

On the Security and Privacy Risks of Browser Extensions

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

Keynote, GDR RSD / ASF Winter School, January 8th 2026

Dr.-Ing. Aurore (/ʊRʊR/) FASS

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



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

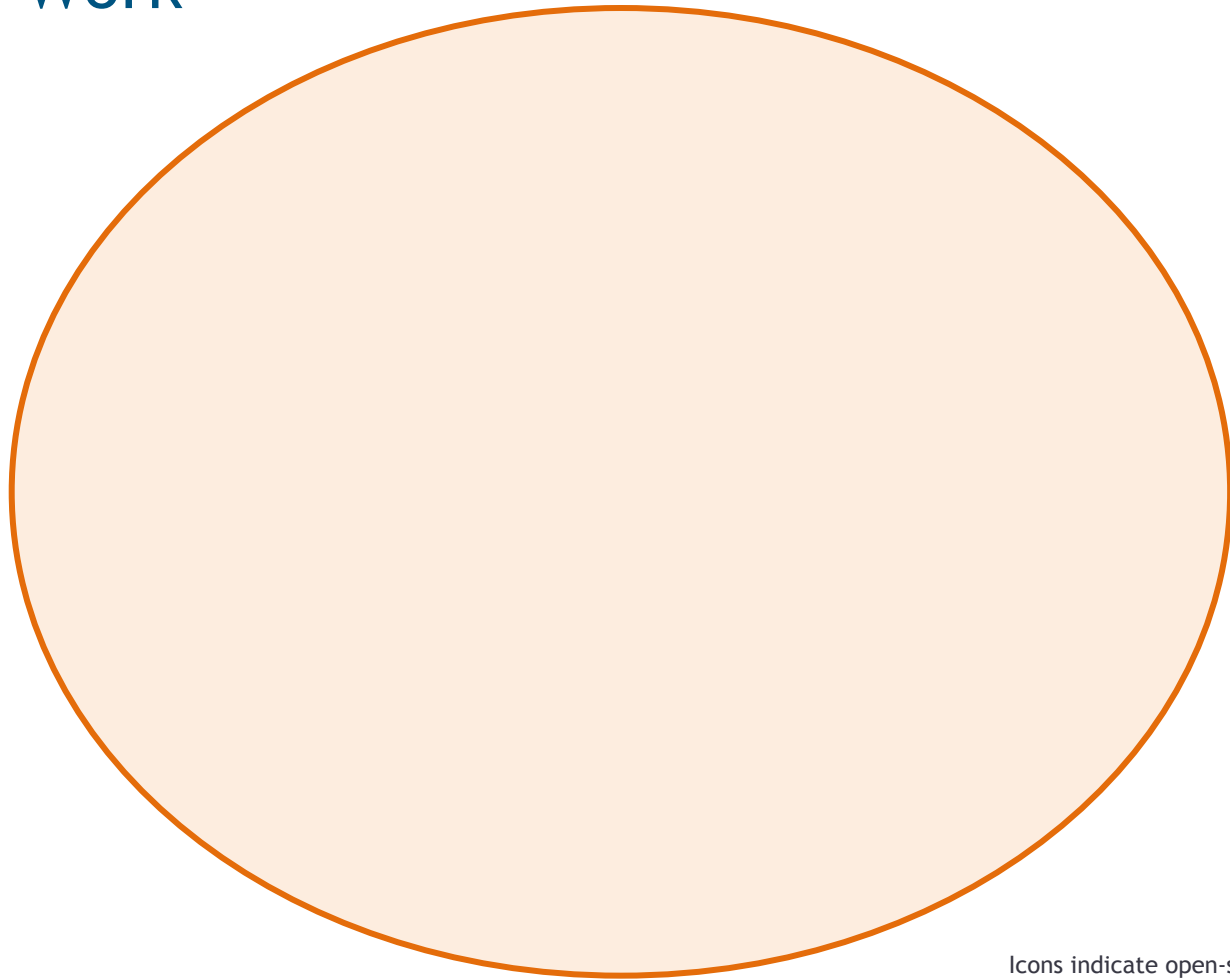
🇺🇸 2021–23: Visiting Assistant Professor at **Stanford** (US)

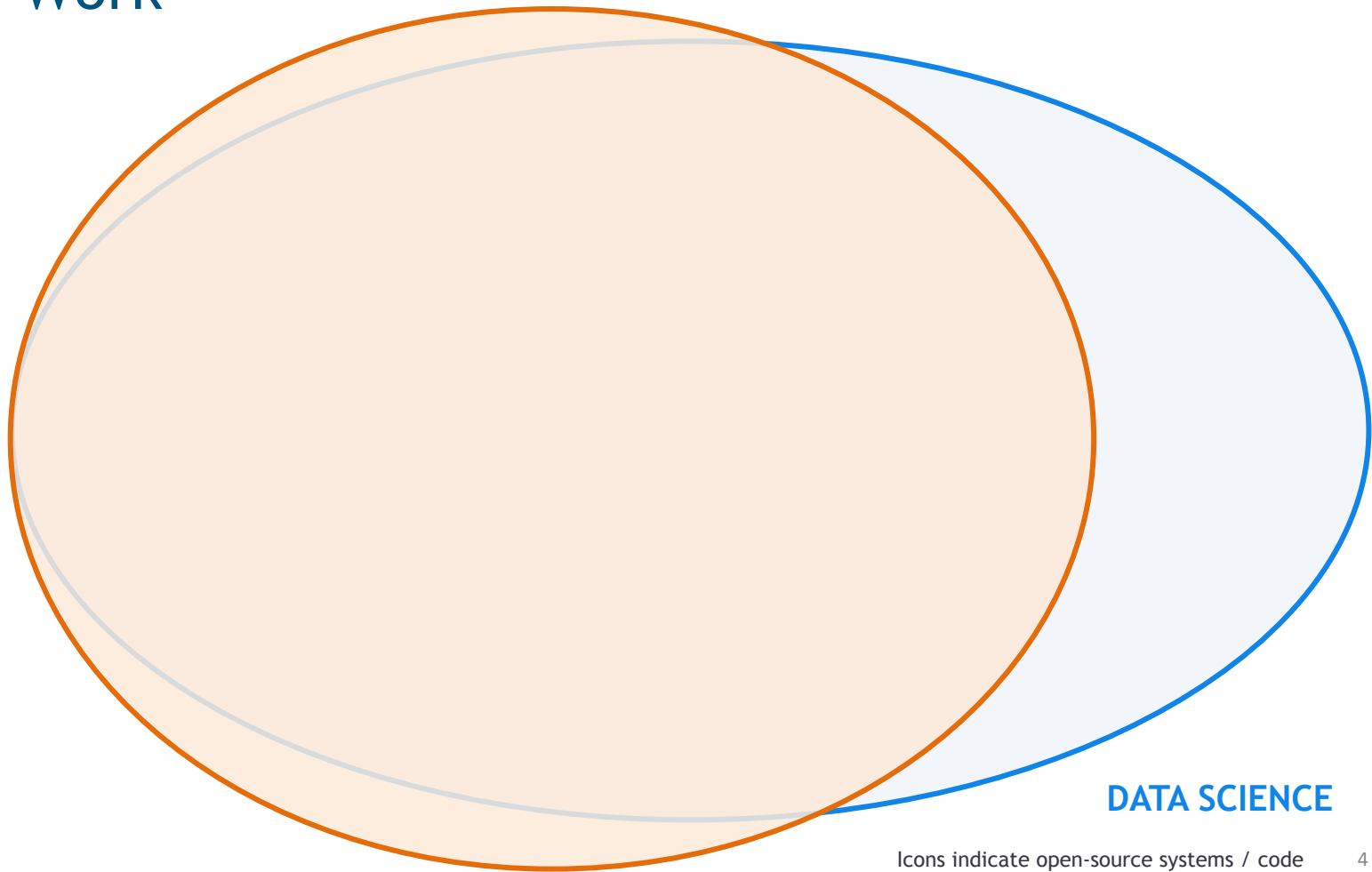


🇩🇪 2023–25: Tenure-Track Faculty W2 at **CISPA** (DE)

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







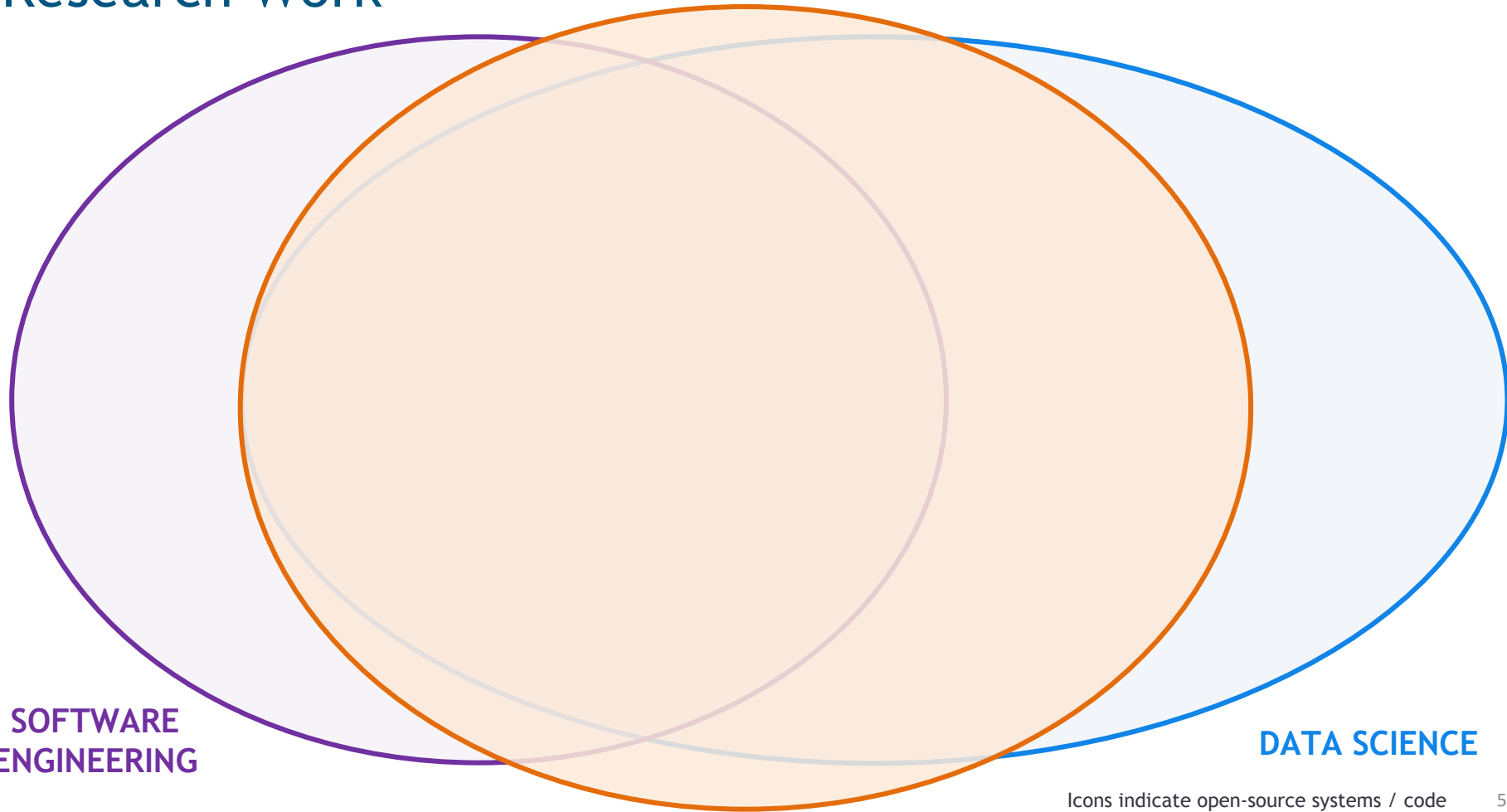
DATA SCIENCE

Research Work

WEB SECURITY & PRIVACY

SOFTWARE
ENGINEERING

DATA SCIENCE





Malicious
JavaScript

Browser
Extensions



Moog et al.
DSN 2021



Agarwal et al.
CCS 2024



Rosenzweig
et al. TWEB
2025

Fass et al.
DIMVA
2018



Fass et al.
CCS 2019

Fass et al.
ACSAC
2019



Fass et al.
CCS 2021

Hsu et al.
AsiaCCS
2024

Malicious
JavaScript

Browser
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Internet
Measurements



Moog et al.
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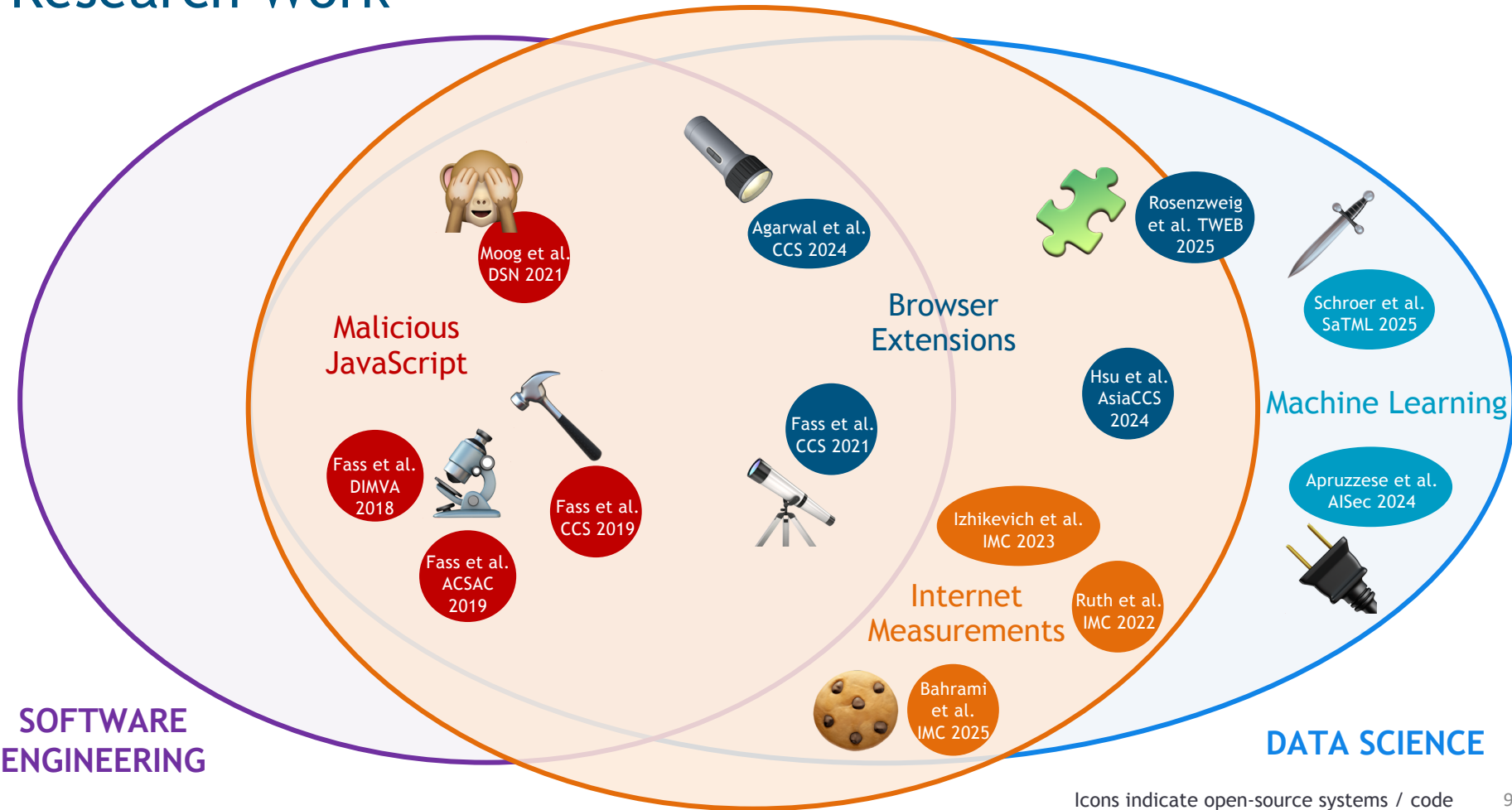
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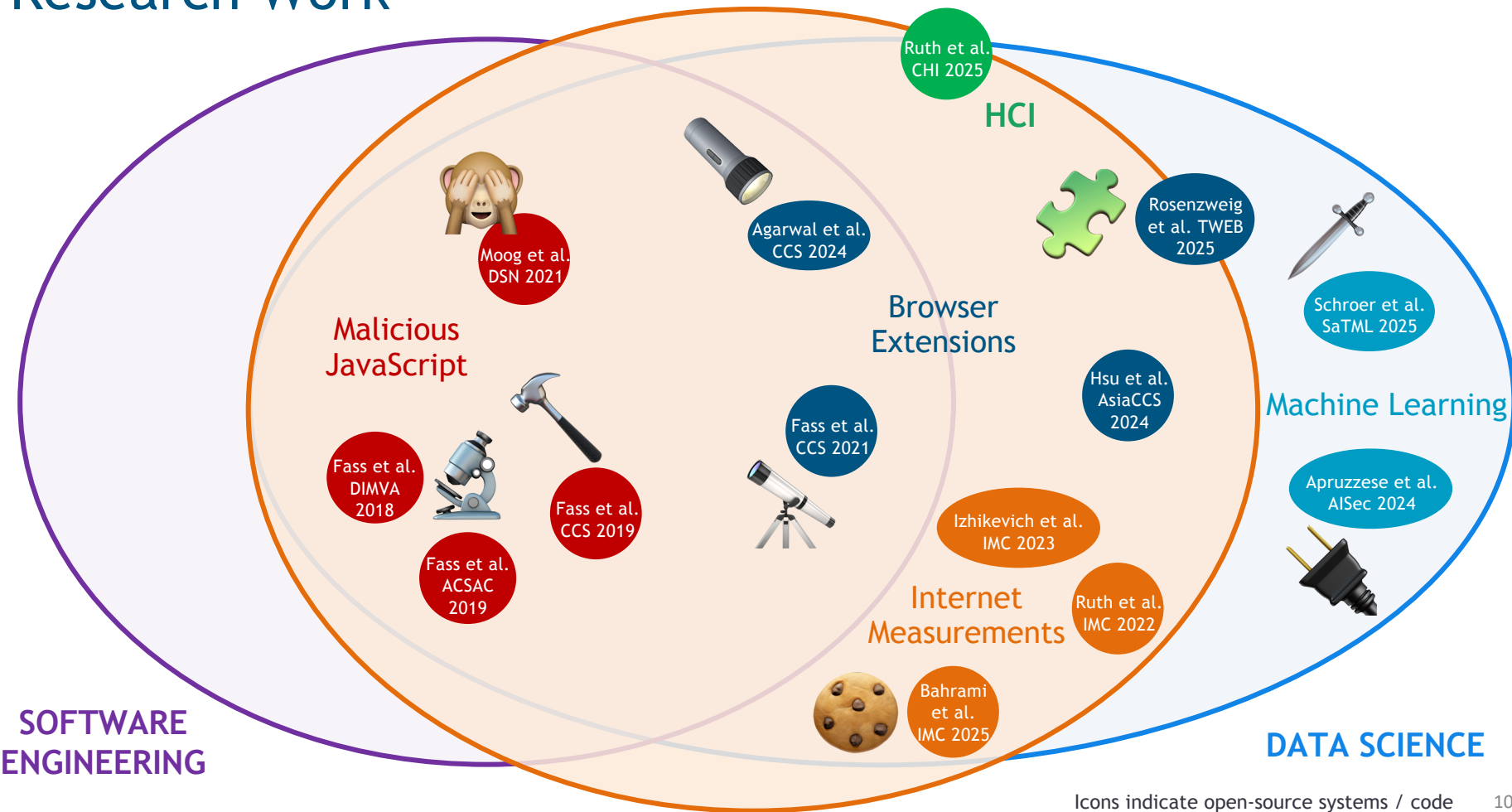
Izhikevich et al.
IMC 2023

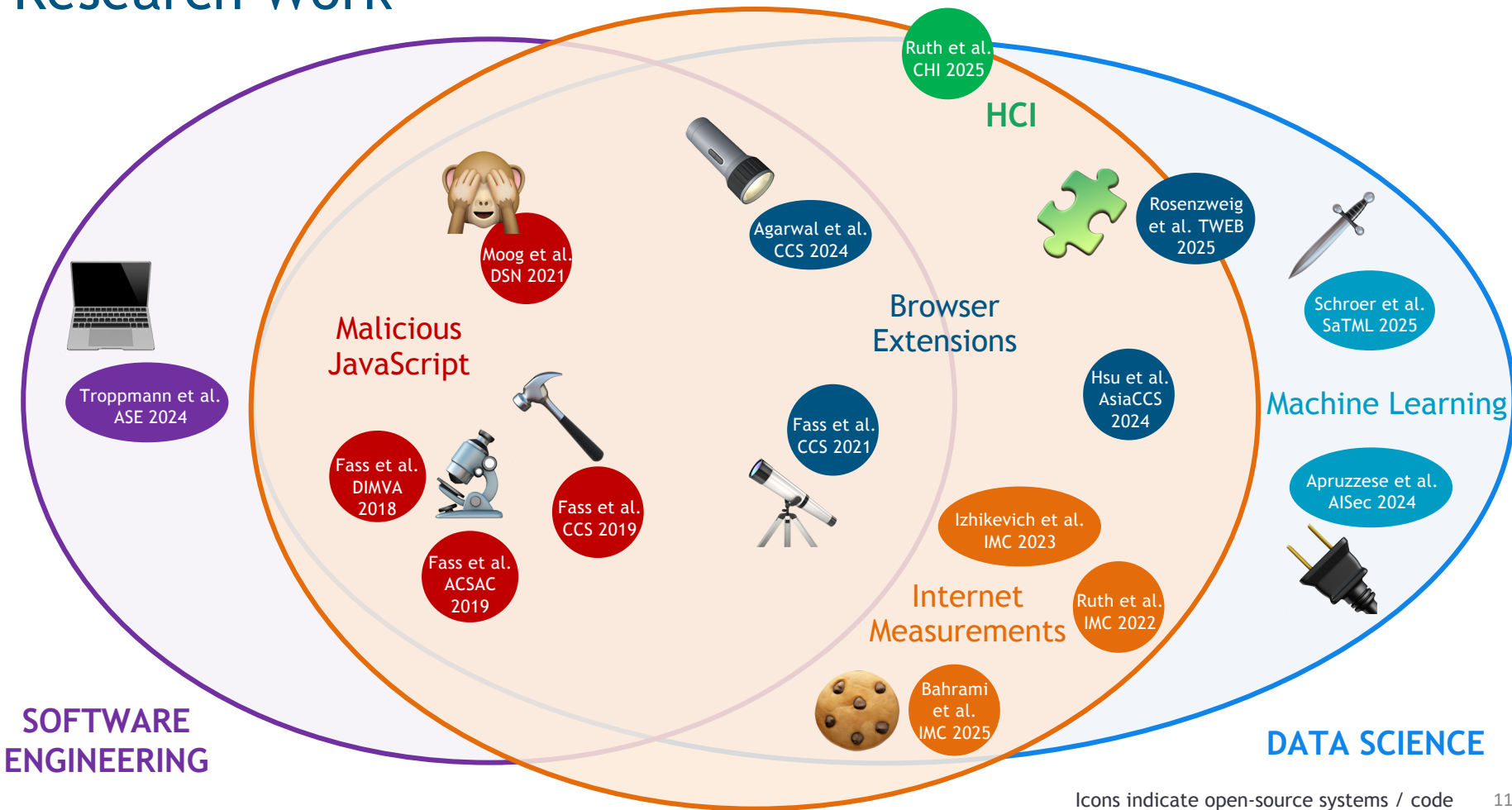
Ruth et al.
IMC 2022



Bahrami
et al.
IMC 2025

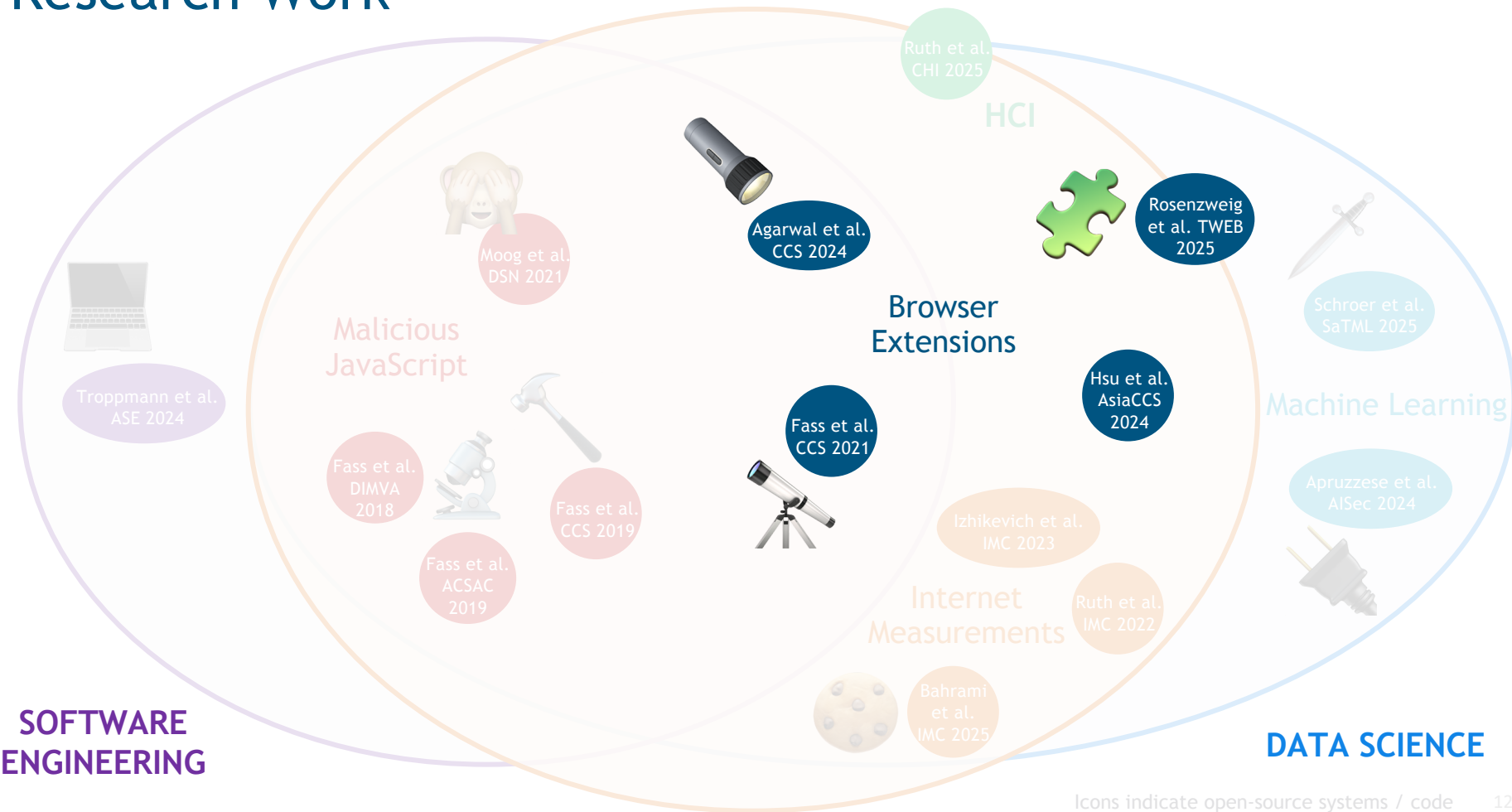






Research Work

WEB SECURITY & PRIVACY



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

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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



Skype

Offered by: www.skype.com



Adobe Acrobat

Offered by: Adobe Inc.



Grammarly for Chrome

Offered by: grammarly.com



Honey

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



Google Translate

Offered by: translate.google.com



LastPass: Free Password Manager

Offered by: LastPass



Cisco Webex Extension

Offered by: webex.com

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

➤ Necessitates a thorough **security and privacy assessment**

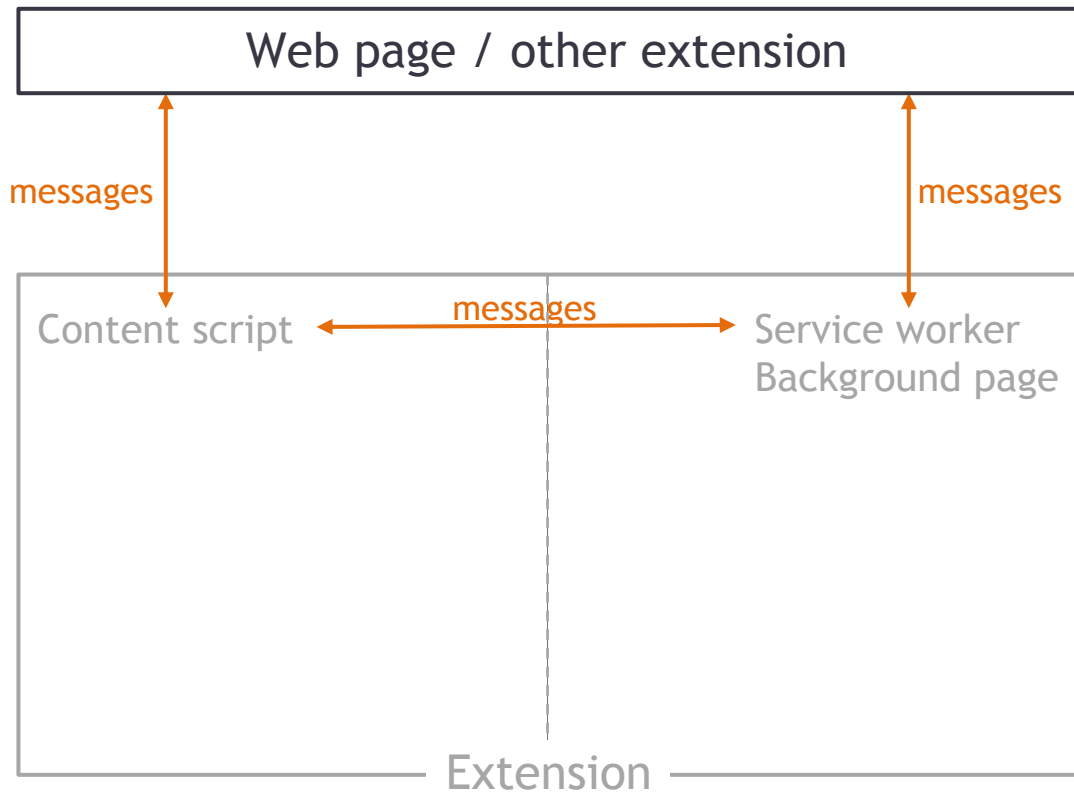
Background – manifest.json

- 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.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]

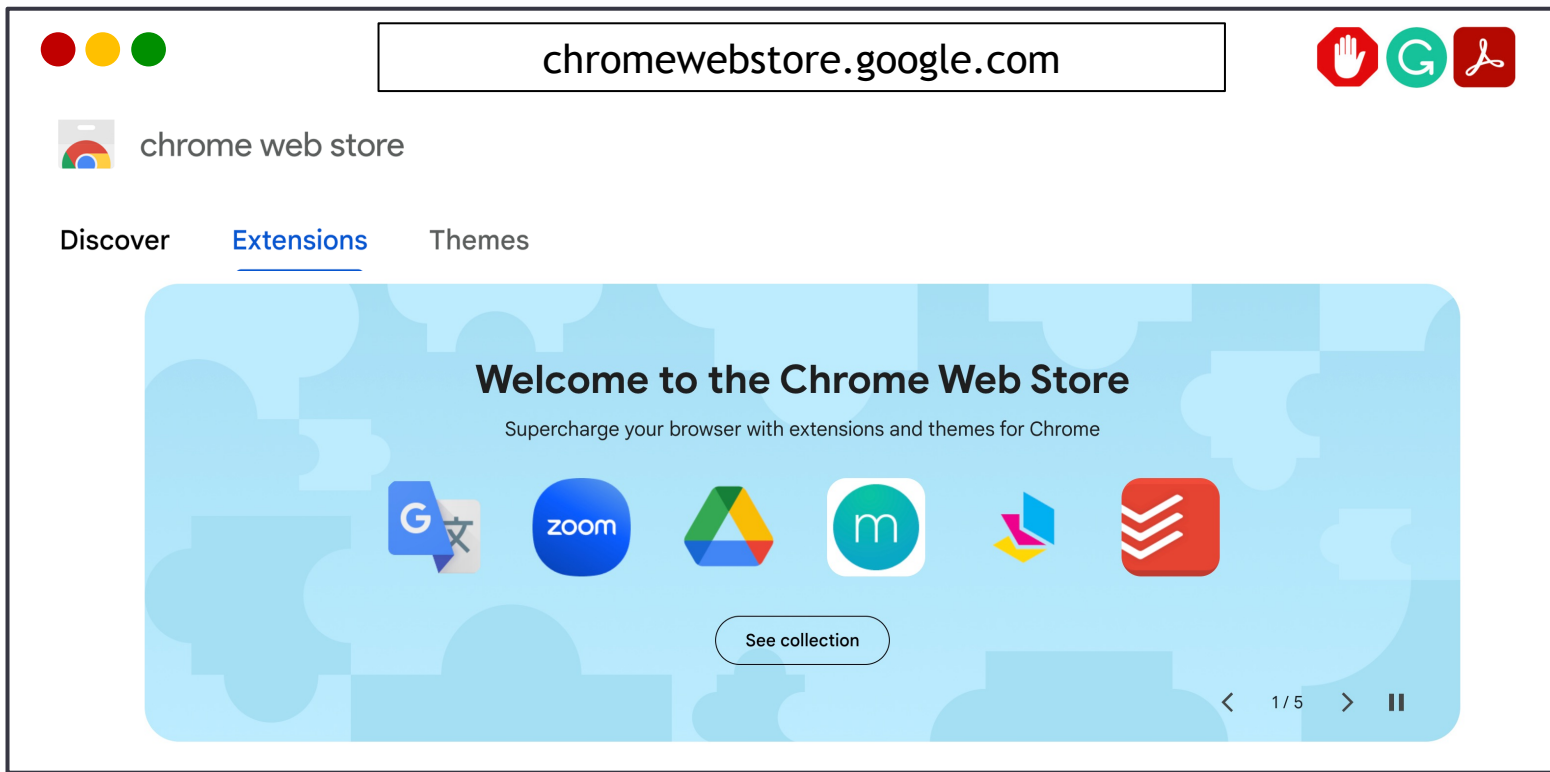
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➤ **Security-Noteworthy Extensions (SNE) [1]**

How are Security-Noteworthy Extensions (SNE) Installed?



How are Security-Noteworthy Extensions (SNE) Installed?



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?

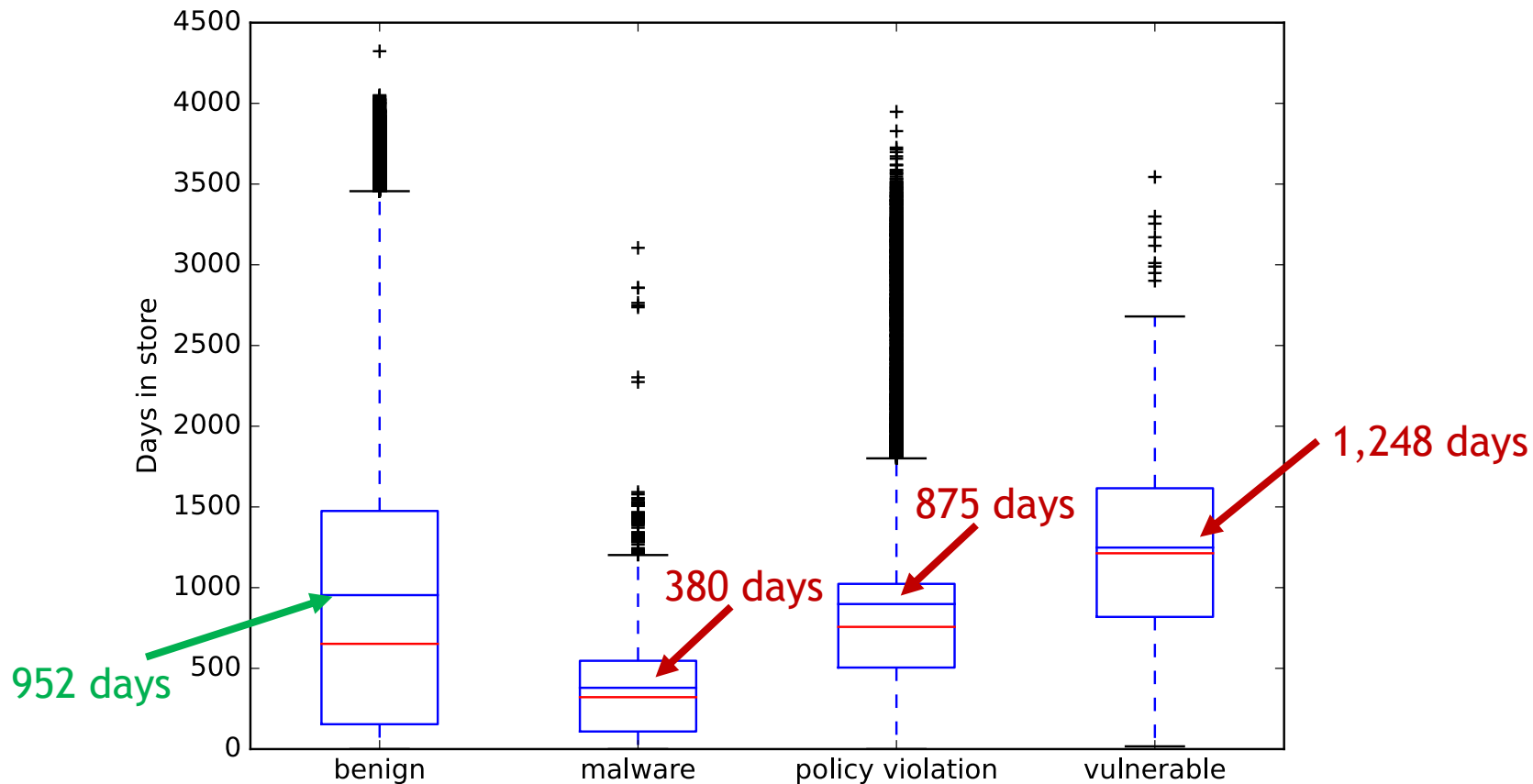
In *ACM AsiaCCS 2024*. Sheryl Hsu, Manda Tran, and Aurore Fass

Hsu et al.
AsiaCCS
2024

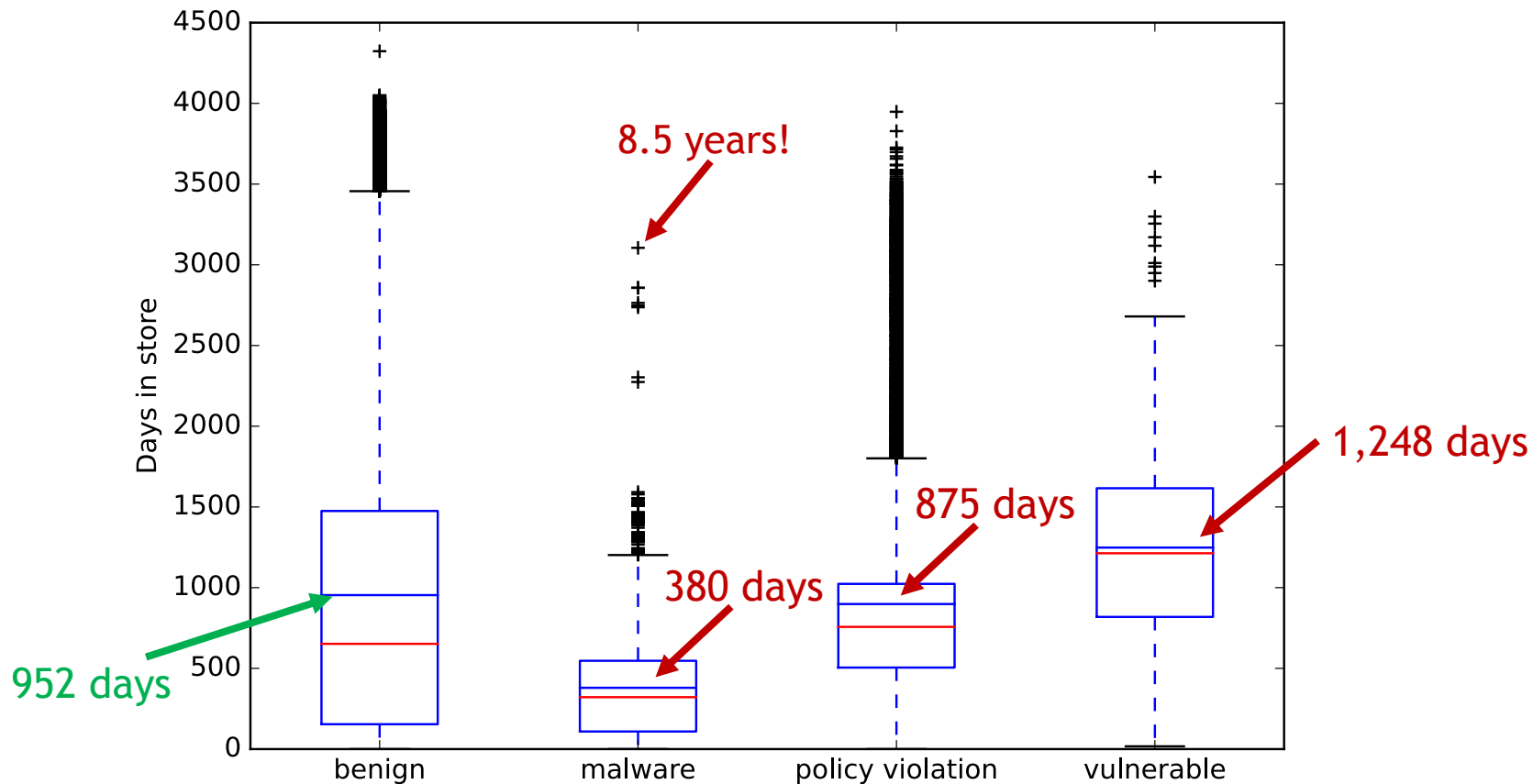
Browser Extension Collection: Chrome-Stats

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

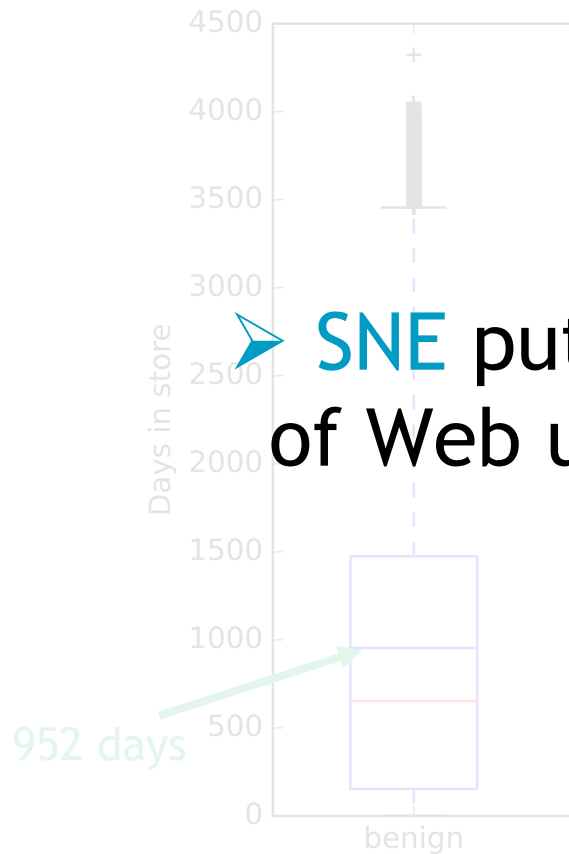
Number of Days in the CWS



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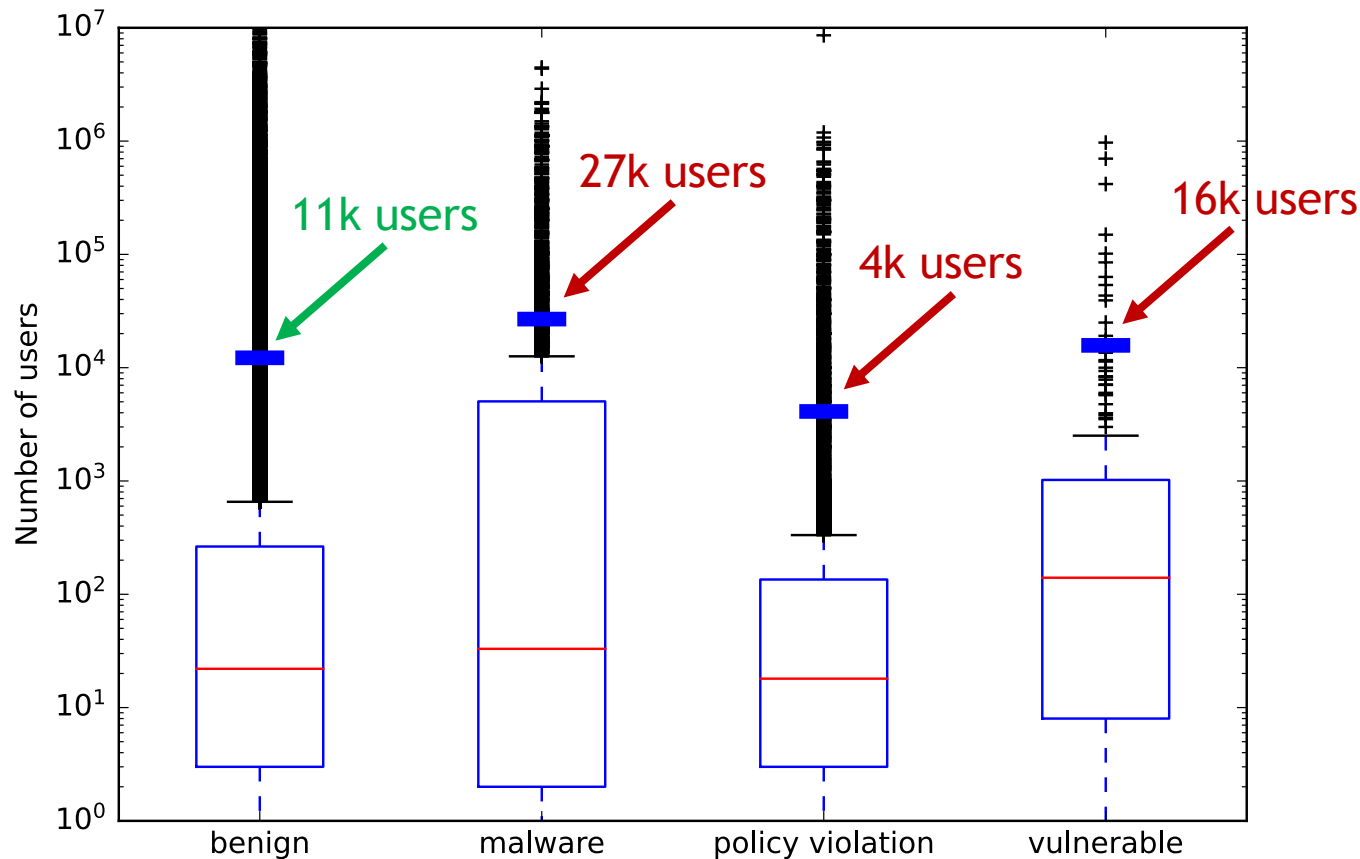
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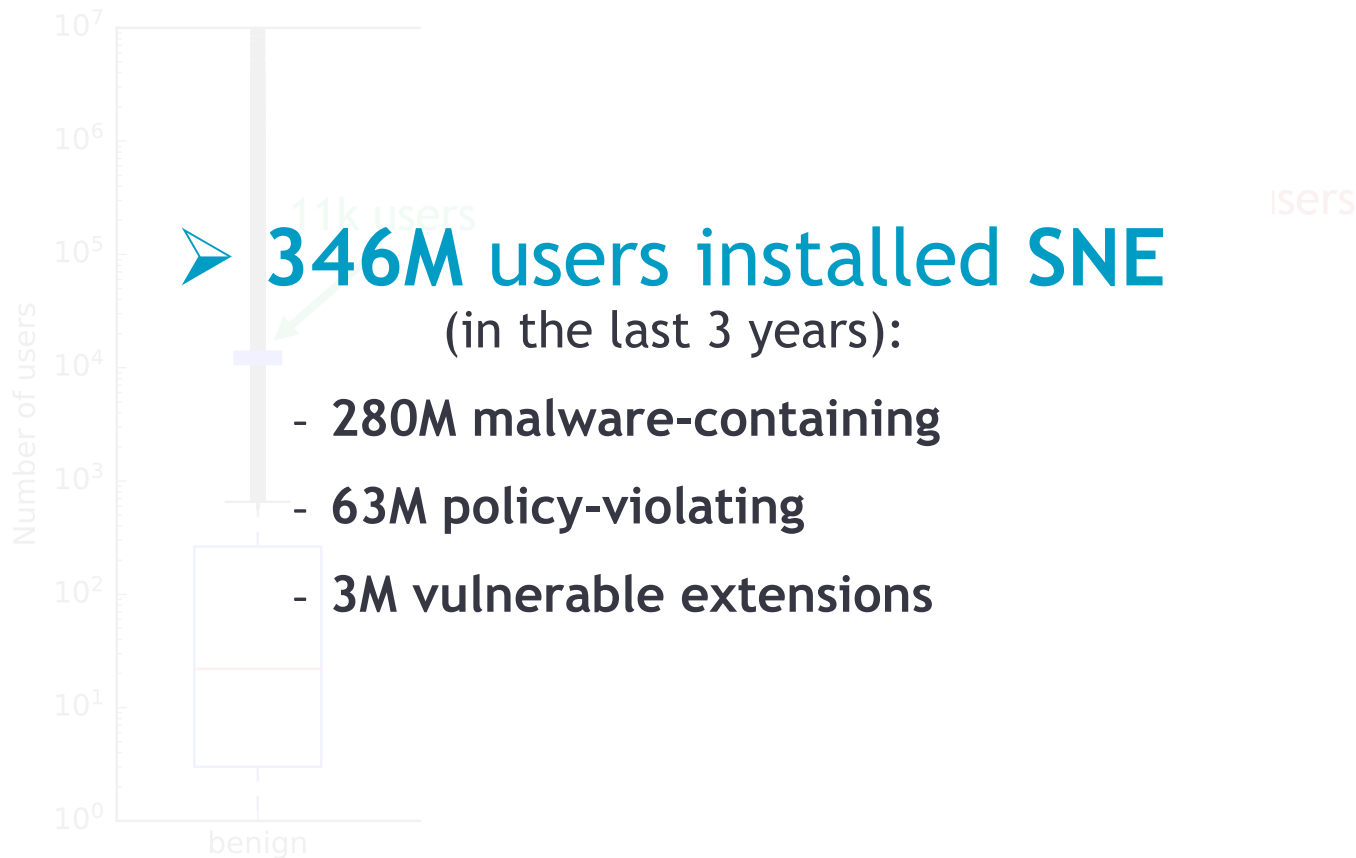
➤ SNE put the security & privacy of Web users *at risk for years*

,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.

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Jun 24, 2024, 06:57am EDT

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

The Register

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

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TECHSPOT

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

TECH > INNOVATION > CYBERSECURITY

280 Million Google Chrome Users Installed Dangerous Extensions, Study Finds

Daevy Winder Senior Contributor
Daevy Winder is a senior contributor to Forbes, covering tech and security.

July 5, 2024



How safe are Google Chrome extensions? - FORBES (IMAGE COURTESY VIA GETTY IMAGES)

The Register



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

All depends on how you use it, Chrome's Easter eggs claim 10% fail rate

TECH > INNOVATION > CYBERSECURITY

million people
re-infected
in the last 3 years
talls include malware

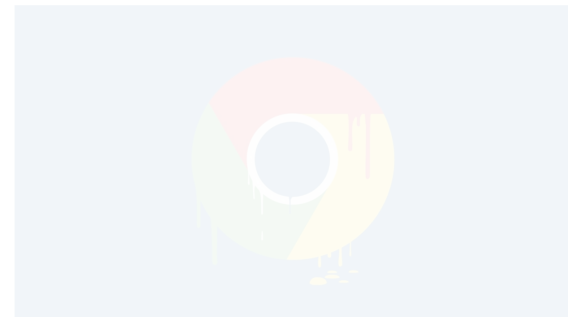
This review process weeds out the overwhelming majority of bad extensions before they even get published. In 2024, less than 1% of all installs from the Chrome Web Store were found to include malware. We're proud of this record and yet some bad extensions still get through, which is why we also monitor 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 5, 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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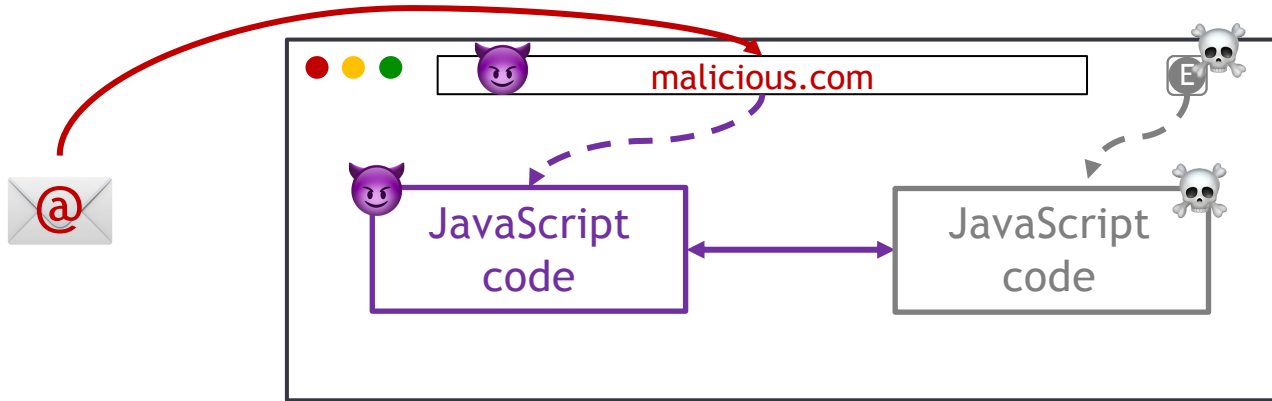
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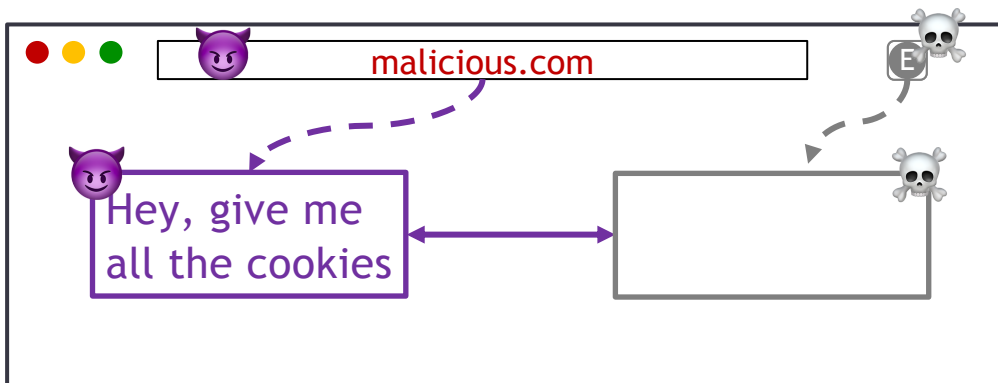
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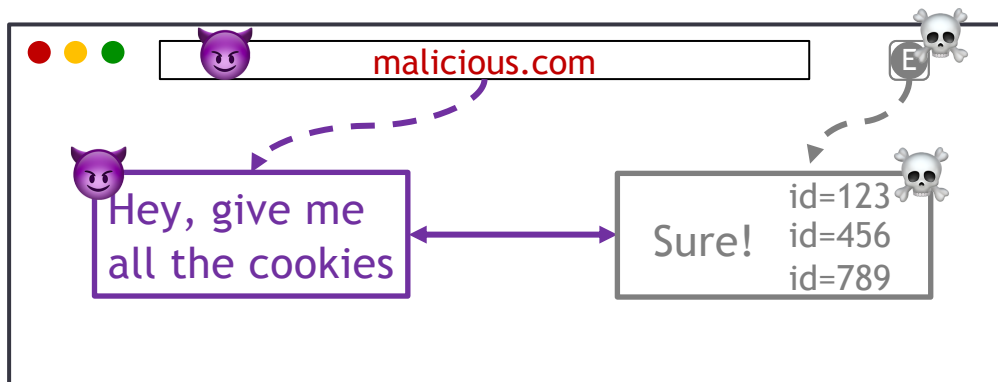
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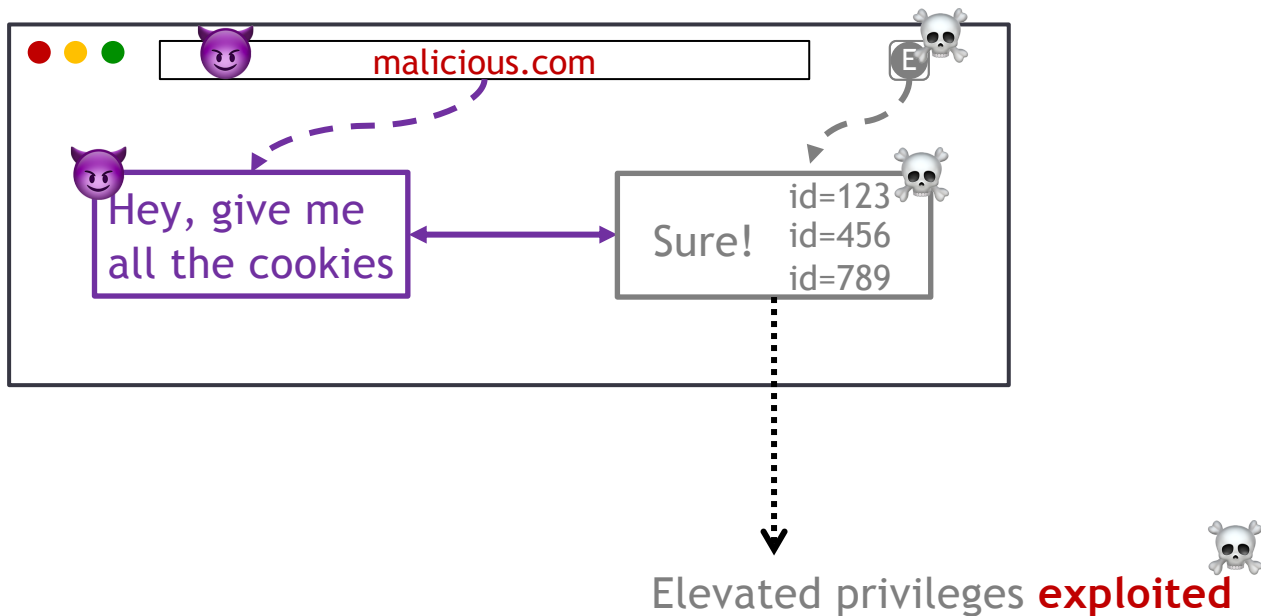
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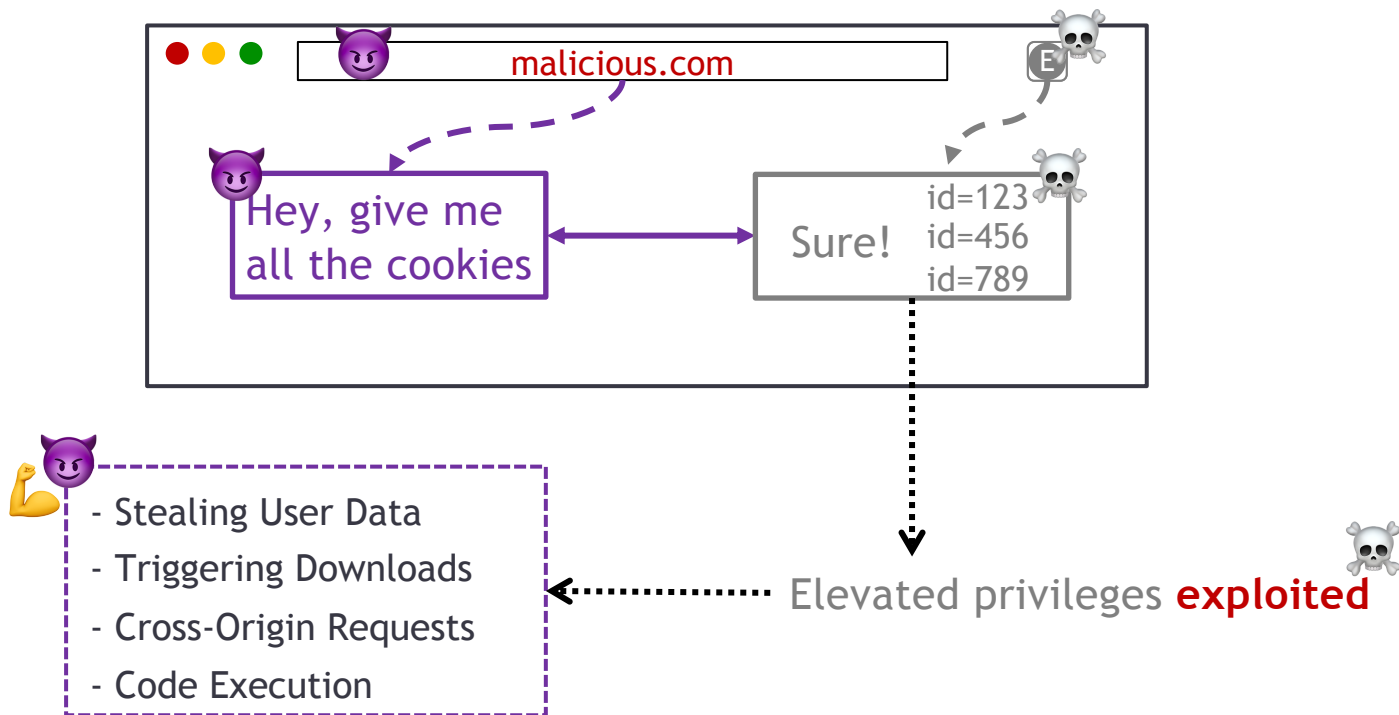
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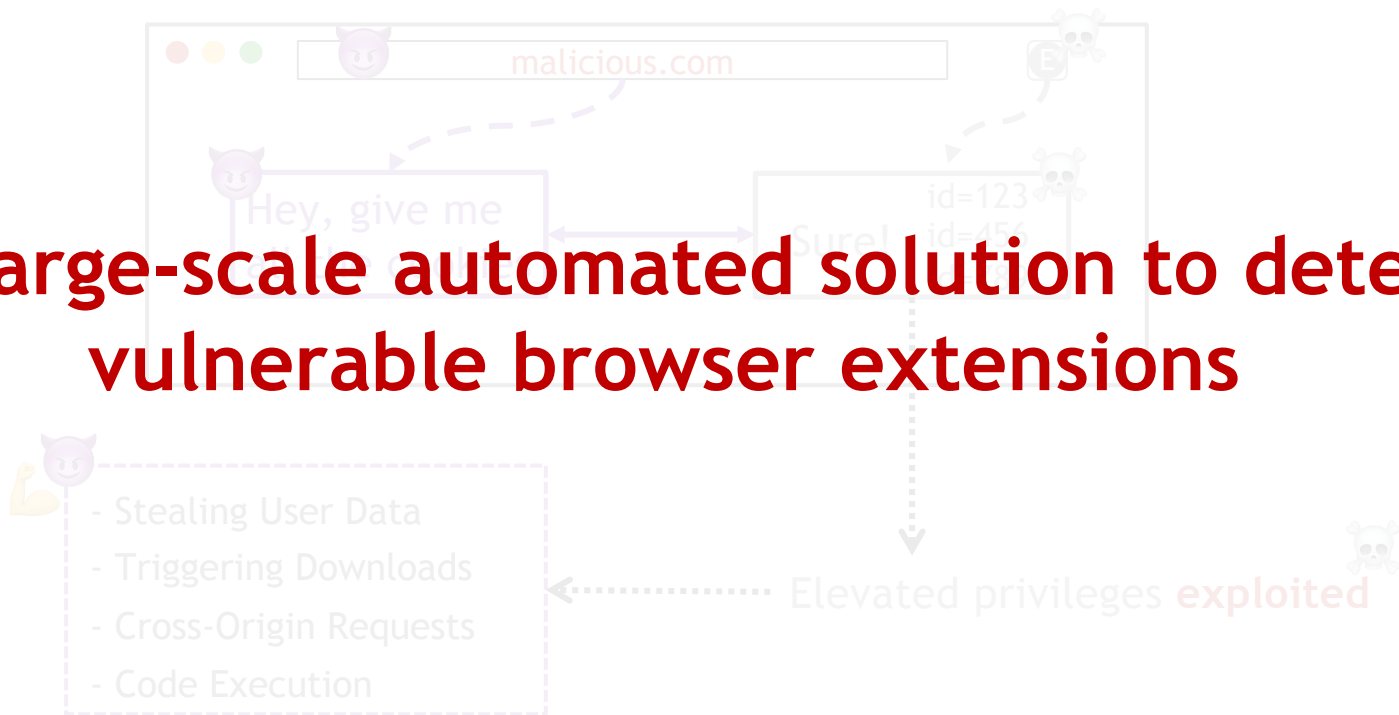
Challenging to detect due to their inherently benign intent (*benign-but-buggy*)



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



Detecting Vulnerable Extensions



> DOUBLEX: Statically Detecting Vulnerable Data Flows in Browser Extensions

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



Detecting Vulnerable Extensions



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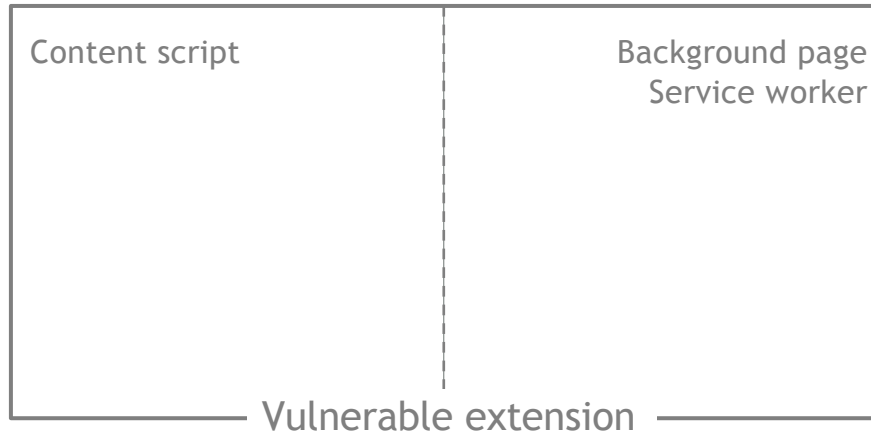
DOUBLEX: Statically Detecting Vulnerable Data Flows in Browser Extensions at Scale
Aurore Fass, Dolière Francis Somé, Michael Backes, and Ben Stock
CCS 2021

Abstract
Browser extensions are a popular way to enhance the functionality of web browsers. However, they are also a common source of security vulnerabilities. In this paper, we present DOUBLEX, a static analysis tool that detects vulnerable data flows in browser extensions. DOUBLEX is designed to be scalable and accurate, and it is able to detect a wide range of vulnerabilities, including data leaks, data corruption, and data loss. We evaluate DOUBLEX on a large dataset of browser extensions and show that it is able to detect a high number of vulnerabilities with a low false positive rate.

1 Introduction
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CCS Categories
Security and privacy → Web applications security; Browser security

Keywords
Browser extensions; Static analysis; Security vulnerabilities; Data flows



Detecting Vulnerable Extensions



> DOUBLEX: Statically Detecting Vulnerable Data Flows in Browser Extensions

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



Malicious web page

Content script

Background page
Service worker

Vulnerable extension

Detecting Vulnerable Extensions



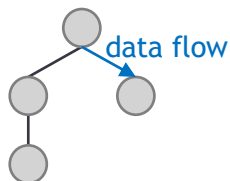
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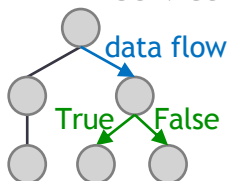


Malicious web page

Content script



Background page
Service worker



Vulnerable extension

Per-component JavaScript code abstraction

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

Detecting Vulnerable Extensions

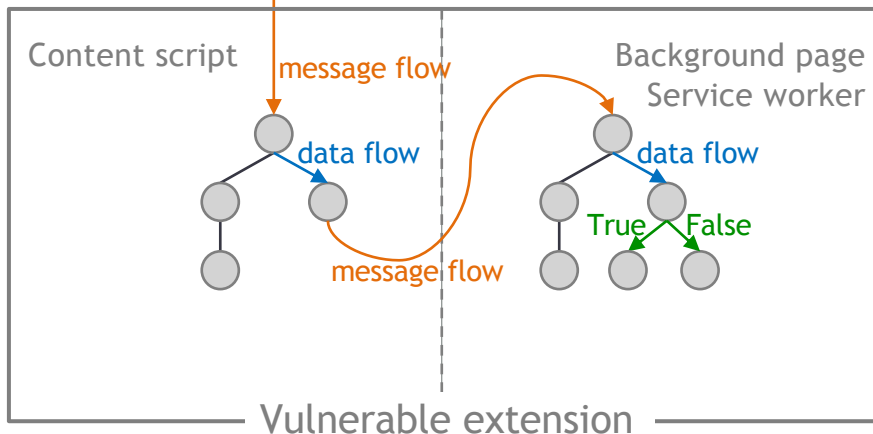


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Malicious web page



Per-component JavaScript code abstraction

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Extension Dependence Graph (EDG)

- > Message interactions

Detecting Vulnerable Extensions

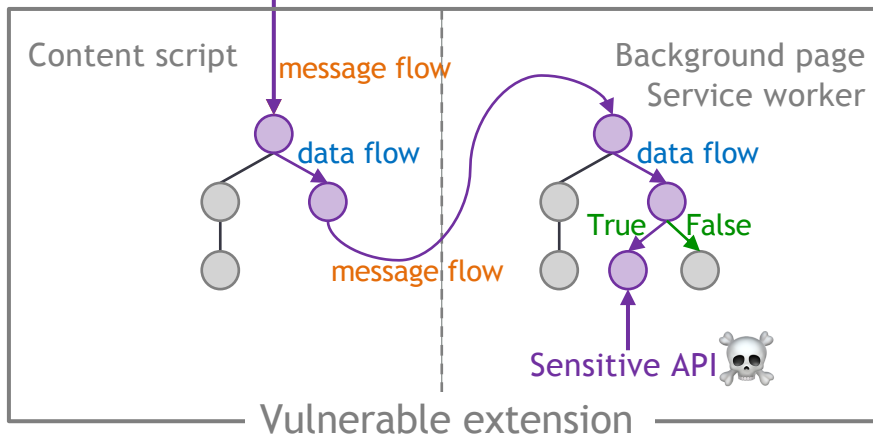


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Malicious web page



Per-component JavaScript code abstraction

- AST (Abstract Syntax Tree)
- Control flow
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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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Simplified Example of a Vulnerability

```
1 // Content script code = from the extension
2 window.addEventListener("message", function(event) {
3     if (1 === 1) {
4         window["e" + "val"](event.data);
5     }
6 })
```

Note: In the original image, a red bracket underlines the string "e" + "val" in line 4, with the label "eval" written below it.



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A red bracket under the string `"e" + "val"` in line 4 points to the word `eval` below it, indicating that the code is performing an eval operation.



```
// 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

```
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     }
6 })
```



```
// DOUBLEX report 🔭
{"direct-danger1": "eval",
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2 window.addEventListener("message", function(event) {
3     if (1 === 1) {
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5         
6
7         
8         event = {"data": 42};
9         eval(event.data);
10    }
11 })
```

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);
5         // Not detected by prior work ✗
6     }
7     event = {"data": 42};
8     eval(event.data);
9 }
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 }},

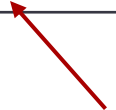
{"direct-danger2": "eval",
 "value": "eval(42)",
 "line": "8 - 8",
 "dataflow": false} ✓
```

Simplified Example of a Vulnerability

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```



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



(very) malicious payload

Simplified Example of a Vulnerability

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eval

developer.chrome.com indique

1

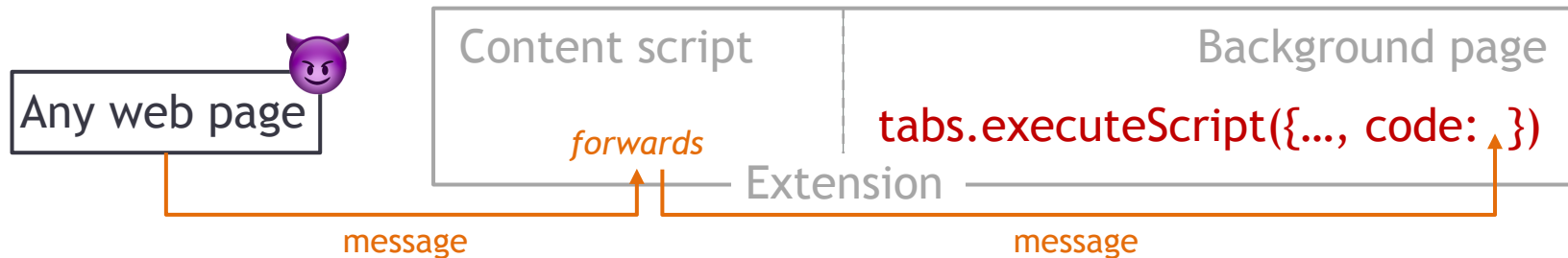
OK

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

(very) malicious payload

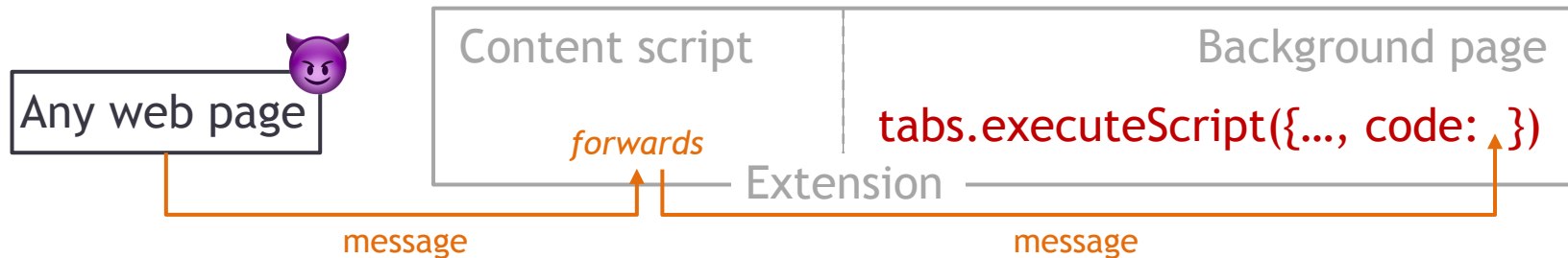
Case Studies of Vulnerable Chrome Extensions

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

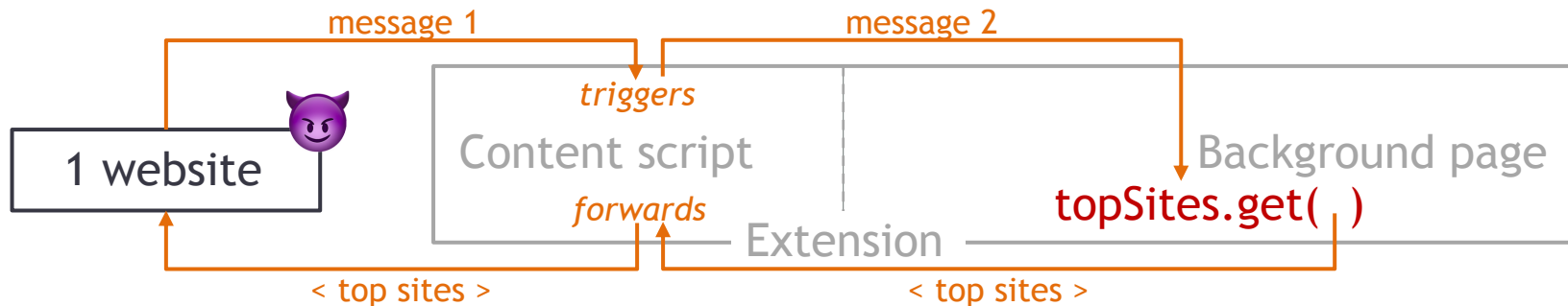


Case Studies of Vulnerable Chrome Extensions

- 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

Rosenzweig
et al. TWEB
2025

[illegible]

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

Rosenzweig
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Detecting Malicious Extensions — Lab Setting



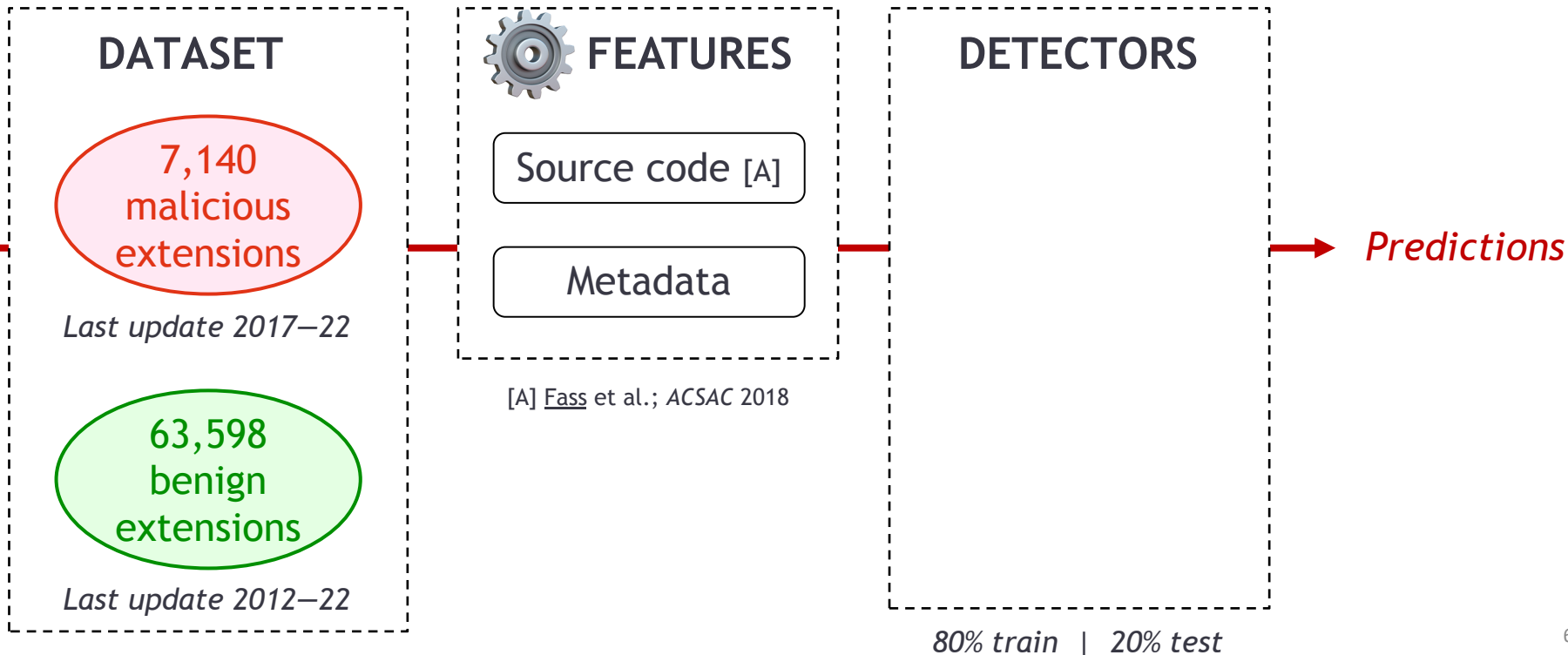
Rosenzweig
et al. TWEB
2025



> 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

It's not Easy: Applying Supervised Machine Learning to Detect Malicious Extensions in the Chrome Web Store
BEN ROSENZWEIG, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
VALENTINO DALLA VALLE, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
GIOVANNI APRUZZESE, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
AURORE FASS, Google Research, Google, Mountain View, CA, USA



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[illegible]

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73

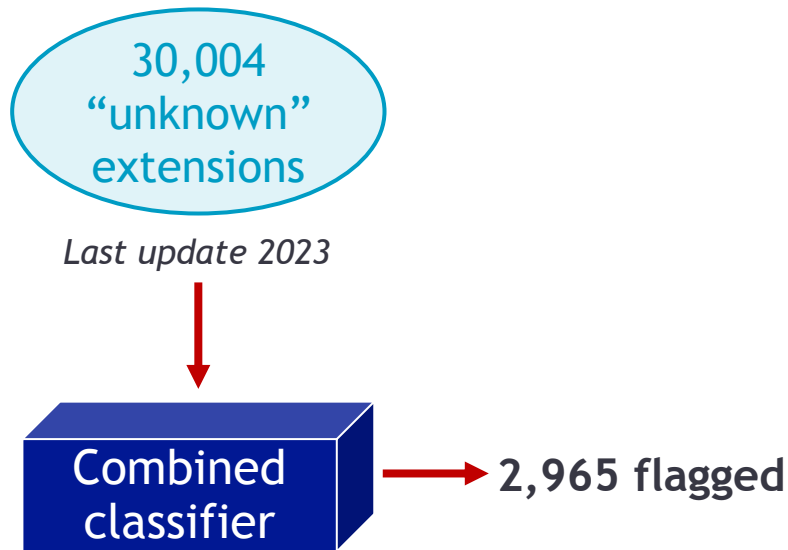
Detecting Malicious Extensions – Real World

30,004
“unknown”
extensions

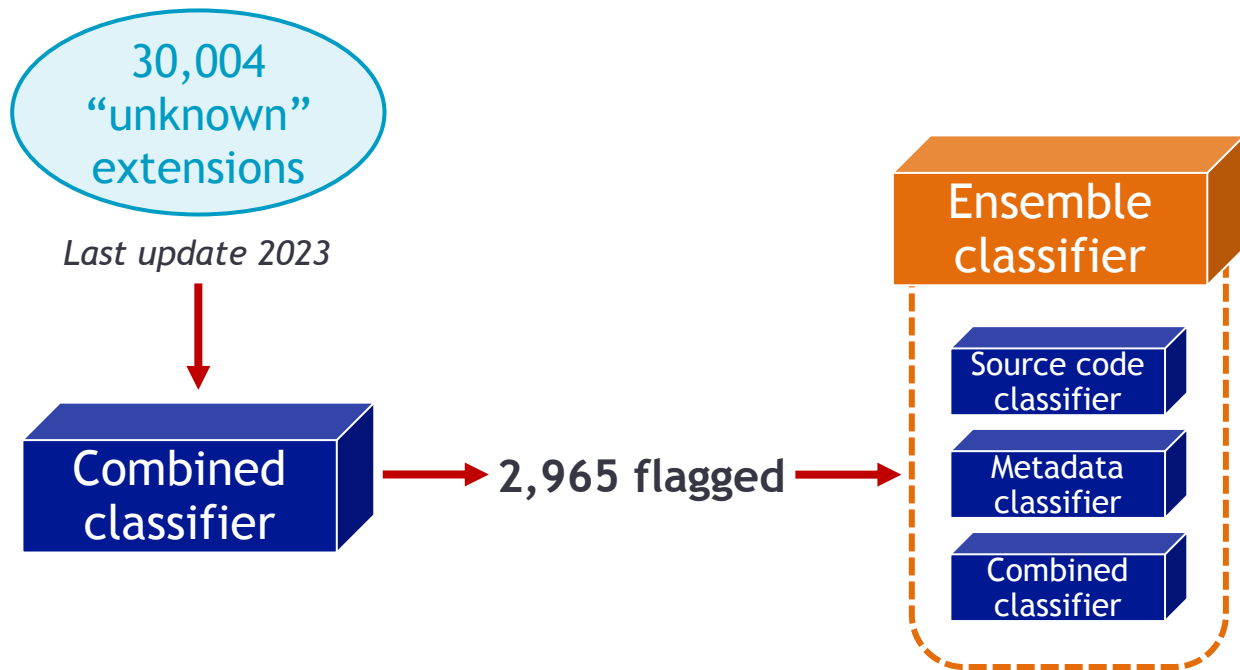
Last update 2023



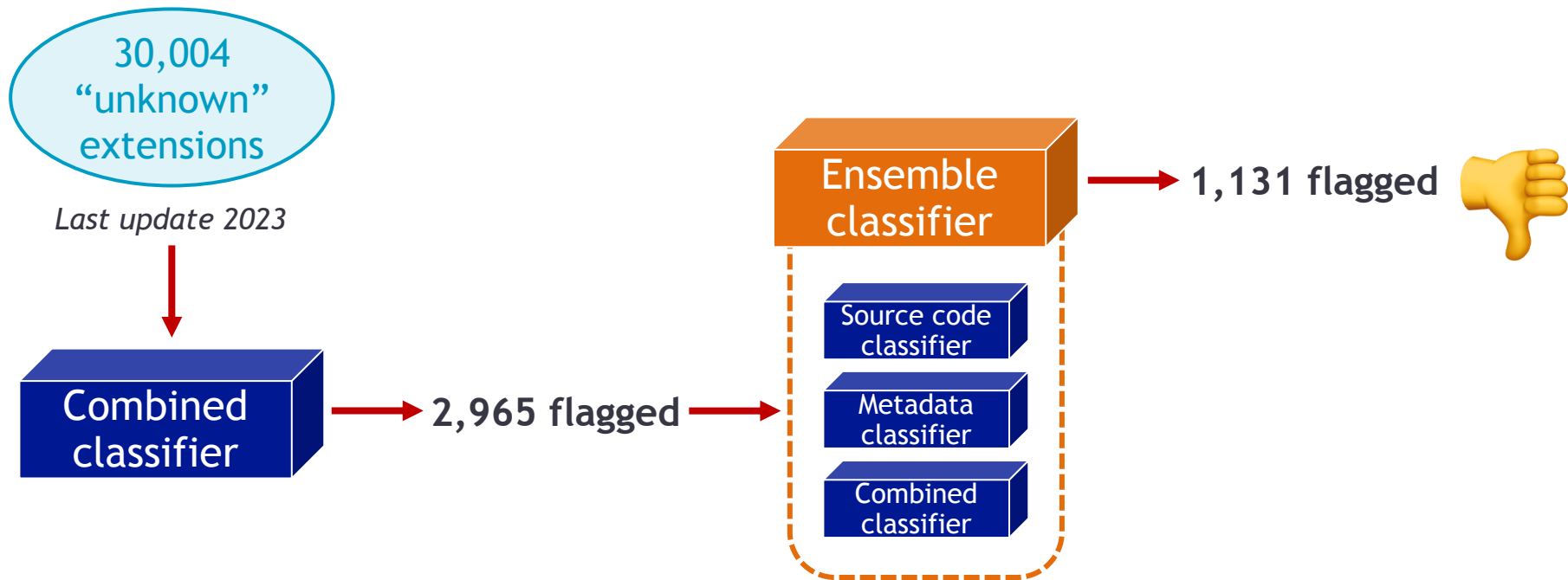
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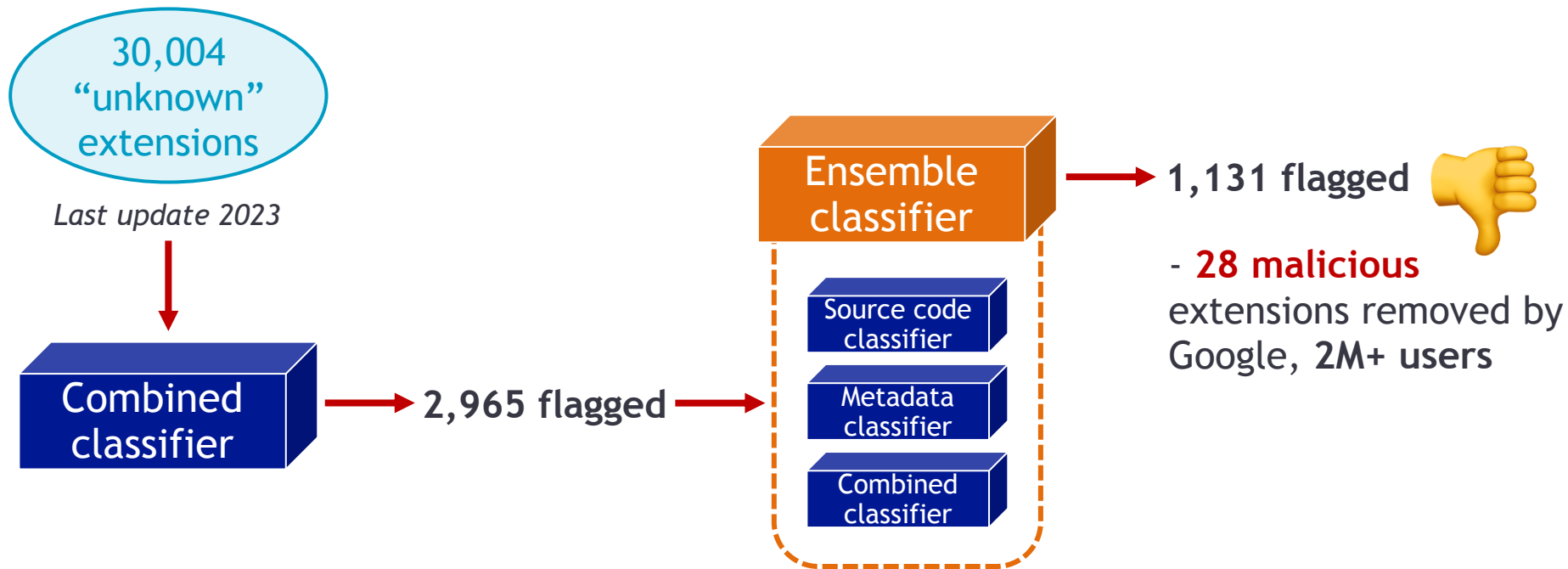
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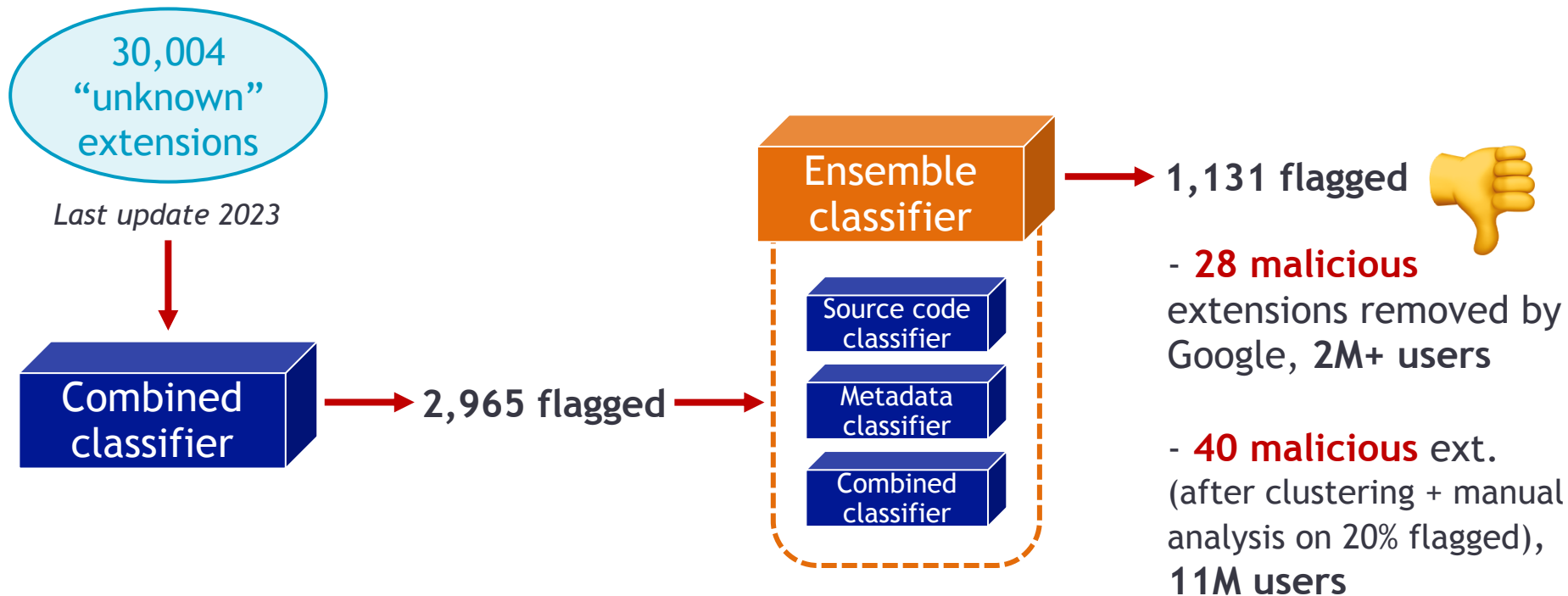
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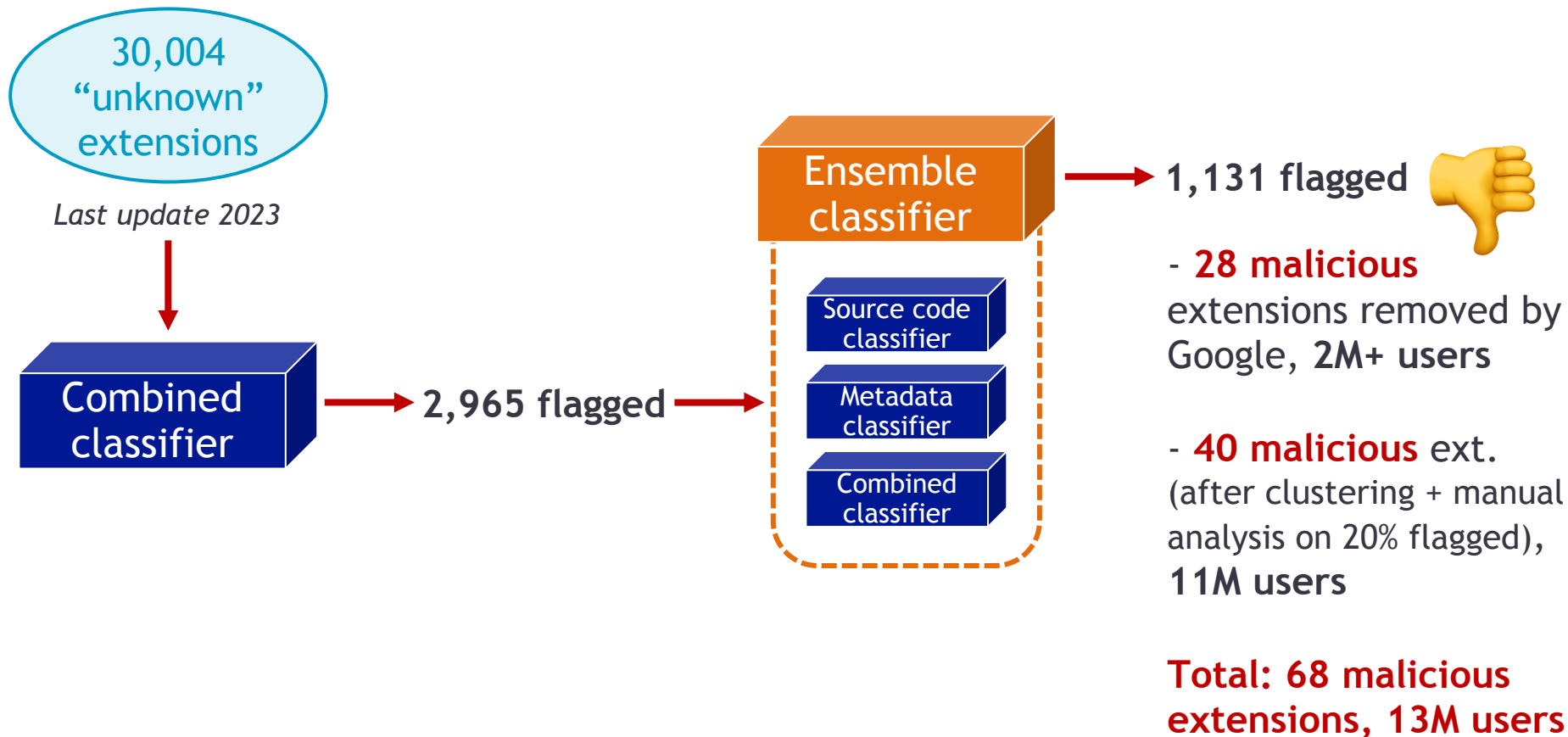
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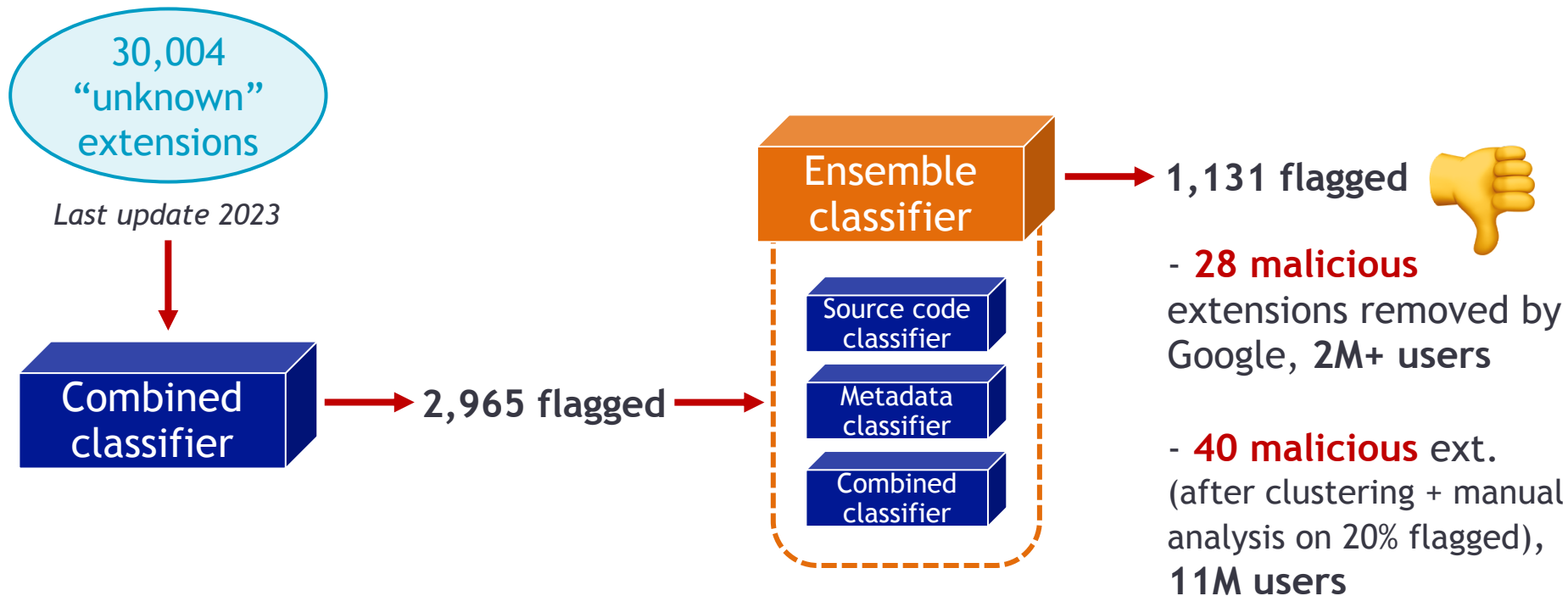
Detecting Malicious Extensions – Real World



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

Total: 68 malicious extensions, 13M users

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

???

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- 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

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Hsu et al.
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Browser Extension Fingerprinting

Browser extensions can interact with web pages...

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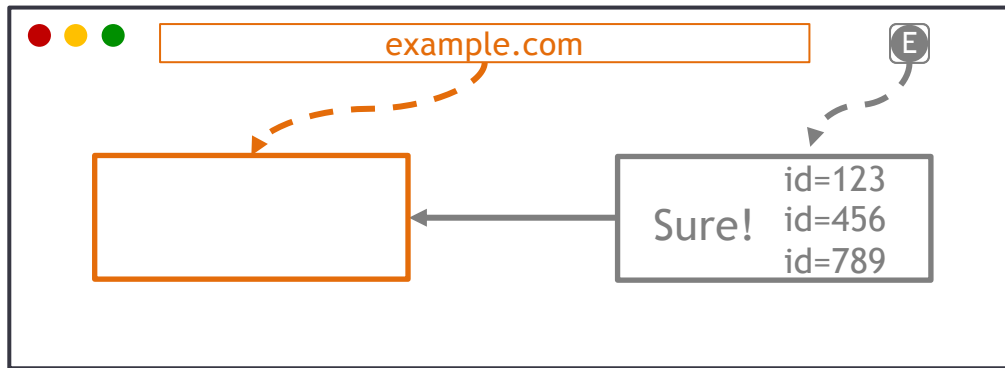
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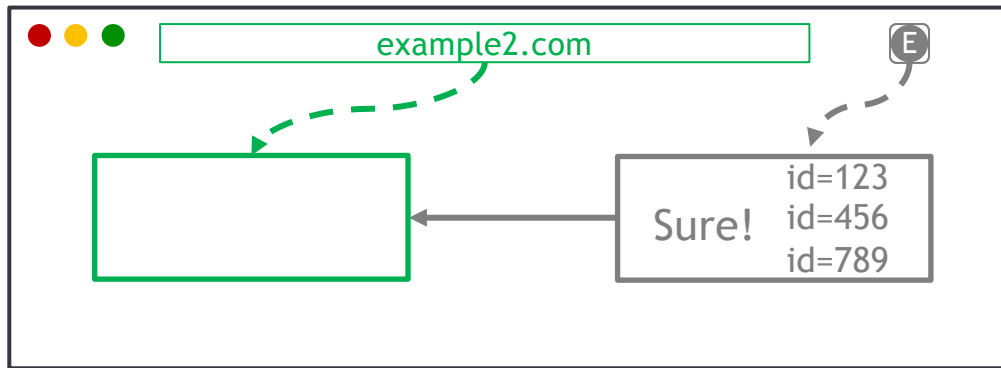
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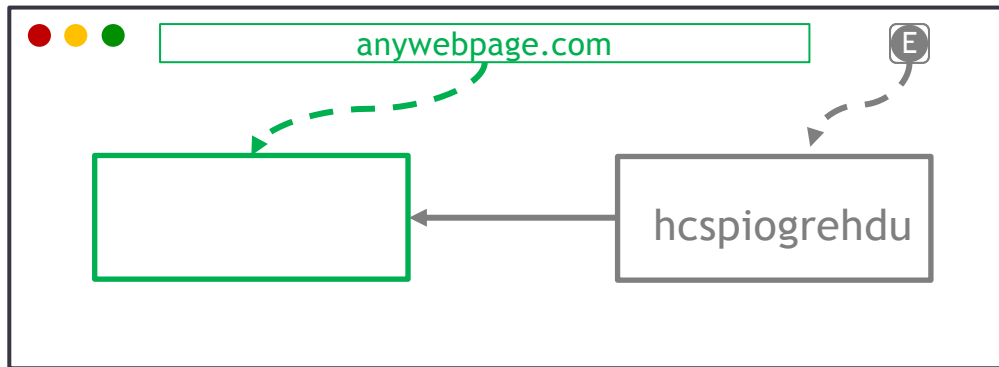
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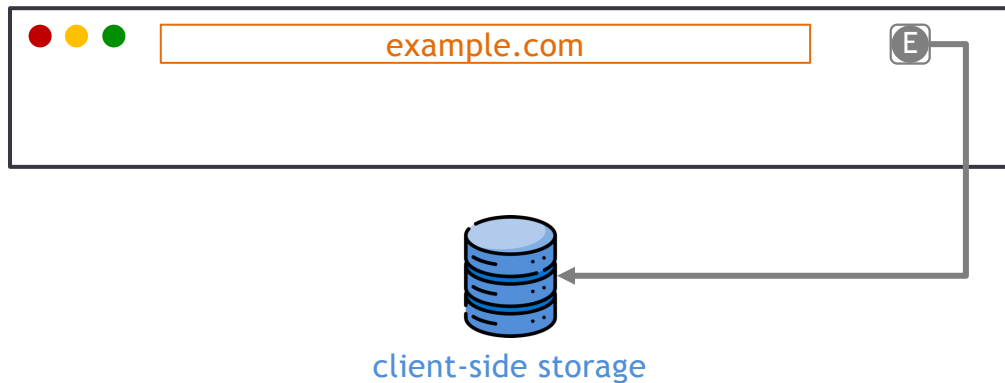
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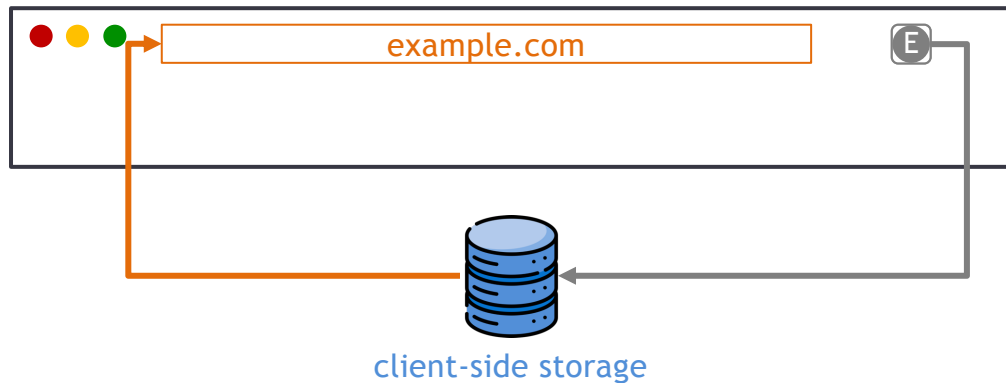
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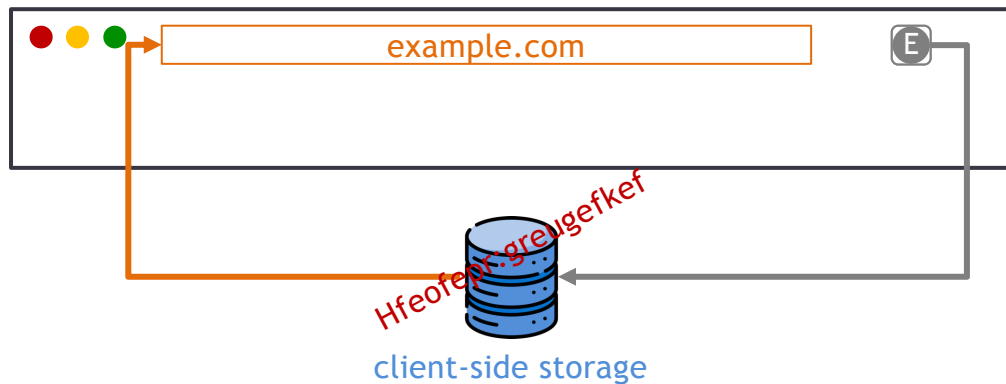
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Why is this bad?

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 - (e.g. `chrome.cookies`, `local/session storage`, `indexedDB`)
- 2) Extensions store data on the client side through storage APIs
 - “Malicious” websites can track users by fingerprinting their extensions
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Browser Extension Fingerprinting

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Why is this bad?

- 1) Extensions send `PostMessage` to web pages
 - `postMessage` to `chrome.runtime.sendMessage`
- 2) Extensions store data on the client side through storage APIs
 - `chrome.storage` (e.g. `chrome.cookies`, `chrome.local/session storage`, `chrome.indexDB`)
 - “Malicious” websites can track users by fingerprinting their extensions
- 3) Extensions inject JavaScript code directly into web pages
 - `chrome.webRequest` (e.g. `chrome.webRequest.onBeforeRequest`)
 - 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

... which leaves traces → observable side effects, can be seen by a “malicious” site

Detecting Fingerprintable Extensions

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

Detecting Fingerprintable Extensions

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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 Malicious Extensions – Lab Setting vs. Real World

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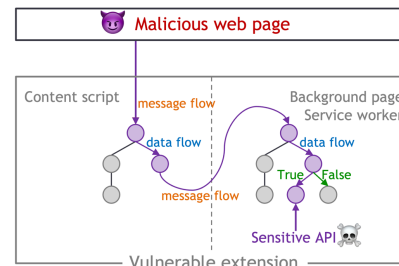


Rosenzweig
et al. TWEB
2025



its-not-easy/tweb25

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 Fingerprintable Extensions with Raider

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Agarwal et al.
CCS 2024



Raider-ext/raider

- Raider detects 2,747 fingerprintable extensions | 169M users



aurore.fass@inria.fr

Aurore Fass – Browser Extension (In)Security



<https://aurore54f.github.io>

109

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