

The background of the slide is a green sunburst pattern with rays emanating from the center. A dark grey horizontal band is positioned across the middle of the slide, containing the title and authors.

# **Daily Deals: Prediction, Social Diffusion, and Reputational Ramifications**

John Byers (BU), Michael Mitzenmacher (Harvard), Giorgos Zervas (Yale)

# Daily deal? "Never heard of it!"

## South Bay Sailing – Redondo Beach

\$65 for Hour of Sailing for Up to Four (\$135 Value)

\$65

Buy!

Value	Discount	You Save
\$135	52%	\$70



Buy it for a friend!



Time Left To Buy  
1 day 9:03:04

267 bought

Limited quantity available



The deal is on!

Tipped at 7:22AM with 25 bought

Share:



Send

Like

80



### The Fine Print

Expires Jun 16, 2012

Limit 3 per visit. Must reserve by 5/16/12. 2-week cancellation notice or fee up to Groupon price may apply.

Subject to weather. Must sign waiver.

Valid only from 9am to sunset. Children must be able to fit into life vest.

[See the rules](#) that apply to all deals.

### Highlights

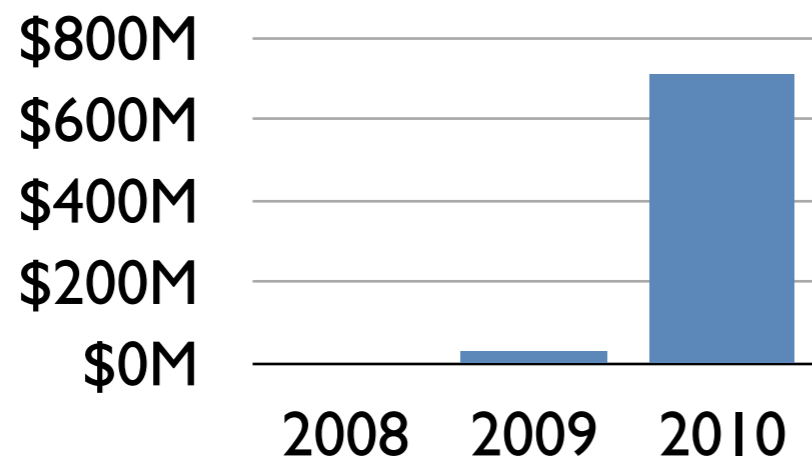
- Sail aboard a 26' J/80 boat
- Learn sailing basics
- Certified instructors
- No experience needed

# What attracts us to Groupon?

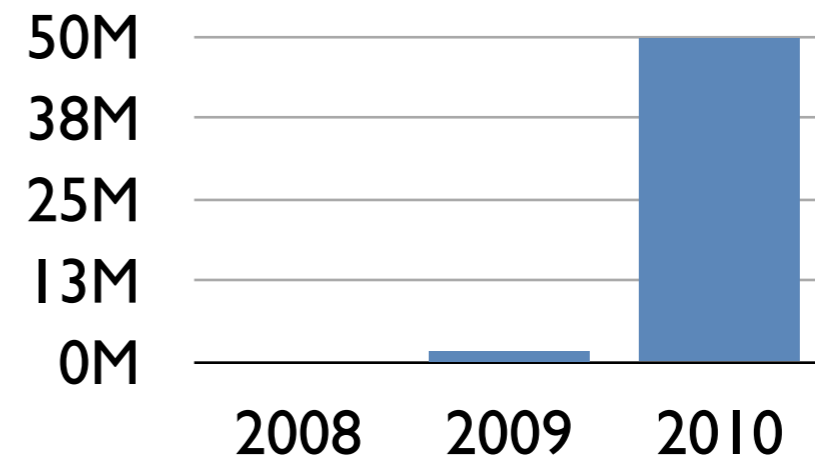


“Groupon is a local e-commerce marketplace that connects merchants to consumers by offering goods and services at a discount.”

### Revenue growth



### Subscriber growth



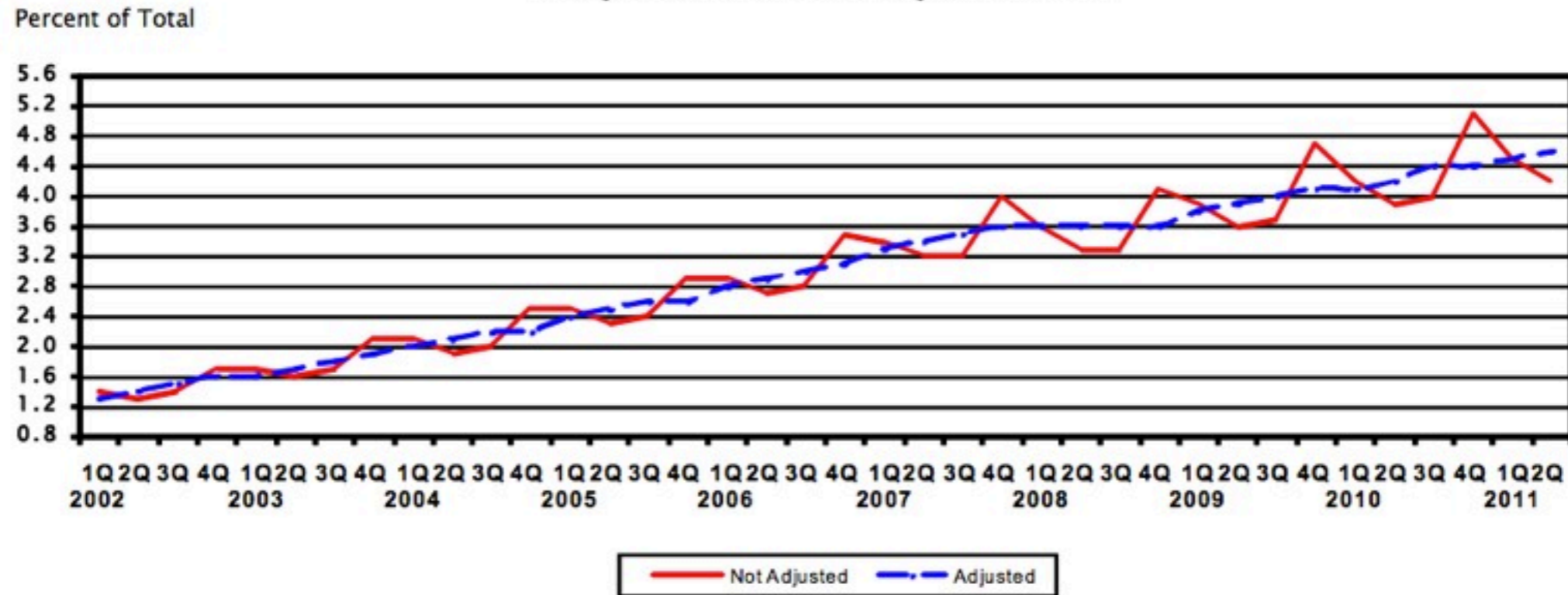
*Groupon says...*



*We have experienced rapid growth over a short period in a new market that we have created and we do not know whether this market will continue to develop or whether it can be maintained.*

# Groupon taps into a previously untapped market

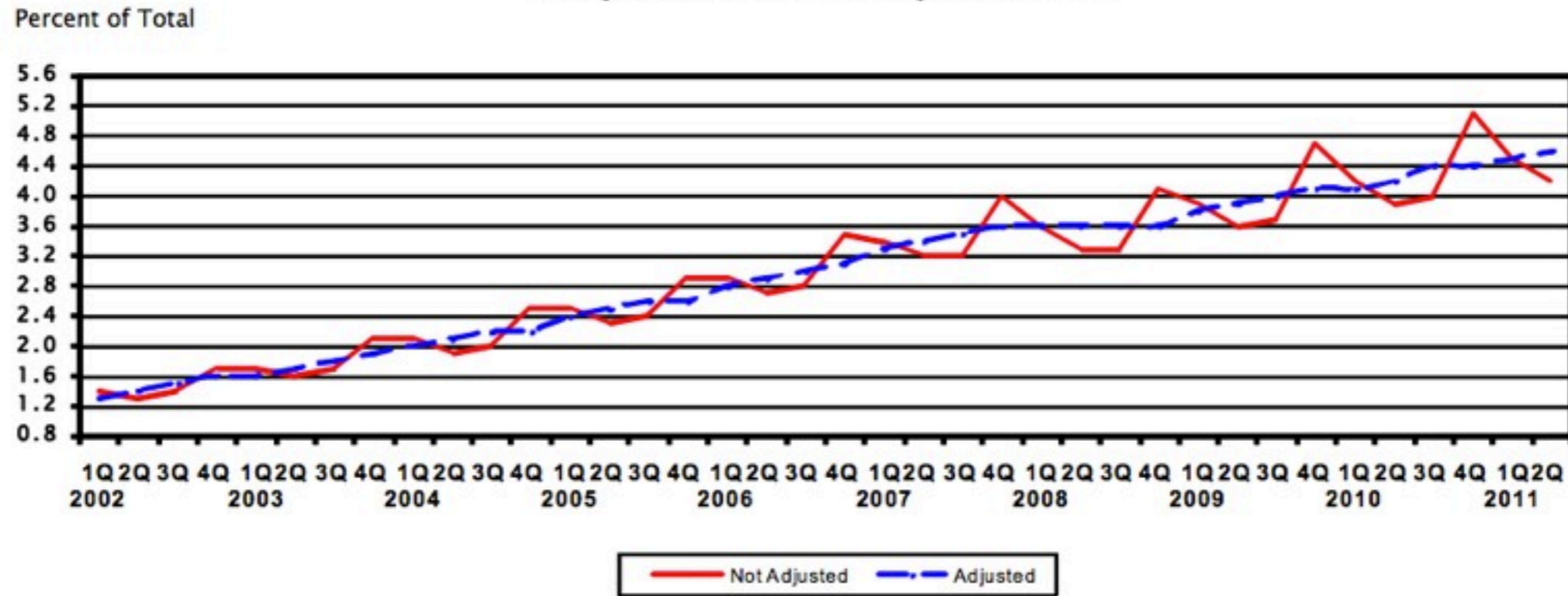
Estimated Quarterly U.S. Retail E-commerce Sales as a Percent of Total Quarterly Retail Sales:  
1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2002 – 2<sup>ND</sup> Quarter 2011



- Q2 2011 electronic commerce sales: **\$47Bn**
- Percentage of overall commerce still small
- Large untapped opportunity!
- **Daily deal sites tap exactly into this market**

# Groupon taps into a previously untapped market

Estimated Quarterly U.S. Retail E-commerce Sales as a Percent of Total Quarterly Retail Sales:  
1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2002 – 2<sup>ND</sup> Quarter 2011



“We depend on the continued growth of online commerce.” [Groupon S-1]

## **How does Groupon make money?**

Groupon sell coupons, retains ~50% of coupon value, passes the rest to the merchant.

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## How does a merchant make money?

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- (?) From existing customers with coupons
- (+) From existing customers without coupons
- (-) Pays revenue share to Groupon

# Daily deals business model

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### **Complicated calculation!**

Some of the above components vary over time.

How many existing customer will use Groupons?

How many new customers will the deal attract?

How many will be **loyal** customers?

Side-effects of deals? Quality of service vs. increased volume



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How many will be **loyal** customers?

Side-effects of deals? Quality of service vs. increased volume

Groupon identifies **failure to retain existing subscribers & merchants** and **to acquire new ones** as risk factors. [Groupon S-1]



Q1

## Can we predict the outcomes of Groupon deals?

- Groupon wants to pick and feature popular deals
- Merchants need to know the cost and potential of a Groupon deal
  - How many customers to expect? Manage customer volume, hire additional workers?
  - How much will the deal cost?
  - Is there a better customer acquisition strategy?

# Research Questions

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Q3

## What drives sales? Are Groupons “social”?

- Groupon has more than **115M** email subscribers
- Cost of subscriber acquisition in the first half of 2011: **\$345M**
- Is this subscriber database the only driving force behind coupon sales?
- To what extent sales propagate via social networks?

# Question 1: Outcome prediction

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## Methodology

Regression model using data from daily deal sites



Monitored **Jan 3<sup>rd</sup>** to **July 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Collected **16,692** deals

Combination of Groupon API and scraping

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Scraping

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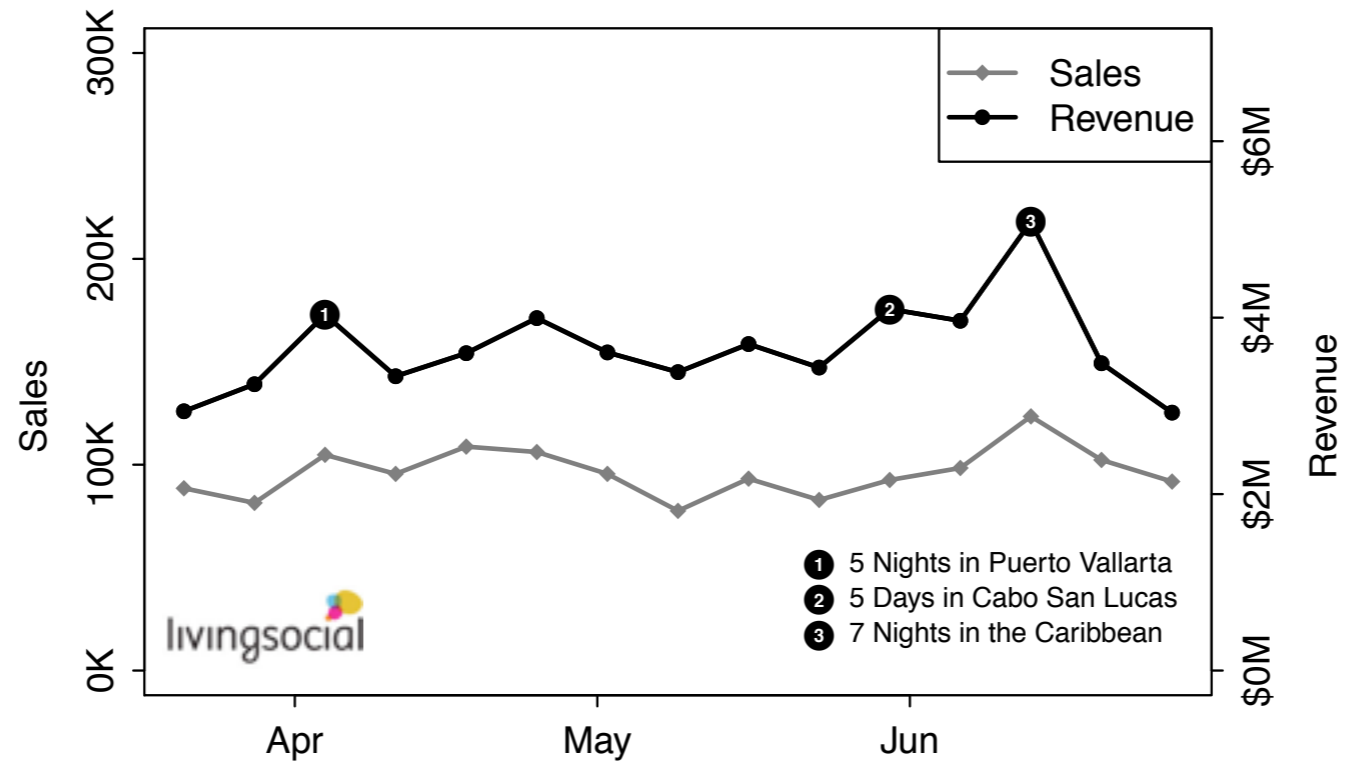
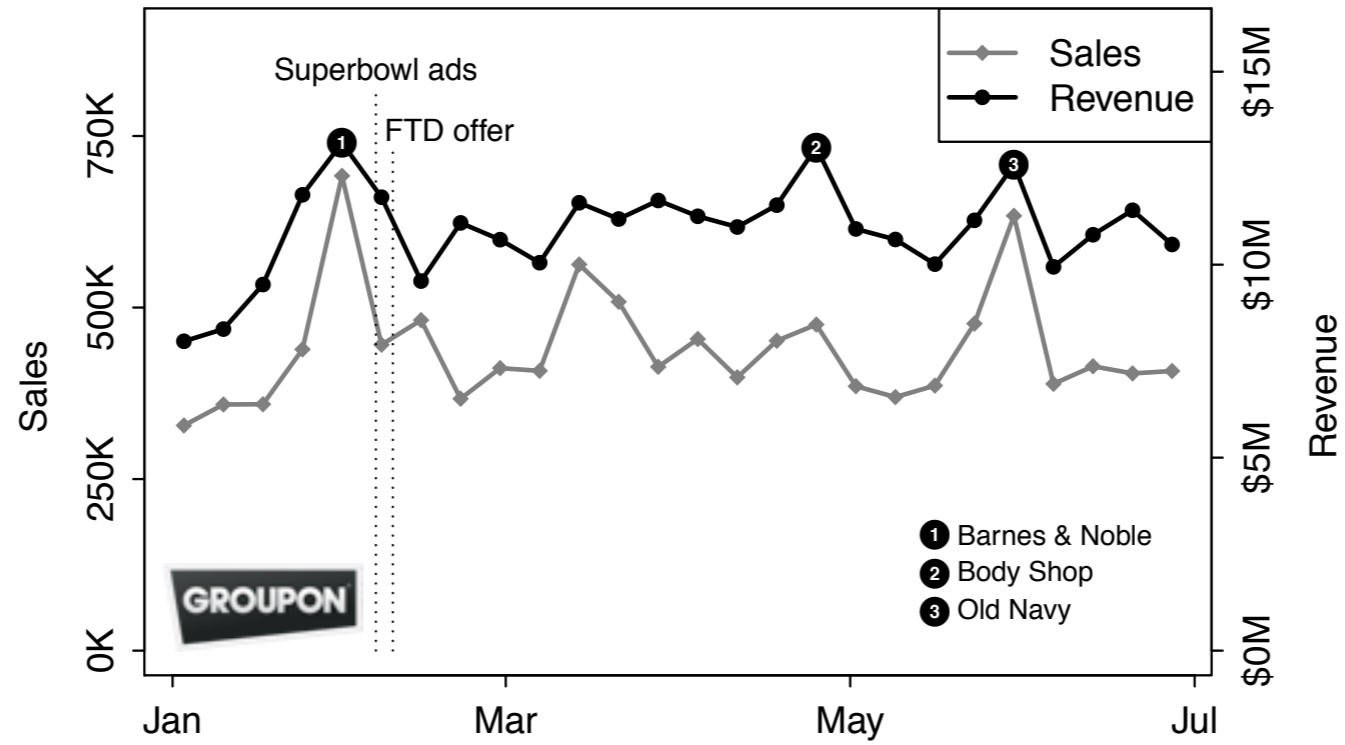
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Scraping

**200GB of compressed data**

# Warmup: Basic operational insights

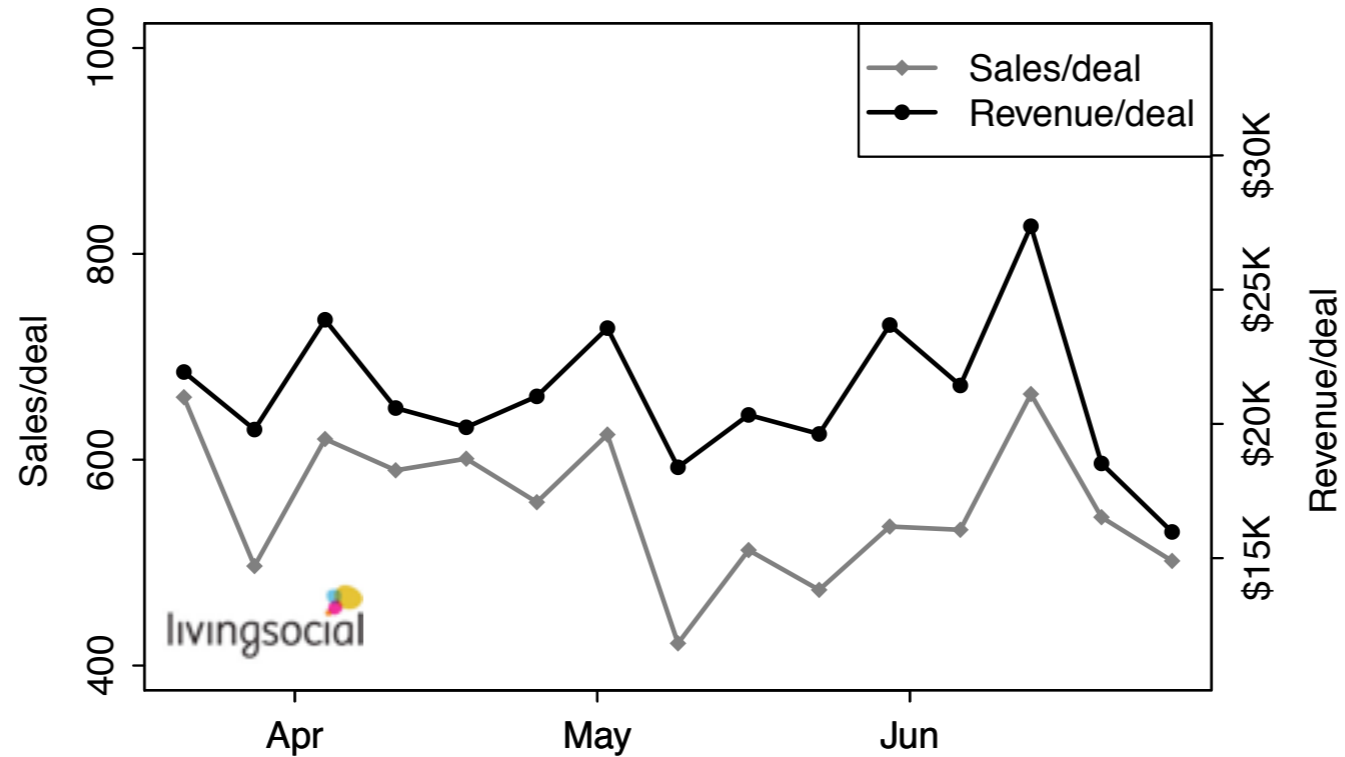
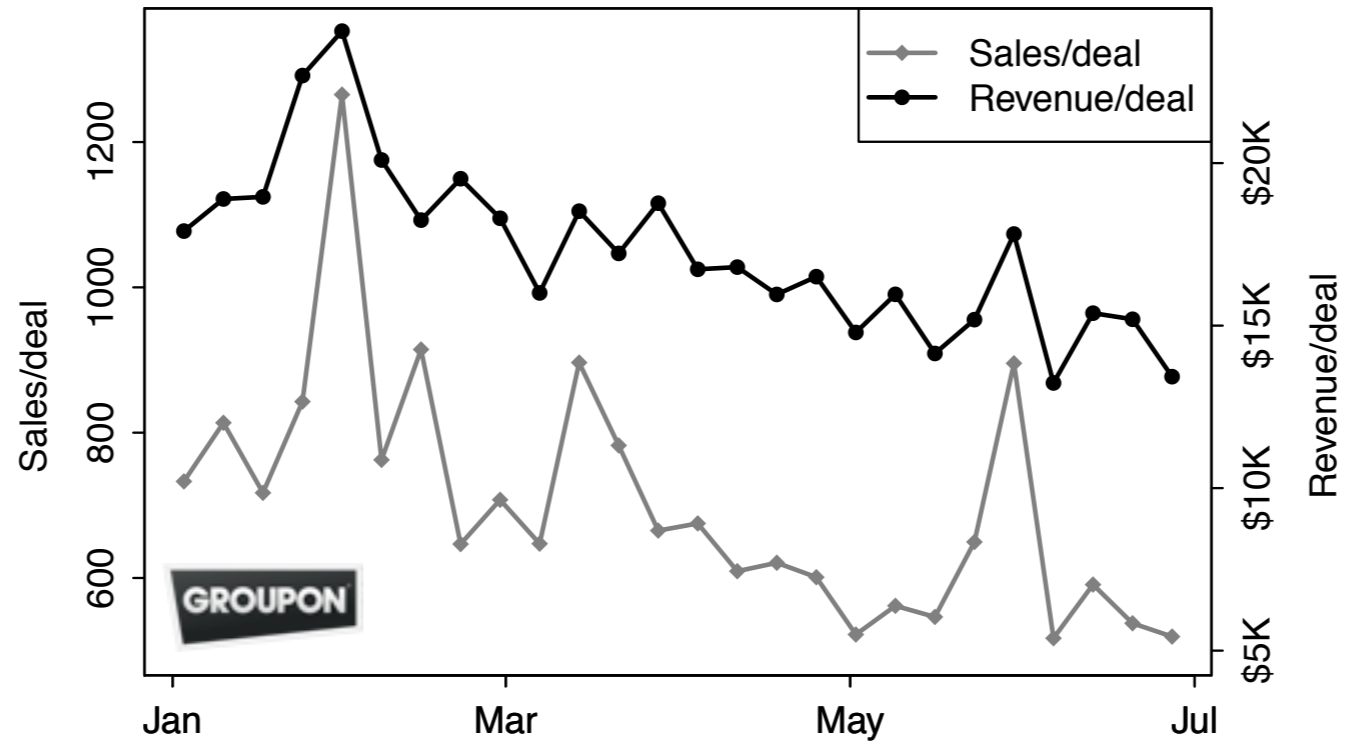
## Flat sales and revenue in local markets.





# Warmup: Basic operational insights

The number of Groupons sold per deal is declining: personalization strategy



# Basic features of a Groupon deal

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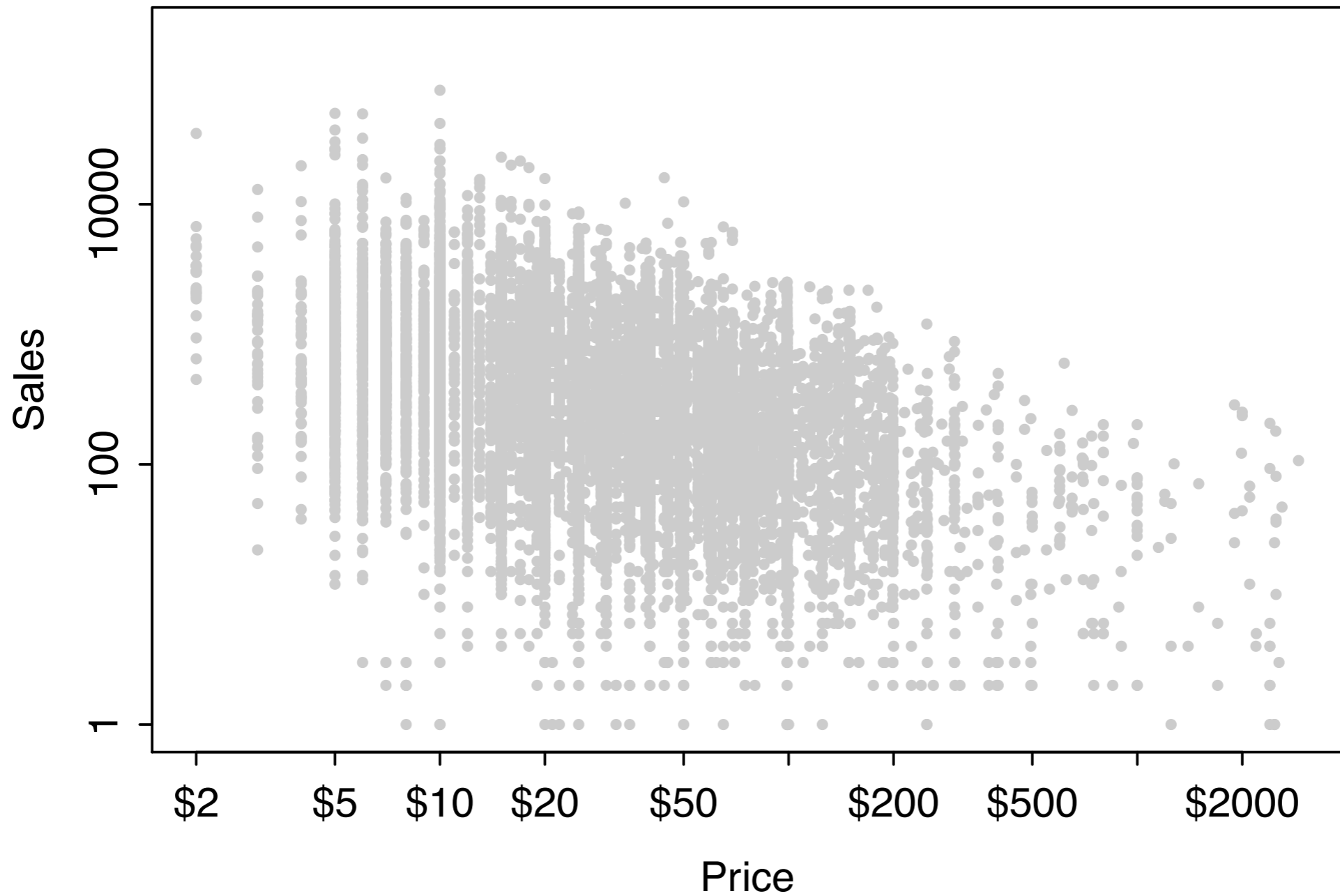
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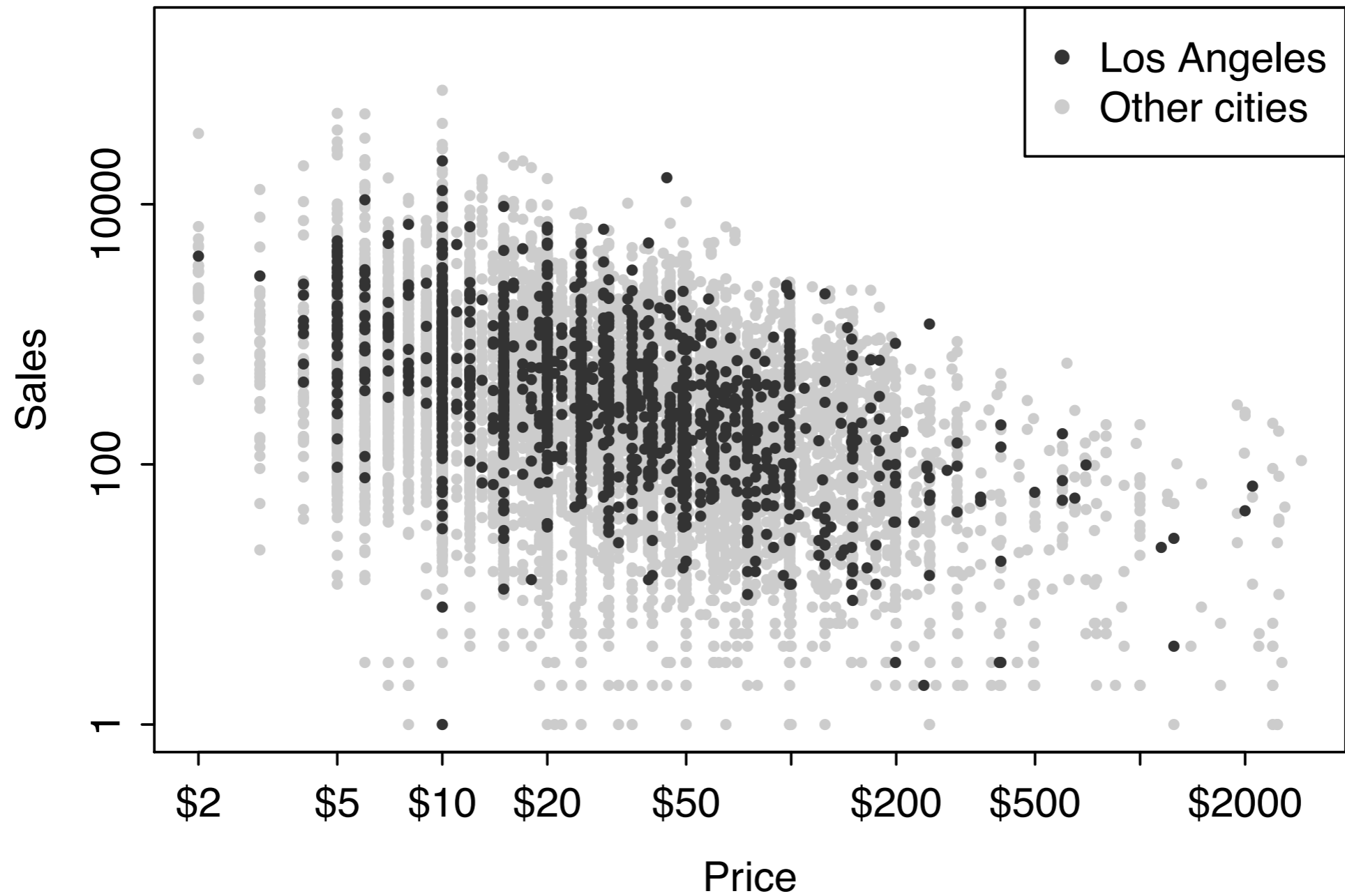
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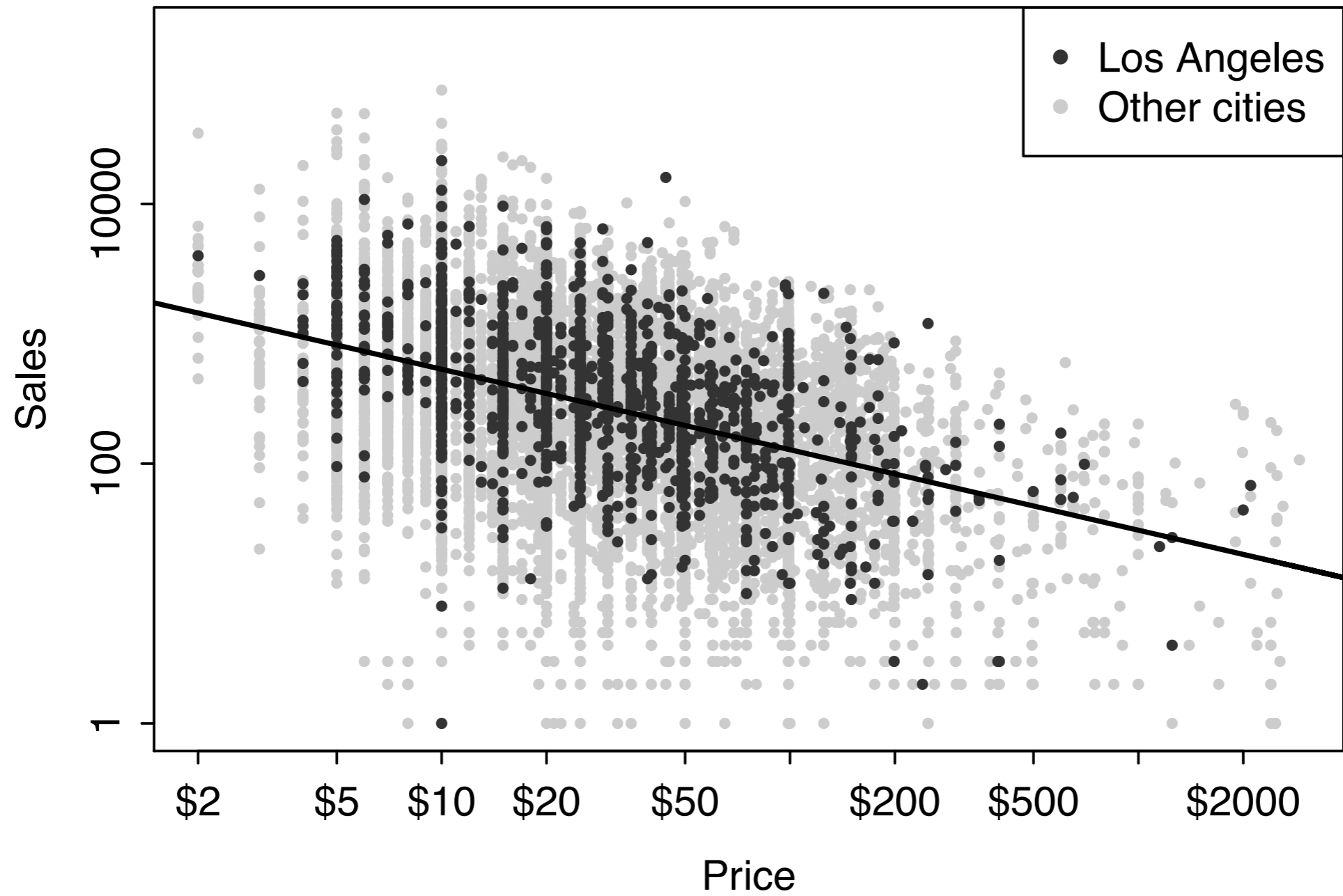
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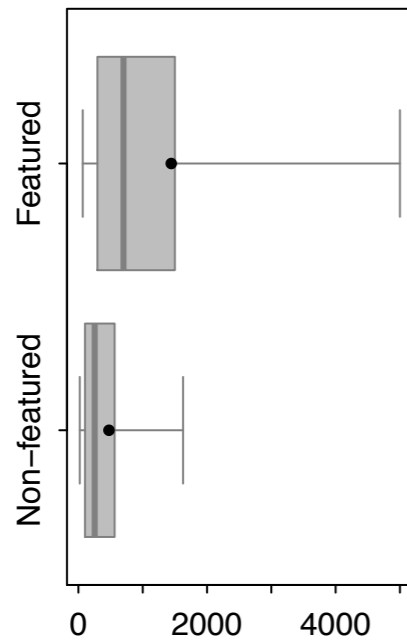


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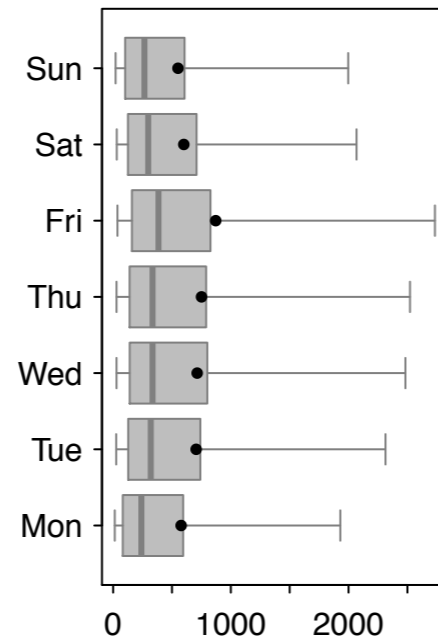


# But Groupon has other means to affect sales...

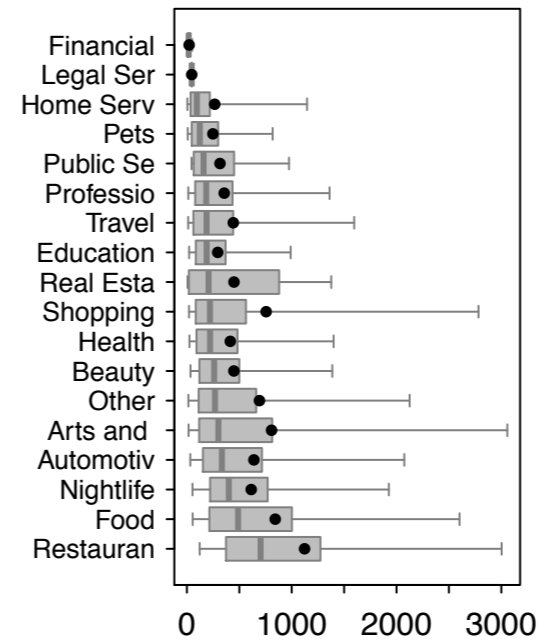
Featured



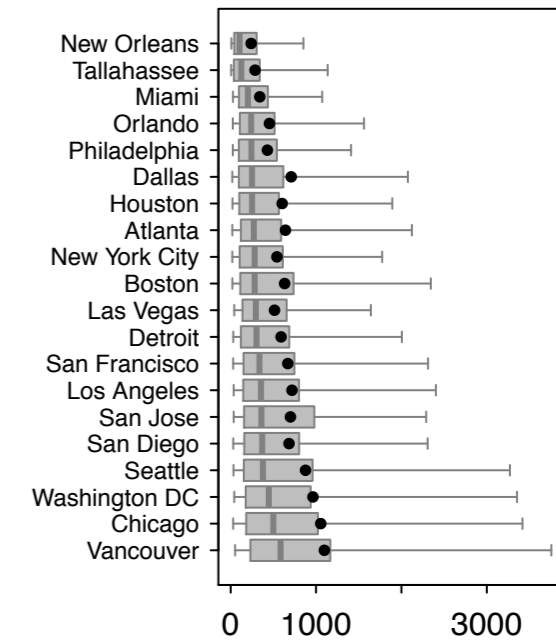
Weekday



Category



City



# Linear regression model of Groupon deals

Sales

Price

Threshold

Featured

Weekday

Category

$$\log q = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \log p + \beta_2 \log t + \beta_3 d + \beta_4 f + \beta_5 l + \bar{\beta}_6 \mathbf{w} + \bar{\beta}_7 \mathbf{c} + \bar{\beta}_8 \mathbf{g}$$

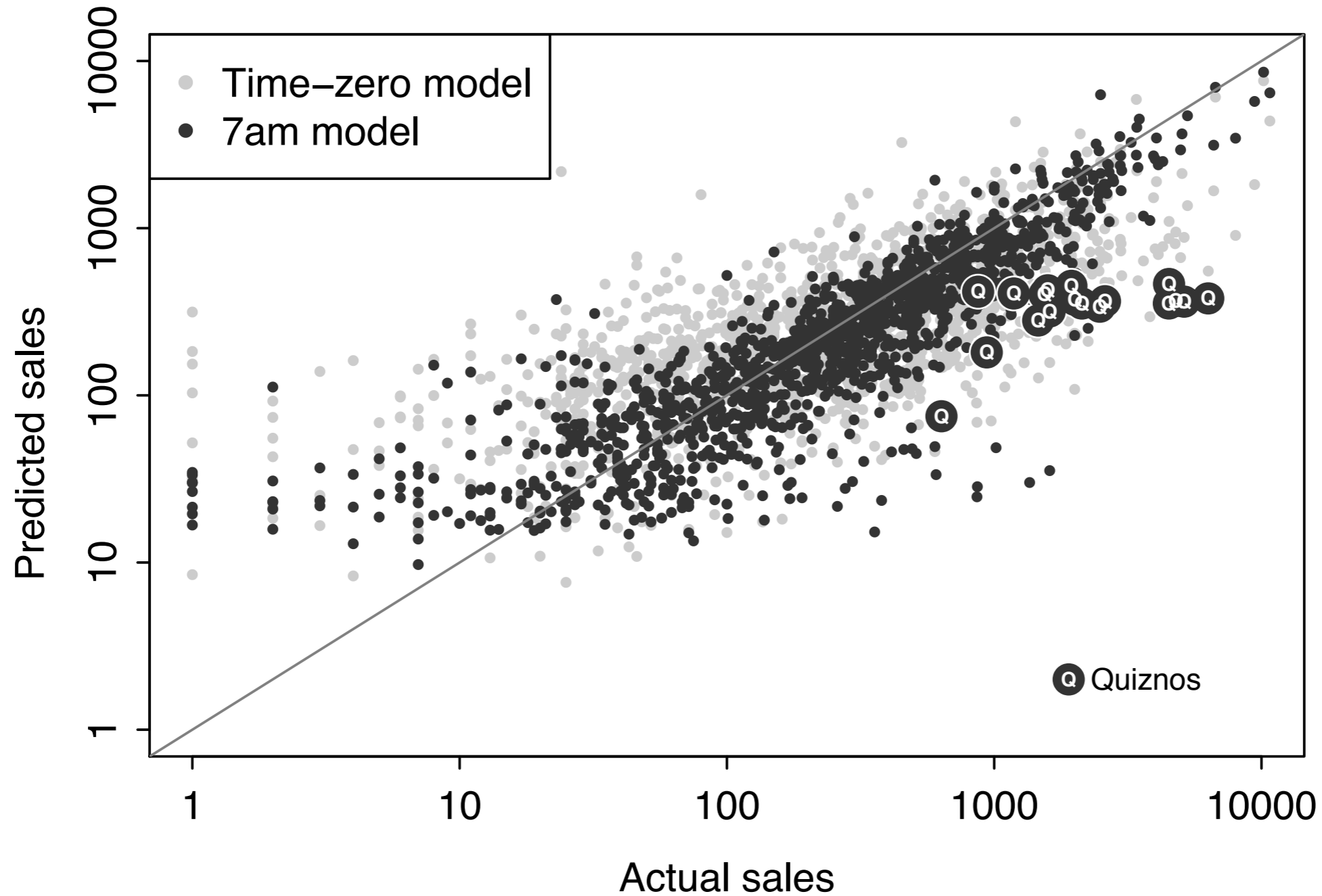
Intercept

Multi-day

Limited

City

# How well can we predict Groupon deals?



**$R^2$  of model = 0.49**



# How do various deal parameters impact its outcome?

## Price

Point price elasticity of coupons is **0.48**, demand is **inelastic**.

**1% increase** in price leads to **0.48% decrease** in sales.

Groupon and merchants have room for price-based optimization.

## “Soft incentives”

For example, in expectation a **featured** deal produces **141%** more sales.

In expectation **Friday** deals produce **27%** more sales than **Monday** deals.

There are means other than price to control sales.

## Can merchants put this to good use?

Consider merchants whose deals sell out.

If they could predict sales they could control customer volume through price and hence optimize profit.

# Question 2: Reputation ramifications

Q2

## Can Groupon please both customers & merchants?

- Groupon promises: “**Valuable new customers, guaranteed**”
- Is this the case? Can Groupon attract **loyal** customers?
- What is the impact of Groupon on merchant reputation?

A

## Methodology

Merge datasets to quantify customer satisfaction with Groupon merchants




Collected **56,048** reviews for **2,332** merchants

Dataset spans **2,496** deals

Scraped Yelp website

# What about the reputation of Groupon merchants?



Real people. Real reviews.®

Search for (e.g. taco, cheap dinner, Max's)

Near (Address, Neighborhood, City, State or Zip)

Welcome About Me Write a Review **Find Reviews** Invite Friends Messaging Talk Events [Member Search](#)

## Ma Soba

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ 243 reviews [Rating Details](#)

Categories: [Sushi Bars](#), [Chinese](#) [\[Edit\]](#)

156 Cambridge St  
(between Hancock St & Joy St)  
Boston, MA 02114  
Neighborhood: Beacon Hill

(617) 973-6680  
[www.MasobaBoston.com](http://www.MasobaBoston.com)

**Nearest Transit:**  
Cambridge St @ Bowdoin St (191, 192, 193)  
Bowdoin Station Blue Line (Blue Line)  
Cambridge St @ Saltonstall Bldg - Bowdoin Sq (191, 192, 193)

**Hours:**  
Mon-Wed 11:30 am - 10:30 pm  
Thu-Fri 11:30 am - 11 pm  
Sat 4 pm - 11 pm  
Sun 4 pm - 10:30 pm


**Parking:** Street

**Accepts Credit Cards:** Yes


[Edit Business Info](#)

**Price Range:** \$\$  
**Attire:** Casual  
**Good for Groups:** Yes  
**Good for Kids:** No  
**Takes Reservations:** Yes  
**Delivery:** Yes  
**Take-out:** Yes  
**Waiter Service:** Yes  
**Outdoor Seating:** No

**Wi-Fi:** No  
**Good For:** Dinner  
**Alcohol:** Full Bar  
**Noise Level:** Average  
**Ambience:** Casual  
**Has TV:** Yes  
**Caters:** No  
**Wheelchair Accessible:** Yes





[Add Photos](#)





[View Larger Map/Directions](#)

**Browse Nearby:**  
[Restaurants](#) | [Nightlife](#) | [Shopping](#) | [Movies](#) | [All](#)

**Deals Nearby**

-  **\$10 for \$20 Certificate**  
Hugh O'Neill's Pub & Restaurant  
Malden, MA
-  **\$20 for \$25 Certificate**  
Masala  
Somerville, MA

**People Who Viewed This Also Viewed...**

-  **Zen Japanese Grill &...**  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ 145 reviews  
Neighborhood: Downtown
-  **King and I**

[Reviews \(243\)](#) [About This Business](#) Yelp Sponsor

**243 reviews for Ma Soba**

# What about the reputation of Groupon merchants?

Sort by: **Yelp Sort** | [Date](#) | [Rating](#) | [Elites'](#) | [Facebook Friends'](#)

## All Reviews



**Natalie T.**  
Boston, MA

 1  
 9

 10/11/2011

This place is AHH-MAZING! As an avid sushi eater and explorer Ma Soba is exactly what a sushi place should be. I go at least once a week .. and sometimes twice (one week I went 4 times.. don't judge). I always go with my bf and we order the same rolls every time -- Jalapeno roll and Crunch Dragon roll.. if we switch it up sometimes we do the Butterfly roll. But the Jalapeno is a MUST. BEST ROLL EVER! We sit at the sushi bar and the sushi chefs know us and like any good place -- if you're a regular you get a free treat. And the prices are decent and typical to Boston sushi.


One thing to note is that the wait staff could use some help. There are only 2 guys who seem to know how to be a waiter. They women are not that good, not friendly, very forgetful etc. But they aren't so terrible that I hate the place.

Go here !



Was this review ...? [Useful](#) [Funny](#) [Cool](#)

[Bookmark](#) [Send to a Friend](#) [Link to This Review](#)

[Add owner comment](#)



**Yelpie G.**  
Boston, MA

 15  
 32

 10/12/2011

I've been talked into dining at Ma Soba on three occasions, each time it's been bad.

The most recent time was this week. There were 4 of us, all fresh from work and ready to have a relaxing dinner. Our waiter arrived at the table and brought with him a butt load of attitude.


Really? I looked around and noticed that there was only one other occupied table in the restaurant so giving your only other paying customers attitude speaks volumes about the restaurant. Volumes. Our beverages arrived and included almost soapy tasting water. I mean, come on. The food followed about 25 minutes later and trust me, it was nothing more than average.

I don't get why this restaurant has any positive reviews. The waitstaff is awful and the food is just passable. One star says it all. AVOID!!!

Was this review ...? [Useful](#) [Funny](#) [Cool](#)


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**Elite '11**



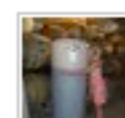

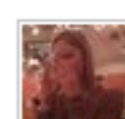



 9/20/2011



**Billy Tse Restaurant**  
 74 reviews  
Neighborhood: North End

## Related Lists

[More »](#)

-  [And I Would Walk 500...](#)  
Even though I moved away, I know I'm gonna be I'm...
-  [Sushi Sushi Sushi](#)  
I could live on Sushi... here's where you need to...
-  [A Local's Guide to Beacon...](#)  
Look beyond the fancy town homes, cobble stone...
-  [Top Restaurants](#)  
Some of my favorite dining destinations in the...
-  [Win Over My Heart With...](#)  
Sushi is my newest obsession, with my goal being...
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This is a comprehensive list of sushi places in...
-  [Seeking Sushi?](#)  
Nigiri, Maki, Sashimi..you can find my reviews...
-  [Top Sushi Spots](#)  
Here are all the sushi places i have tried - most...

## People Viewed This After Searching For...

[Sushi Boston](#)

[Restaurants On Cambridge Street Boston](#)

[Chinese Restaurant Boston](#)

# What about the reputation of Groupon merchants?

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Was this review ...? [Useful](#) [Funny](#) [Cool](#)

[Bookmark](#) [Send to a Friend](#) [Link to This Review](#)

[Add owner comment](#)



Elite '11  
35  
604

Anne W.  
Boston, MA

★☆☆☆☆ 9/20/2011

I convinced some of my friends to come here because I bought a **Groupon** here a week ago and some work colleagues who also agreed to buy the **Groupon** never did. So I went with some other friends.. thinking it has to be okay. So.. if you're a **icky sushi** eater (which means you value thick slices, freshness, and innovation).. this is not the place for you.

It has a good spot in Beacon Hill.. it has a nice ambience.. if you're handicap, I have no idea how you use the bathroom because it's in the basement. The service isn't that great or bad... and the place isn't that crowded or filled with expert sushi eaters.

Tried a bunch of specialty rolls.. which were all okay to bad. The coveted crunch dragon roll is good.. and that was eaten up first... but everything else was just a dissapointment.

Don't go.. save your money.. even if it's a Groupon.

Was this review ...? [Useful](#) [Funny](#) [Cool](#)

[Bookmark](#) [Send to a Friend](#) [Link to This Review](#)

[Add owner comment](#)



0  
2

Mildred C.  
Boston, MA

★★★★☆ 10/5/2011

We were pleasantly surprised with the service, food, ambience and being in the neighborhood.

- Our waiter was courteous, came at the right times and was always smiling.
- The food was much better than we had expected - we had sushi which was delicious and a crispy beef which was very good.
- The restaurant had a pleasant feeling to it, not overly formal but not totally casual . Having a window seat was especially nice.

We'll definitely return.

Was this review ...? [Useful](#) [Funny](#) [Cool](#)

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[Restaurants On Cambridge Street Boston](#)

[Chinese Restaurant Boston](#)

# Why do Yelp reviews matter?



## Yelp reviews are forever!

Reviews persist for future potential customers to peruse



## Yelp drives merchant traffic

Merchants with higher ratings get more visibility on Yelp



## Yelp ratings affect merchant revenues

1-star increase leads to 9% increased revenue. **[Luca'11]**



## Merchants care about Yelp

They care enough to spam it (25% of Yelp reviews filtered)

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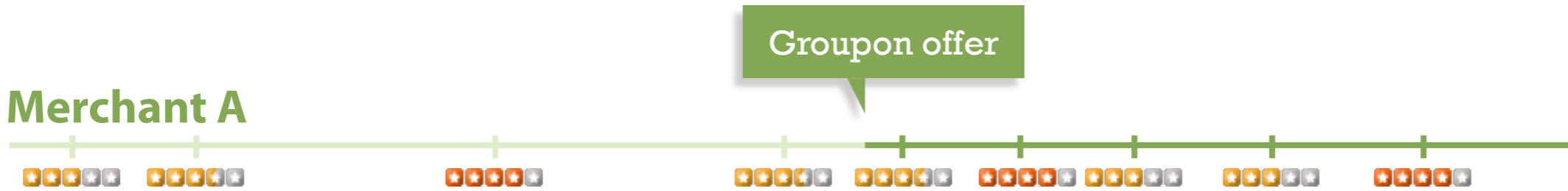
## Merchants care about Yelp

They care enough to spam it (25% of Yelp reviews filtered)

In the long run, Groupon can benefit from pleased customers and merchants.

# How can we measure the impact of Groupon?

Merchant A





# How can we measure the impact of Groupon?

Merchant A



Merchant B



# How can we measure the impact of Groupon?

Merchant A



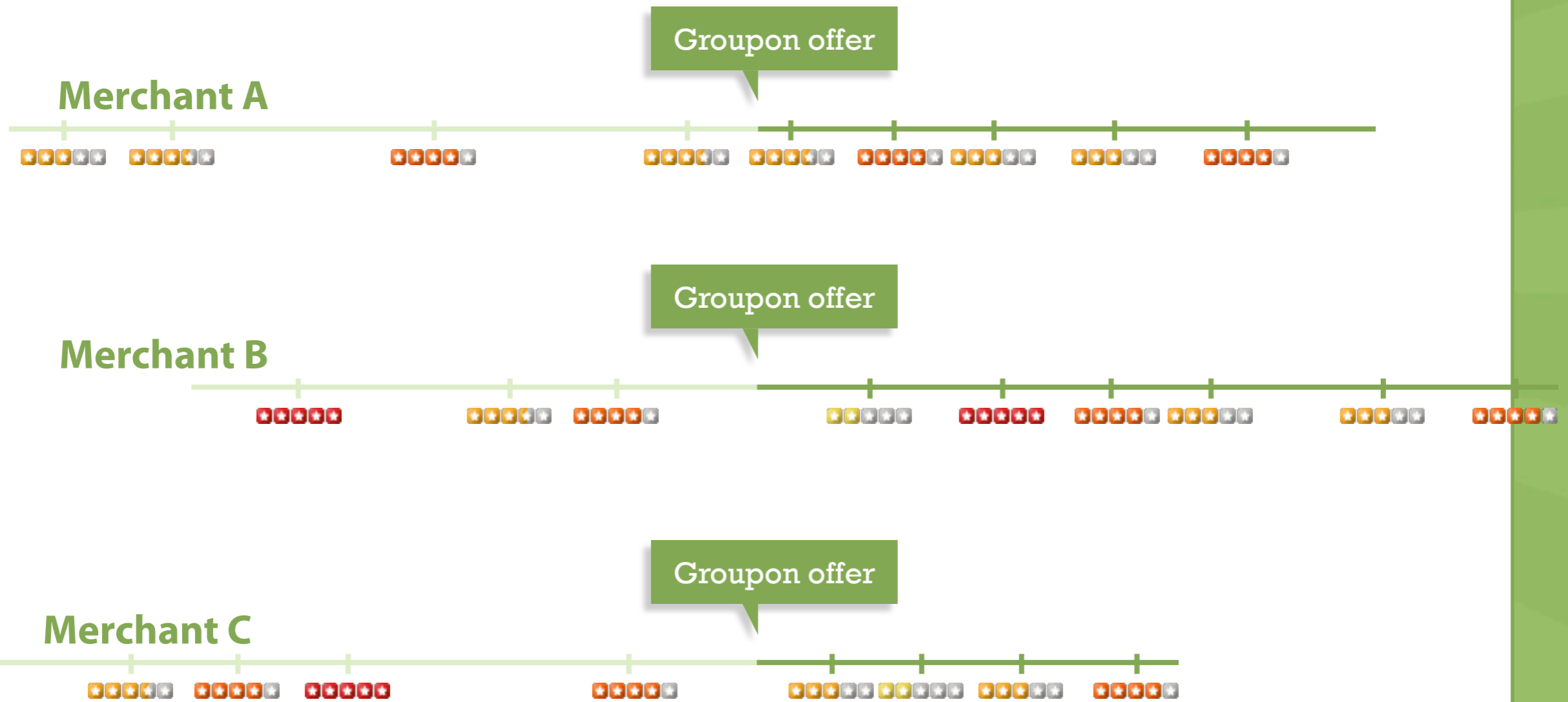
Merchant B



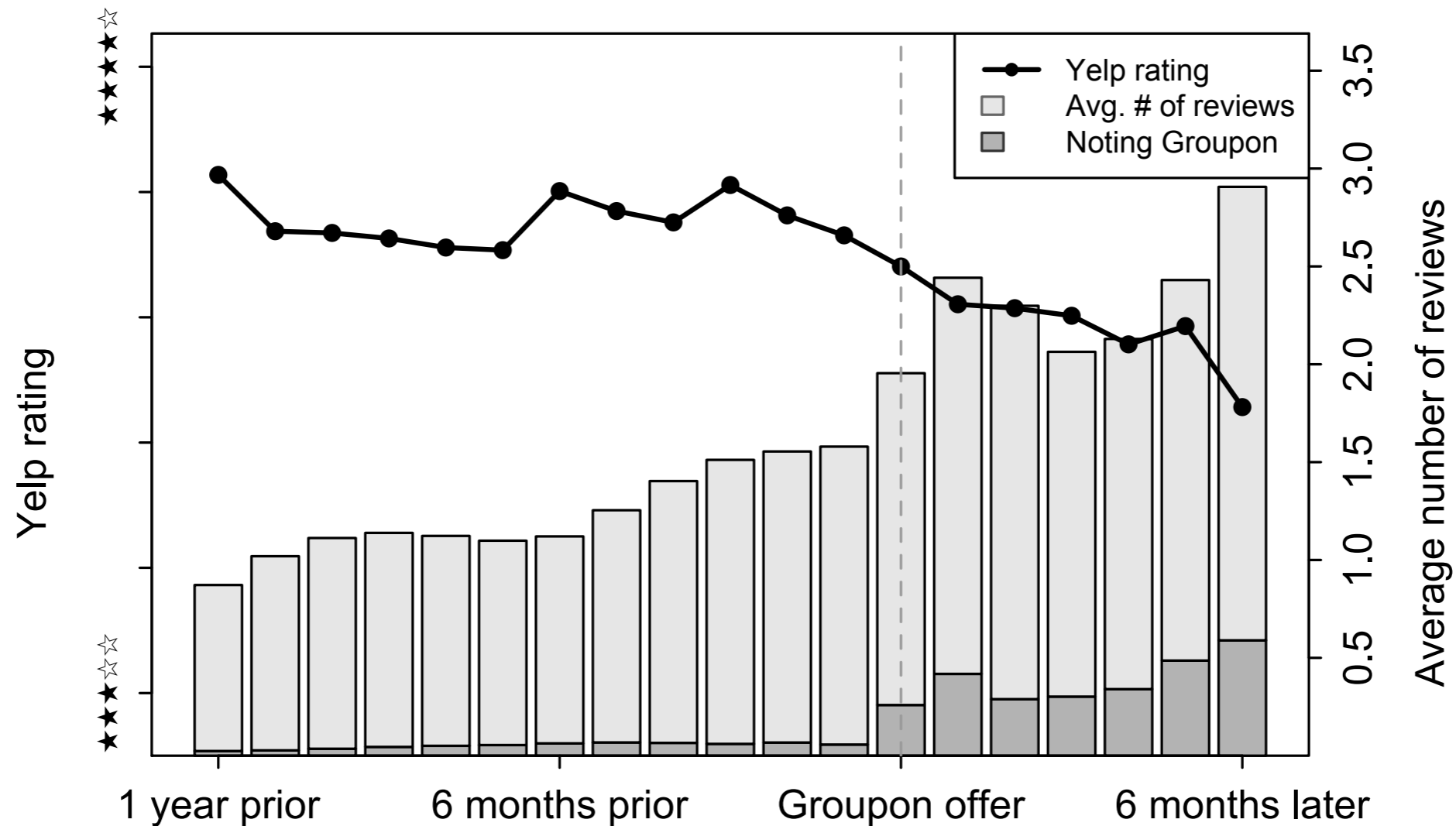
Merchant C



# How can we measure the impact of Groupon?



# Yelp ratings before & after Groupon



	Avg. Rating	Reviews
Before period (12 months)	3.71	39,042
After period (6 months)	3.59	17,006



## Breakdown of reviews by mentions of keywords “Groupon” and “coupon”

---

		Coupon mentioned			
		Yes		No	
<b>Groupon mentioned</b>	Yes	2.98	(354)	3.36	(4,315)
	No	3.36	(1,166)	3.71	(50,213)

---

 **This analysis struck a popular nerve...**

“ ‘ The consumers were being told: You will never pay full price again. The merchants were hearing: You are going to get new customers who will stick around and pay full price. Disappointment was inevitable. ’ ’

**The New York Times**

**...by providing some quantification of what was already on people's mind.**

# Groupon says...

“ It's been documented that anytime an influx of customers visits a business their online reviews tend to see a decrease in quality. This effect holds true for online as well as traditional advertising such as print, broadcast, radio.

Groupon is still the most effective and guaranteed marketing method for reaching hundreds of thousands of new customers and getting them into your business and engaged.”

The Groupon logo is displayed in white, bold, uppercase letters on a dark, rounded rectangular background. The background has a slight gradient and a drop shadow effect.

**GROUPON**

# Question 3: Social diffusion

Q3

## What drives sales? Are Groupons “social”?

- Groupon has more than **115M** email subscribers
- Cost of subscriber acquisition in the first half of 2011: **\$345M**
- Is this subscriber database the only driving force behind coupon sales?

A

## Methodology

Merge datasets to look for evidence of diffusion of deals on social networks

facebook

Monitored **Jan 3<sup>rd</sup>** to **July 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Collected Facebook “Likes” for **16,692** deals in our dataset

Utilized Facebook API

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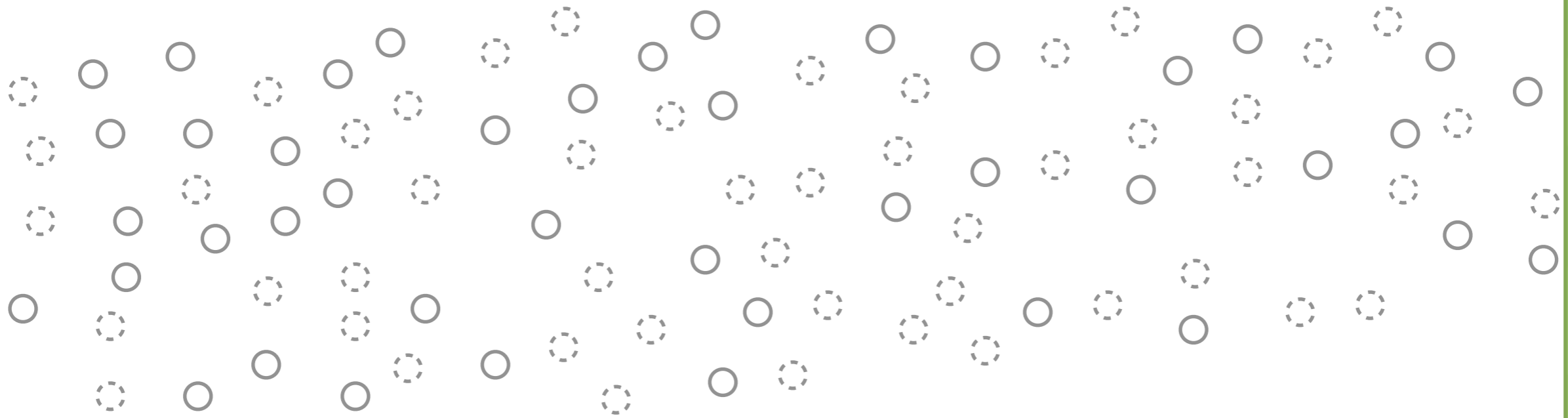
Print

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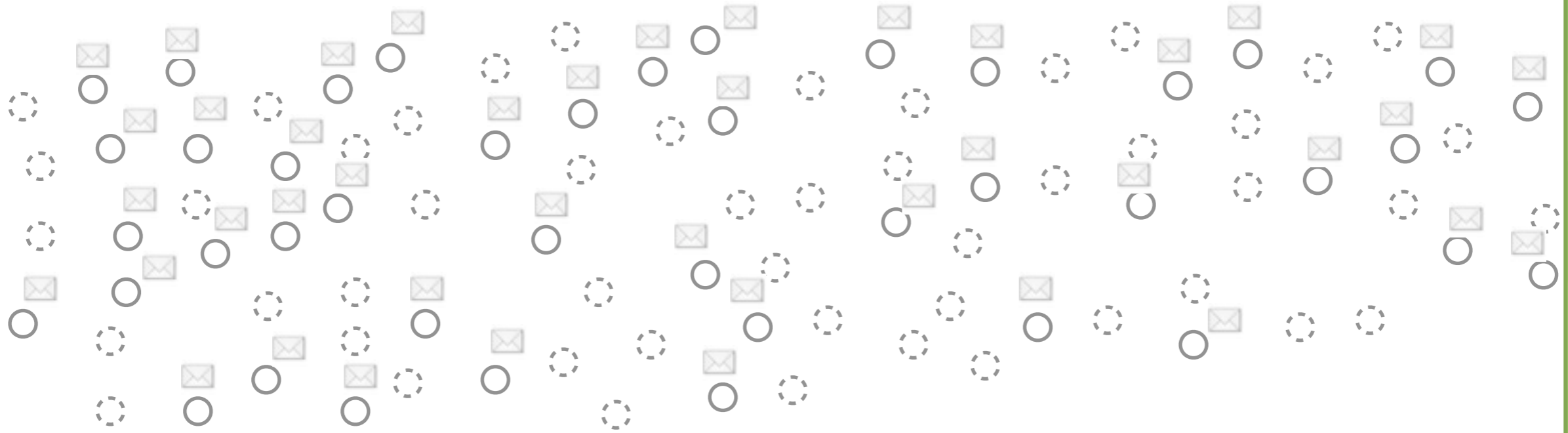


# Strawman hypothesis of sales: You've got mail!



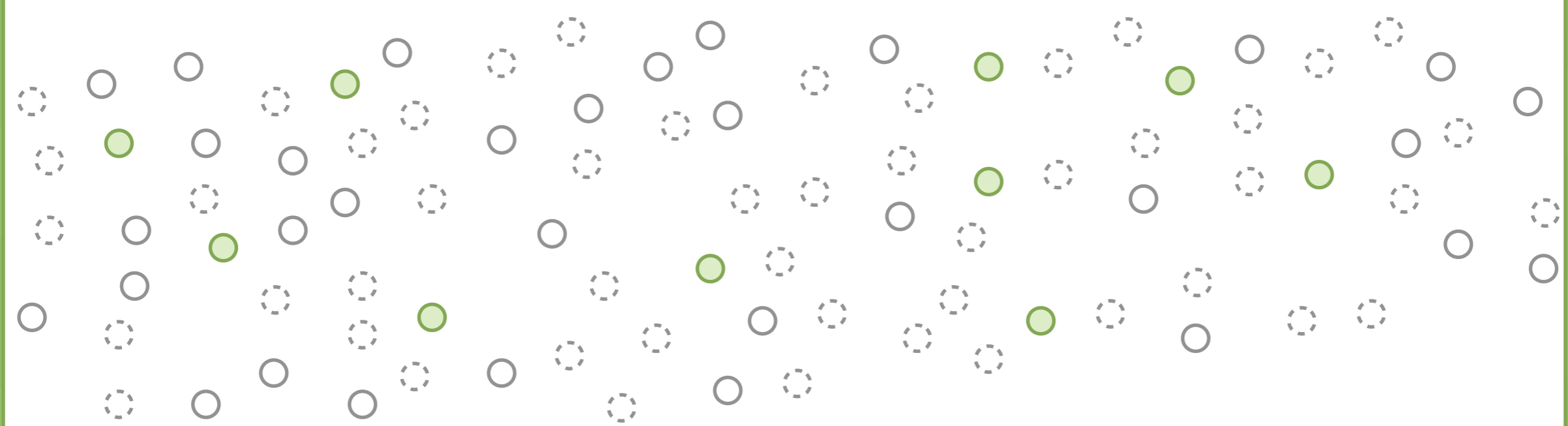
○ Non-subscriber    ○ Subscriber

# Strawman hypothesis of sales: You've got mail!



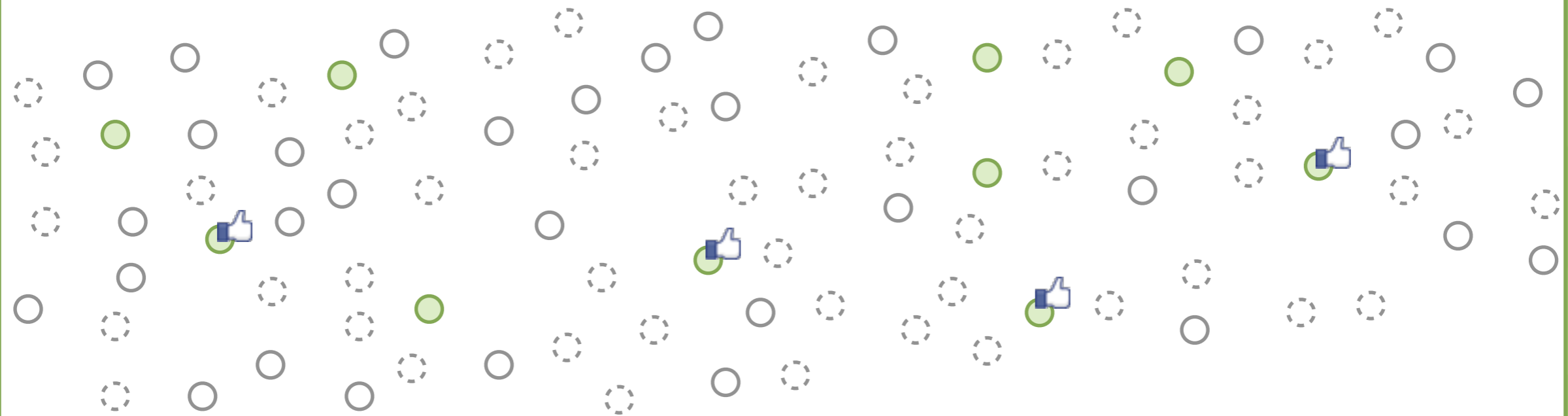
⊖ Non-subscriber    ○ Subscriber

# Strawman hypothesis of sales: You've got mail!



⊖ Non-subscriber   ⊙ Subscriber   ● Purchaser

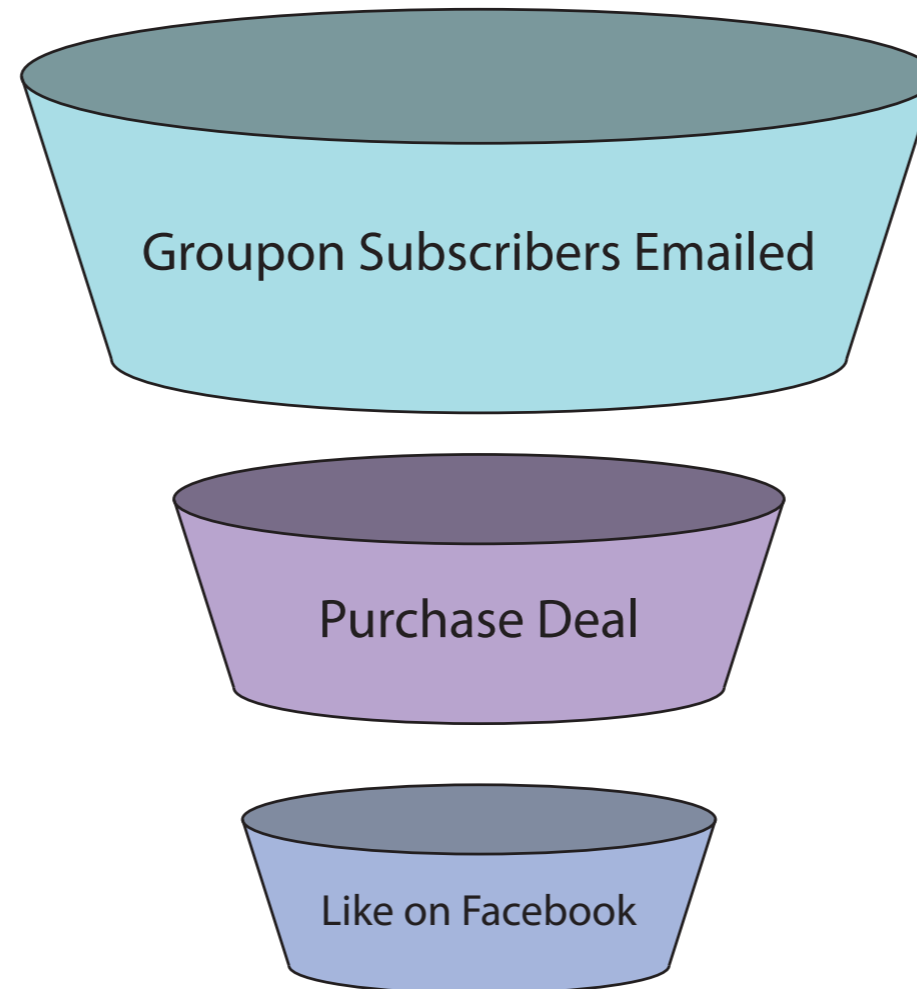
# Strawman hypothesis of sales: You've got mail!



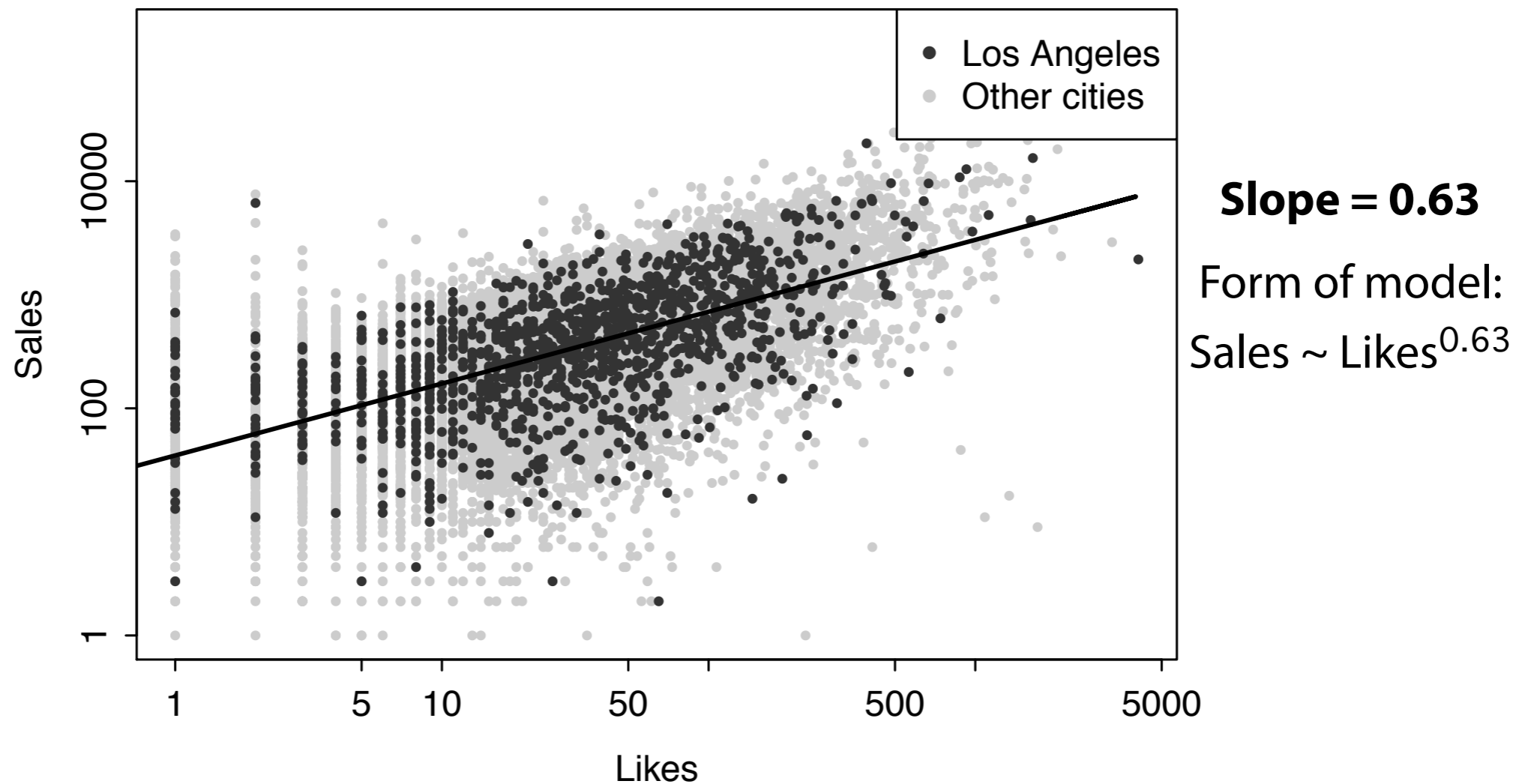
⊖ Non-subscriber   ○ Subscriber   ● Purchaser   👍 Likes on FB

# Strawman hypothesis of sales: You've got mail!

**This hypothesis suggests linear relationship between likes and sales**



# Groupon × Facebook

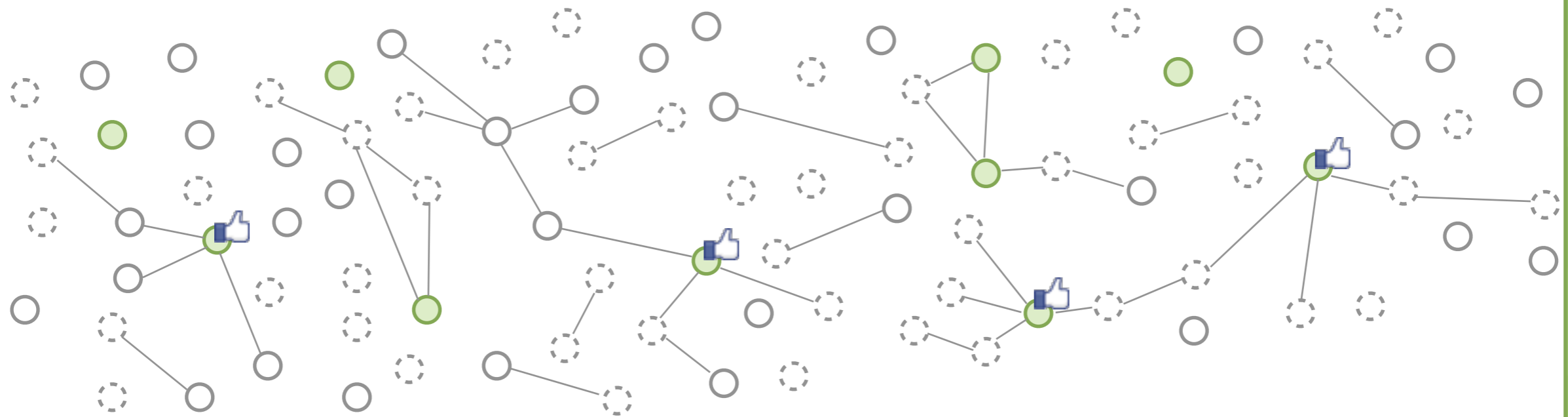


- Sales not linear in likes, reject hypothesis
- We observe diminishing marginal gains of sales in likes

# Alternative hypothesis: Social diffusion



## Likes cascade on the social network



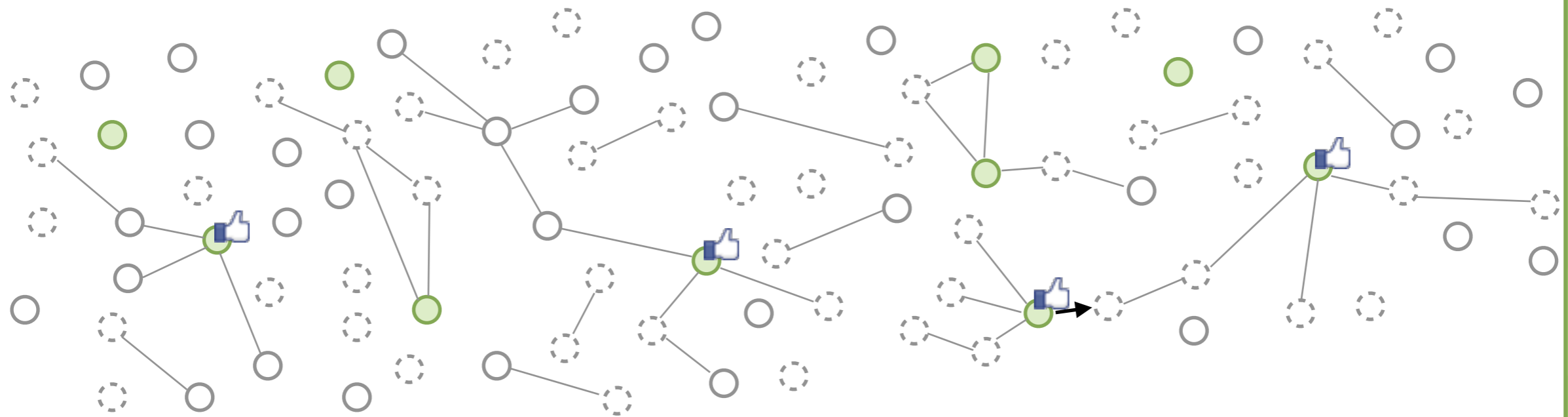
⊖ Non-subscriber   ○ Subscriber   ● Purchaser   👍 Likes on FB

# Alternative hypothesis: Social diffusion



## Likes cascade on the social network

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⊖ Non-subscriber   ⊙ Subscriber   ● Purchaser   👍 Likes on FB

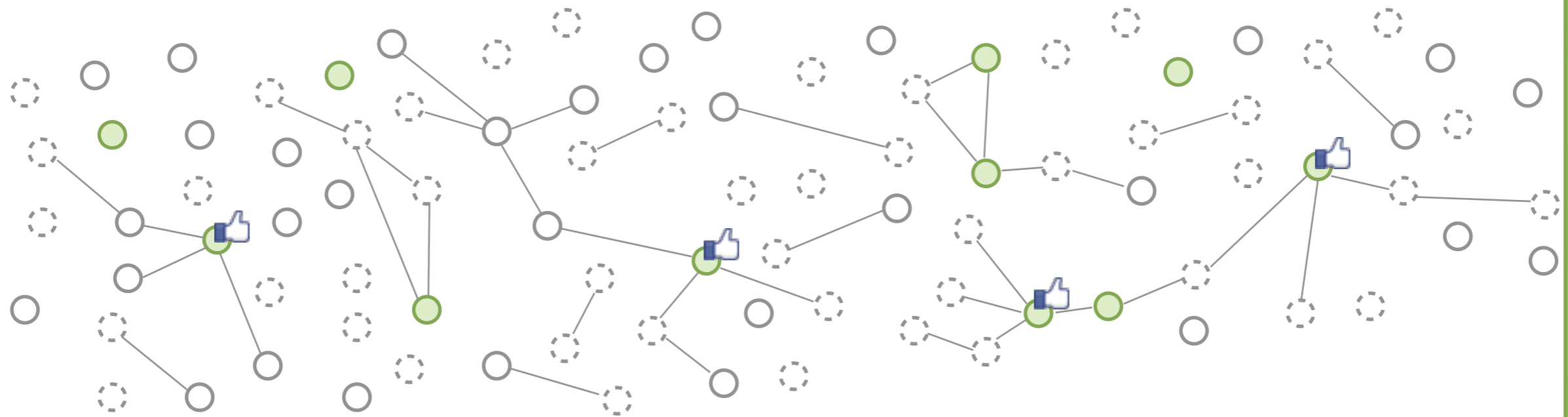


# Alternative hypothesis: Social diffusion



## Likes cascade on the social network

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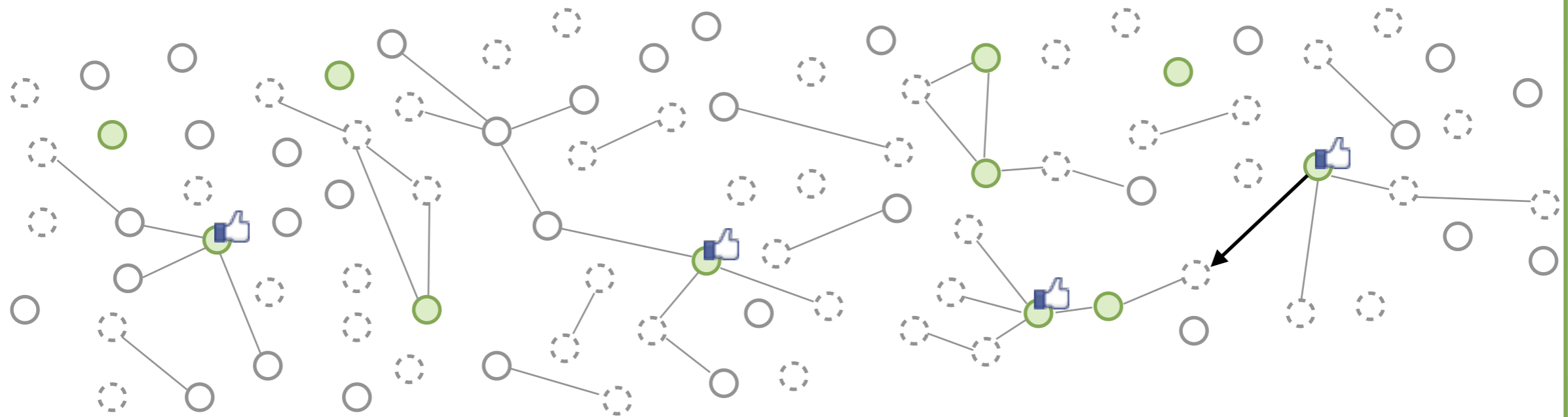
⊖ Non-subscriber   ○ Subscriber   ● Purchaser   👍 Likes on FB

# Alternative hypothesis: Social diffusion



## Likes cascade on the social network

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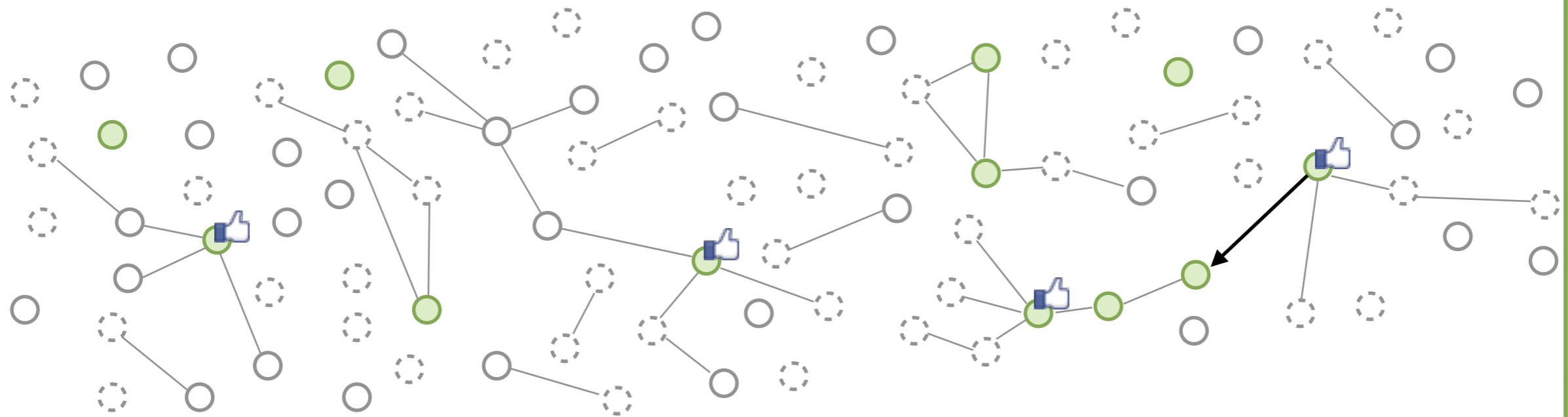


⊖ Non-subscriber   ⊙ Subscriber   ● Purchaser   👍 Likes on FB

# Alternative hypothesis: Social diffusion



## Likes cascade on the social network

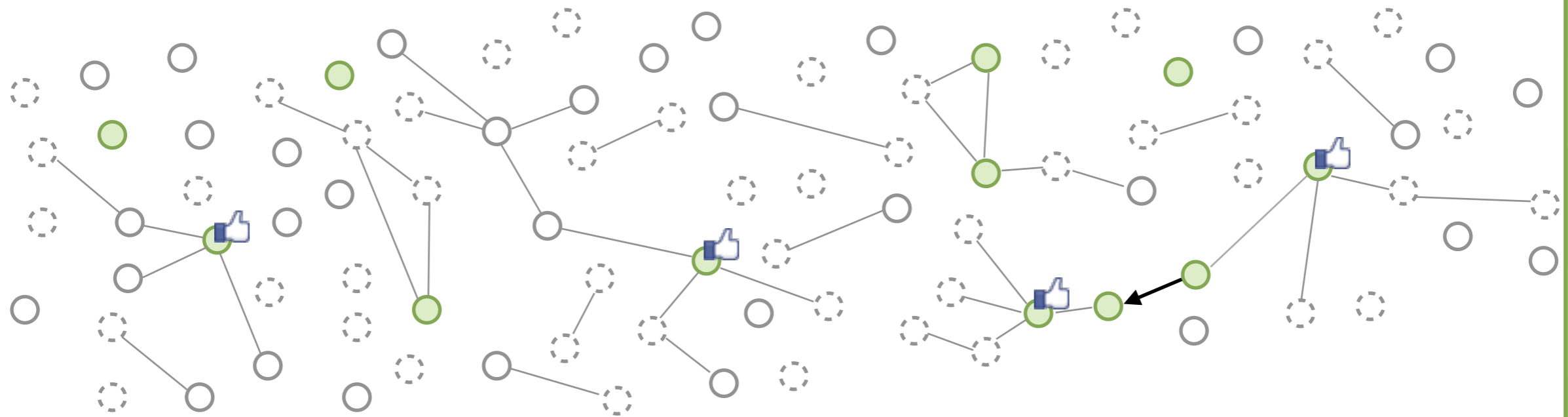


⊖ Non-subscriber   ○ Subscriber   ● Purchaser   👍 Likes on FB

# Alternative hypothesis: Social diffusion



## Likes cascade on the social network

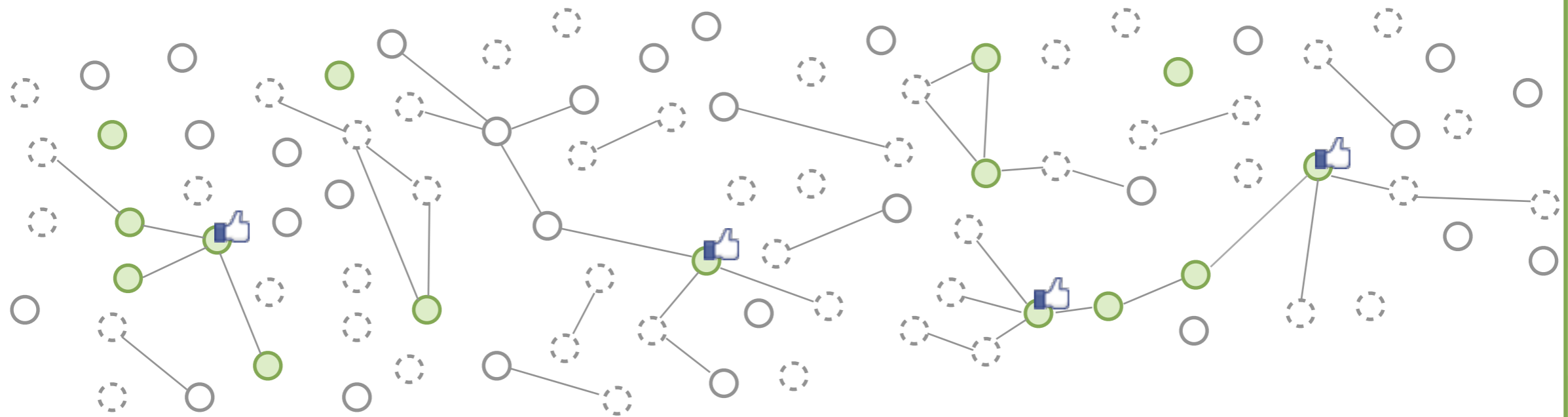


⊖ Non-subscriber   ⊙ Subscriber   ● Purchaser   👍 Likes on FB

# Alternative hypothesis: Social diffusion



## Likes cascade on the social network



⊖ Non-subscriber   ⊙ Subscriber   ● Purchaser   👍 Likes on FB

**Q** Is our data consistent with theoretical cascade models?

**A** Need to consider two key features of cascade models

**1. How is the seed set selected?**

Our dataset does not answer this, but...

Top 50% of FB users by degree responsible for most social interaction.  
**[Wilson et al. '09]**

**2. How do likes propagate? [Kempe et al. '03]**

**Independent Cascade**

Fixed probability of activation  $p$  by each active neighbor

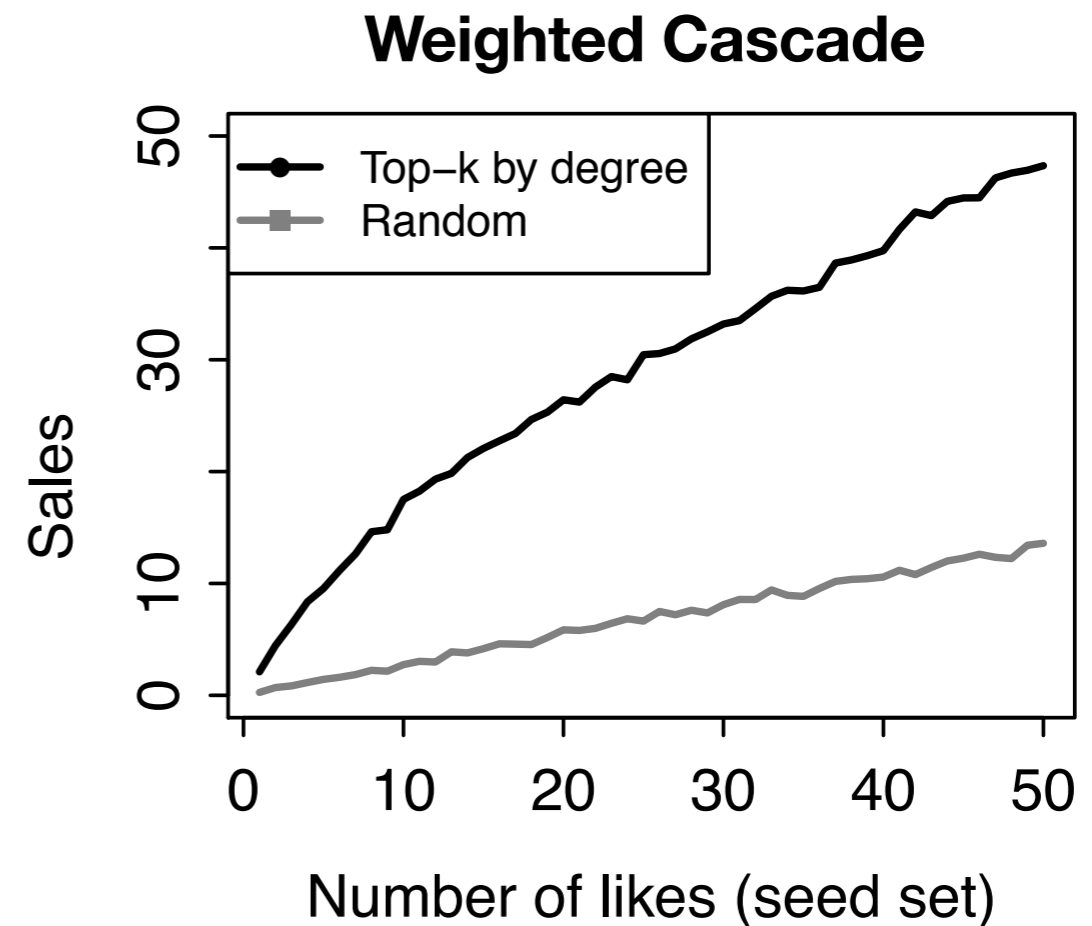
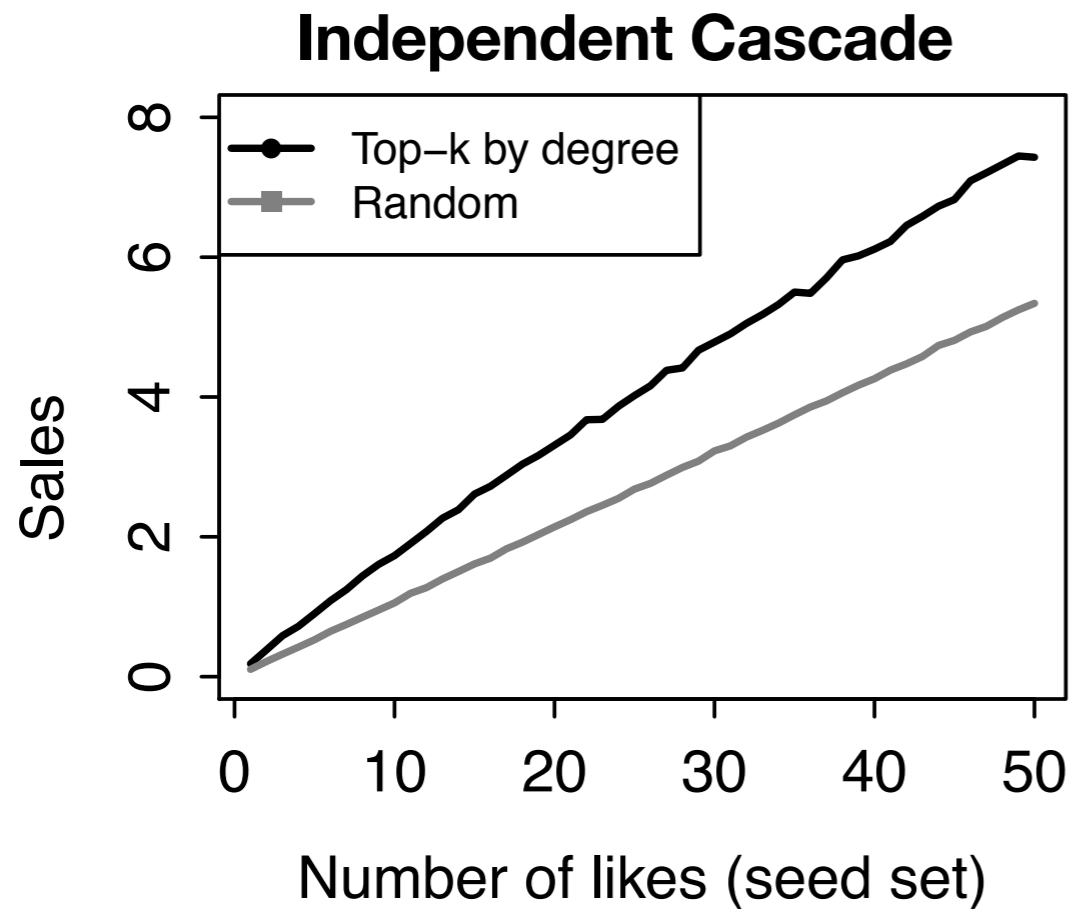
**Weighted Cascade**

User activated with probability  $1/own-degree$  by each active neighbor

# Alternative hypothesis: Social diffusion

**Q** Is our data consistent with theoretical cascade models?

**A** Yes, under previous two assumptions



# Conclusions

- Study “turned corner” when we used multiple data sources rather than looking head-on.
- Great opportunity to test well studied theoretical social diffusion models.
- Groupon sustainability: reviews go up, ratings go down. Is this a net win or loss for merchants? What happens in the longer run?
- Computer Scientists well placed to do these studies, but rich in interdisciplinary aspects.



# Does reputation *really* matter?

## At least according to Twitter....

