

HTTP



MAPPING INTERNET COOKIES

ACCEPT ALL



8th semester Techno-Anthropology
Mapping controversies course

Gréta Haraszti, Kira Tilcock,
Aleksandra Moranda & Ainoa Pubill.

What's the cookie controversy?

Internet Cookies are small files that store information about your interactions while browsing the internet. Types of cookies include; first party-cookies that are responsible for providing a smooth user experience such as recalling login information, saving shopping cart items, etc. Another type is 3rd party cookies that track your interactions across multiple platforms and devices, and are primarily used for advertising.

3rd party cookies have become contentious as some believe that they are invasive of users' privacy, and are not in favour of users interests but disproportionately benefit organisations and platforms that place them. A primary concern is that users do not have any control of what websites are tracking them on and what they are doing with the gathered data. On the other side of the debate, some believe that 3rd party cookies are a necessary instrument for the internet to work, as they generate revenue for businesses.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) entered into force in 2018 as a response to privacy concerns, and required websites in European countries to inform users about their cookie policy and obtain their consent. There has been backlash from the industry as Simon Davis states that GDPR will “destroy the entire industry”. Although there is a regulatory body in the EU, the controversy persists as some actors are not compliant, and cookie banners are often appropriated by companies to coerce users into accepting their policy without properly informing users about the consequences. The two opposing sides of the debate represent the controversial voices/actors that the following project aims to map out in detail and provide context for.



1 Who tracks you online?

2 The power of GDPR on the cookie debate

3.1 Not everyone loves cookies

3.2 The fight against cookies

4.1 Are cookies part of the GDPR conversation?

4.2 The effects of GDPR on businesses

Visualising the controversy

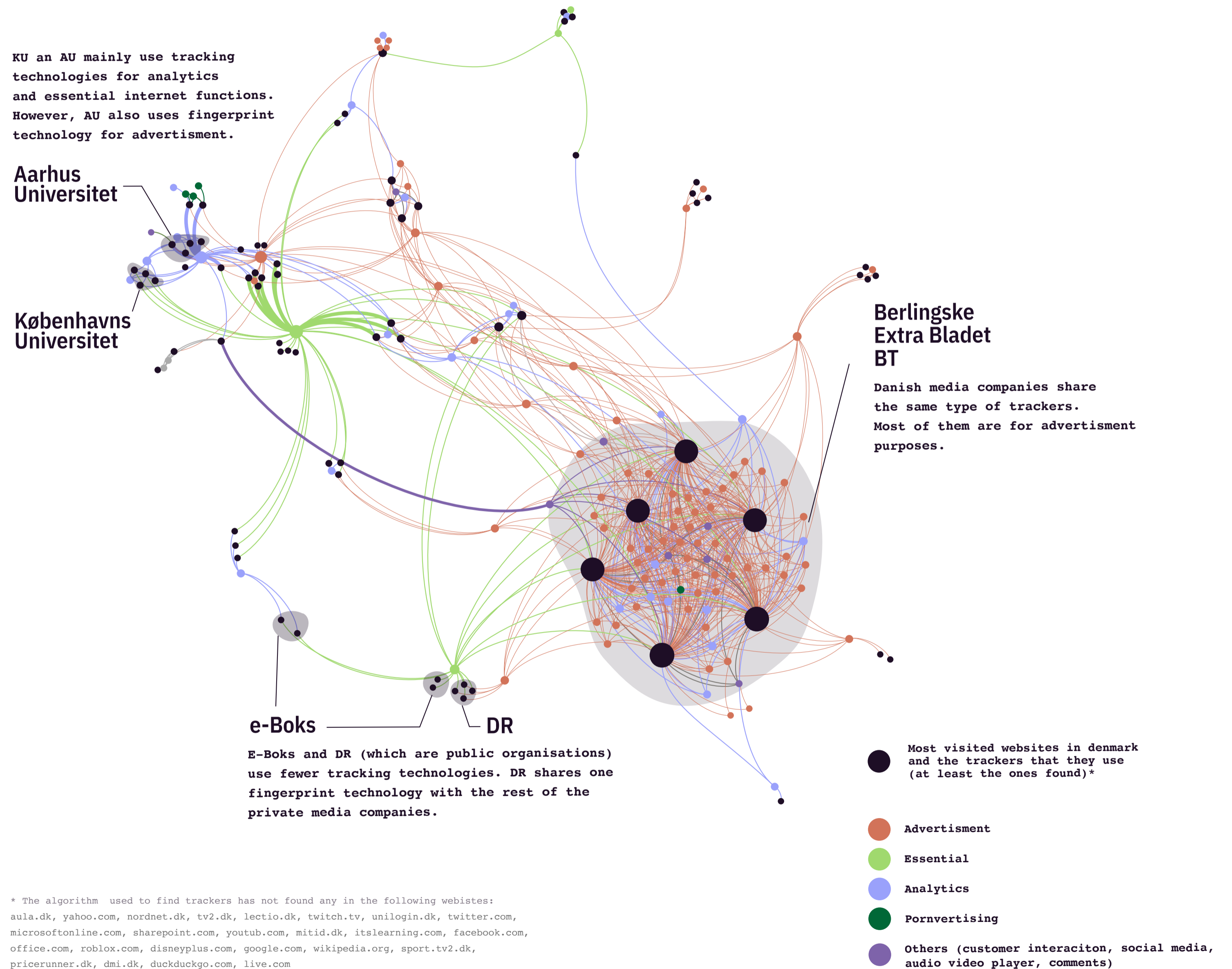
SUMMARY OF VISUALISATIONS

Who tracks you online?

Network of tracker tracker fingerprinting technologies found on most visited Danish websites

Given the current state of the internet, web trackers have essentially become the new Big Brother in the online space. They follow your actions, they know where you go, which websites you surf, what clothes you buy, how much you spend on certain items, how you indulge yourself, where you study, what books you read and the list goes on. All of this wouldn't be problematic if you knew exactly what data they have on you and, more importantly, what that data is used for.

The following visualisation shows us the aspect of the cookie controversy that surrounds the use of 3rd party cookies, specifically for advertisement. A significant majority of the links (edges) between the top visited websites are linked by advertising trackers, that strongly connect the largest Danish news/media outlets like Berlingske or Extra Bladet. What's problematic with these is the lack of information such websites provide for users when they enter the site, where users surf the page unknowing that their data is being seriously exploited for advertising purposes. Often it's unclear to users where personalised ads come from, and this is a fine exemplification of that issue.



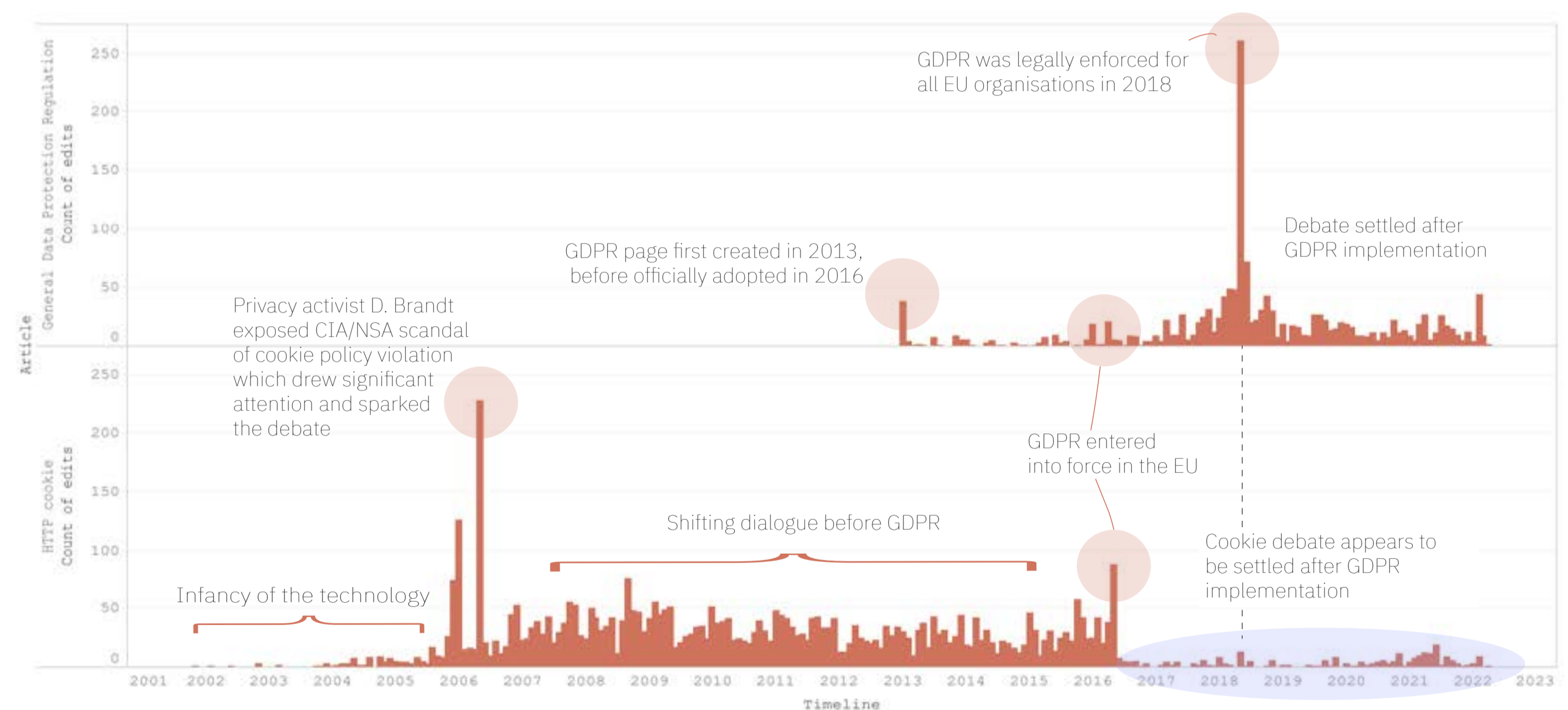
The power of GDPR on the cookie debate

Wikipedia edits on a timeline

The following visualisation demonstrates a comparison and relation between the edit history and activity of the two Wikipedia pages: General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and HTTP Cookie. The visualisation aims to answer the question of: How has the adoption of GDPR affected the debate around internet cookies? The main finding demonstrates GDPR's role in subsiding a debate that went on consistently for around 2 decades.

The annotations focus on the main events that significantly influenced all actors involved in the controversy and consequently shaped the debate around cookies. The map accentuates the correlation between the two critical actors of GDPR and cookies, and points out when they entered the debate and how much attention they received over the development of the controversy.

The map and its subsequent analysis highlights the power of the GDPR regulation as an influential actor within the controversy, and demonstrates the difference it made prior and post its implementation. The edit history shows consistent activity of the HTTP Cookie page up until the years of the implementation of the GDPR, after which the debate appears to have subsided. One can observe similar changes on the GDPR page, which is the main event that could potentially be further researched for more detailed explanations.



Not everyone loves cookies

Network of Youtube comments on top 5 most visited videos on 'internet cookies' – part 1

The conversation about cookies on Youtube is quite entangled, and different topics overlap. However, we see different opinions represented in the network surrounding cookies; Some users find cookies and cookie law puzzling and annoying. Others consider that the system around cookies helps content creators and businesses make revenue.

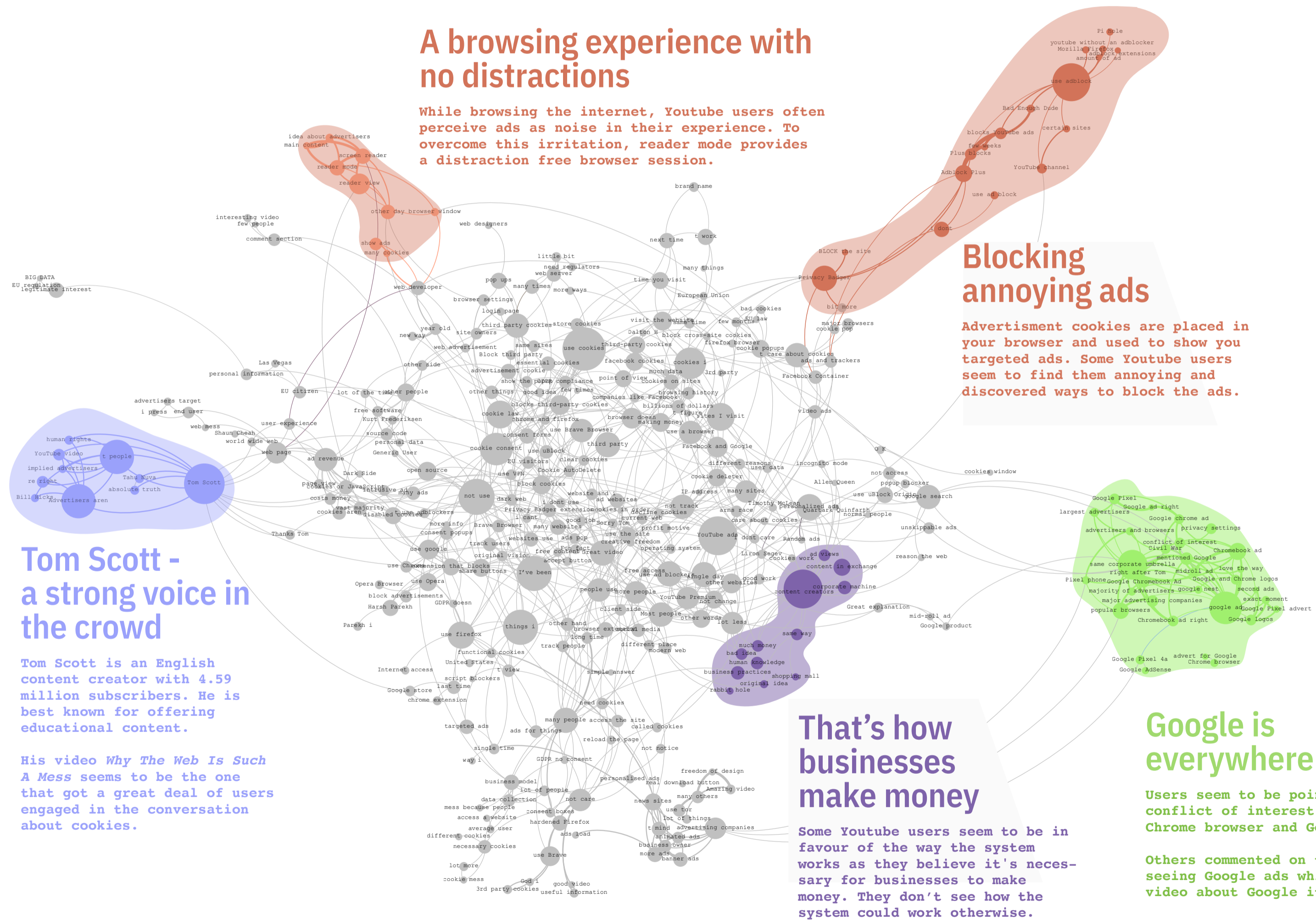
One issue seems to be prevalent across the conversation; The resistance of users to cookie technology. We suspect that part of the controversy underpinning this visualisation is the proliferating nature of cookies that users perceive as intrusive and, more importantly, ridding them from the option of opting in or out of the tracking mechanisms. Youtube appears to be a platform where people ask or suggest different ways to fight back against this technology.

A browsing experience with no distractions

While browsing the internet, Youtube users often perceive ads as noise in their experience. To overcome this irritation, reader mode provides a distraction free browser session.

Blocking annoying ads

Advertisement cookies are placed in your browser and used to show you targeted ads. Some Youtube users seem to find them annoying and discovered ways to block the ads.



Tom Scott - a strong voice in the crowd

Tom Scott is an English content creator with 4.59 million subscribers. He is best known for offering educational content.

His video *Why The Web Is Such A Mess* seems to be the one that got a great deal of users engaged in the conversation about cookies.

That's how businesses make money

Some Youtube users seem to be in favour of the way the system works as they believe it's necessary for businesses to make money. They don't see how the system could work otherwise.

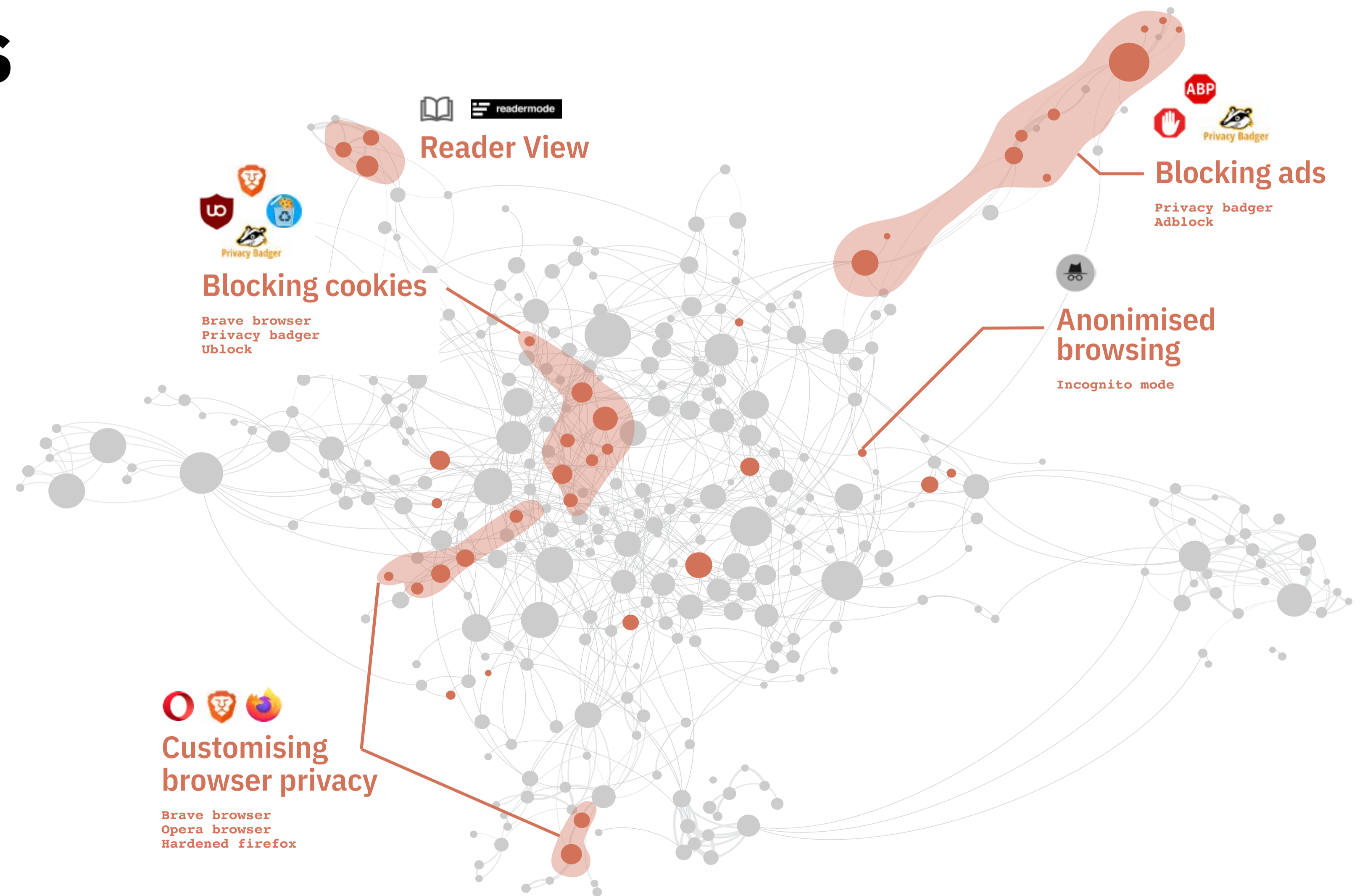
Google is everywhere

Users seem to be pointing at the conflict of interest between the Chrome browser and Google Ads.

Others commented on the irony of seeing Google ads while watching a video about Google itself.

The fight against cookies

Network of Youtube comments on top 5 most visited videos on 'internet cookies' – part 2

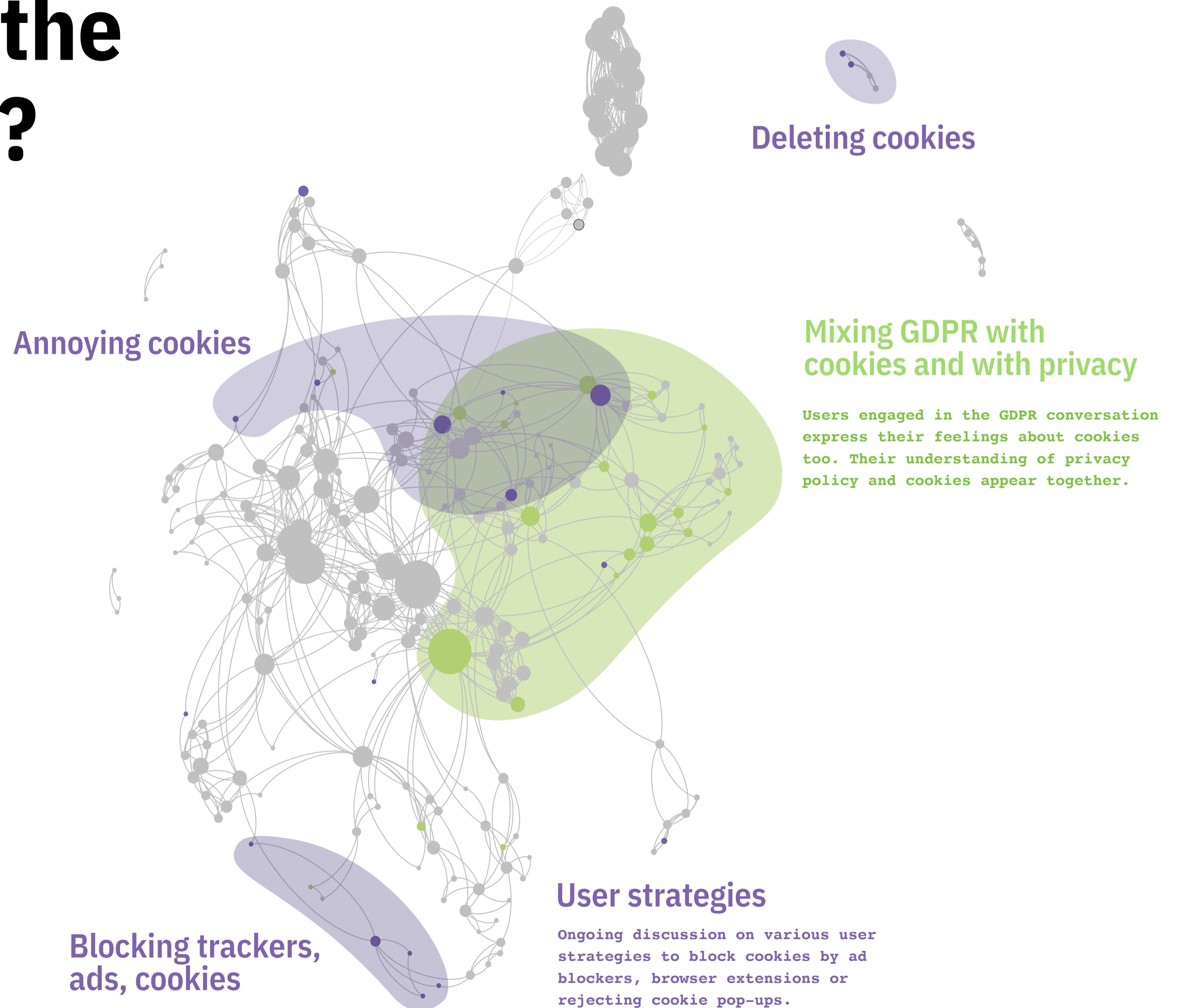


Are cookies part of the GDPR conversation?

Network of co-occurring noun phrases from Youtube comments on top 5 most relevant videos on 'GDPR' — part 1

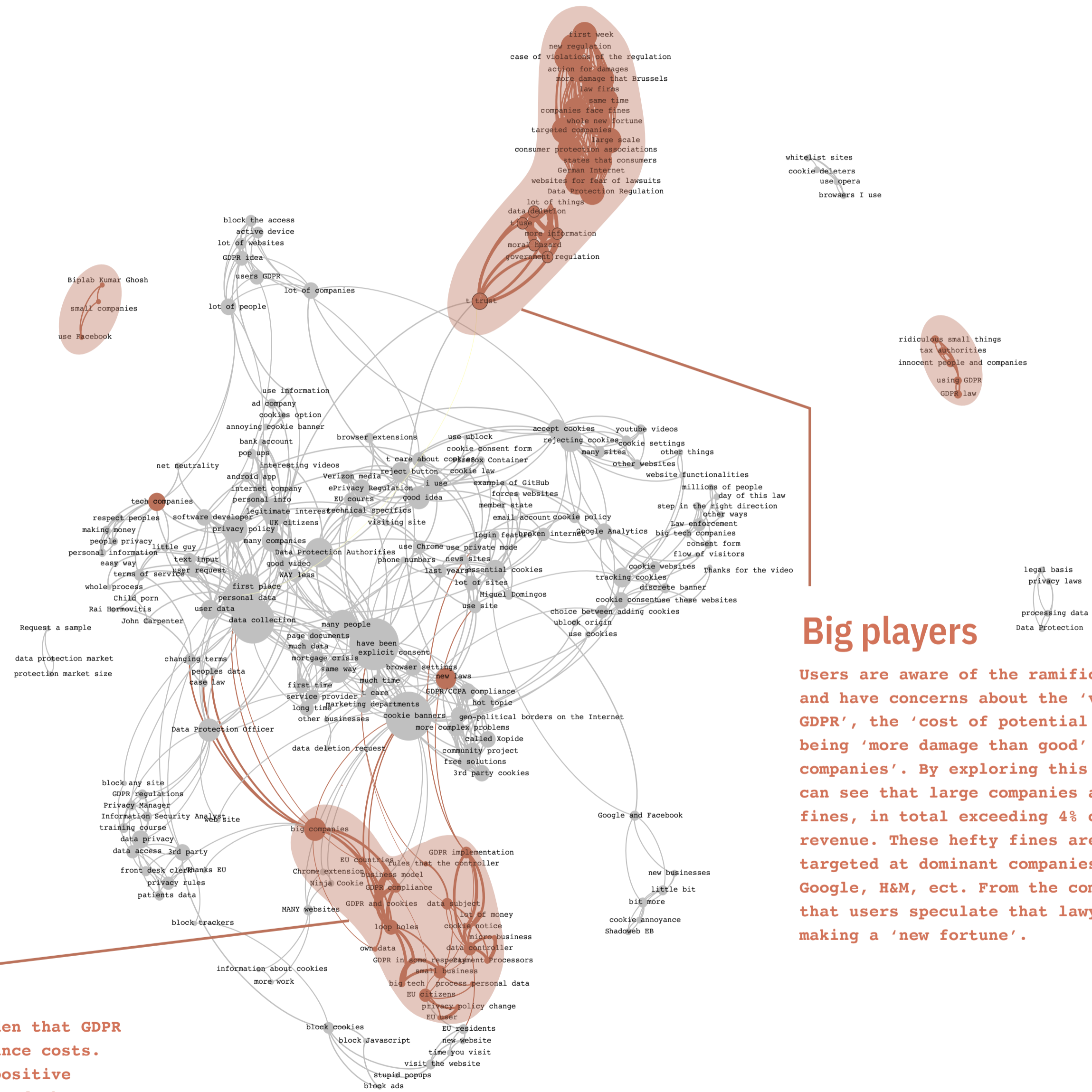
The main conversations about GDPR on Youtube appears to surround questions and facts about privacy policy. What is interesting is that the discussions around GDPR also include the topic of cookies.

Does it mean that GDPR is largely synonymous to cookies? When we compare what the GDPR addresses in its formal documentation, cookies are only merely mentioned once. We suspect that privacy concerns are understood by users as issues around cookie technology.



The effects of GDPR on businesses

Network of co-occurring noun phrases from Youtube comments on top 5 most relevant videos on 'GDPR' – part 2



How about small business?

Conversations also occurred around the burden that GDPR poses on small business as well as compliance costs. However, some small business owners have positive associations with GDPR stating that it forced them to review what they were doing and made them document where they stored customer data.

Big players

Users are aware of the ramifications of GDPR and have concerns about the 'violations to GDPR', the 'cost of potential lawsuits', GDPR being 'more damage than good' and target companies'. By exploring this topic further, we can see that large companies are facing massive fines, in total exceeding 4% of annual global revenue. These hefty fines are primarily targeted at dominant companies such as; Amazon, Google, H&M, ect. From the comments it appears that users speculate that lawyers are the ones making a 'new fortune'.

PROTOCOLS

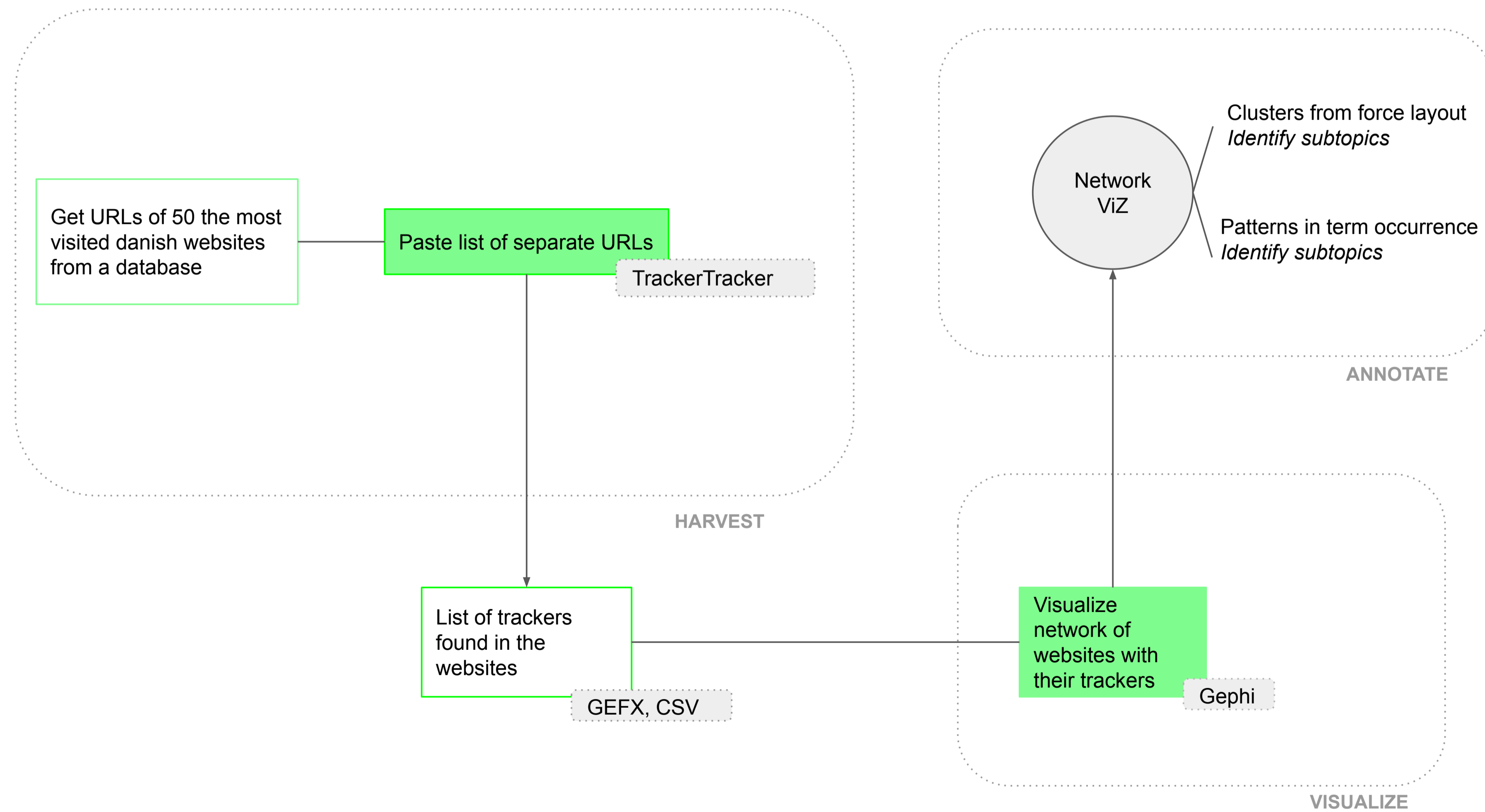


8th semester Techno-Anthropology
Mapping controversies course

Gréta Haraszti, Kira Tilcock,
Aleksandra Moranda & Ainoa Pubill.

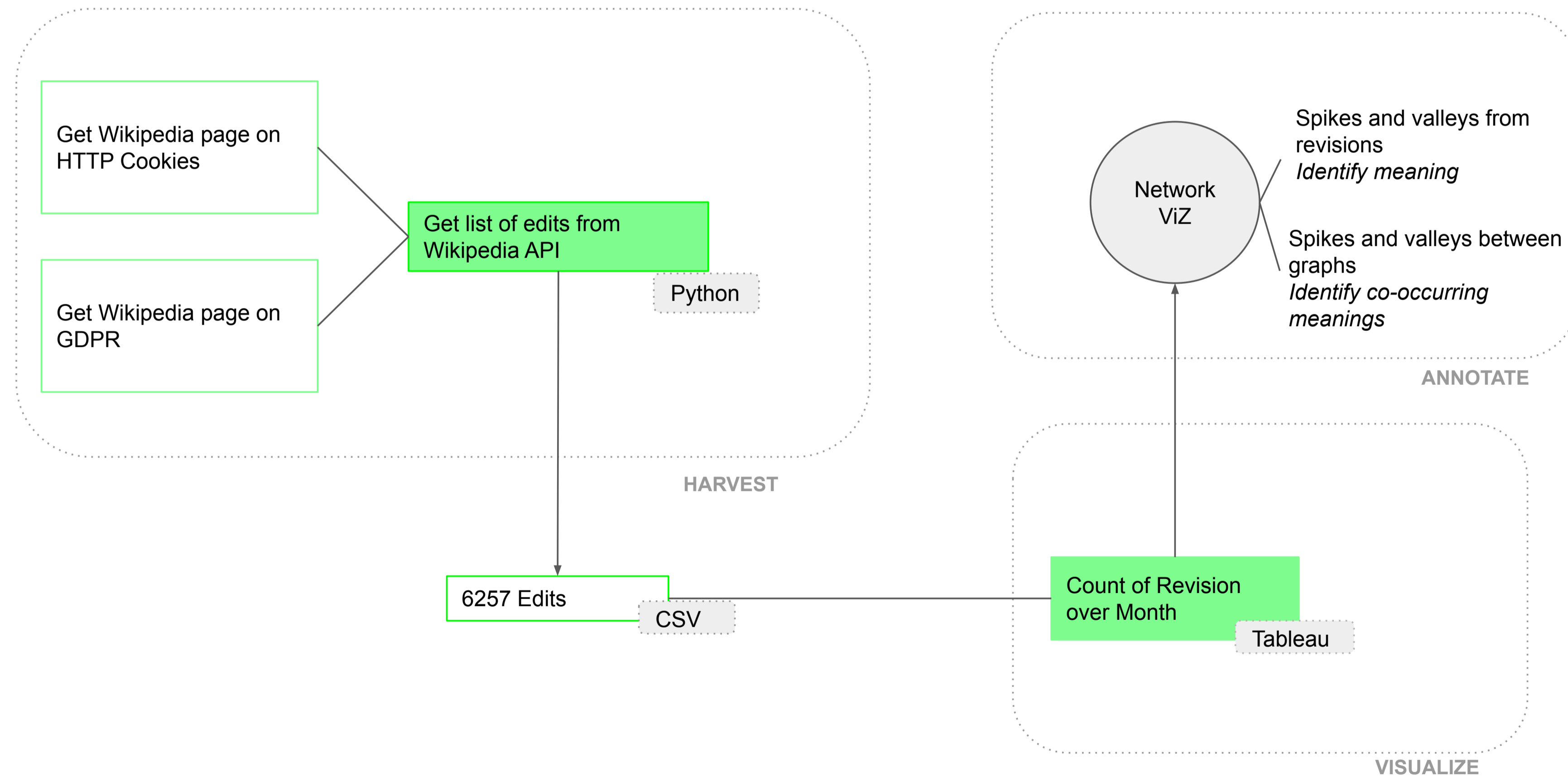
PROTOCOL 1

Who tracks you online?



PROTOCOL 2

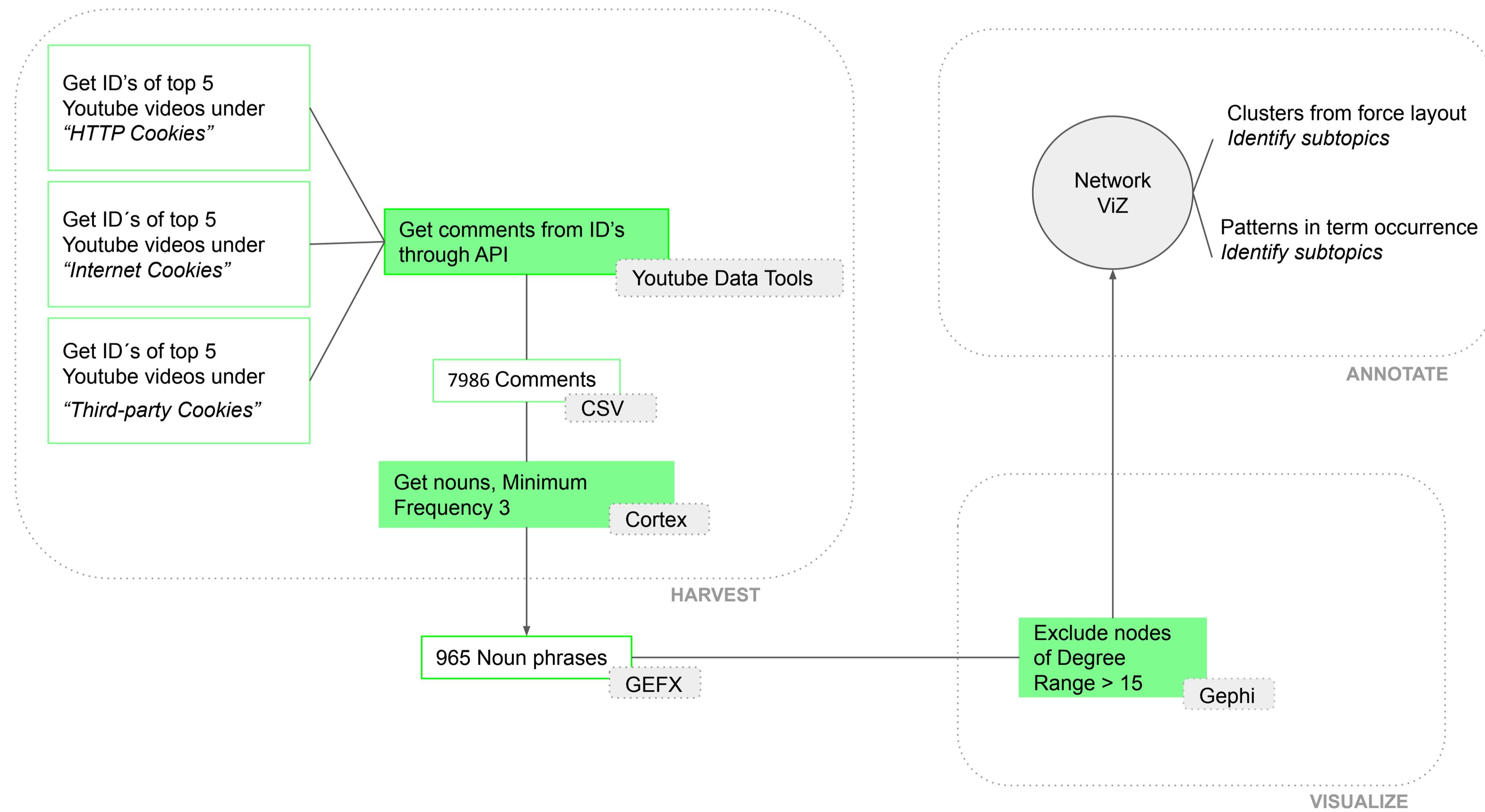
The power of GDPR on the cookie debate



PROTOCOL 3

Not everyone
loves cookies

The fight
against cookies



PROTOCOL 4

Are cookies part of the GDPR conversation?

The effects of GDPR on businesses

