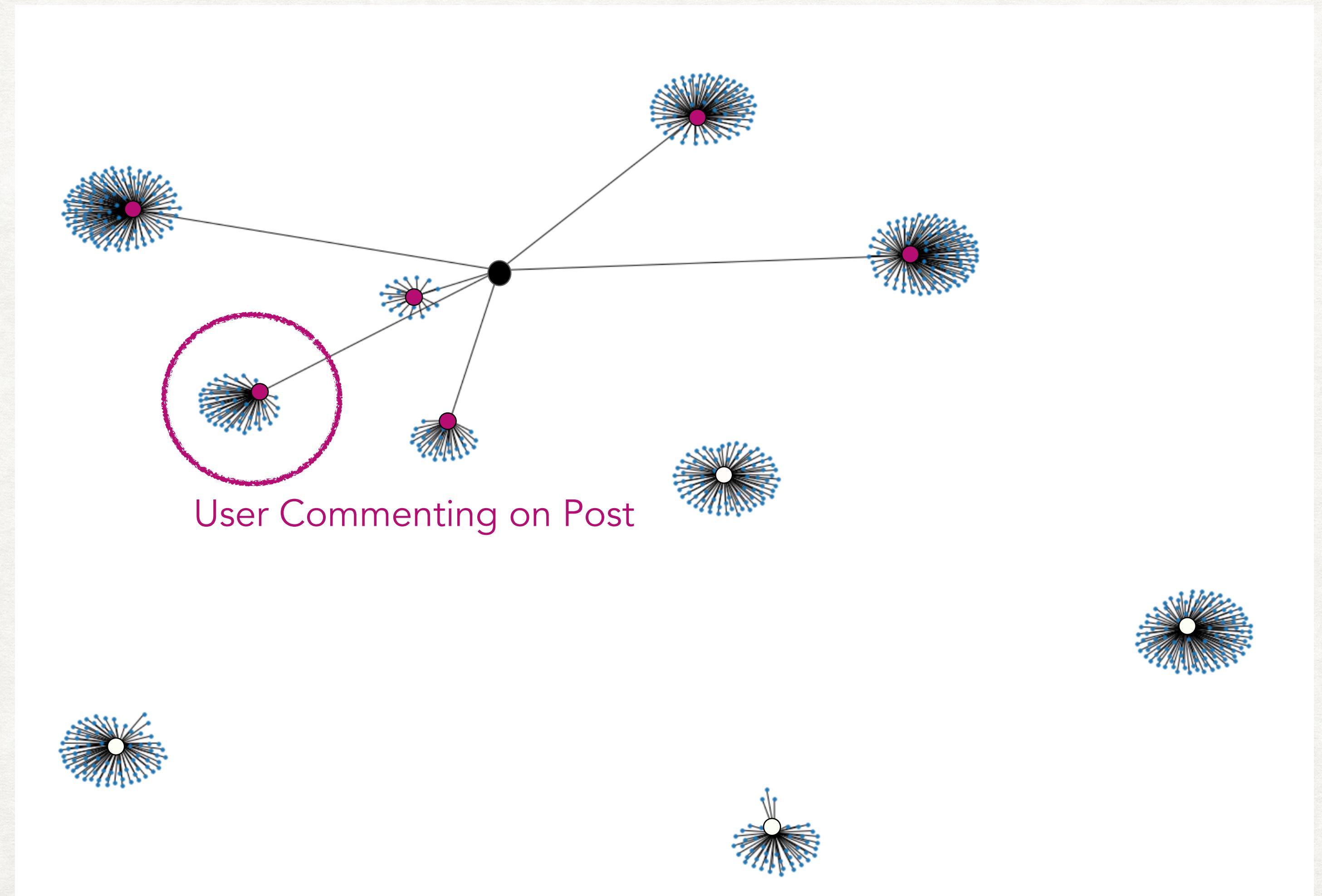
USING REAL-WORLD DATA TO DRIVE THE SIMULATIONS

REDDIT POST



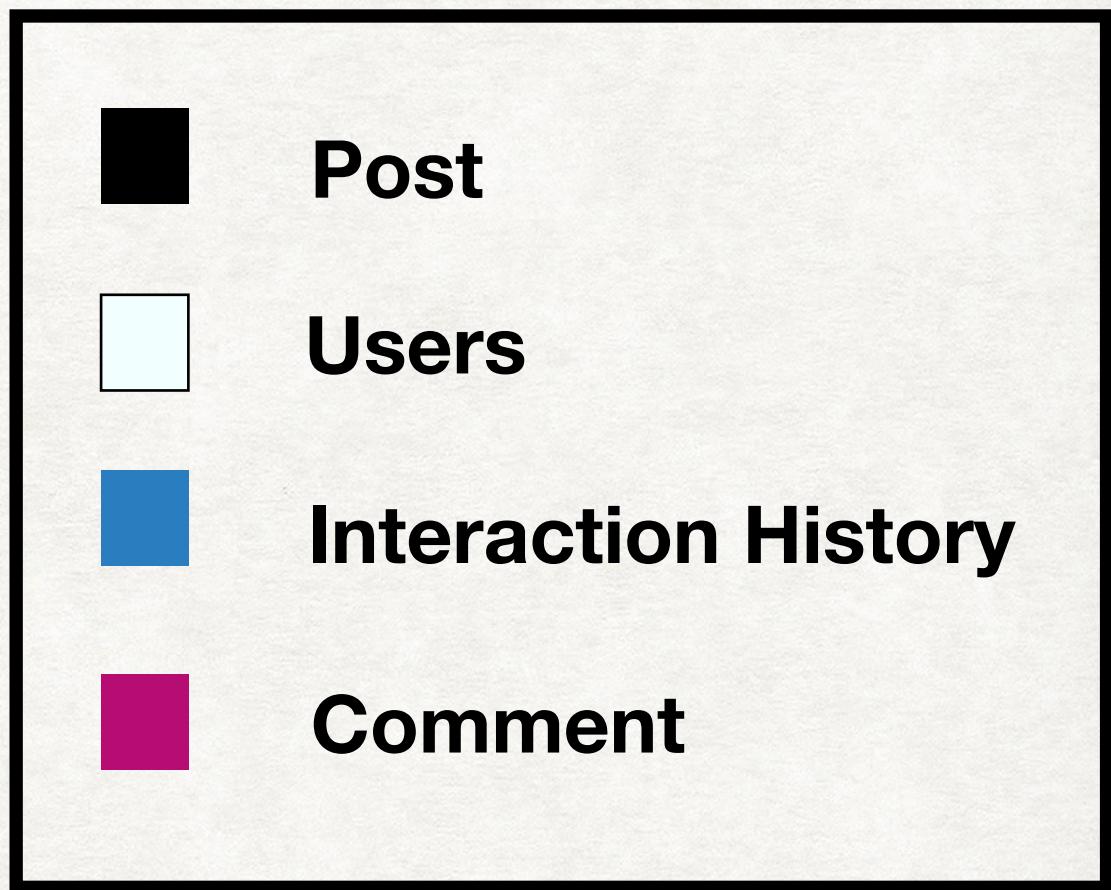
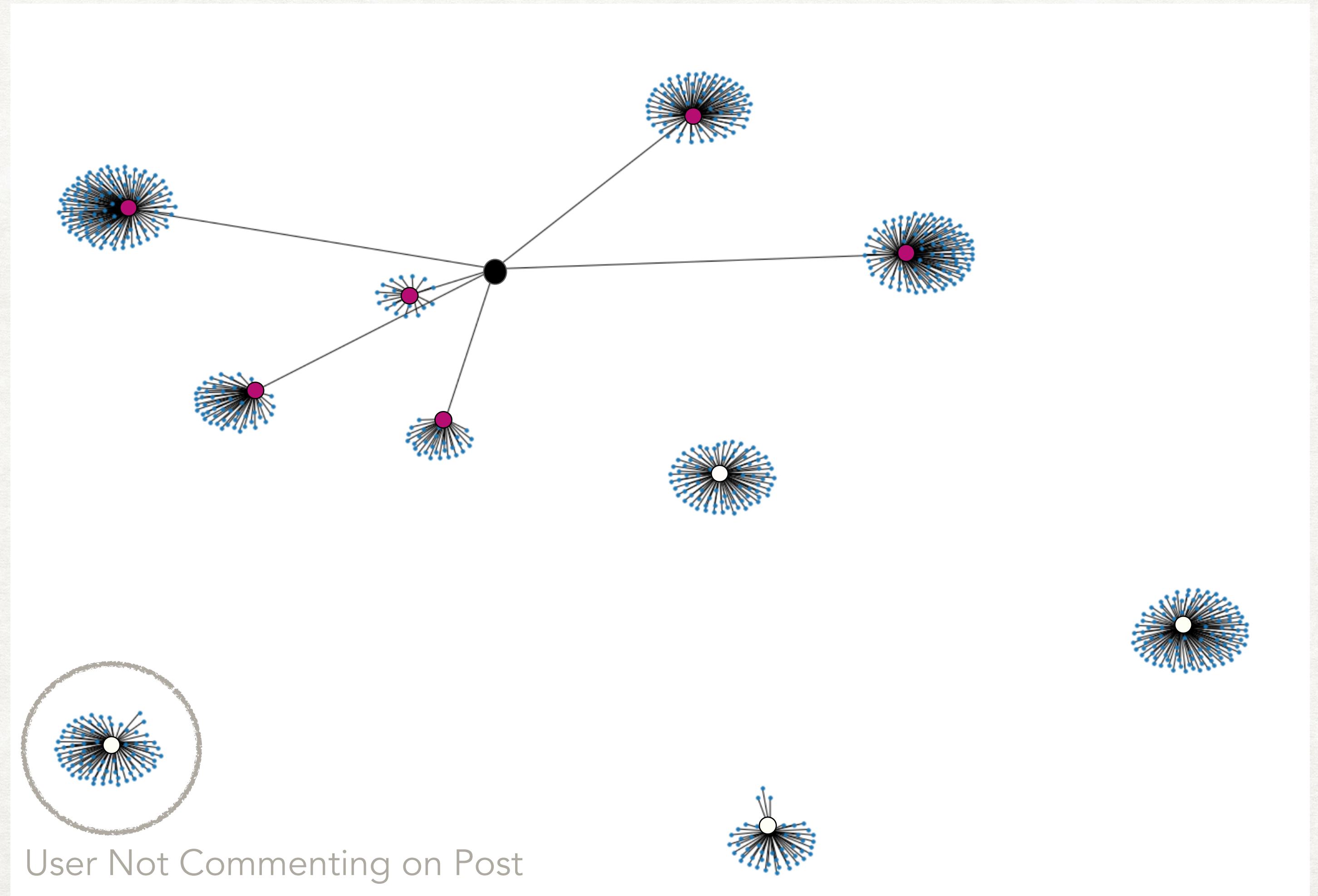
- Post
- Users
- Interaction History
- Comment

REDDIT POST

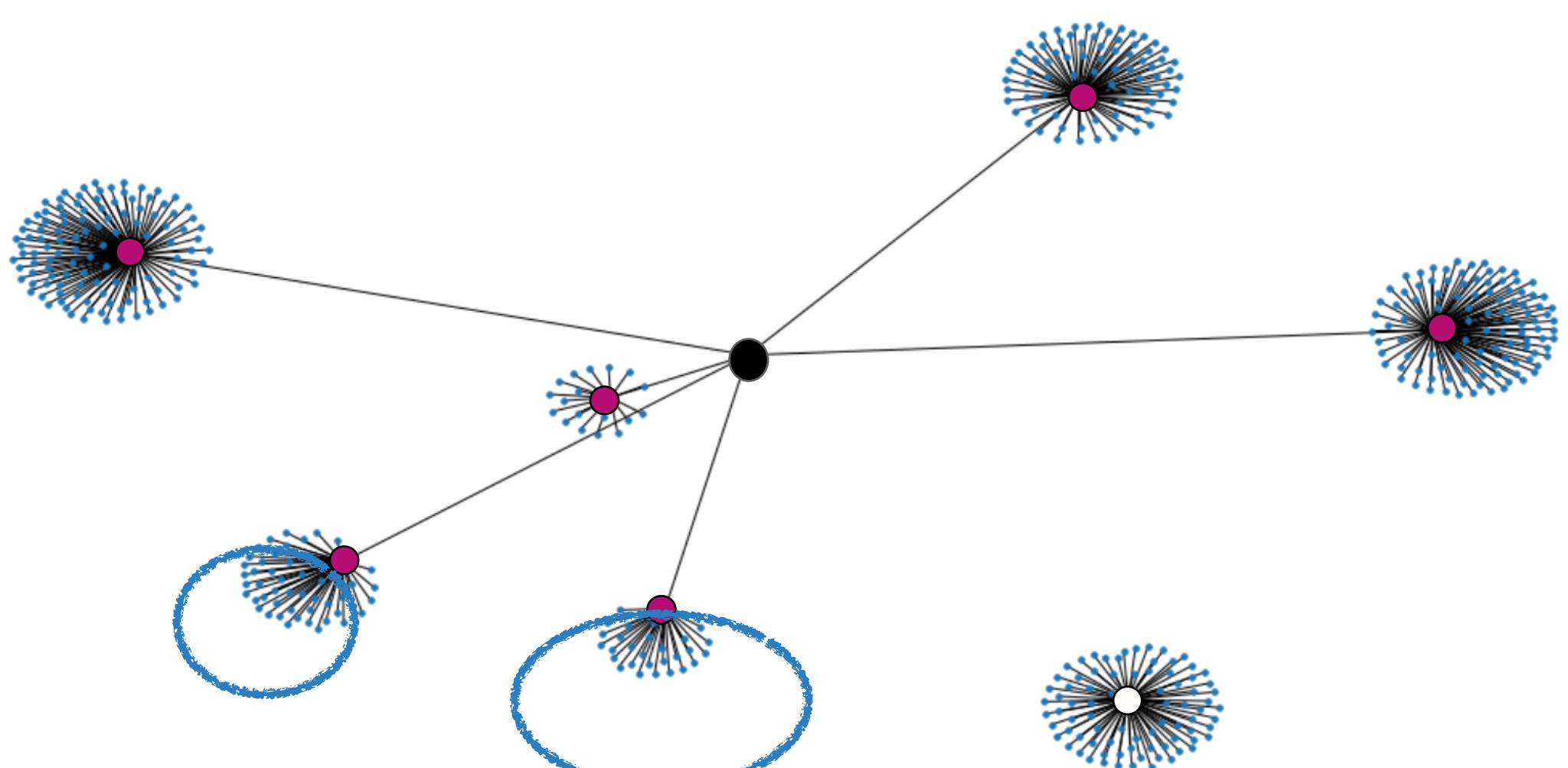


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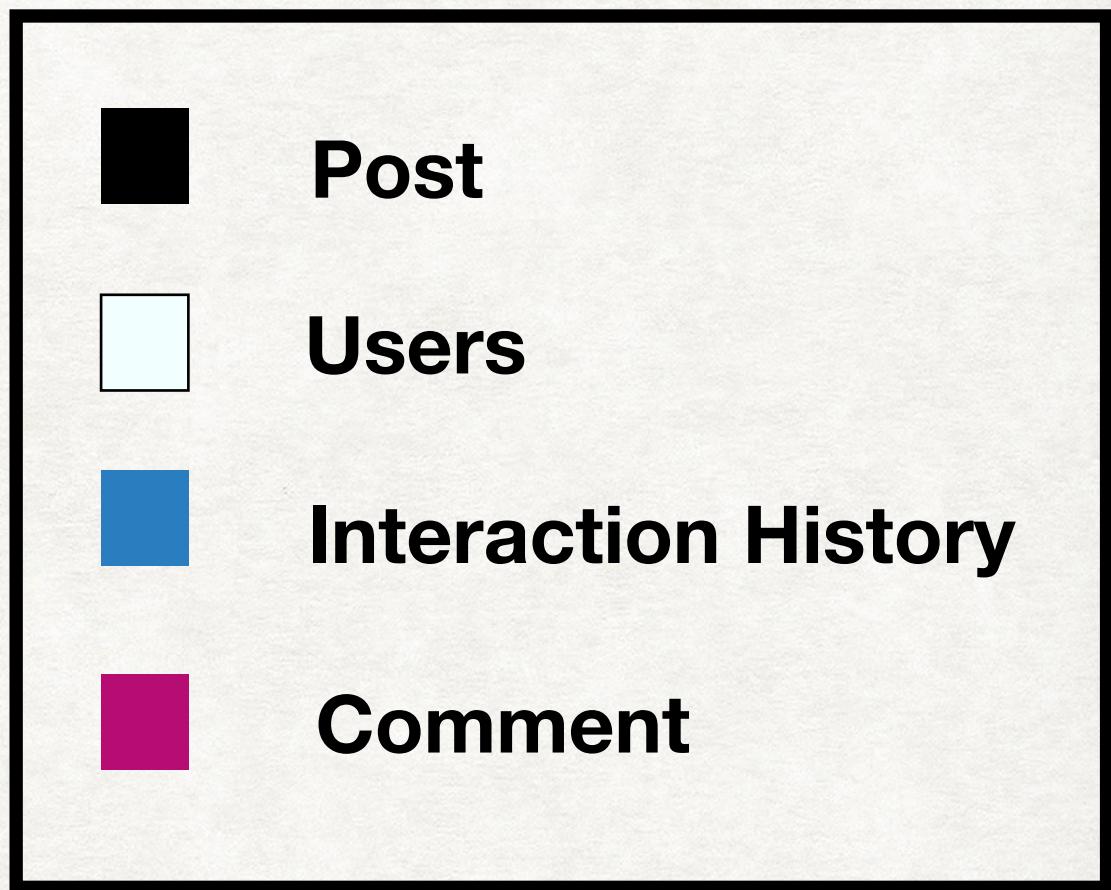
REDDIT POST



REDDIT POST

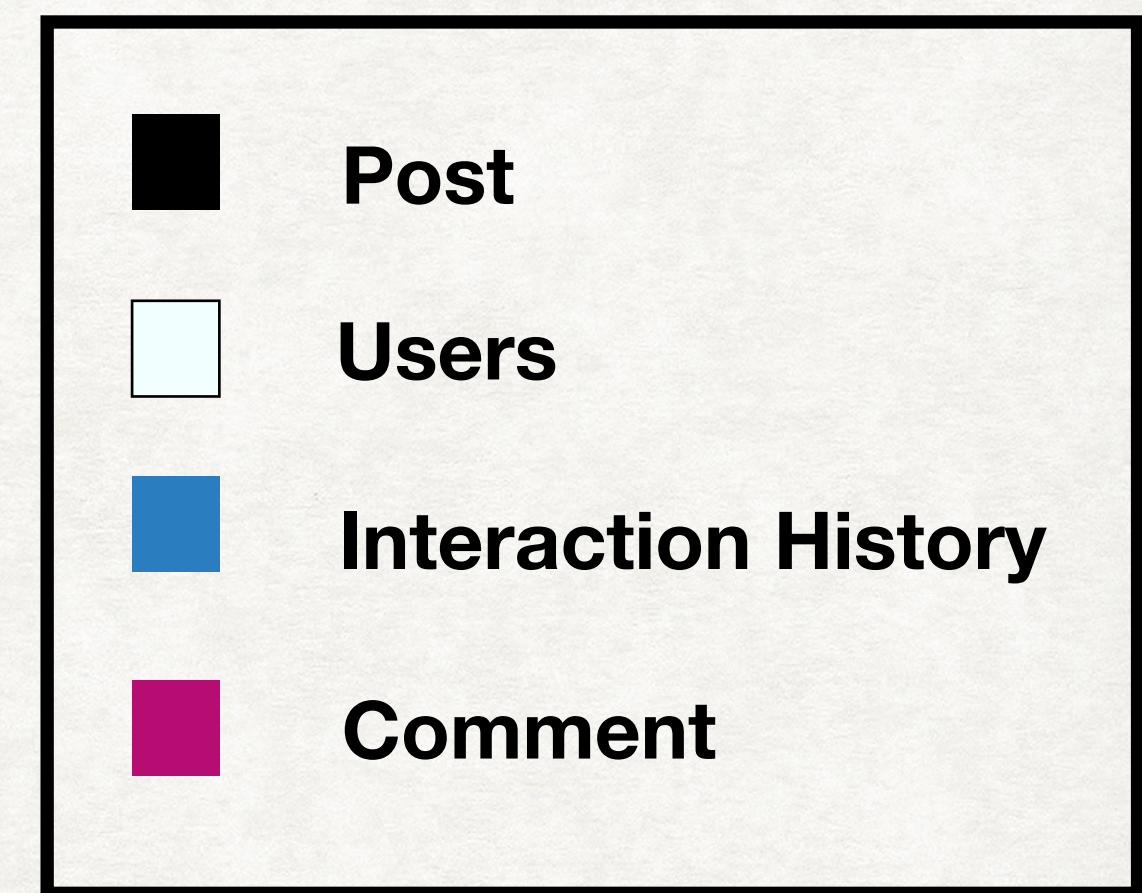
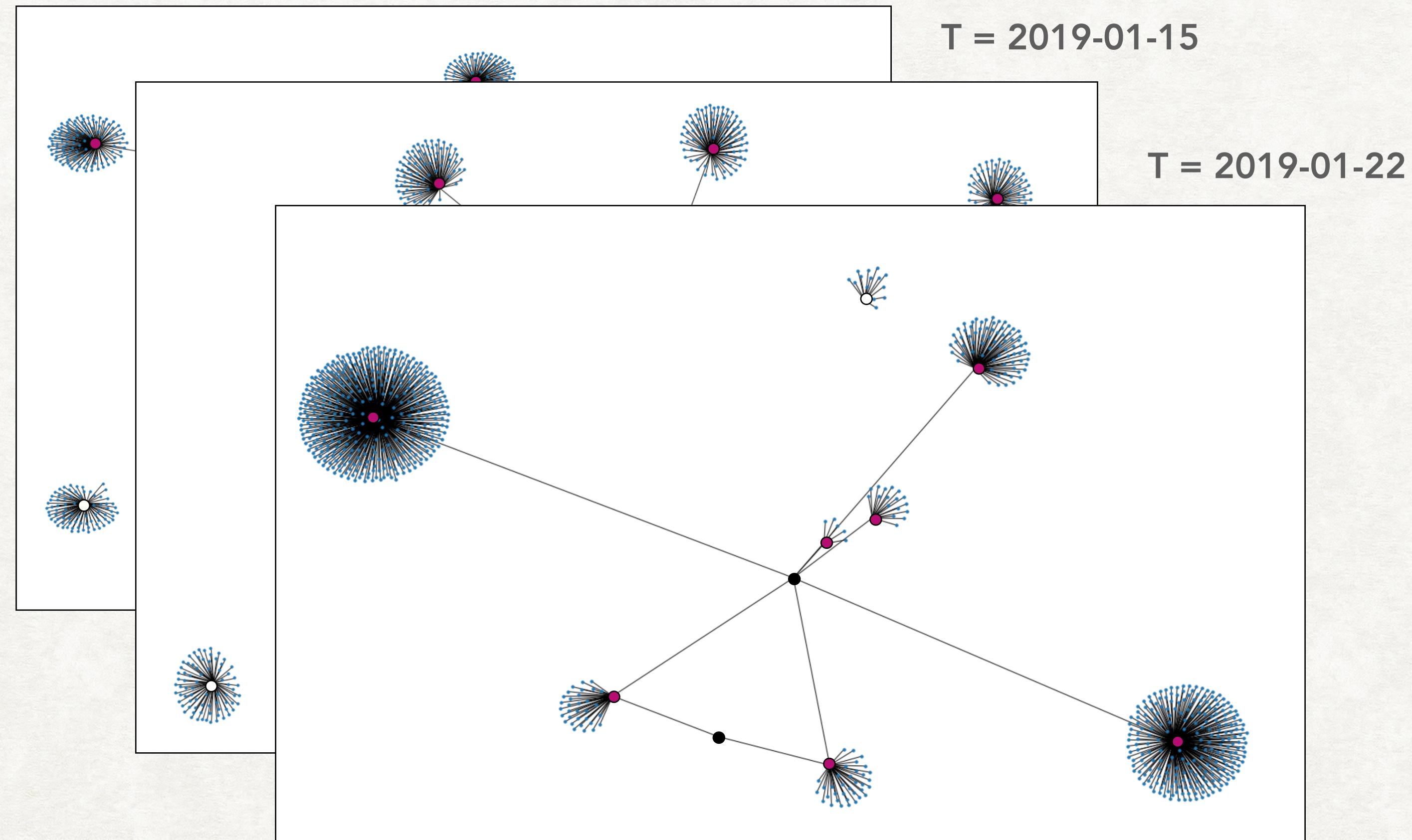


History of user interactions



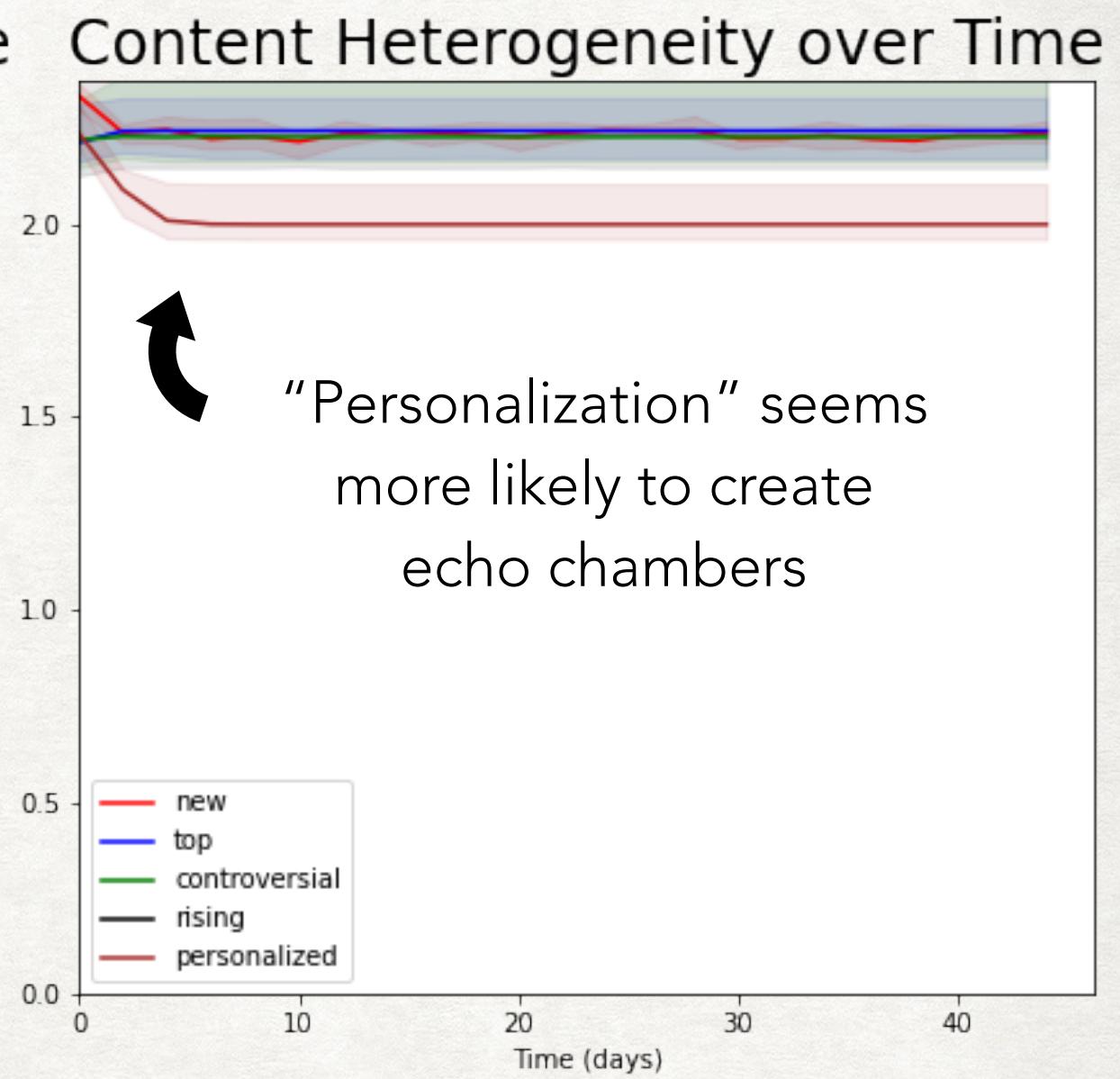
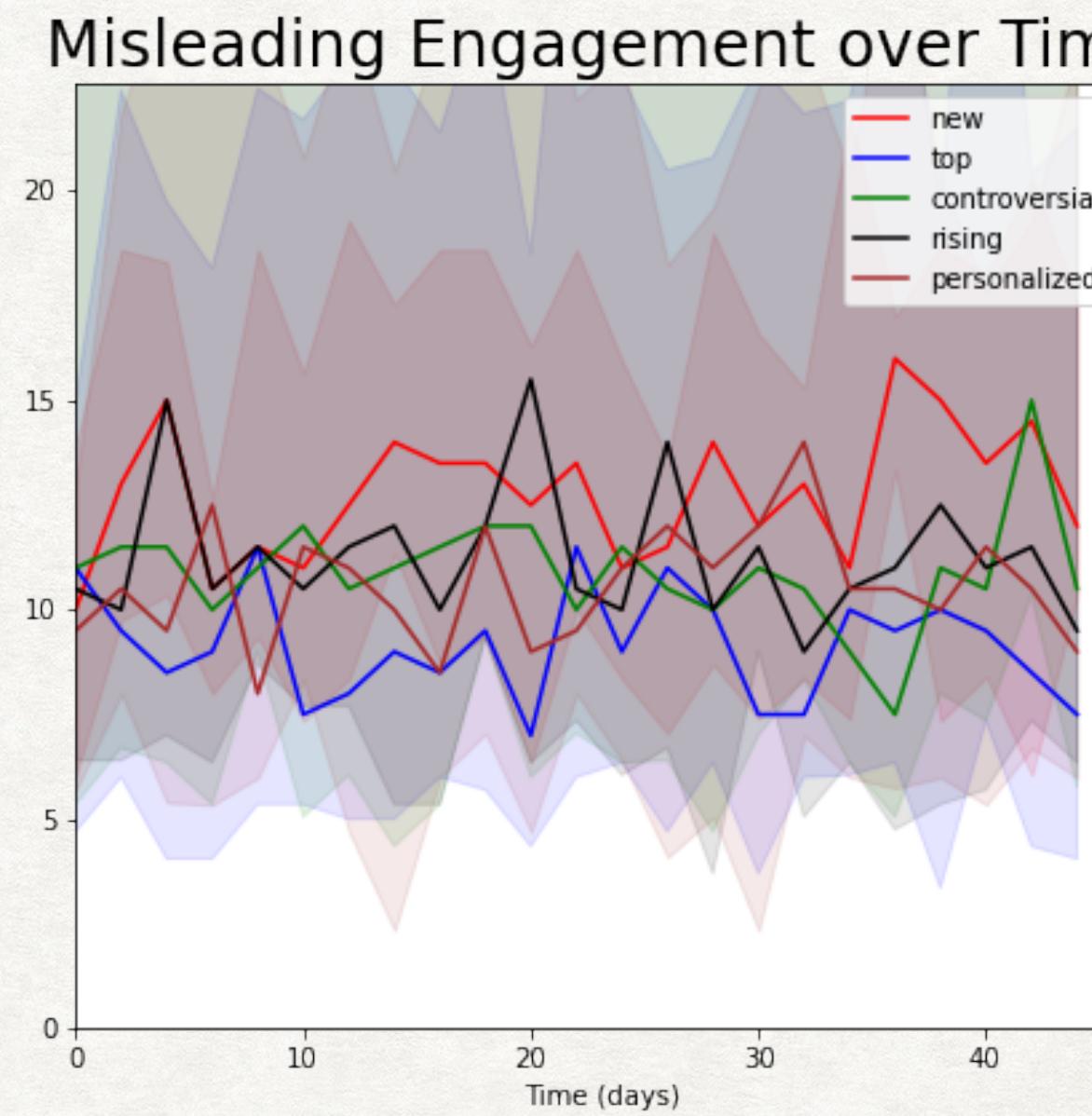
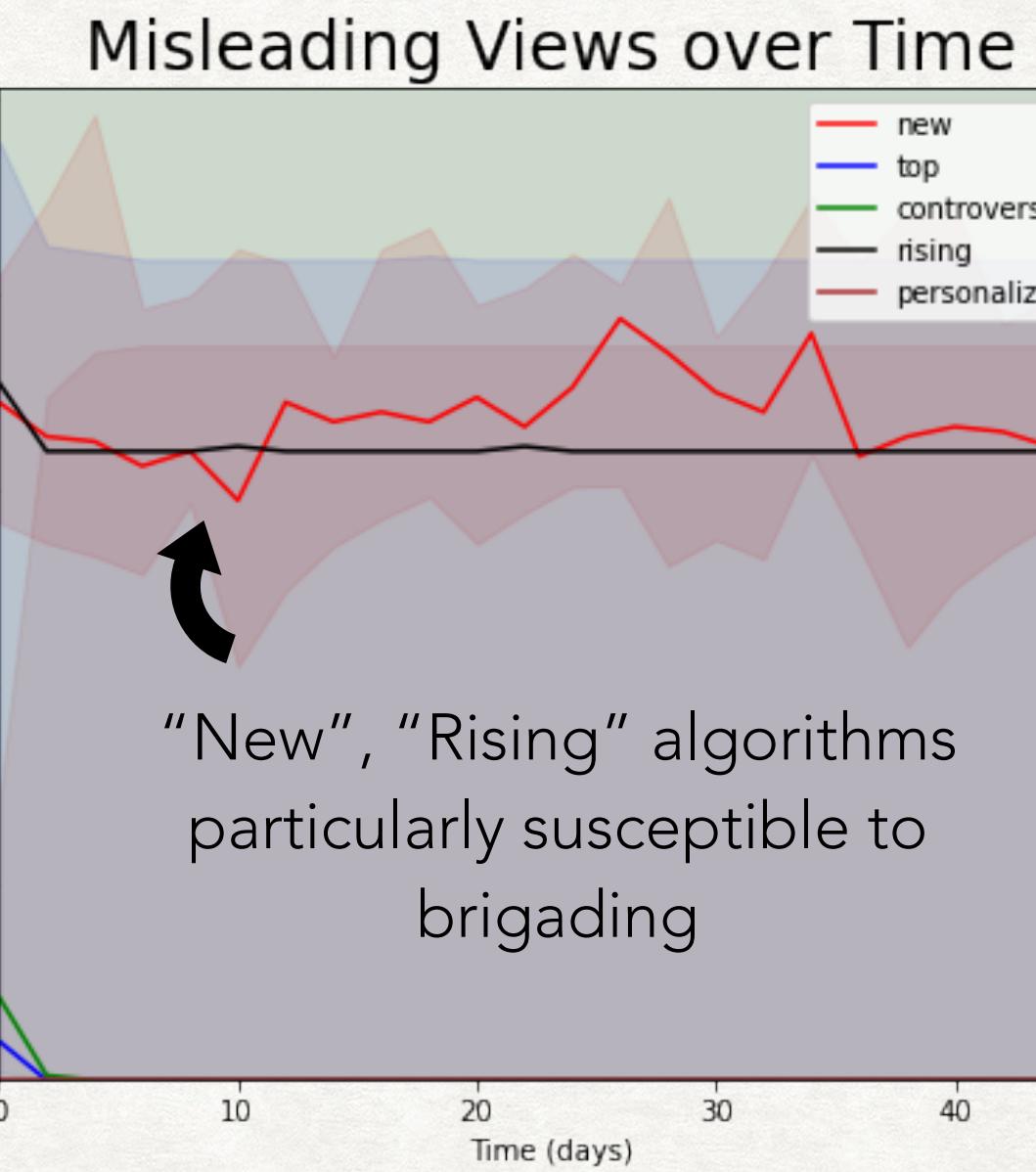
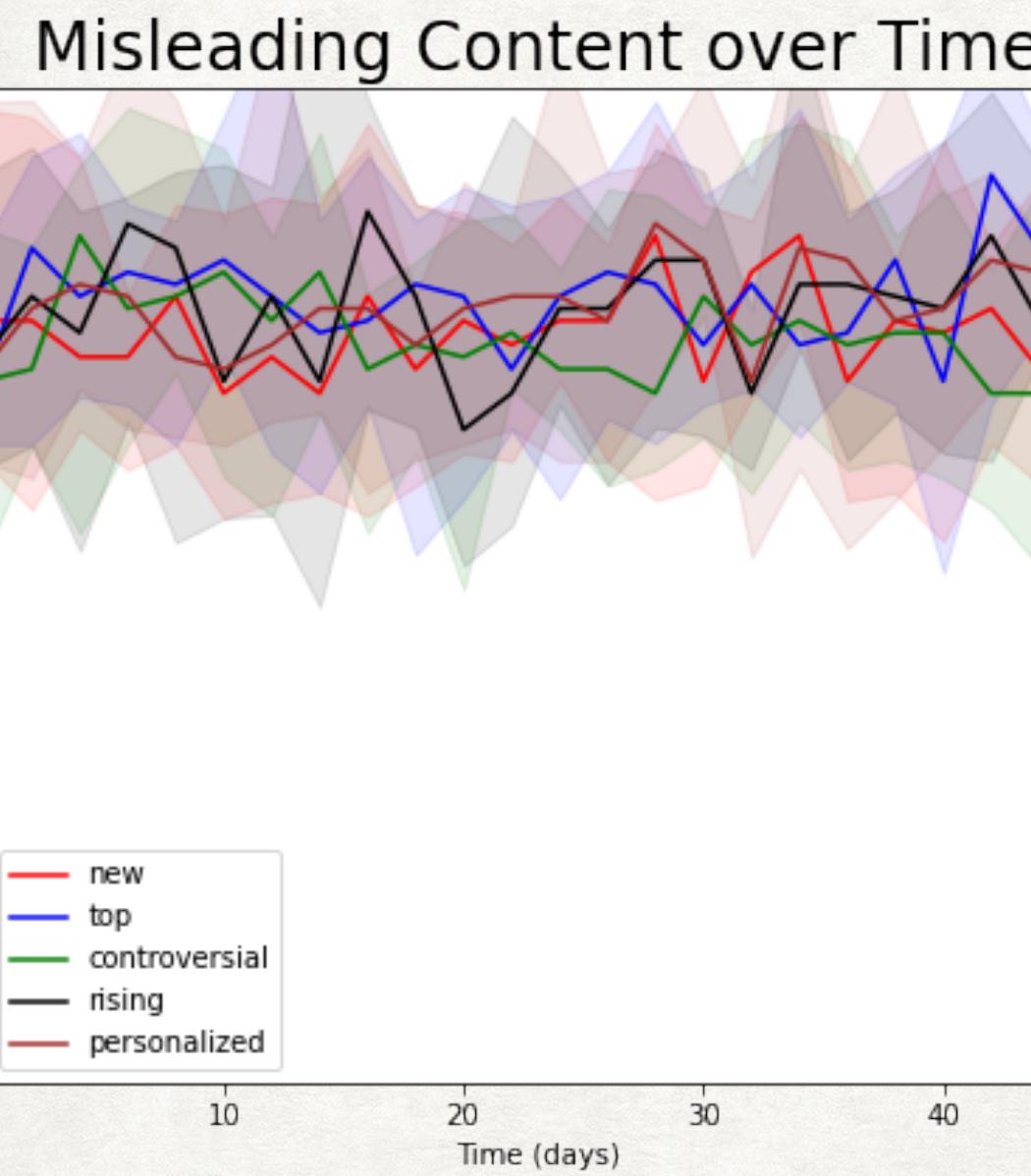
REDDIT POSTS

$T = 2018-12-31$



HOW SUSCEPTIBLE ARE ALGORITHMS TO
COORDINATED INAUTHENTIC BEHAVIOR?

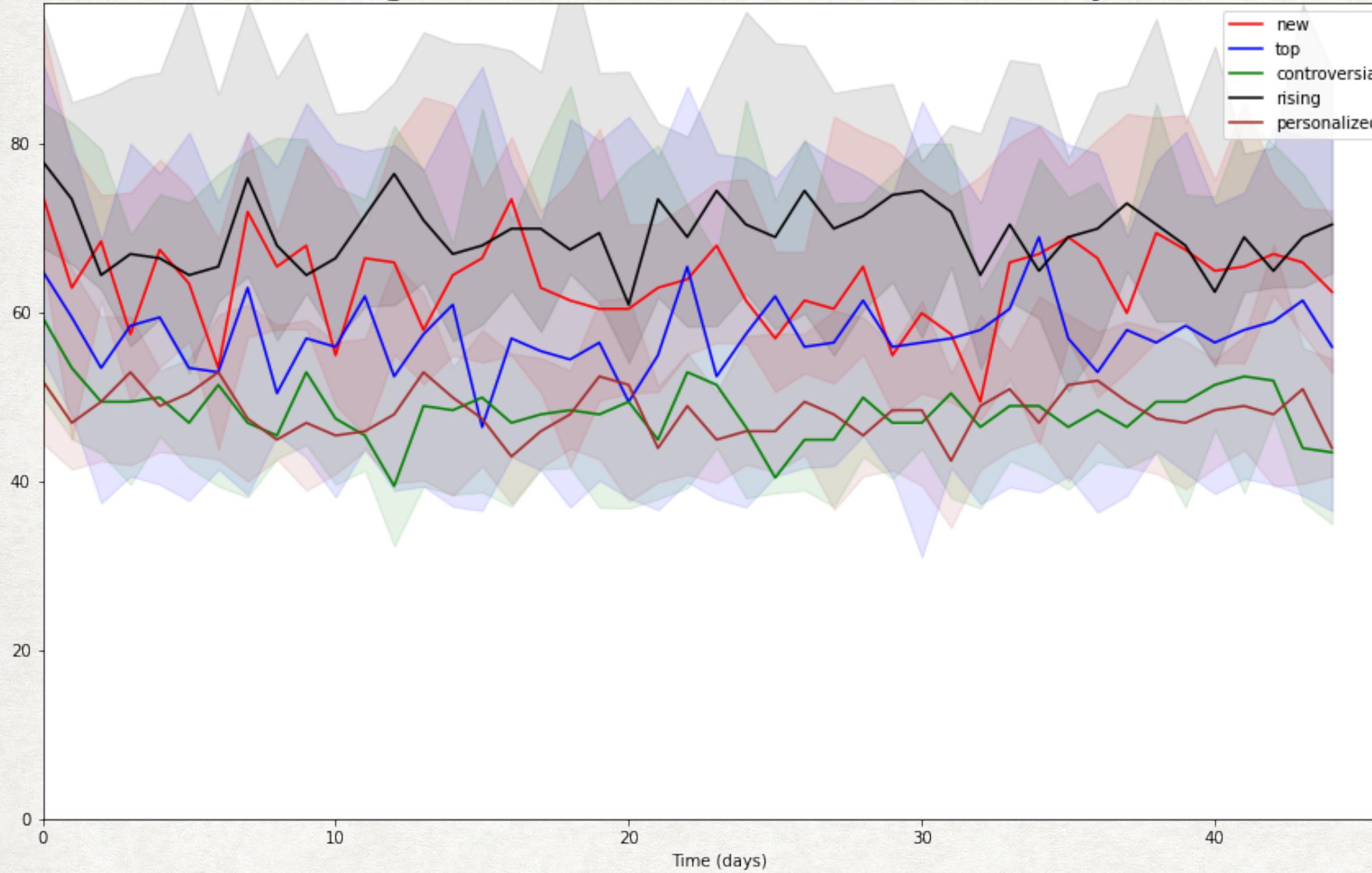
WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF BRIGADING?



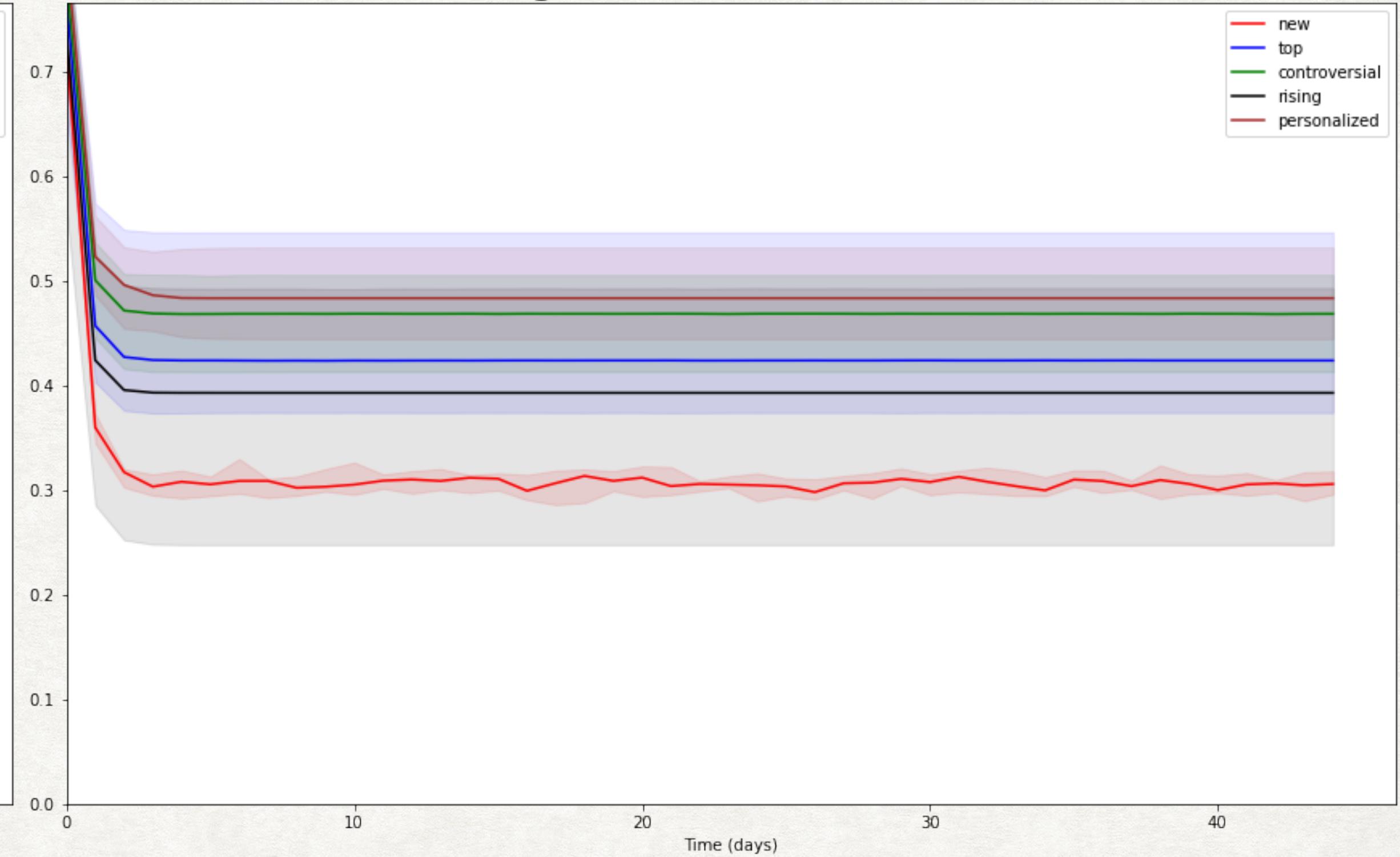
Similar levels of misleading content leads to different emergent dynamics

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF BRIGADING?

Targeted Subreddit Coordinated Activity



Targeted Subreddit Stance



Despite similar levels of activity, there is a significant drop in the positive opinions expressed on the target subreddit for the “New” ranking algorithm

CONTENT DISTRIBUTION CHOICES

APPS \ HOW-TO \ REVIEWS

How to switch your Twitter feed to a chronological timeline

Look for the sparkle

By Natt Garun | @nattgarun | Mar 6, 2020, 11:47am EST

Facebook's new 'Feeds' tab chronologically displays posts from your friends and groups

Aisha Malik @aiishamalik1 / 10:13 AM EDT • July 21, 2022

Comment

TECH • BIG TECH

Facebook Is Finally Giving People A Non-Algorithmic News Feed

A few taps will allow you to see timely "Feeds" from friends, groups, or pages.



Katie Notopoulos
BuzzFeed News Reporter

Posted on July 21, 2022 at 9:01 am



Your timeline is set to
Home

Switch to latest Tweets
Latest Tweets show up as they happen.

View content preferences

Cancel

CONTENT DISTRIBUTION CHOICES

APPS HOW-TO REVIEWS

How to switch your Twitter feed to a chronological timeline

Look for the sparkle

By Natt Garun | @nattgarun | Mar 6

Twitter no longer lets users access the chronological timeline by default [U: Rolled Back] 

Filipe Espósito - Mar. 14th 2022 12:00 pm PT  @filipeesposito

Facebook now feeds users chronologically displays posts from your friends and groups

Aisha Malik @

TECH • BIG TECH

Facebook's new algorithm

Here's How to Switch Your Instagram Back to Chronological Order

It's a great way to see posts from people you actually follow, instead of posts from ads and "suggested" accounts.



BY TUCKER BOWE UPDATED: JUL 4, 2022

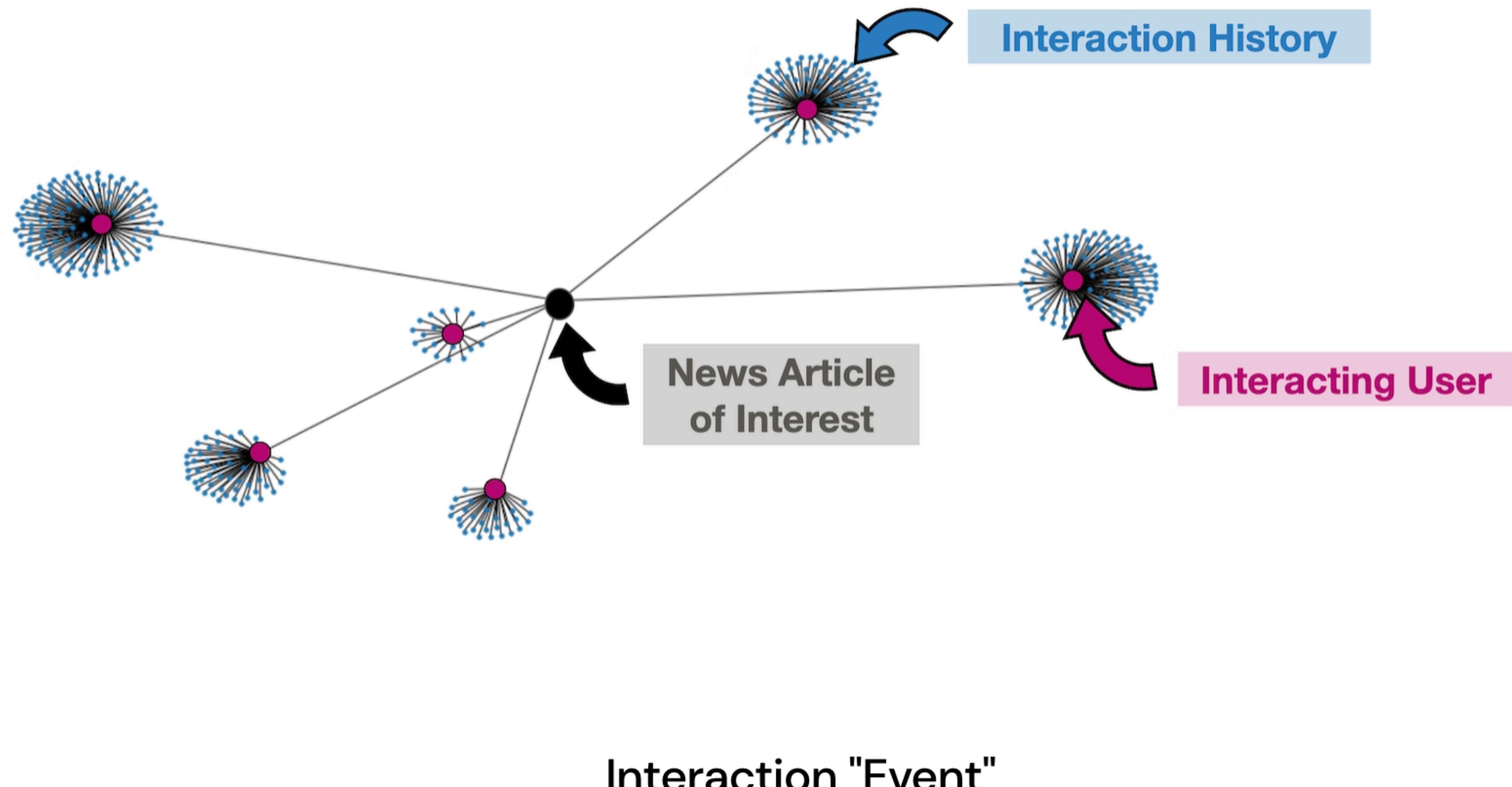
A few taps will allow you to see timely "Feeds" from friends, groups, or pages.



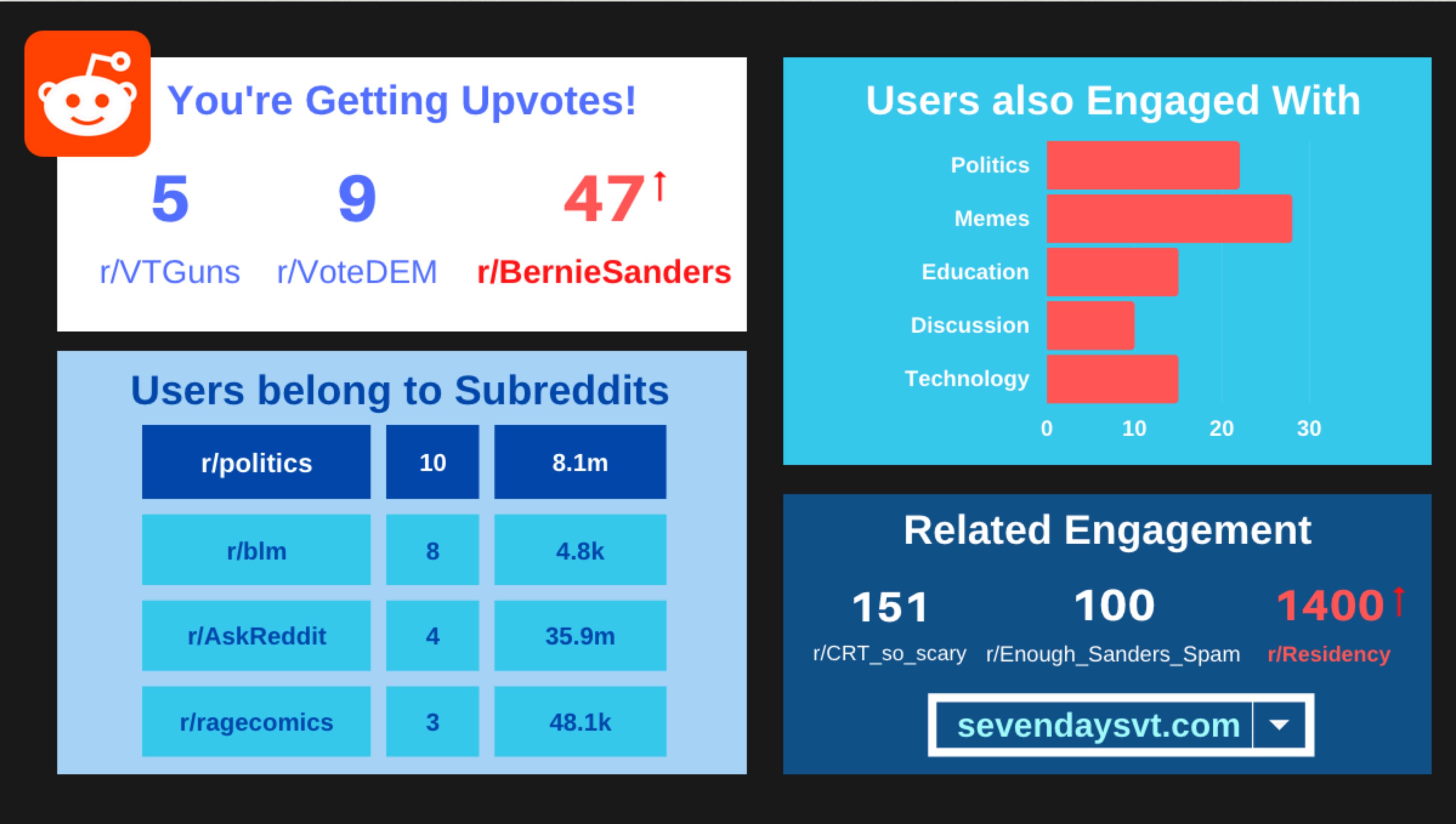
Katie Notopoulos
BuzzFeed News Reporter

Posted on July 21, 2022 at 9:01 am

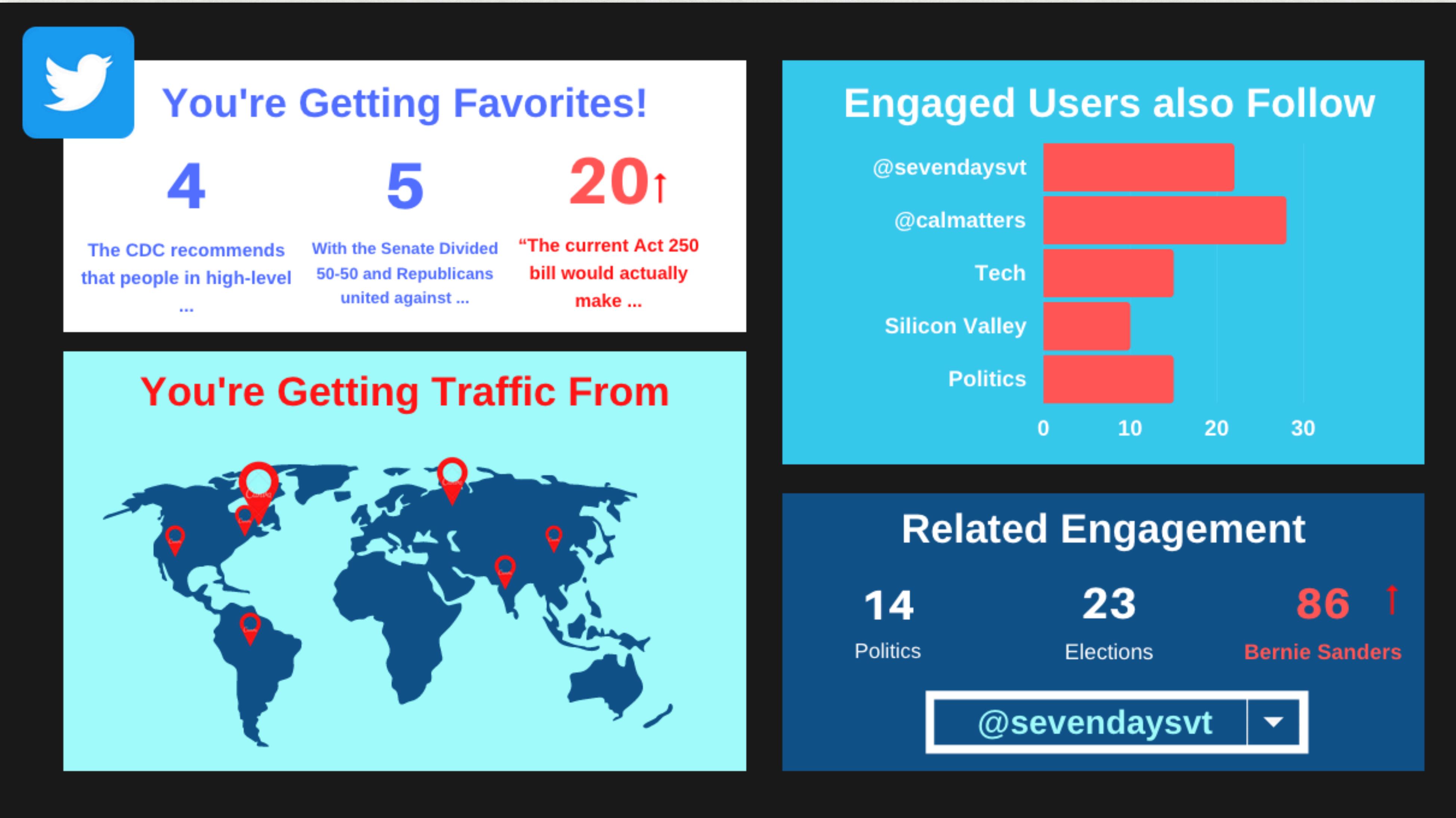
APPLYING SIMPPL'S TECH TO NEWS ARTICLES



HELPING LOCAL NEWS UNDERSTAND AUDIENCES



HELPING LOCAL NEWS UNDERSTAND AUDIENCES



DEMO

Projection Dash

Audience Dashboard

Projections

Engagement >

Messages >

External Data >

Settings

Product Page

Support

Update Projections

Search

+ Social Media Monitor

Current User: admin

Twitter Retweets

18

Yesterday **10.57%**

Month Week

Day	Retweets
Mon	10
Tue	12
Wed	14
Thu	16
Fri	18
Sat	16
Sun	19

Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat Sun

New Users **23**

Bounce Rate **12.88%**

Site Visits **82,7** **Settings**

SUMMARY

- We simulated coordinated campaigns seeking to manipulate public debate using multiple authentic/inauthentic (fake) accounts to mislead people.
- Goal: Quantify the harms arising from CIB on Social Networks
 - Measure its effects on ranking and recommendation algorithms
 - Use real-world networks and behavior to simulate counterfactual outcomes
 - Next Steps: *Simulate Interventions*

COLLABORATORS



Jonathan Nagler



Richard Bonneau



Atılım Güneş Baydin



Philip Torr



Bogdan State

LET'S TALK!

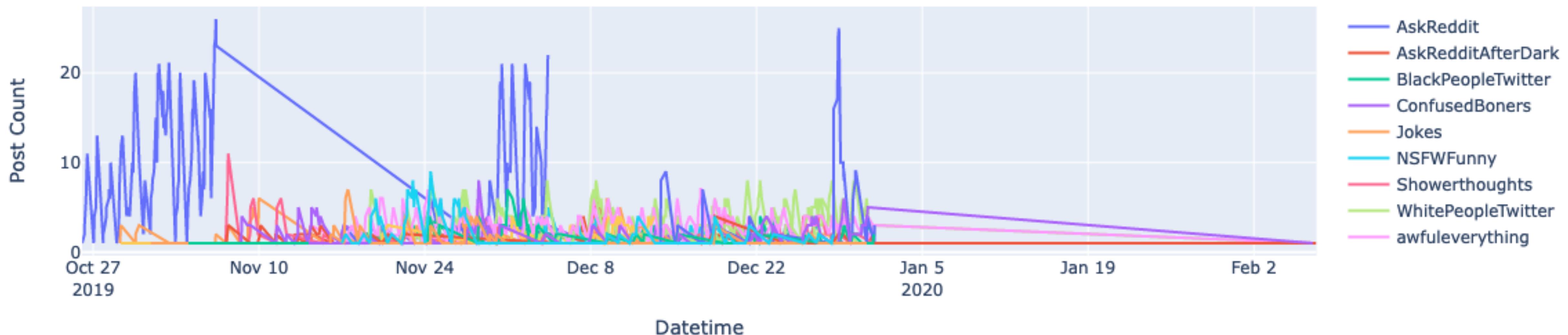
@swapneel_mehta
swapneelm.github.io
swapneel.mehta@nyu.edu

ai4abm.org

REAL-WORLD MODELING

REDDIT USER 'JONNYCREEPYCREPES3'

Subreddit-wise Post Count in 12H bins by jonnycreepycrepes3



REDDIT WIKI PAGES

- User-driven hierarchical categorization of subreddits
- Discussion > Stories > Customer Service
- 4998 subreddits
- 5-level hierarchy of categories

The screenshot shows a portion of a Reddit Wiki page. At the top, there's a header with the Reddit logo and the title "r/ListOfSubre...". To the right is a search bar with the placeholder "Search Reddit". Below the header, a sidebar contains a list of categories, each with a blue underline:

- [Discussion](#)
- [General](#)
- [Advice](#)
- [AMA](#)
- [Games](#)
- [Question/Answer](#)
- [Ask](#)
- [Occupation](#)
- [Sex/Gender](#)
- [Stories](#)
- [Customer Service](#)
- [Revenge](#)
- [Scary/Weird](#)
- [Support](#)
- [Educational](#)
- [General](#)
- [Facts](#)
- [Questions](#)

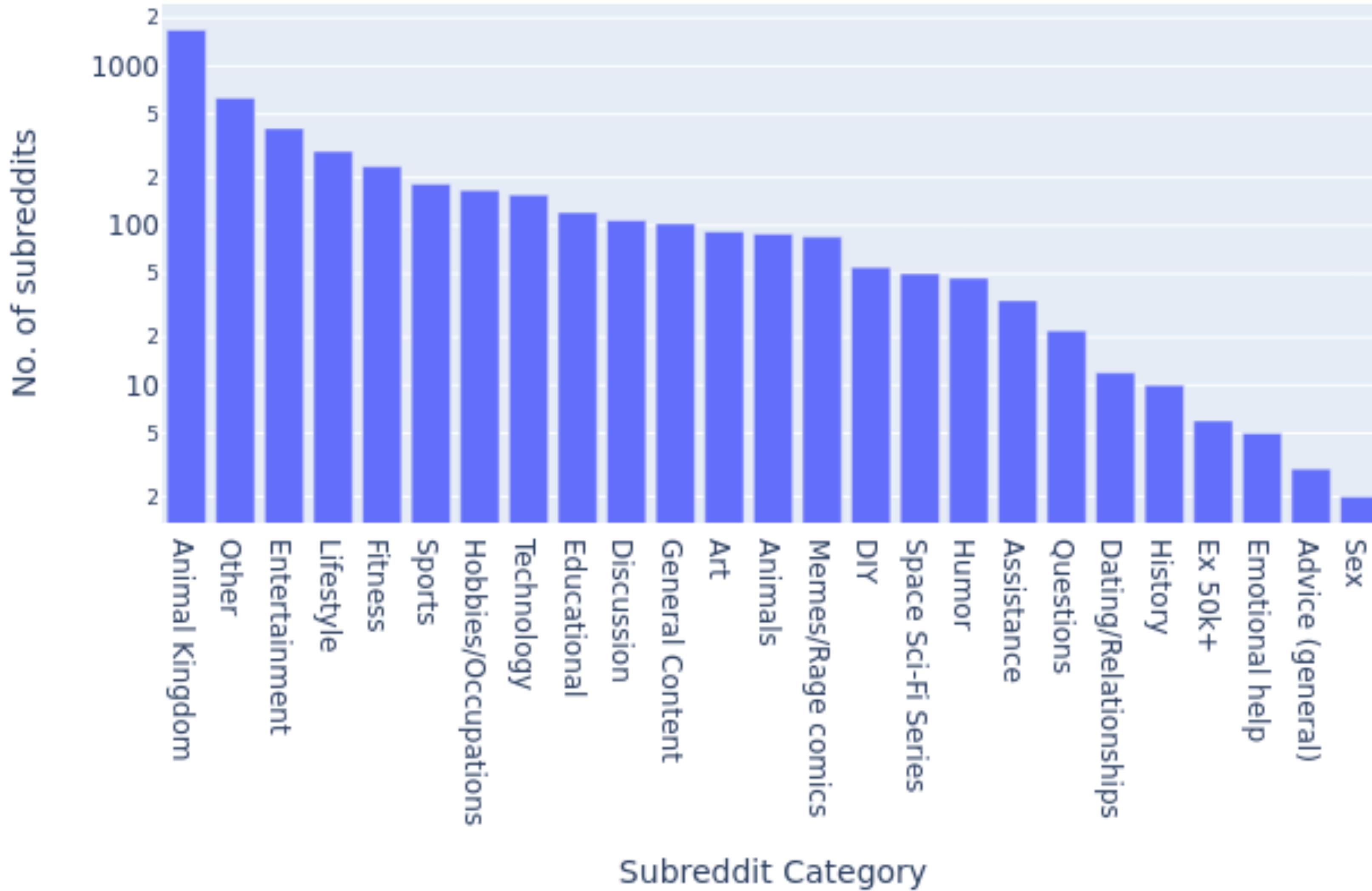
REDDIT WIKI PAGES

- User-driven hierarchical categorization of subreddits
- Discussion > Stories > Customer Service
- 4998 subreddits
- 5-level hierarchy of categories
- For each new subreddit
 - Split words > match embeddings > associate category

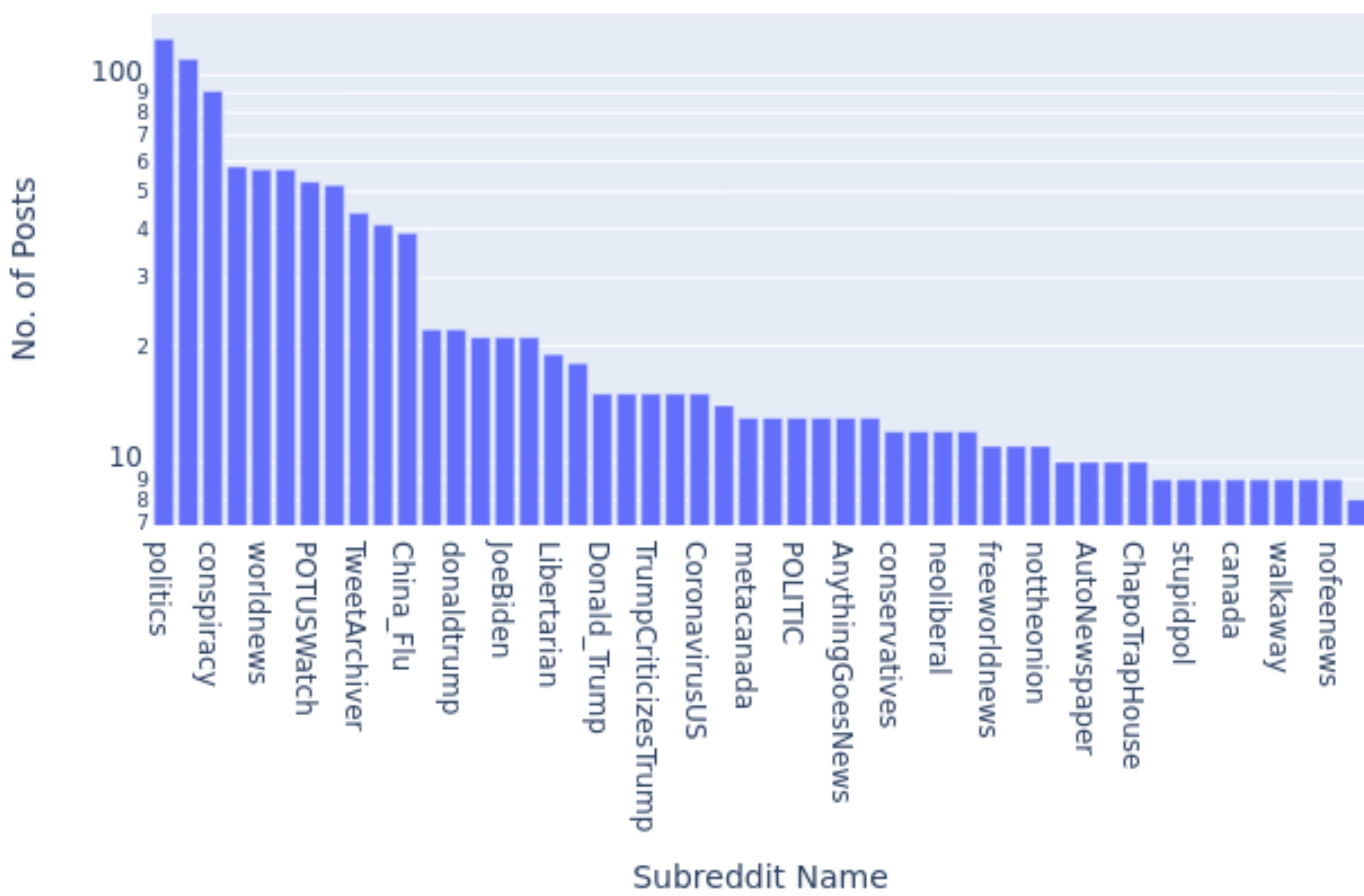
The screenshot shows a screenshot of a web browser displaying the Reddit Wiki page for the subreddit `r>ListOfSubreddits`. The page features a sidebar on the left containing a 5-level hierarchy of categories, each with a corresponding blue link:

- Discussion
- General
- Advice
- AMA
- Games
- Question/Answer
- Ask
- Occupation
- Sex/Gender
- Stories
- Customer Service
- Revenge
- Scary/Weird
- Support
- Educational
- General
- Facts
- Questions

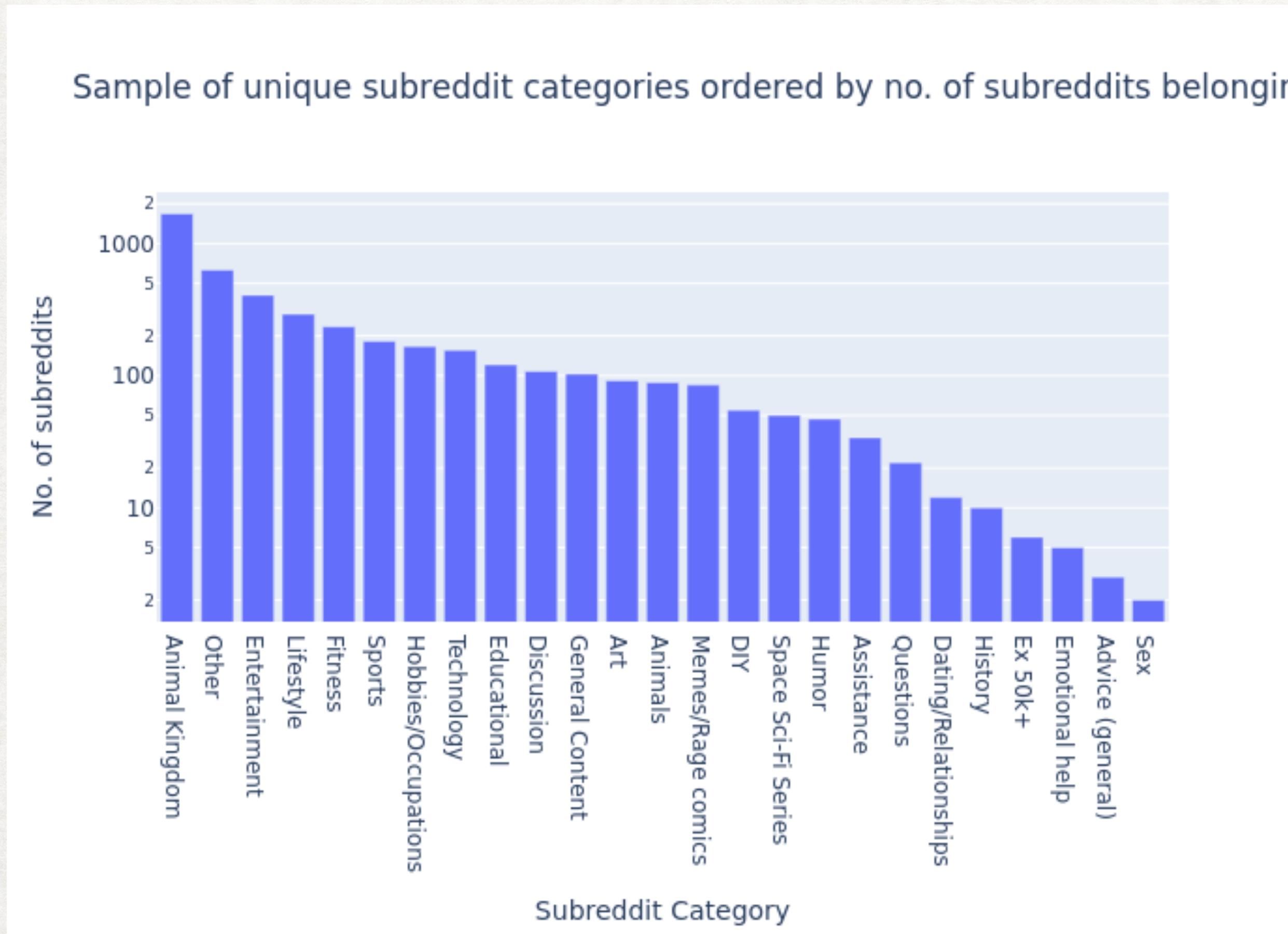
CATEGORIZE POSTS ACROSS SUBREDDITS



CATEGORIZE POSTS ACROSS SUBREDDITS



CATEGORIZE POSTS ACROSS SUBREDDITS



['mormon', 'politics']

Predicted Subreddits:

['mormonhistory', 'ldshistory',
 'christianhistory', 'jewishhistory',
 'historicalreligion']

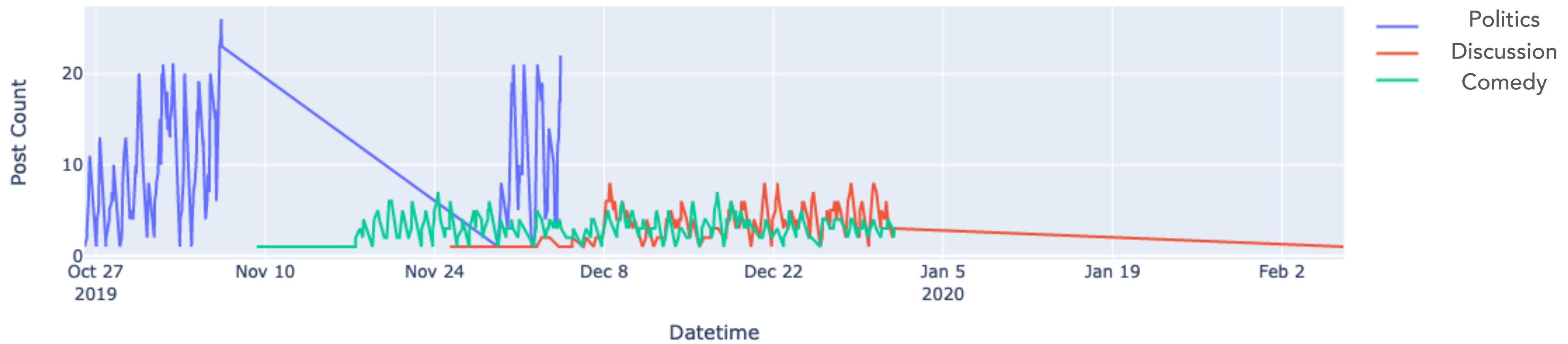
Predicted Category:

[[None, 'History of People', None, None,
 None],

MODELING CATEGORIES

REDUCING SUBREDDIT DIMENSIONALITY

Subreddit-wise Post Count in 12H bins by jonnycreepycrepes³



REAL-WORLD INTERVENTIONS

1. AGENT - LEVEL

Awareness campaigns, training, ideological change

2. NETWORK - LEVEL

Reduced sharing, visibility, confirmation of retweets

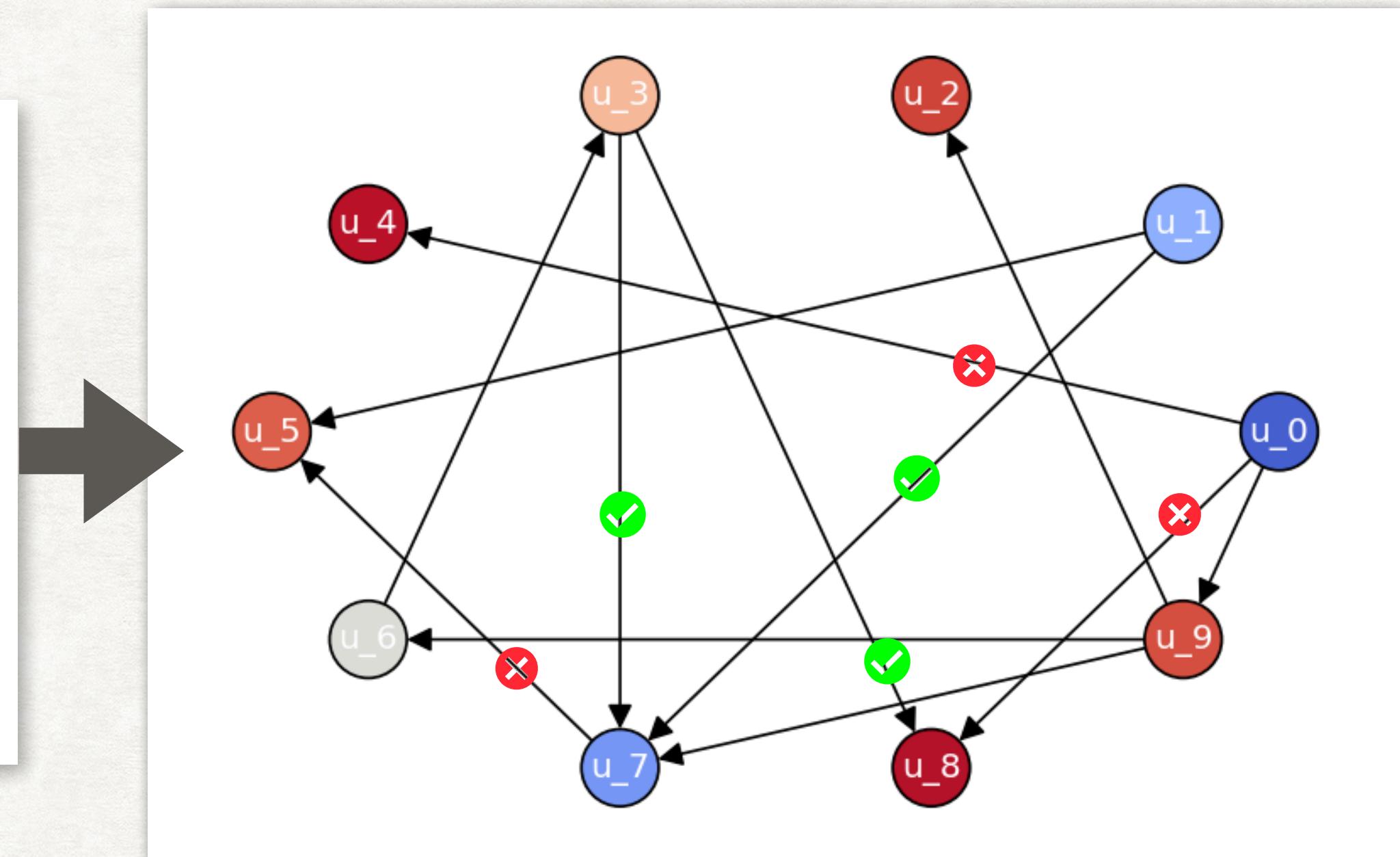
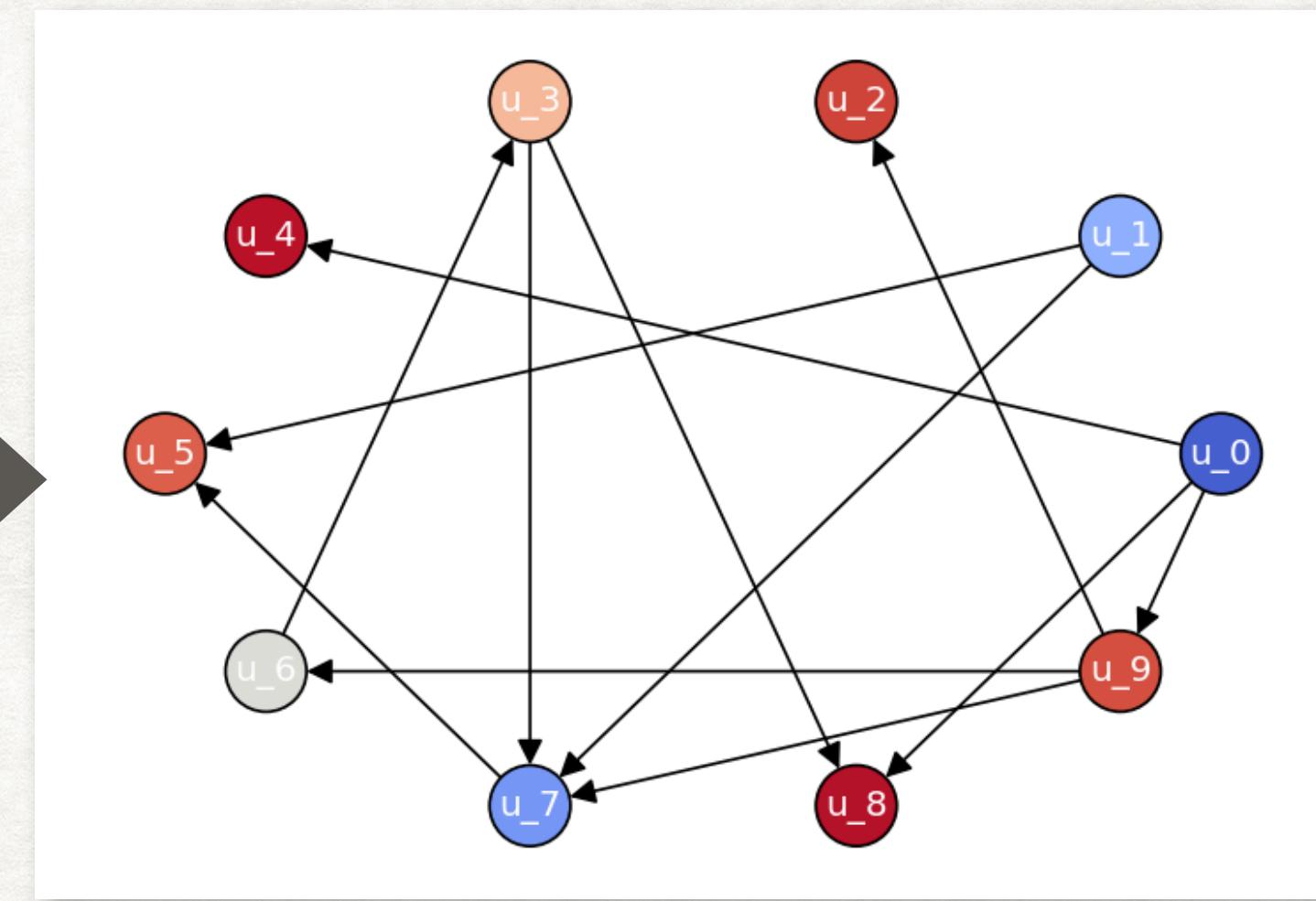
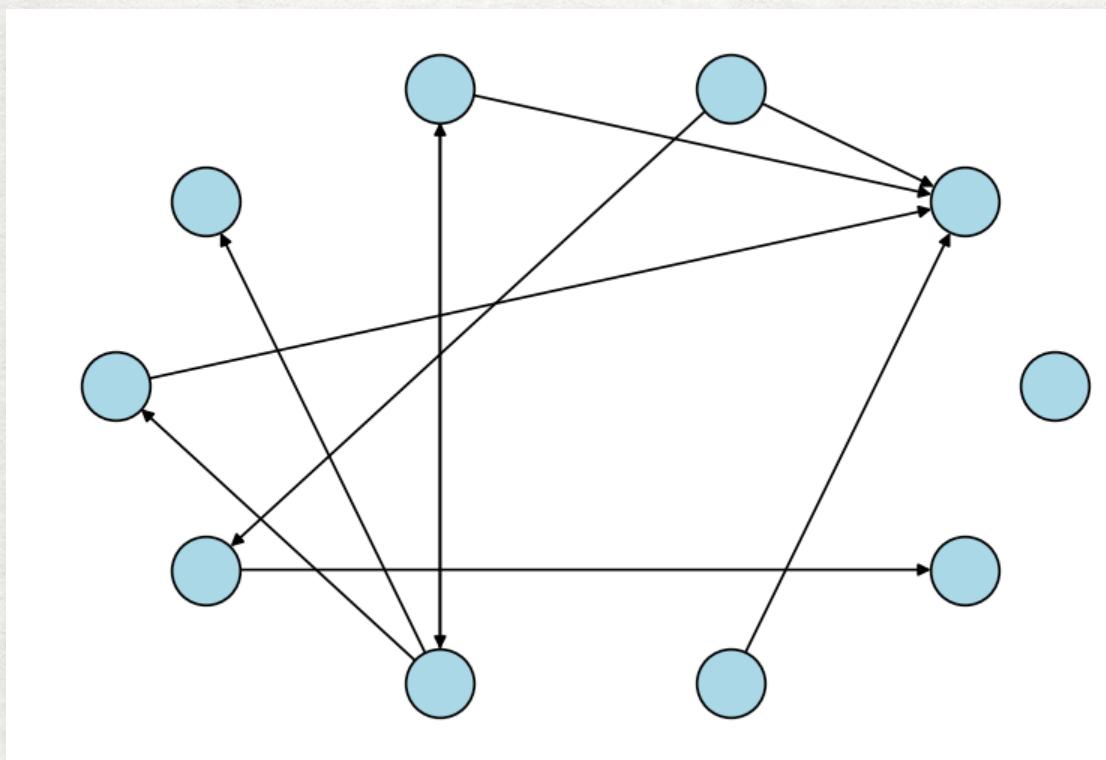
3. HYBRID

Blocking/Temporarily suspending users, articles, links

4. ADAPTIVE

Time-limited blocking and reductions in sharing, visibility

INTERVENTIONS TO LIMIT DISINFORMATION



Agents + Networks

Agents + Networks + Behaviors

Agents + Networks + Behaviors + Interventions