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Hold the homepage!

How scoops circulate through
the modern media landscape

Introduction and methodology

Avoiding the spread of scandal isn't as simple as buying up papers to hide a headline anymore – stories spread from print, to online, to social media, and sometimes to Parliament and wider regulatory bodies.

While the spread of positive stories is good news for PRs, failure to plan for the speed at which potential crises can spread is often bad news for business and stakeholder trust. Using data points across publishing and social media, we track two specific scandals to highlight the potential problems PRs may face in today's landscape of increased accountability, and shareability.

This report covers:

✦ How a political scandal spread beyond a publishing paywall into the UK public consciousness
✦ What enables a brand scandal to skip from print to widespread social media virality
✦ How the crisis contagion can be caught by unrelated organisations

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Approach

Data Collection Period:
- The Sunday Times's Richard Sharp Scandal:
  21 January – 30 June 2023
- Reuters' LVMH reporting:
  10 June – 16 Augst 2024

Channels:

X, Reddit, Facebook, TikTok, Online News, TV, Radio, Podcasts, Blogs and Forums

Markets/Languages:

UK data collection.
Analysis collects all mentions in English language.

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News breaking beyond political circles: How the Richard Sharp loan scandal spread

Former BBC Chair Richard Sharp's involvement in a loan to former Prime Minister Boris Johnson is a story that exemplifies just how quickly crisis can cross platforms – and audiences. What would eventually result in the BBC

Chair's resignation in April 2023 began (for those not directly involved, at least) as a Sunday Times exclusive, spread online, and in follow-up reports from journalists taking up the story. As column inches racked up, and public interest grew, an investigation

by the Commissioner for Public Appointments would eventually conclude that Sharp breached public appointment rules. How did this scandal spread so quickly? A mix of public interest, amplification from high-profile figures, and reporters willing to dig further.

Week 1: Exclusive Sunday Times piece revealing Sharp as the guarantor for a £800,000 personal loan for Boris Johnson

Week 8: Sharp faces fresh scrutiny as the BBC's policy on impartiality was challenged by Gary Lineker, who was briefly removed from presenting Match of the Day over tweets criticising the Government

Week 14: Richard Sharp resigns as BBC Chairman, leaving many unsatisfied

Week 4: Richard Sharp appears before the Culture, Media and Sports Committee

@Gabriel_Pogrund
The BBC chairman helped arrange a guarantee on a loan of up to £800K for Boris Johnson weeks before then PM selected him for the role Johnson was told to end Richard Sharp's involvement in his financial affairs by Cab Office 1/7
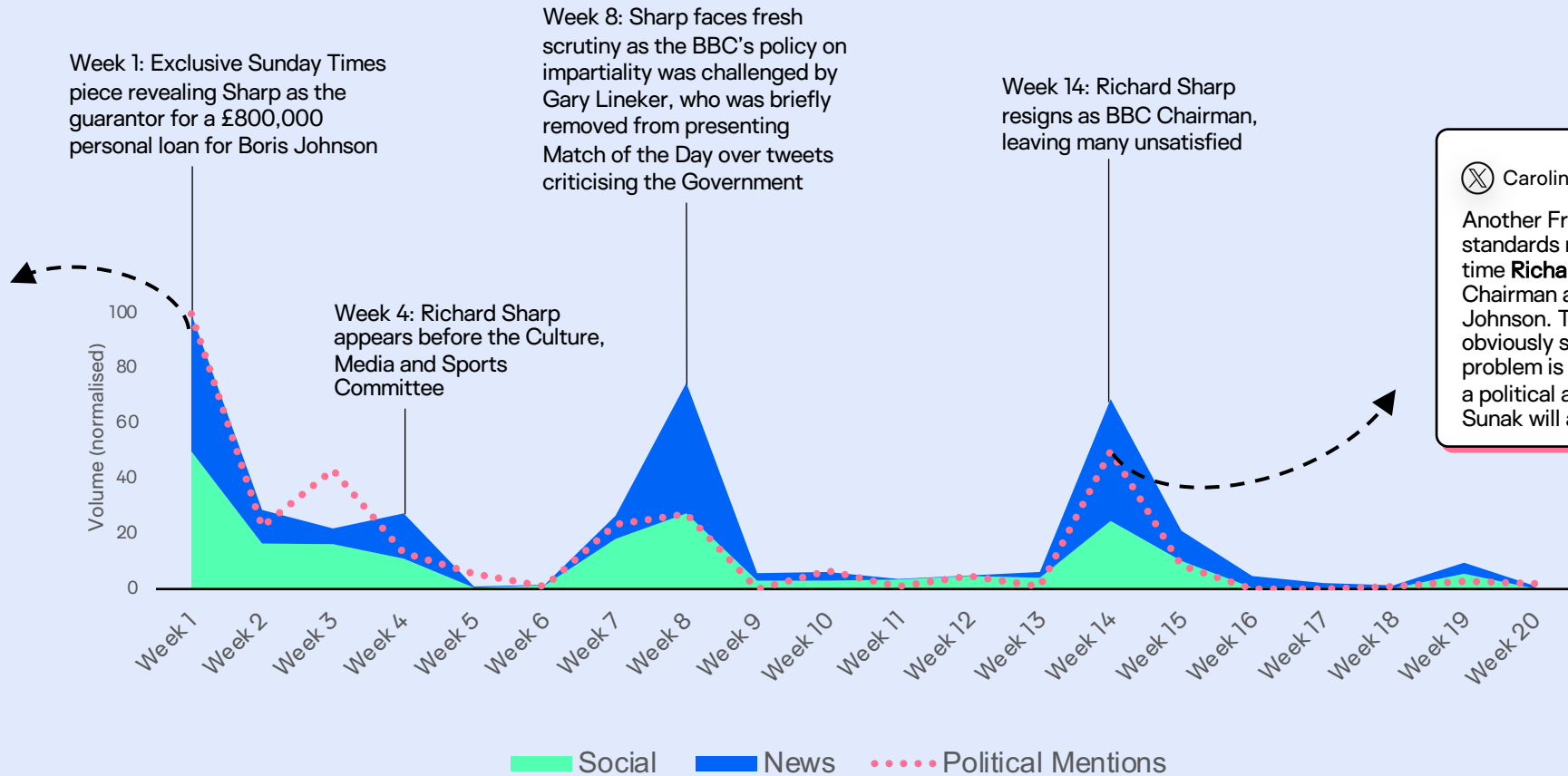
Caroline Lucas MP
Another Friday, another forced standards resignation – this time **Richard Sharp**, BBC Chairman appointed by Boris Johnson. The loan thing obviously stank, but deeper problem is the BBC Chair being a political appointee – and now Sunak will appoint the next one.

Volume (normalised)

100
80
60
40
20
0

Week 1 · Week 2 · Week 3 · Week 4 · Week 5 · Week 6 · Week 7 · Week 8 · Week 9 · Week 10 · Week 11 · Week 12 · Week 13 · Week 14 · Week 15 · Week 16 · Week 17 · Week 18 · Week 19 · Week 20

■ Social ■ News •••• Political Mentions

A deeper look at the Richard Sharp story in political circles

The 21 January 2023 Sunday Times Sharp piece set in motion a conversation that led to his resignation within 14 weeks. Examining the public pronouncements of MPs shows an explosion of speculation across socials, and news of ex-footballer and pundit Gary Lineker's BBC suspension

following his public criticism of government policies would cause a spike in weeks 7 and 8. Political stakeholders then questioned BBC bias (and supposed protection from the Tory government). Week 14 brought Sharp's eventual resignation, and the story quickly died down... Apart from within left-leaning

MP circles. Sharp's resignation was used to draw attention to supposed corruptions in the BBC chair appointment process, and distrust in Tory influence in neutral state appointments. The lesson of the Sharp scandal for PRs faced with a similar reputational crisis? Stories can spread and live on in circles beyond their origin.
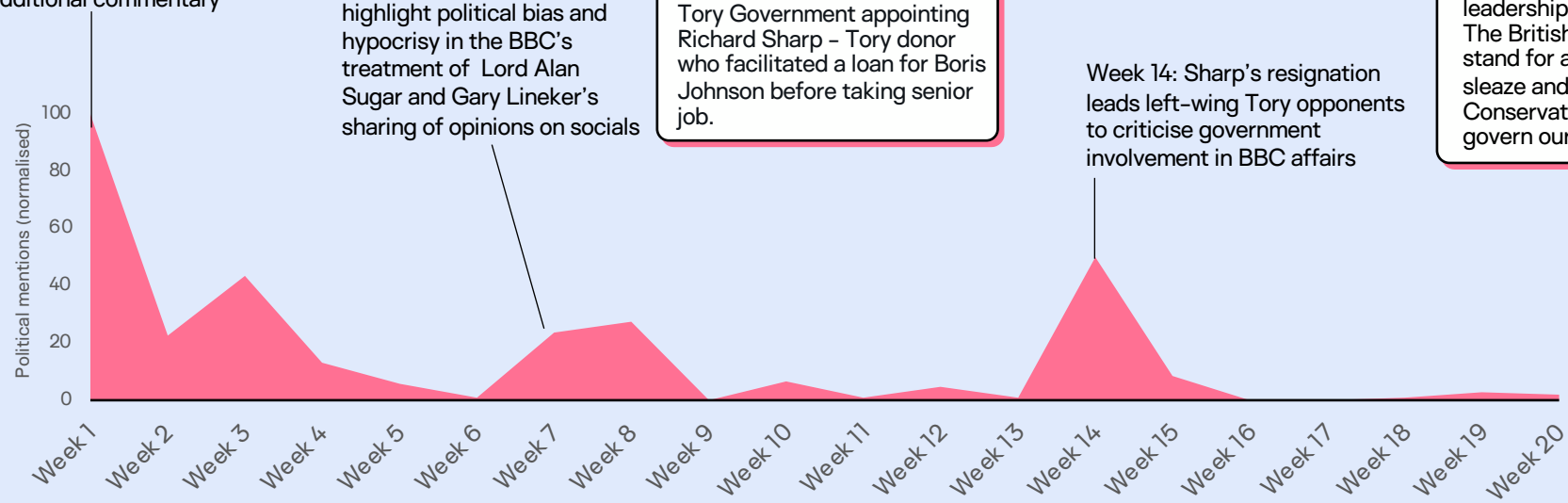
ⓧ John Nicolson, SNP

Pals with Boris Johnson. Pals with Rishi Sunak. And a huge Tory donor. But when I cross-examined him @CommonsDCMS, Richard Sharp said nothing about the huge loan for Boris Johnson he'd helped arrange just before Boris Johnson appointed him BBC Chair.

Week 1: Politicians widely share Whitehall Editor Gabriel Pogrund's post about The Sunday Times' piece, with the most left-wing offering their own additional commentary

Week 7-8: Politicians highlight political bias and hypocrisy in the BBC's treatment of Lord Alan Sugar and Gary Lineker's sharing of opinions on socials

ⓧ Zack Polanski, Green Party

📣 Public service broadcasting must be defended. 💚 The BBC is important to our democracy.📖 The problem is Tory Government appointing Richard Sharp – Tory donor who facilitated a loan for Boris Johnson before taking senior job.

Week 14: Sharp's resignation leads left-wing Tory opponents to criticise government involvement in BBC affairs

ⓧ Liberal Democrats

Boris Johnson should never have been allowed to appoint Richard Sharp. What's worse is Rishi Sunak didn't show leadership by sacking him. The British people won't stand for any more of this sleaze and scandal. The Conservatives aren't fit to govern our great country.

Y-axis: Political mentions (normalised) — 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100

X-axis: Week 1 through Week 20

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Mentions of the Richard Sharp scandal by political figures between 21 Jan 2023 – 30 Jun 2023 across X, Reddit, blogs, forums, online news, TV, radio, and podcasts. Source: Vuelio Political Monitoring and Pulsar TRAC.
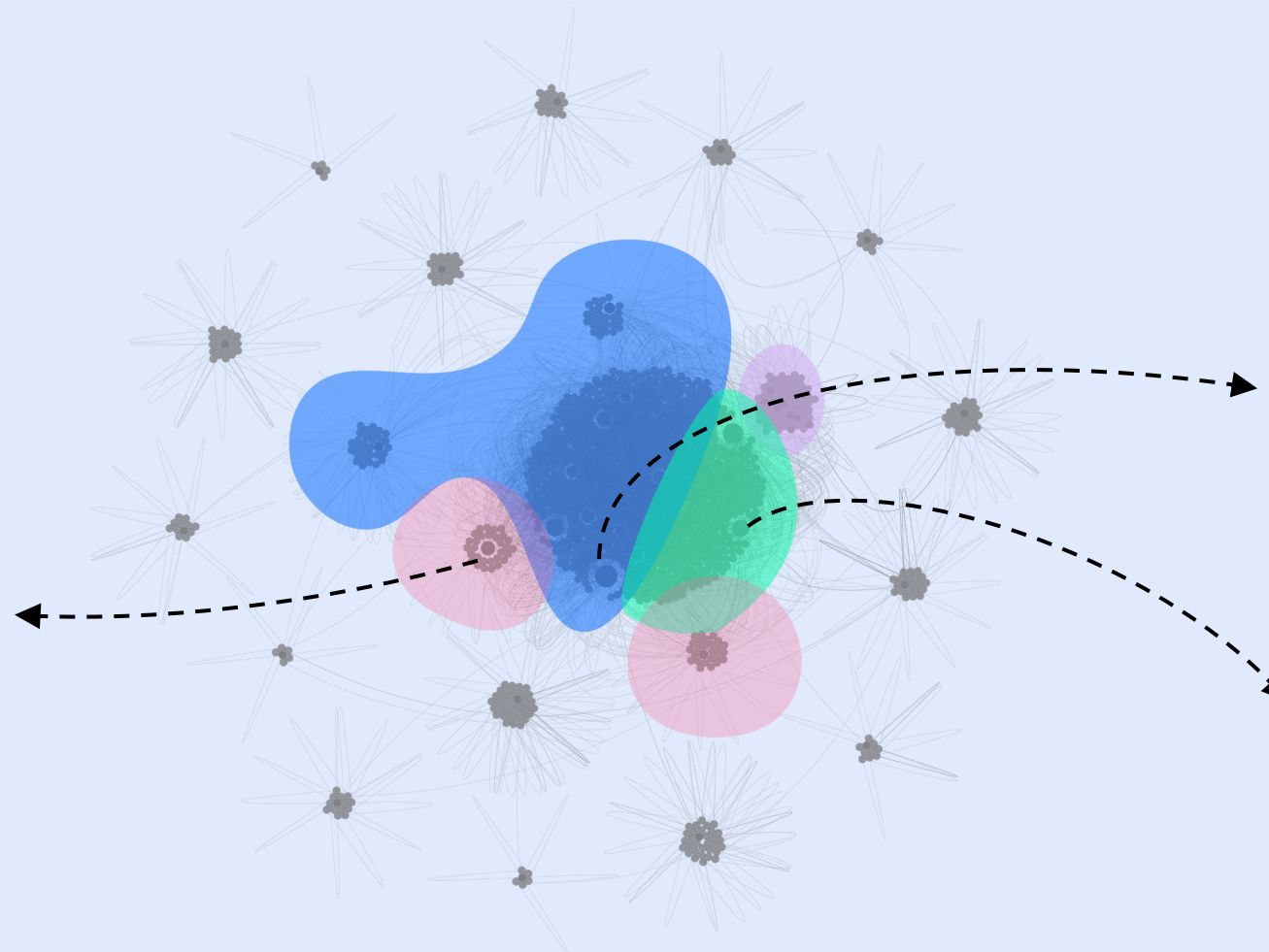
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Who drove the Richard Sharp scandal to a wider audience?

The network sharing the Sharp story was clearly split between staff reporters and independent 'citizen' journalists. Each spread key news moments, but with distinct differences. While 'traditional' journalists offered their professional opinions with commentary, citizen journalists were free to add extra sensationalism. Outside of this dense bubble was conversation between MPs, with their own motivations. These generally more left-leaning politicians openly showed their disdain for bias in the BBC as well as the Tory government of the time. Another important force – Reddit, where conversation echoed that in the press. This scandal grasped the attention of the press, politicians, and public – a perfect storm of crisis to overcome.

- 🟦 Journalists & authors
- 🟩 Activists
- 🟪 Political & news subreddits
- 🟥 MPs

Ⓧ Gabriel Pogrund

EXCLUSIVE🔴w/ @HarryYorke1

The BBC chairman helped arrange a guarantee on a loan of up to £800K for Boris Johnson weeks before then PM selected him for the role. Johnson was told to end Richard Sharp's involvement in his financial affairs by Cab Office 1/7

Ⓧ Zarah Sultana MP

It's a good time to remember that the Chairman of the BBC is Richard Sharp, someone who's donated £400,000+ to the Conservatives and helped Boris Johnson with an £800,000 loan.

Let's remember that when they talk about BBC "impartiality".

Ⓧ @Britain_People

Richard Sharp helped facilitate a loan of £800k for Boris Johnson, who weeks later appointed him to his role at the BBC. Which he failed to disclose. Sharp also donated £400,000 to the Conservative Party. RETWEET if you want him to resign.

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Map of engagers in the Richard Sharp scandal, between 21 Jan 2023 – 30 Jun 2023 across X, Reddit, blogs, forums, online news, TV, radio, and podcasts.
Source: Pulsar TRAC.

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LVMH: A Reuters scoop amplified across the world by social sharing

Global big-name brands can become big news for all the wrong reasons very quickly, too. On 11 June 2024, Reuters reported that luxury goods company LVMH – owner of Dior, Armani, and Givenchy, as well as Tiffany, Moët, Sephora and Fenty – was facing court administration due to accusations of exploitative labour practices. The report was shared widely, along with related articles from WSJ and Fortune.

Conversation would spike again three weeks later, when an WSJ article was shared on X by a venture capital influencer focusing specifically on labour practices for luxury handbags. While the attention lasted only a day, New York Post picked up this thread, pushing the conversation further.

An online personality shares a WSJ deep-dive article on X, which garners 6.1M views (4 Jul 2024)

Reuters reveals Dior is under investigation for labour exploitation in Italy (11 June 2024)

Legend:
- Online News
- X
- Reddit
- Broadcast

Week 0 · Week 1 · Week 2 · Week 3 · Week 4 · Week 5 · Week 6 · Week 7 · Week 8

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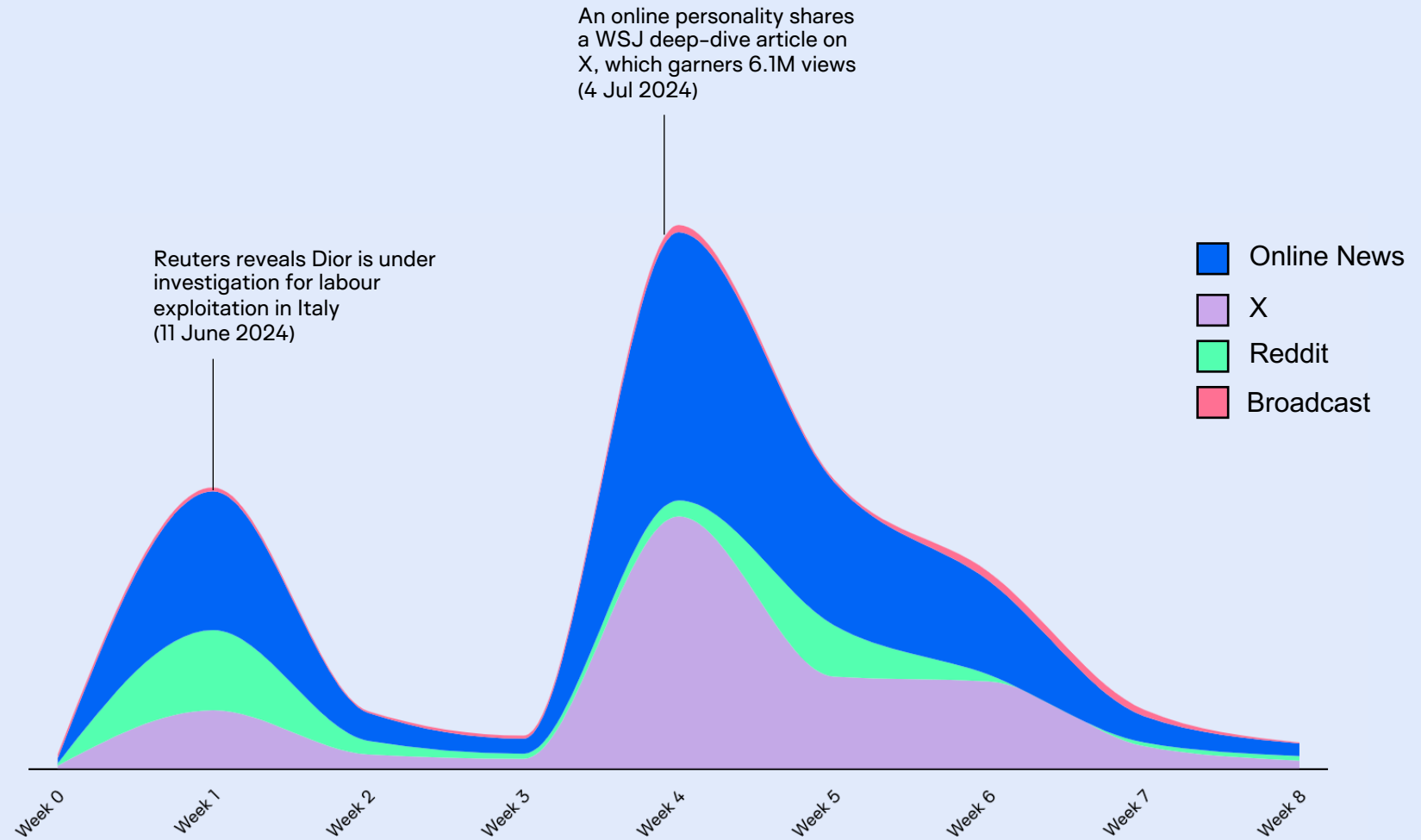
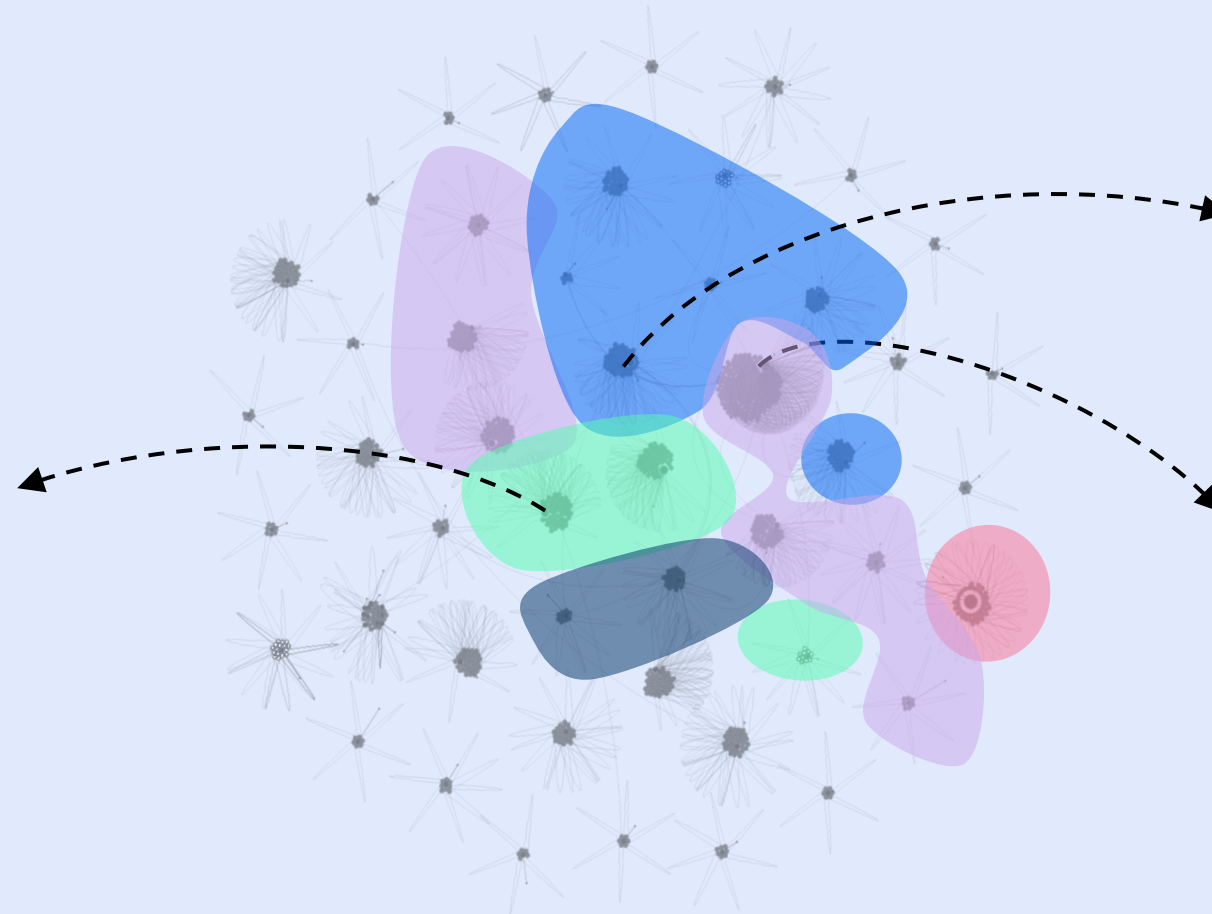# Fashion communities propel story further into mainstream

The LVMH story became a flashpoint for various interest groups, quickly moving on from mainland European news followers to global fashion fans. Influencers within this space spread the story to those outside the audience of the initial news channels.

As political influencers joined the conversation, the debate grew polarised, further escalating the story's reach. MAGA factions reinterpreted the narrative, casting it as evidence of media bias and tying labour issues to capitalism.

In contrast, activists underscored anti-exploitation messages, connecting the brand's actions to broader movements for social justice. Yet, the story's fragmented spread across disconnected networks ultimately prevented it from achieving sustained impact.

Legend

- **News Followers**
- **Fashion Enthusiasts**
- **MAGA**
- **Activists**
- **Fashion Redditors**

(X) I think we should be more focused on the fact that [BLACKPINK Lisa's] alleged boyfriend is the heir of LVMH which heavily invests in Israel and funds the genocide in Palestine as well as exploiting countries in Africa for precious stones/gems and labour.

(X) DEMS ETHICS-->Do As I Say Not As I Do
"Italian prosecutors uncovered Dior pays only $57 to produce bags retailing for $2,780!"
"investigation extended to include Giorgio Armani"
"exploited workers round-the-clock production" Let them eat cake!

(X) DWNews
€3,000 for a €60 bag? Police raids in Italy on workshops manufacturing luxury handbags revealed how little it's costing Dior to make its products — largely due to exploitation of workers.

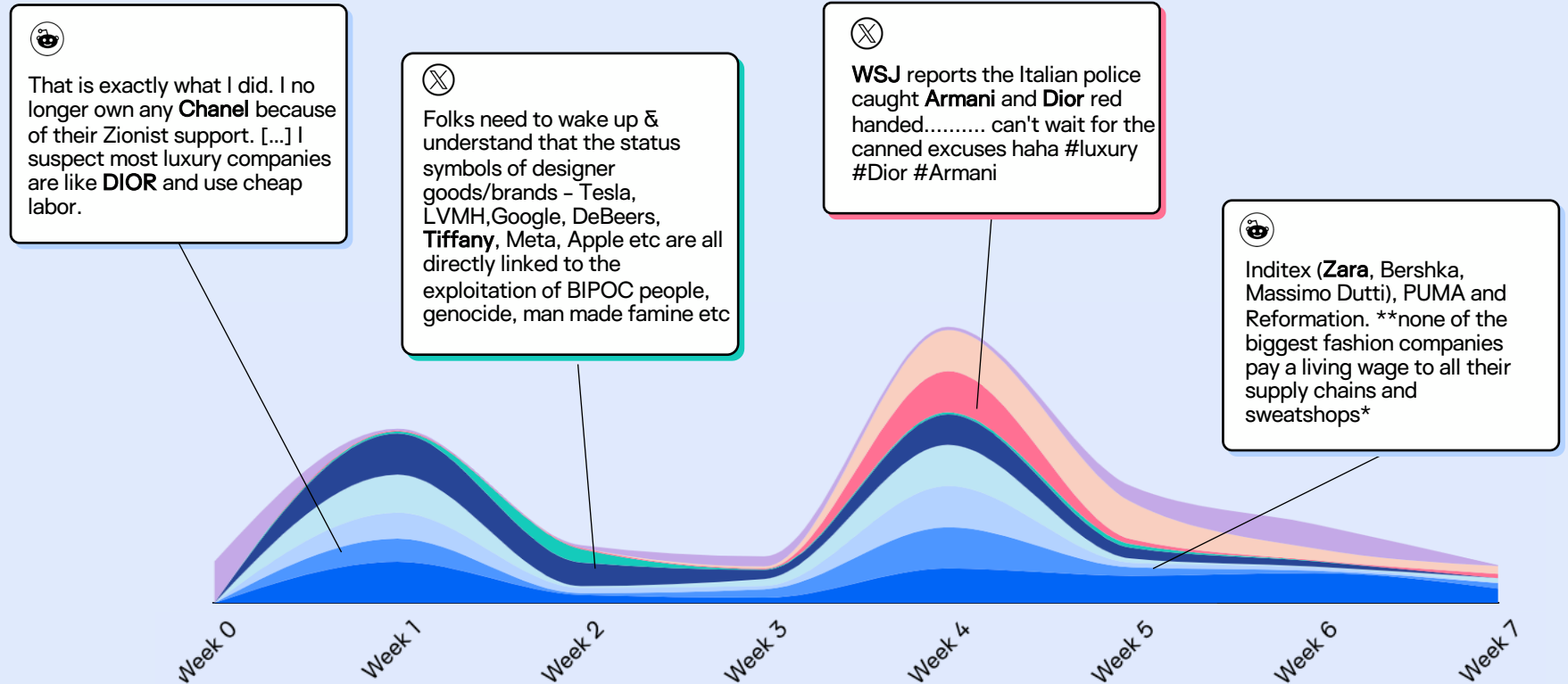# Which brands were pulled into the LVMH scandal tractor beam?

Accusations would eventually spill over to other designer labels as the public speculated on possible impacts within the high-end goods industry. Would changes be made in line with modern consumer expectations of more ethical business practices?

Four weeks on from the original Reuters report, the story reached a wider audience with coverage by WSJ and Business Insider. This new wave of coverage generated discussions on Reddit, expanding the scope from luxury brands into a broader discussion of supply chain issues. This entire story cycle took a speedy seven weeks to play out, dragging seemingly unrelated brands like Tesla, Google, and Apple into the public's speculative spotlight.

News coverage started a wider conversation, but social media posts would question other organisations with high-ticket prices. On social media, crisis can be contagious.

Legend

- LVMH, Dior & Armani
- Gucci
- Chanel
- Prada
- Zara
- Tiffany
- Wall Street Journal
- Business Insider
- Reuters

Annotations

That is exactly what I did. I no longer own any Chanel because of their Zionist support. [...] I suspect most luxury companies are like DIOR and use cheap labor.

Folks need to wake up & understand that the status symbols of designer goods/brands – Tesla, LVMH, Google, DeBeers, Tiffany, Meta, Apple etc are all directly linked to the exploitation of BIPOC people, genocide, man made famine etc

WSJ reports the Italian police caught Armani and Dior red handed.......... can't wait for the canned excuses haha #luxury #Dior #Armani

Inditex (Zara, Bershka, Massimo Dutti), PUMA and Reformation. **none of the biggest fashion companies pay a living wage to all their supply chains and sweatshops*

X-axis

Week 0 · Week 1 · Week 2 · Week 3 · Week 4 · Week 5 · Week 6 · Week 7

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