

Rewriting the Nuclear Story

Uncovering the most powerful
opportunities in media to re-represent
a future of denuclearization



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The Objective

The Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) is committed to telling the cultural stories that can create and support Americans' commitment to denuclearization—the elimination of all nuclear weapons worldwide.

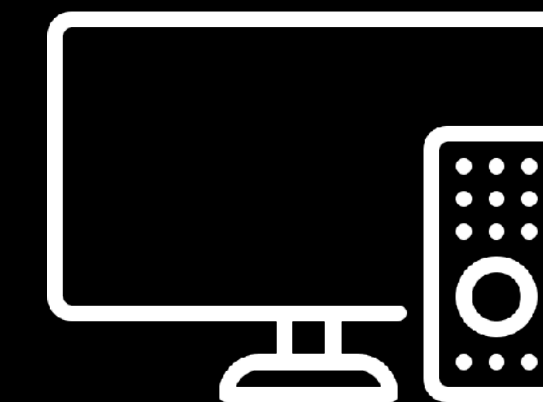
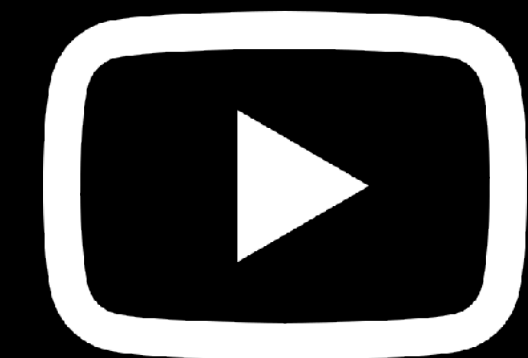
US culture is already rich in nuclear weapons stories, so this report details where persuadable audiences specifically find these stories and describes the narrative that already dominates in their media.

NUCLEAR NARRATIVE REPORT

TERMINOLOGY & SCOPE

The subject of this report is “nuclear weapons” (or “nukes”). Nuclear content is defined as any found media consumed that uses the keywords “nuke” and “nuclear.” All the analysis here is based on text in news, YouTube video descriptions and tags, broadcast and cable TV, and internet searches. Important exclusions:

- “Nuclear energy” comes up in the text data but is excluded except where it occurs in stories that also include nuclear weapons.
- Metaphorical references to “nukes” were excluded—i.e. protagonists who “go nuclear” on people who offend them, eat noodles hot enough to cause physical pain, and scream their music. Their goals are extremism and self-destruction, not the accumulation of power, and the content was not relevant.
- We excluded found media when the text surrounding the keyword indicated that the media was unrelated, such as when “nuclear” was followed by “family.”



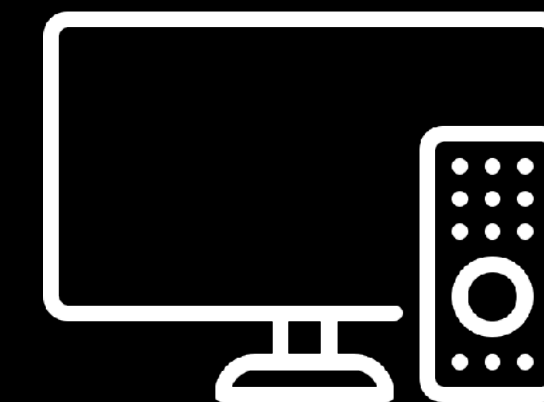
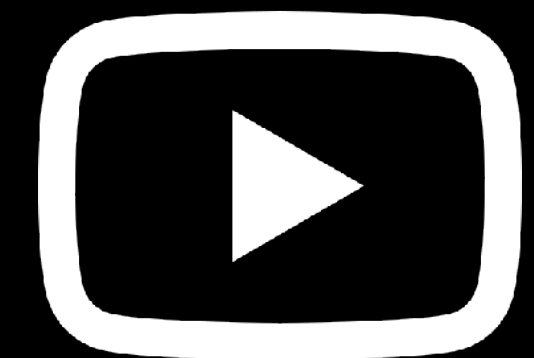
NUCLEAR NARRATIVE REPORT

METHODOLOGY

For this report, Harmony Labs used opt-in internet and television panel data between January 1, 2020 and October 31, 2021, touching 300,000+ people in the U.S. and offering a minute-by-minute view into the content audiences care about, wherever they consume or create it.

- Online news content was from 1/1/21 to 8/31/21
- YouTube content was analyzed from 1/1/20 to 9/30/21
- Online search content was from 1/1/20 to 10/31/21
- TV was from 6/1/21 to 8/31/21

The earlier starts for online search and YouTube compared to online news accounts allowed for more nuclear content, and the different ending dates were due to different windows of complete data. The timeframe of TV data was relatively short because of the large amount of TV transcript data available for any given time period.



NUCLEAR NARRATIVE REPORT

PERSUADABLE AUDIENCE

Throughout this report, we will refer to a person's "persuadability"—their propensity to be transported into a story about a nuclear weapons-free world.

In a previous engagement with NTI, Harmony Labs tested user responses to media about nukes in randomized controlled trials (RCT), totaling 10,000 survey responses. In a RCT, some people see the "treatment" or NTI stories, and some people see neutral "control" content. If the treatment group agrees more with the questions about the target narrative, the content moved the audience.

We used demographic data to understand what groups tended to be more persuadable, and used that understanding to model the persuadability of individuals outside of the group of testing respondents.

We asked 3 questions in the testing surveys to see if we had moved people to:

- Envision a nuclear-free future, "I can imagine a future where every country eventually eliminates all nuclear weapons."
- Desire that future to come to pass, "I want to live in a world where no country, including the United States, has any nuclear weapons."
- Feel agency in bringing that future about, "I personally can do something that gets us closer to a world without nuclear weapons."

NUCLEAR NARRATIVE REPORT

PERSUADABLE AUDIENCE

Most of the persuadable audience self-identifies as Democrats, and almost none are Republican, but there’s substantial persuasion opportunity among people who don’t subscribe to either label. The “neither” group was about 30% of this sample.

While “Republicans” are not persuadable, there are potentially persuadable conservatives.

- The persuadable audience is Democrats and Independents.
- The persuadable audience is diverse in age and gender.
- The persuadable audience is multi-racial.

	Dem	Rep	Neither
Least Persuadable	1%	79%	20%
Most Persuadable	86%	1%	13%

	Women	Age <30	30 - 50	> 50
Least Persuadable	56%*	6%	34%	53%
Most Persuadable	67%	26%	43%	36%

	White	Black	Latino
Least Persuadable	97%	0%	3%
Most Persuadable	50%	27%	18%

NUCLEAR NARRATIVE REPORT

PERSUADABLE AUDIENCE

Outside of being open to believing in a nuclear-weapons free world, members of the persuadable audience don't have that much in common.

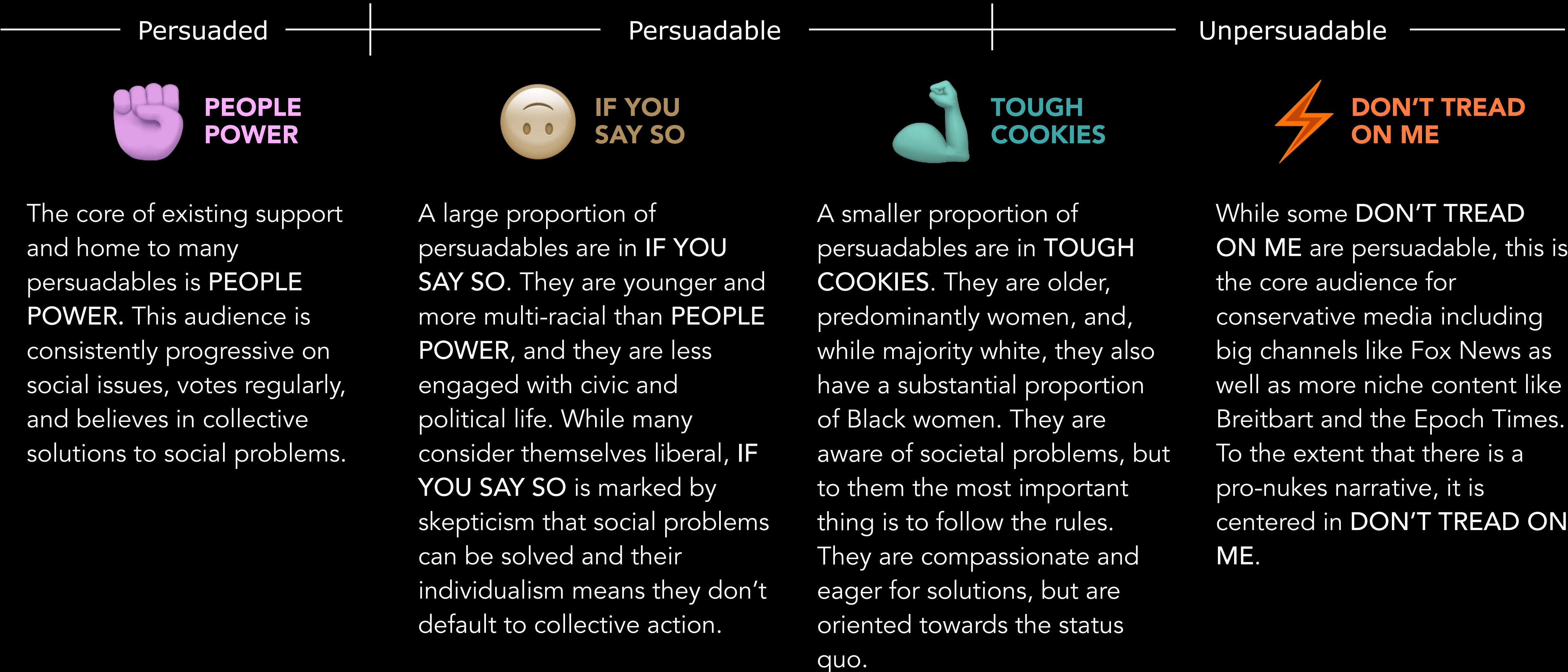
They have different ages, races, genders, and are spread geographically all over the US. Combinations of race, gender, age, geography, and political orientation quickly become dizzying.

So, rather than focus on demographics, we use people's "core values," or the goals they want to achieve, to capture audience variation. We can use this audience map to better understand the variation in the persuadable audience.



NUCLEAR NARRATIVE REPORT

PERSUADABLE AUDIENCE



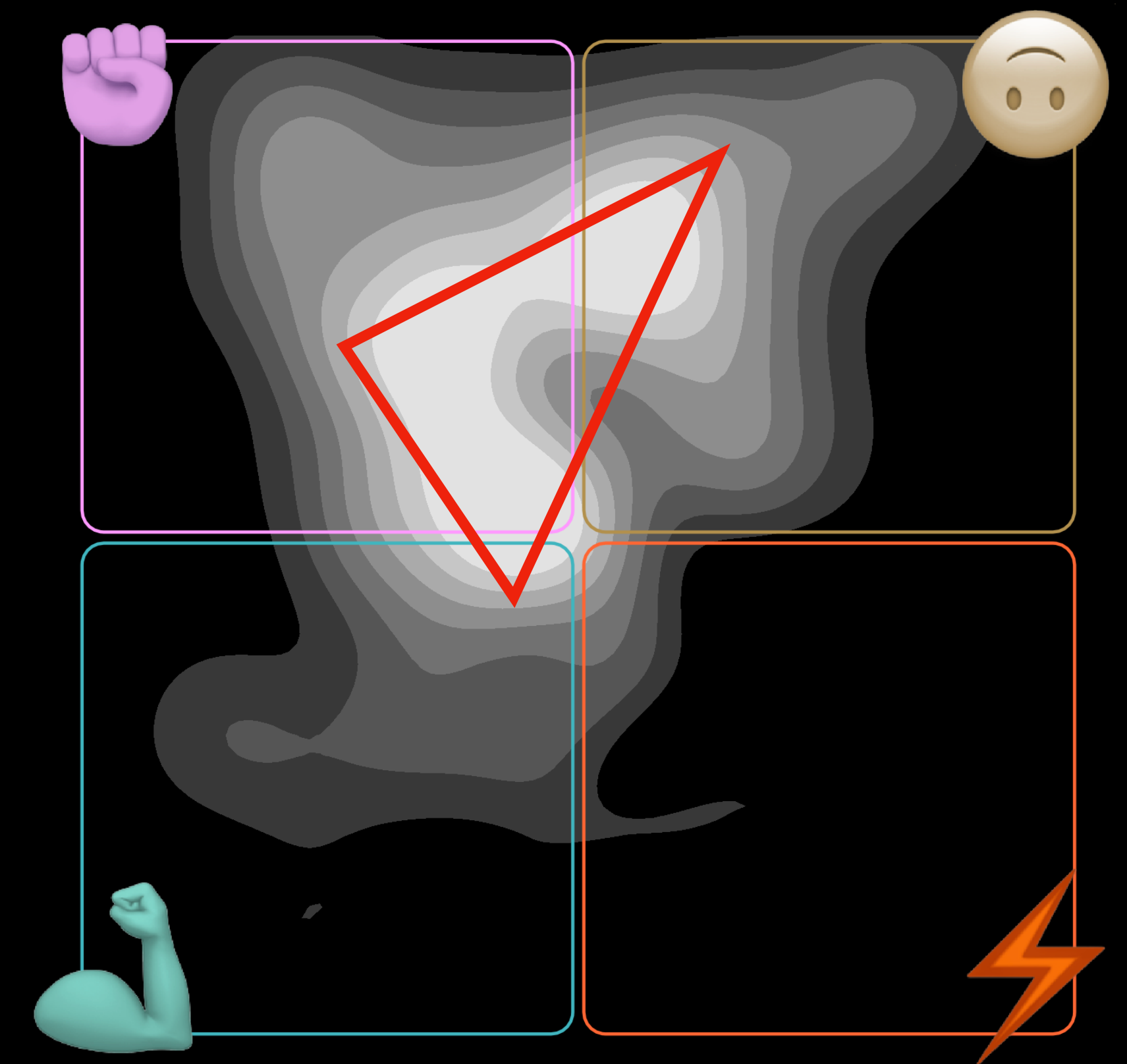
NUCLEAR NARRATIVE REPORT

PERSUADABLE AUDIENCE

This framework gives us a scope for understanding the whole persuadable audience and also describes variations within it. In this report, we describe where the persuadable audience is in our culture from news to YouTube to TV, and we discover where and how they experience nuclear weapons to illuminate opportunities for cultural and storytelling interventions that meet them where they are.

The persuadable audience for denuclearization, almost by definition, isn't defined by how they engage with denuclearization. They don't — yet.

Instead, these audience(s) are defined by what they care about now, where they spend their time, and the kinds of stories that already resonate with them.



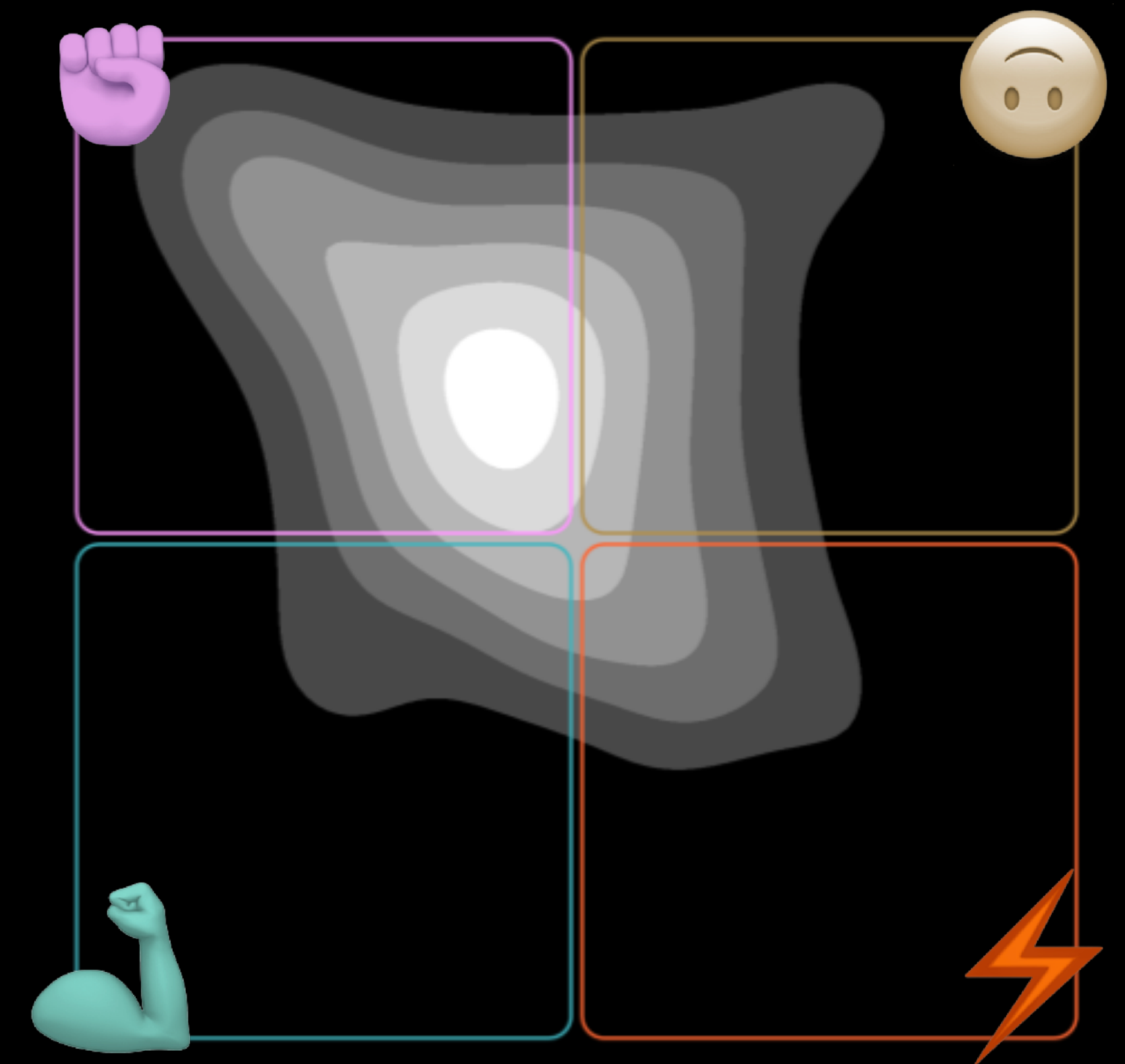
OPPORTUNITY ZONE

NUCLEAR NARRATIVE REPORT

MOBILIZATION AUDIENCE

There is also a core group of existing supporters in the community-focused, progressive, PEOPLE POWER audience. These people are “unpersuadable” because they are *already* persuaded that we can and should be actively moving toward a future free of nuclear weapons.

This persuaded audience is not a target for narrative change, but is a target for mobilization to help create the change they already believe in and desire.



BASE MOBILIZATION AUDIENCE

Takeaway #1

Nukes are everywhere in news, especially TV news, but the reach of news for persuadables is smaller than for other audiences.

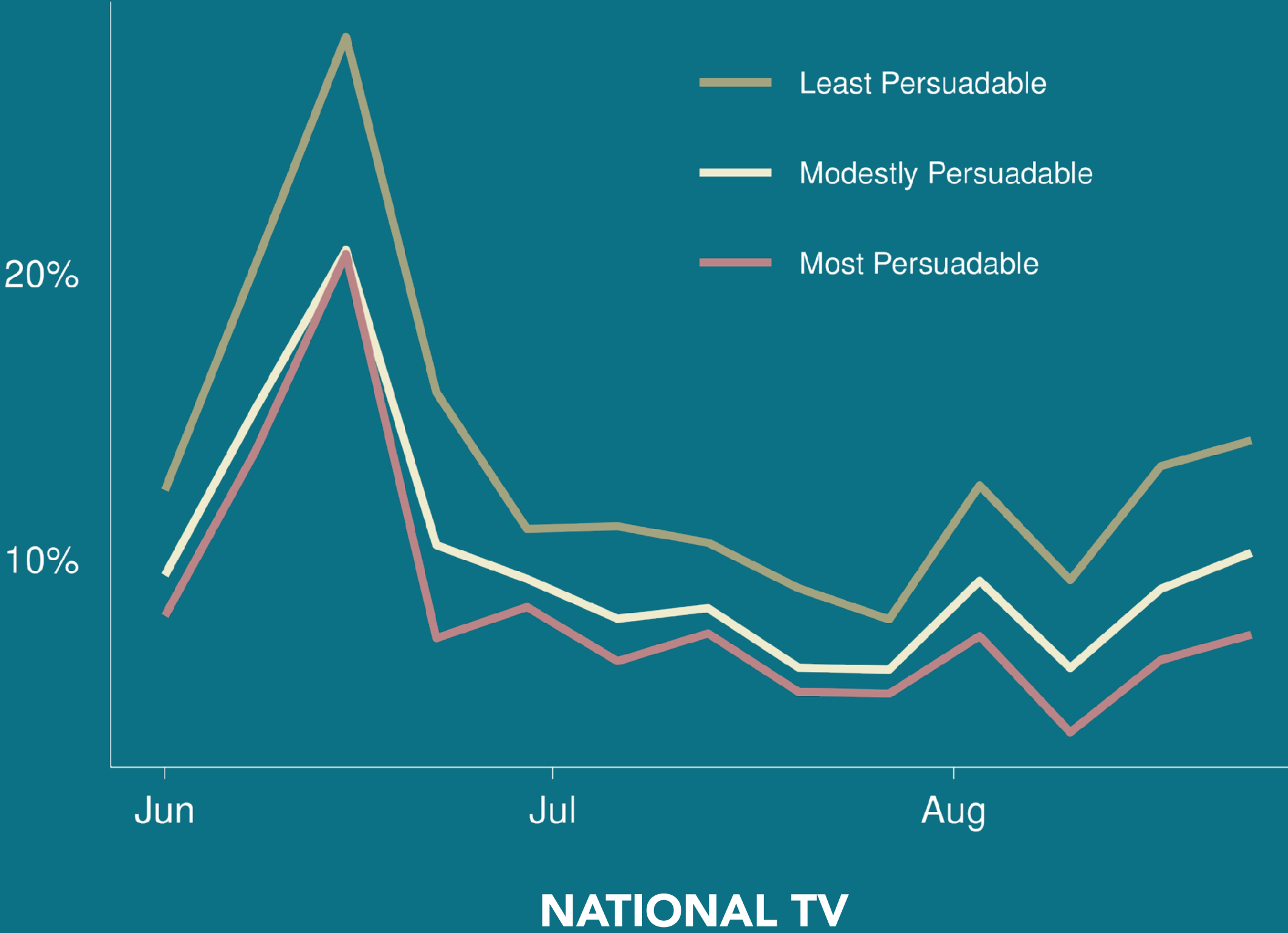
NUKES IN THE NEWS

PERSUADABLES x TV

Nukes content has really high reach on TV, especially in the news. From January through August 2021, anywhere from 10% to 30% of people watching national TV in our panels each day saw something about nuclear weapons. A lot of this was about Iran.



DAILY REACH OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS



NUKES IN THE NEWS

PERSUADABLES x ONLINE NEWS

The most persuadable group is the least likely to encounter online news. The table here shows average daily reach of online news from mainstream and other sources. Just 10% of the persuadable audience spends time on online news sites daily compared to 18% of the least persuadable group.

These results don't vary by values-based audience. From **PEOPLE POWER** to **DON'T TREAD ON ME**, persuadable audience members are about half as likely to read the news.

Persuadables in the **IF YOU SAY SO** audience watch very little broadcast or cable TV, so they don't get news there either. But nuclear weapons come up on TV a lot. Between 10%-30% of people who watch regular TV on a given day see something about nuclear weapons! Unfortunately, a large proportion of those people are unpersuadable.

Persuadability	Average Daily Reach of Online News
Least Persuadable	18%
Modestly Persuadable	14%
Most Persuadable	10%

NUKES IN THE NEWS

UNPERSUADABLES x ONLINE NEWS

Across media and across audiences, the least persuadable people are engaging with news. That includes conservative news but also mainstream national and liberal news, as well as political late night comedy.



CROSS-PLATFORM NEWS CONSUMPTION

Takeaway #2

News has already moved the people who are going to be moved. The remaining persuadables are consuming other media, but the news stories that have resonated provide a good direction to start.

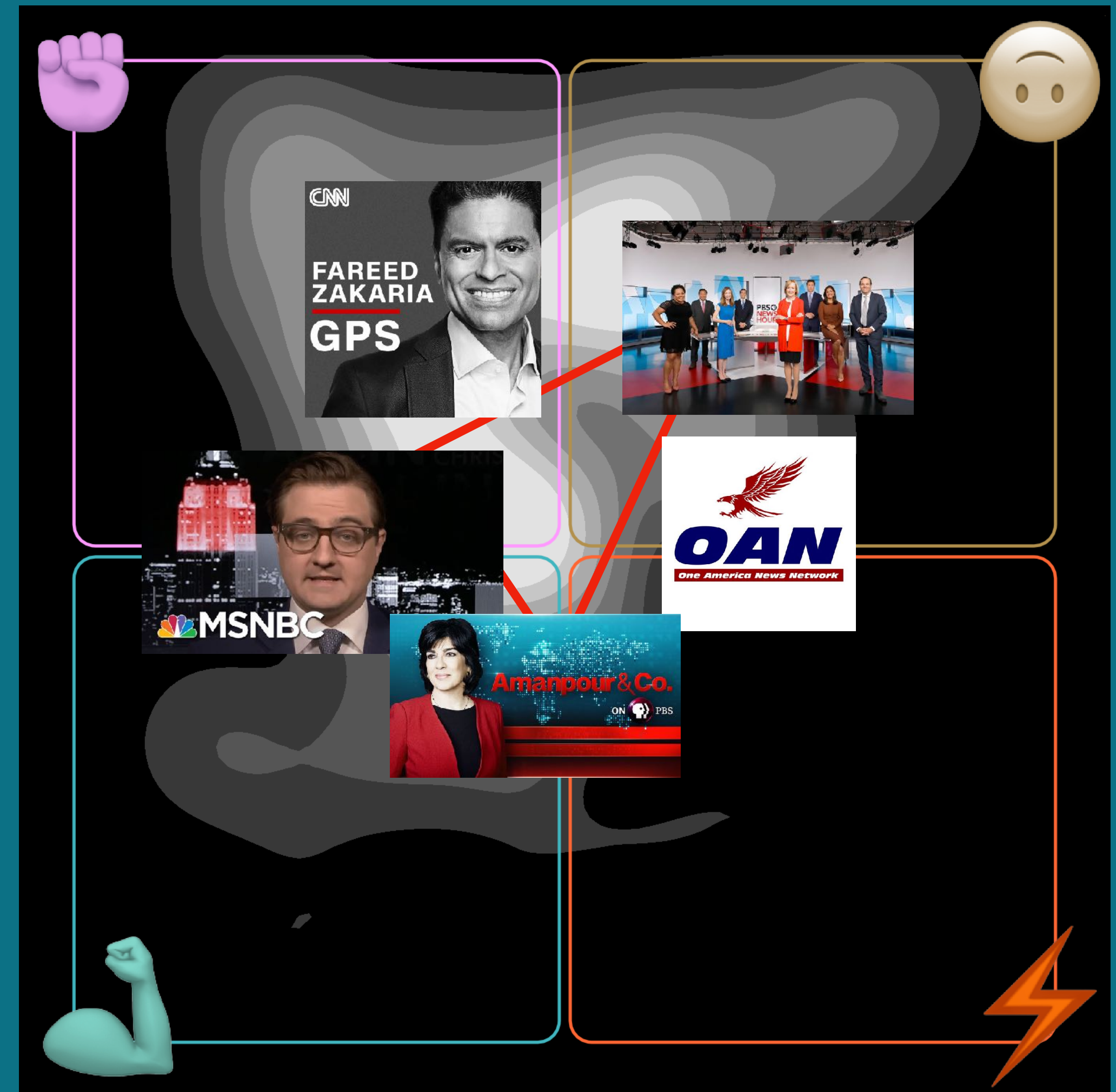
NUKES IN THE NEWS

STORY OPPORTUNITIES

When the most persuadable audience members do watch national TV news about nukes, the news focuses on diplomacy even when they are watching conservative news.

In contrast, the TV news that unpersuadable audiences consume focuses on international threats.

Persuadables are interested in where we go from here.



OPPORTUNITY ZONE

NUKES IN THE NEWS



STORY OPPORTUNITIES

When modestly persuadable people read news about nukes, one story that reaches them is “integrated threats.”

Persuadable people also read about risks to the “nuclear football” and resonate with the idea that some unstable individuals put the whole world at risk.

When the unpersuadable audiences watch national news about nuclear weapons, they choose stories about threats and the aggression of nuclear opponents. Unpersuadables are interested in how we keep ourselves safe from foreign threats.

And while their online print news sometimes acknowledges the threat to the US of having these weapons, the stories (progressive and conservative) mostly feature partisan infighting and bickering. The heroes in the new denuclearization stories will not be politicians.



EXISTENTIAL THREATS

Will These Places Survive a Collapse? Don't Bet on It. Skeptics Say.

World

Pandemic treaty needs to start with rethinking the paradigm of global health security

Analysis • Source: BMJ • Posted: 4 Jun 2021 • Originally published: 3 Jun 2021 • Origin: [View original](#)

Fears That Trump Might Launch a Strike Prompted General to Reassure China, Book Says

In a sign of his concerns, the nation's highest-ranking military officer also gathered commanders to remind them of the safeguards in the nuclear launch procedures.

1679



Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had become increasingly concerned about former President Donald J. Trump's fixation on his election loss. Sarabeth Maney/The New York Times

UNHINGED INDIVIDUALS

A military aide carries the nuclear "football" with the equipment and nuclear codes to Marine One the Trumps board.







Takeaway #3

The opportunity space for persuadables is on social media where they prefer to spend their time, and it's a big opportunity.

NUKES ON SOCIAL

PERSUADABLES x SOCIAL PLATFORM

IF YOU SAY SO and PEOPLE POWER visit more social media sites than other audiences. Facebook has high reach, though the most persuadable are less likely to visit than the least persuadable; the most persuadable are especially likely to visit YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.

		 PEOPLE POWER	 IF YOU SAY SO	 TOUGH COOKIES	 DON'T TREAD ON ME
Facebook	Most Persuadable	60%	59%	60%	63%
	Least Persuadable	67%	66%	70%	67%
YouTube	Most Persuadable	60%	65%	43%	50%
	Least Persuadable	52%	58%	39%	41%
Instagram	Most Persuadable	44%	47%	23%	31%
	Least Persuadable	37%	40%	21%	21%
TikTok	Most Persuadable	19%	25%	11%	15%
	Least Persuadable	14%	21%	11%	10%
Twitter	Most Persuadable	20%	18%	10%	11%
	Least Persuadable	22%	23%	12%	12%
Reddit	Most Persuadable	12%	10%	2%	4%
	Least Persuadable	12%	14%	4%	5%
Discord	Most Persuadable	7%	7%	1%	2%
	Least Persuadable	6%	8%	1%	2%

NUKES ON SOCIAL

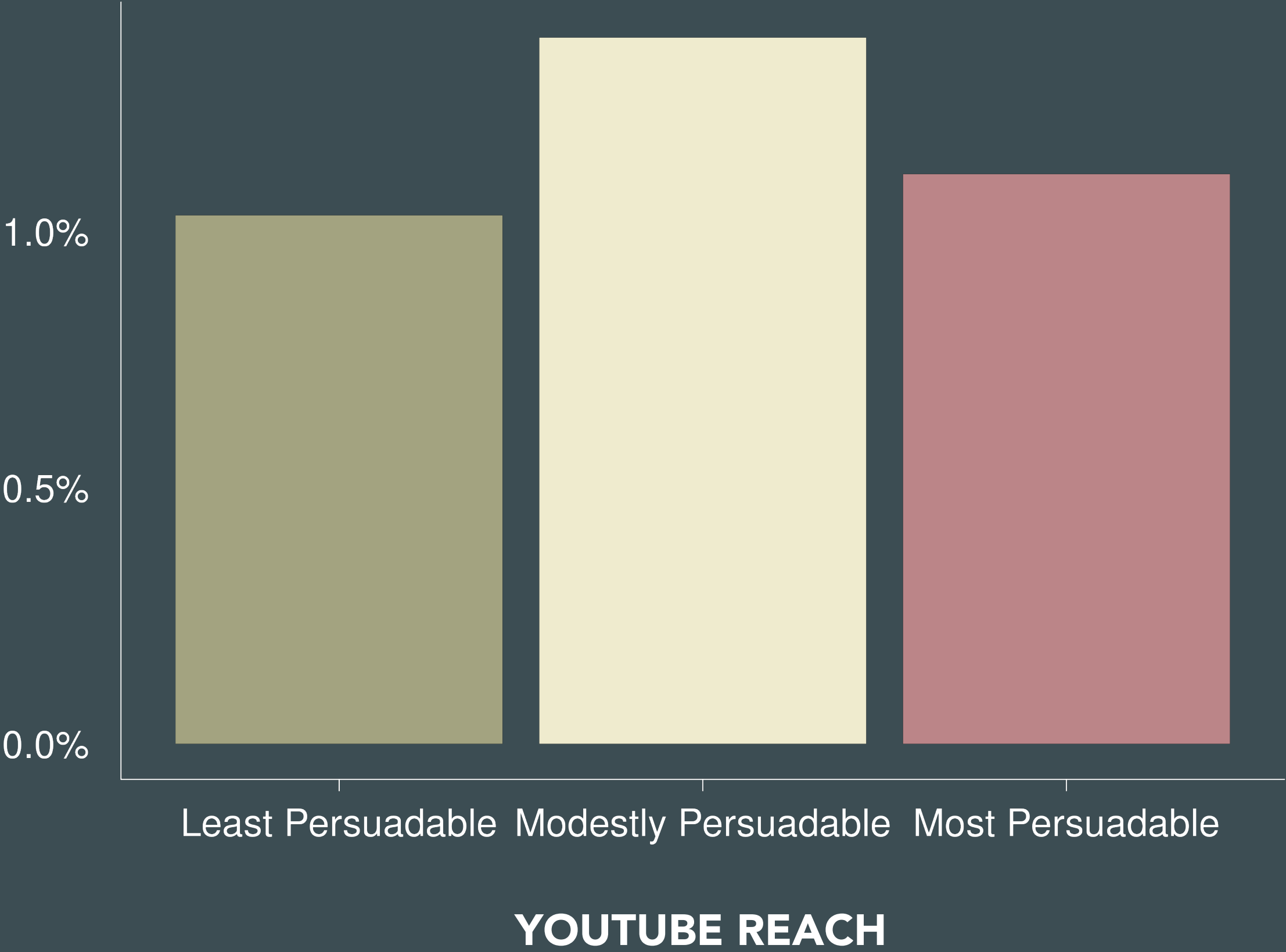


YOUTUBE OPPORTUNITY

YouTube is a great opportunity platform. About 1% of YouTube users are consuming nuke content every day! For comparison, Joe Rogan reaches 1/1000 people each day vs. 3/1000 people consuming nukes.

Persuadables are getting as much nuke content as unpersuadables on YouTube. If anything, the more persuadable people are getting more of this content. This doesn't include any metaphorical references.

But, the nukes content that reaches persuadable audiences on YouTube is not news content...

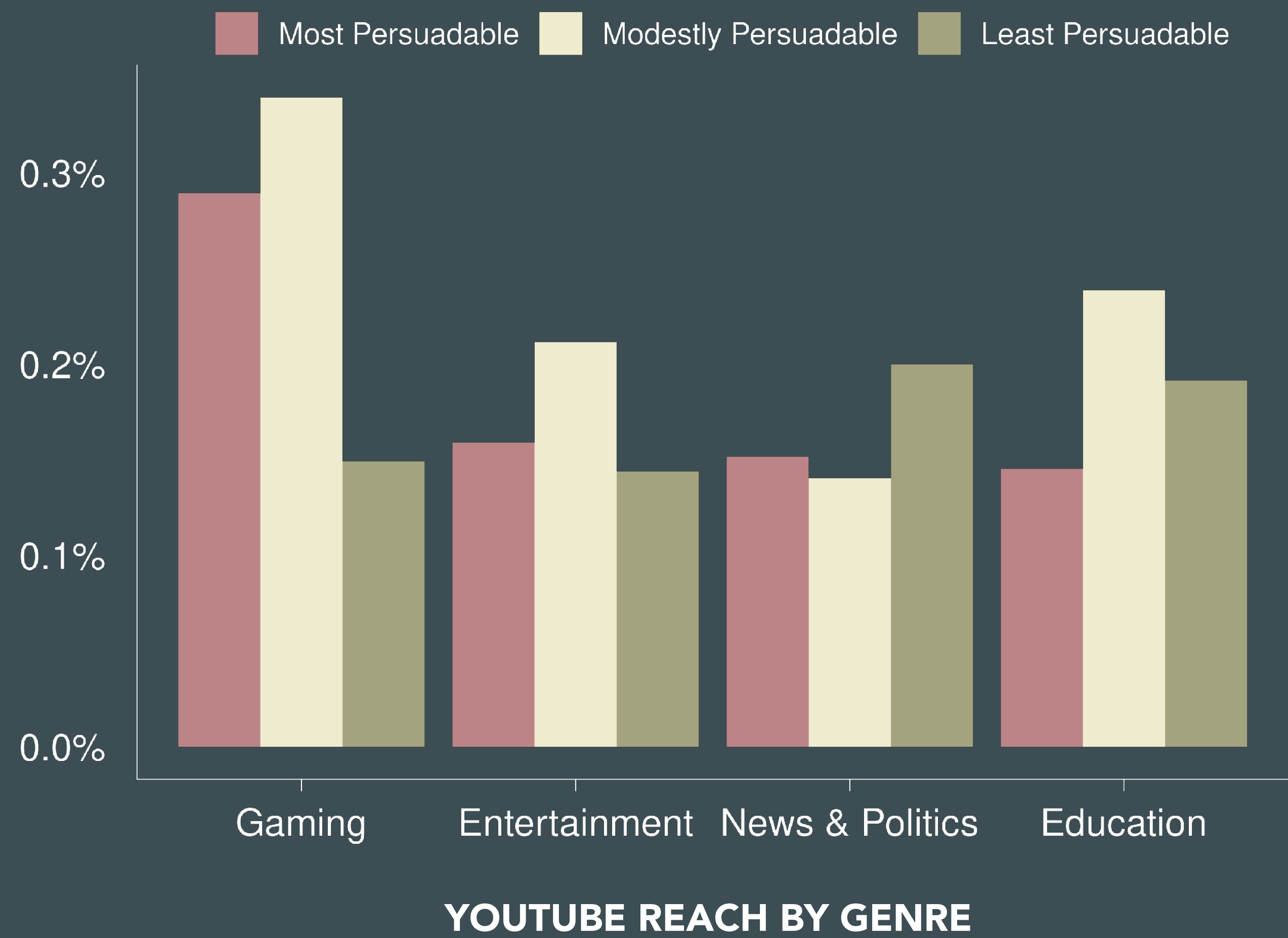


NUKES ON SOCIAL



YOUTUBE OPPORTUNITY X GENRE

Gaming is the most popular genre for persuadables on YouTube. 3 out of every 1,000 adult YouTube users in the most persuadable group consumes nuke-related gaming content every day.



NUKES ON SOCIAL YOUTUBE GAMING

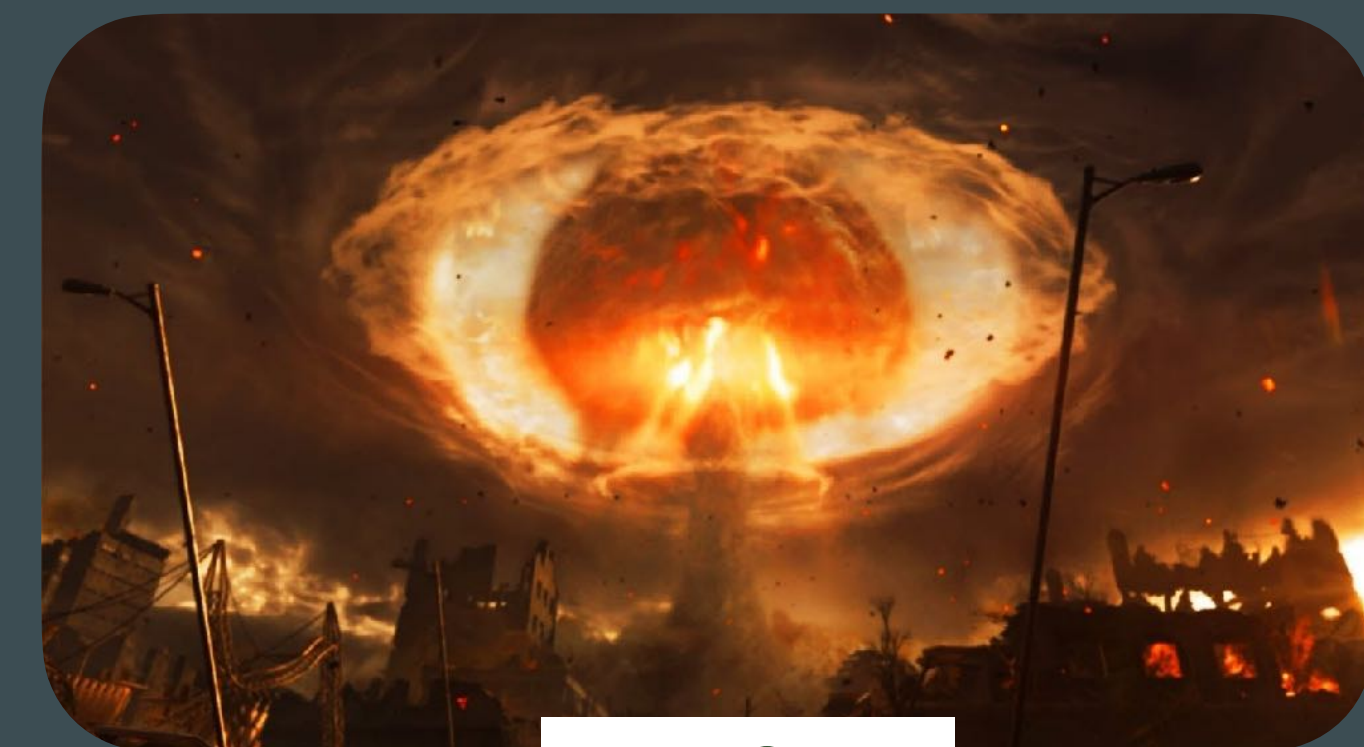
The content in gaming points to a widespread, salient narrative about nukes that regularly reaches persuadables. To help illustrate the narrative, we profiled how nukes show up in some hugely popular games.



MINECRAFT



CALL OF DUTY



FALLOUT

NUKES ON SOCIAL

YOUTUBE GAMING <> MINECRAFT

Minecraft is a technological version of Legos, where users explore an online world to gather ("mine") virtual building blocks that have various attributes, then combine these blocks to create ("craft") to build whatever their imagination can conjure. Users can then share their creations online with other users. Thus, users can create "mods" for anything they like, with varying degrees of complexity. And as with Lego, some users enjoy destroying their creations. Mods are available for users to do so, including mods for nuclear bombs.

Nuclear energy and nuclear meltdowns routinely appear in the same stories as nuclear weapons in gaming.



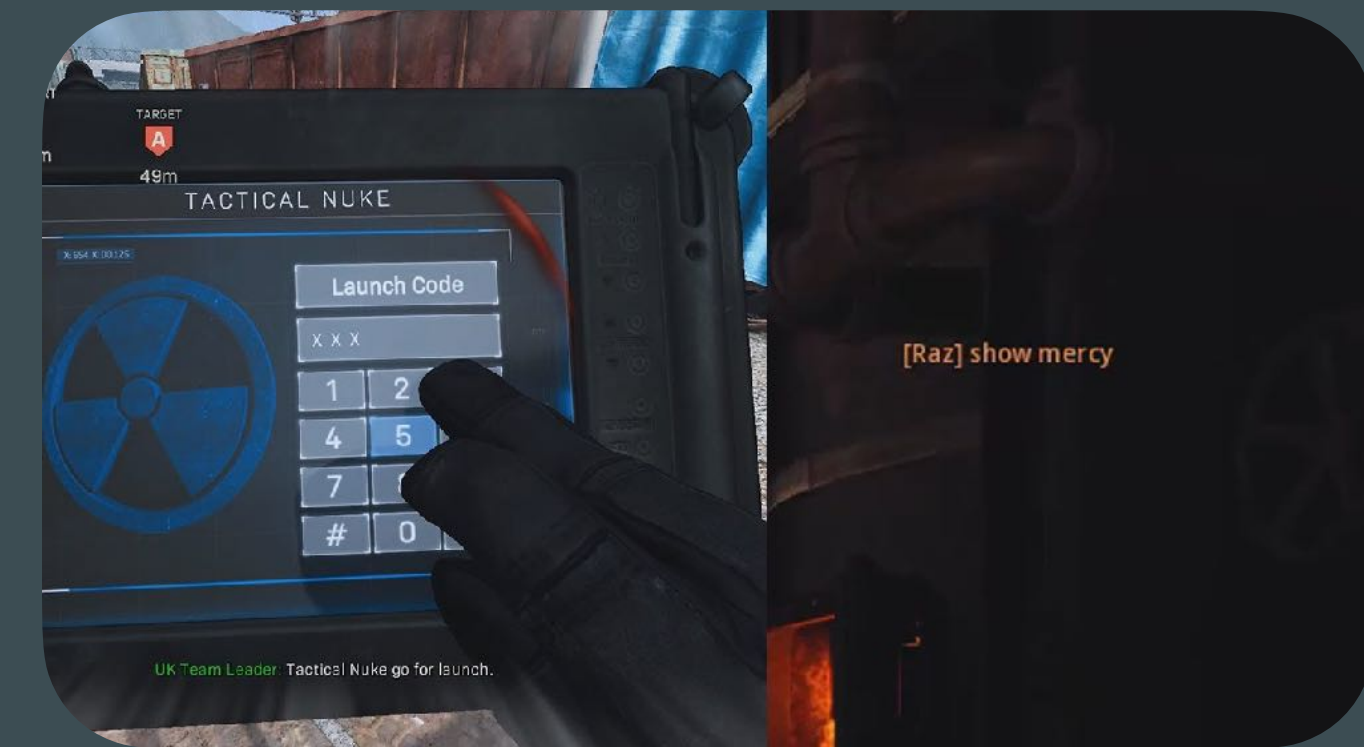
NUKES ON SOCIAL

YOUTUBE GAMING <> CALL OF DUTY

Call of Duty started as a single-player game, but evolved into an online experience, with players shooting each other. In online play, dead players respawn to fight again. The goal is to have a high "kill/death ratio," where you kill more people than kill you.

The game features a "tactical nuke" that must be earned by achieving "kill streaks"—killing many other players without dying. Deploying the tactical nuke kills all players in its blast radius, thus upping the player's kill/death ratio and score.

Nuclear energy and nuclear meltdowns routinely appear in the same stories as nuclear weapons in gaming.



NUKES ON SOCIAL

YOUTUBE GAMING <> FALLOUT

Fallout is a game set in 2077, after an atomic war between U.S. and China. The player explores a wasteland populated by mutants and extremist factions. The post-war atomic age is satirized in the game, which features sci-fi atomic-powered robots and radioactive soft drinks. Every game in the series references nuclear weapons, and requires using a weapon to advance in the game. Detonated nukes mutate flora, change the characteristics of ore, and opens new levels to the player to explore. Atomic energy and weapons are the central theme to this game, and is presented sometimes as farce.

Advocates have already noticed that the Fallout series is culturally important. Read more [here](#).



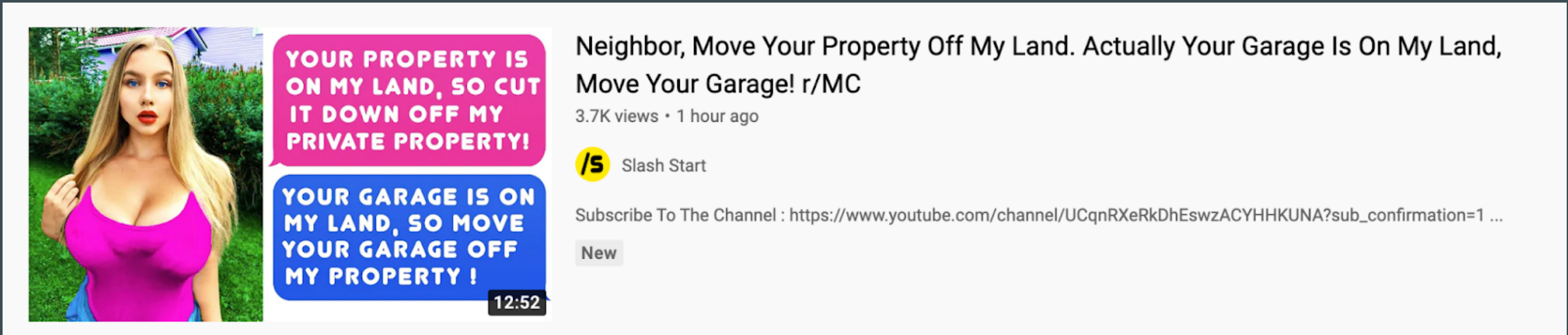
NUKES ON SOCIAL

UNHINGED PERPETRATORS

People who use nukes in multiplayer games aren’t considered cool or powerful. They’re considered rude at best and unhinged at worst. Elsewhere on social media, “going nuclear” means jumping the shark or going completely wild.

To get to the true nuclear narratives, we had to wade through all kinds of references to this unhinged “nuclear” behavior in popular culture. Tropes like nuclear revenge (popular on Reddit and YouTube) and nuclear noodles emphasize that “nuclear” doesn’t mean strong in the persuadable culture; it means incredibly stupid and self-destructive.

NUCLEAR REVENGE



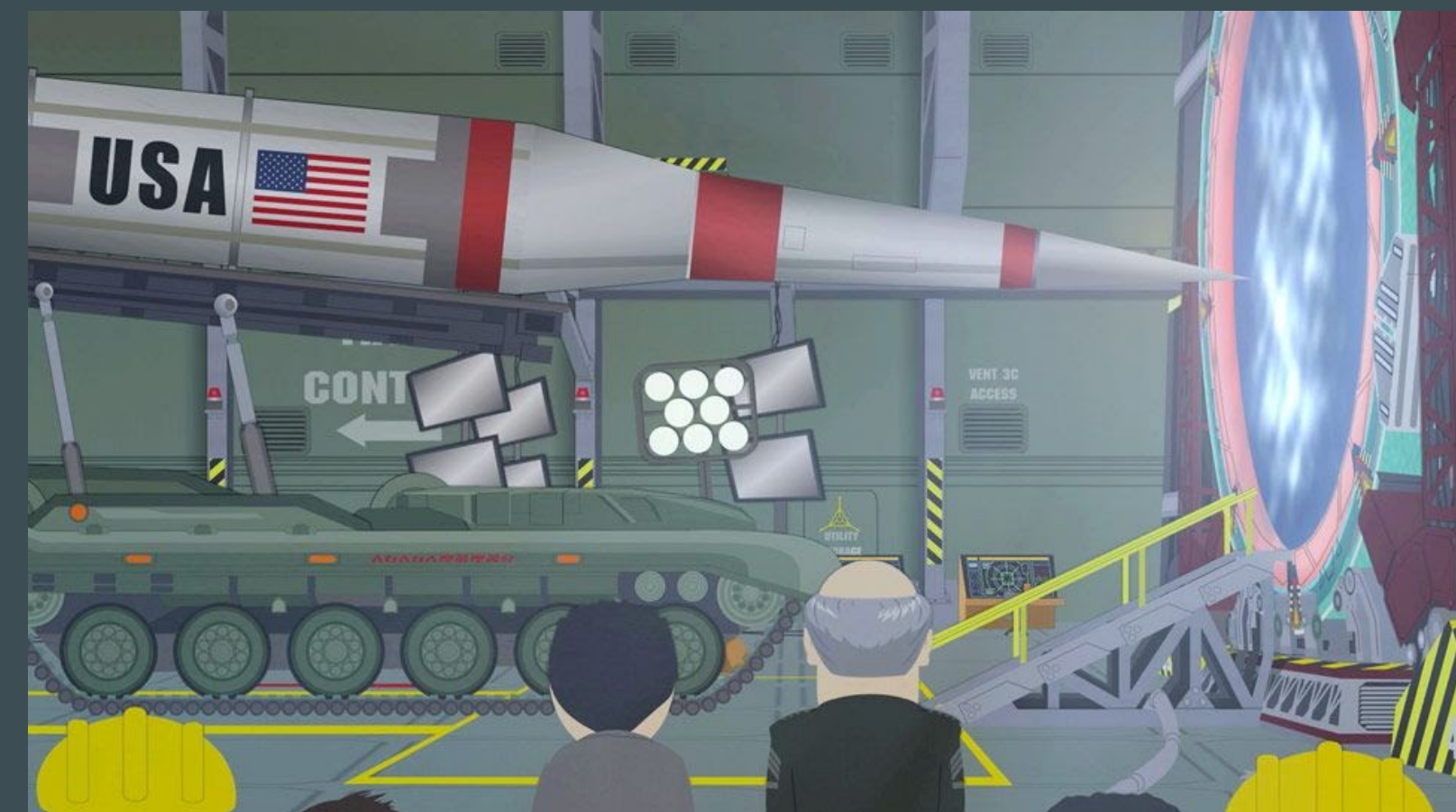
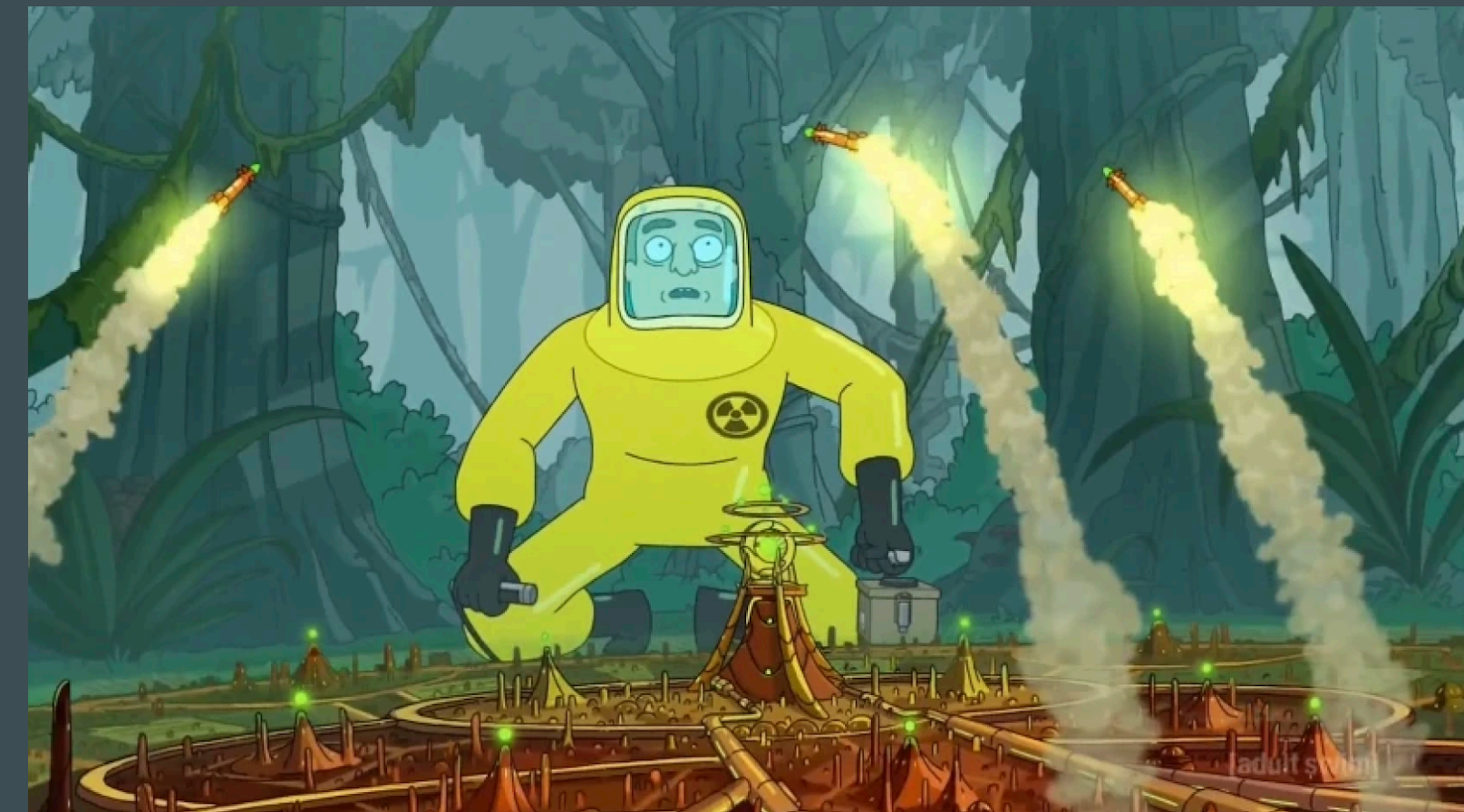
NUCLEAR NOODLES



NUKES ON SOCIAL

EXTENDING TO ENTERTAINMENT TV

The entertainment TV featuring nukes that reaches persuadables is on cartoons targeted to adults. They reinforce the cartoonish villainy of nuclear attack in shows like *South Park* and *Rick and Morty*, often combined with non-human or other-worldly encounters.



Takeaway #4

The entertainment, gaming, and social media narrative is very anti-nuke, but it's not working for denuclearization yet.



... Nuclear weapons are capable of
world-ending destruction,

Fears That Trump Might Launch a S Prompted General to Reassure China Book Says

In a sign of his concerns, the nation's highest-ranking military officer also gathered commanders to remind them of the safeguards in the nuclear launch procedures.



...unhinged individuals will cause
our downfall—

 Achievement get!
Crazy Ivan



And there is no other future.



Takeaway #5

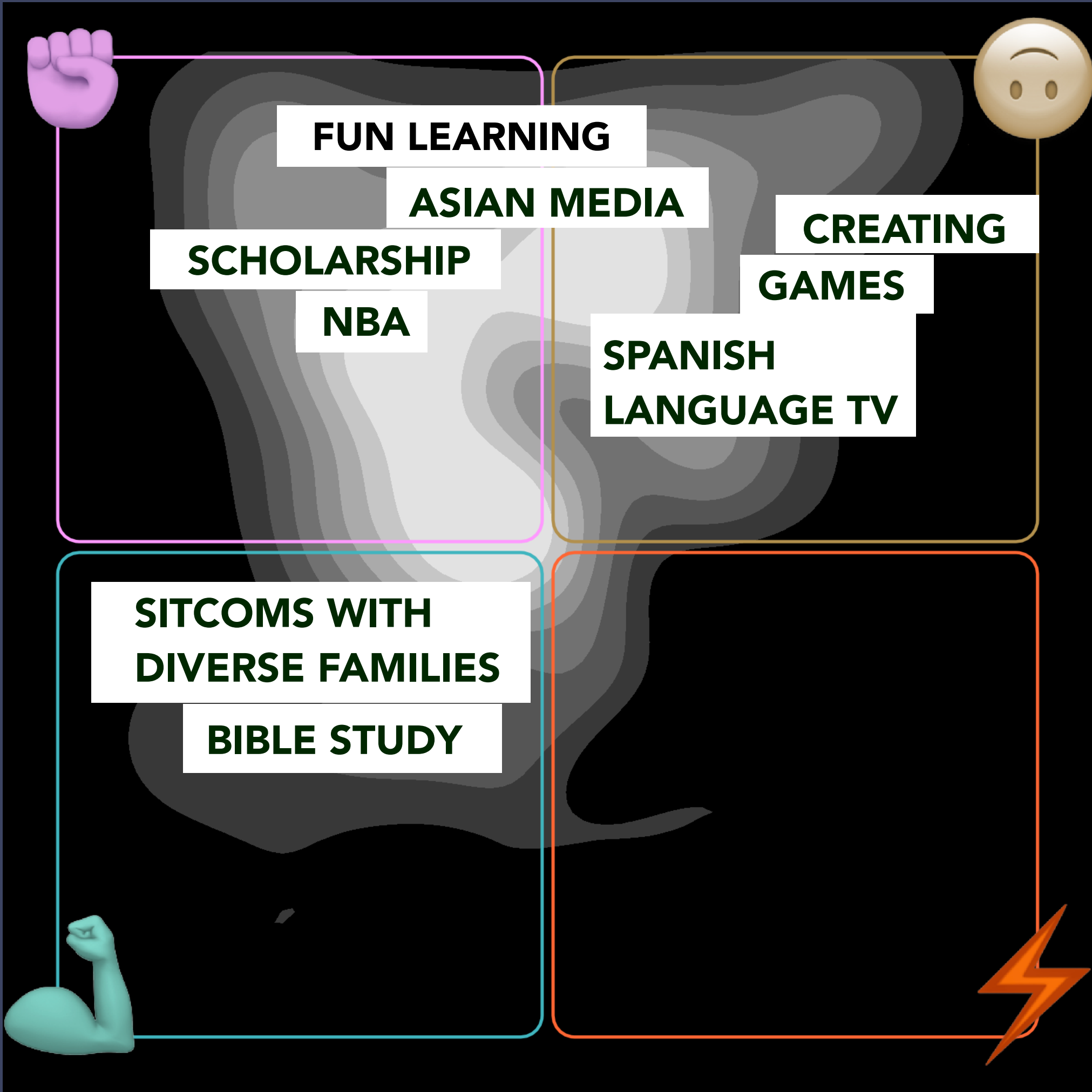
Persuadables are already bought into the idea that nukes are dangerous, but they don't believe the apocalypse is avoidable. We need to find and tell them a story of a more hopeful future.

CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

OVERALL PERSUADABLE OPPORTUNITIES

The biggest narrative opportunity is to take this existing aware-but-cynical narrative and add a nuclear weapon-free future to it.

That might be difficult to do in gaming specifically because game creators don't see themselves as educators, but members of the gaming persuadable audience also engage with cultural content elsewhere. This map shows some of the audience's favorite cultural homes online.



OPPORTUNITY AREAS

CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

PERSUADABLES: GAMING & CREATING

One thing that makes this gaming subset of the persuadable audience a particularly powerful target for stories is that they are creators themselves. They visit YouTube Studio and Canva more than other audiences, suggesting that if they encounter stories they like about our nuclear weapon-free future, they are well equipped to amplify those stories.

penguinz0 is one example of a YouTube creator with substantial reach in the most persuadable segment, and a tour of his channel is an instructive guide to the kinds of content that these creators make and like. It includes gaming videos, but also covers reactions, stunts, and comedy.

Challenges and other campaign formats that actively engage the audience as storytellers could be very successful here.



OPPORTUNITY AREAS

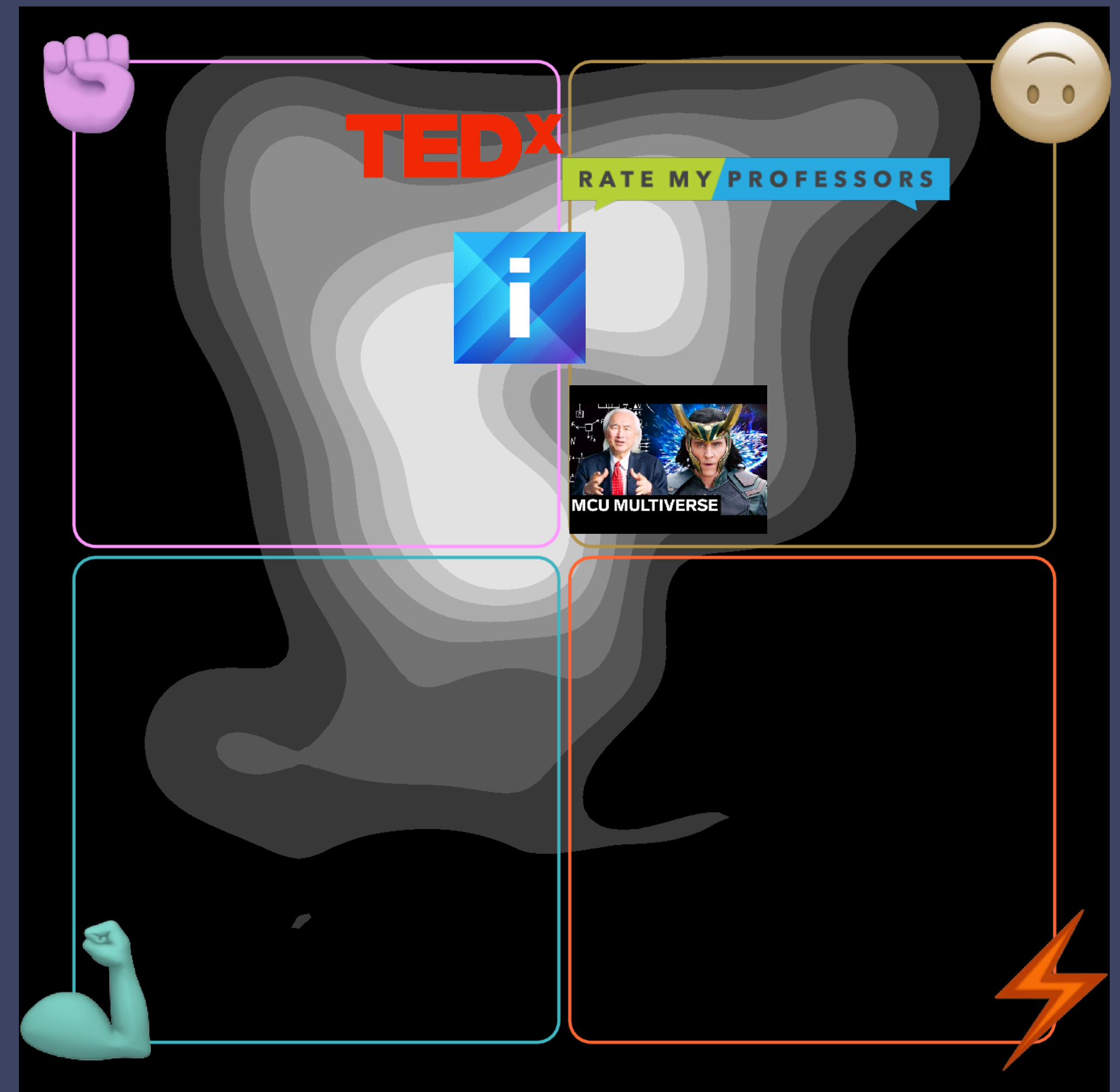
CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

PERSUADABLES: FUN LEARNING

Education is a big area of opportunity on YouTube. Education videos are bringing nuclear weapons-related content to about 1 out of every 1,000 persuadable audience members every day.

But not just any education content resonates with this group. Mark Rober, for instance, is a big YouTube education influencer, but we found that his content mostly reaches people who are not persuadable.

The education content that reaches persuadables is a little sillier, and Wired is a very good example. Other YouTube channels that reach persuadables are TedEd and TedX, The Infographics Show, and Crash Course. Ratemyproffessor.com is another learning-themed website popular with persuadables.

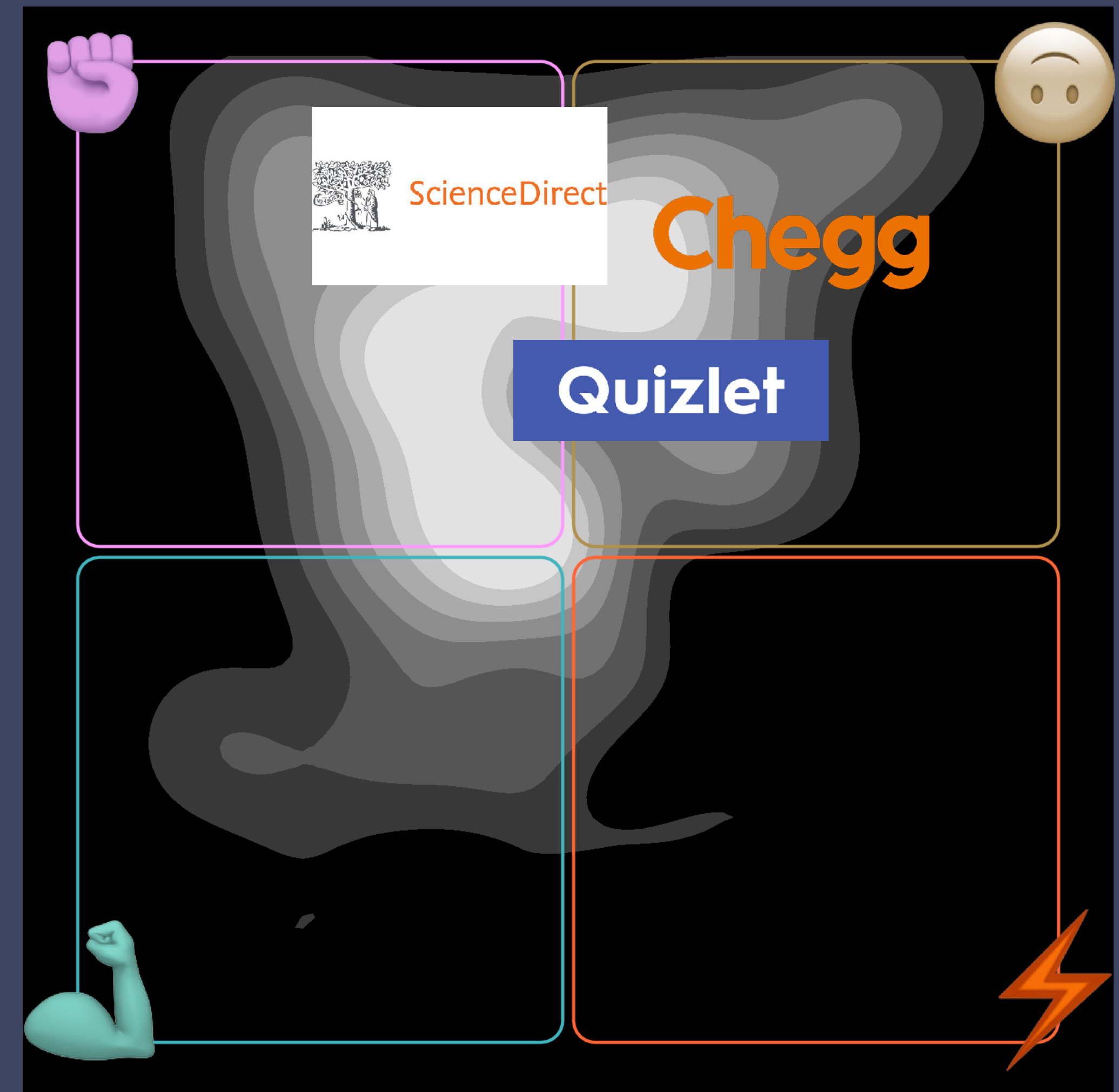


OPPORTUNITY AREAS

CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

PERSUADABLES: SCHOLARSHIP

Other YouTube channels that reach persuadables focus less on fun learning and more on formal learning. Sites like Science Direct, Chegg, and Quizlet are all popular destinations for persuadables looking to learn. One way to reach this audience may be to have stories about decommissioning nuclear weapons and denuclearization assigned to them in class through curriculum or arising in response to their searches for class assignments.



OPPORTUNITY AREAS

CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

PERSUADABLES: SPANISH LANGUAGE TV

Spanish Language Television programming is also popular amongst persuadables, particularly IF YOU SAY SO's. News and information-focused channels like Primer Impacto and Noticiero Univision, and Gordo Y La Flaca all reach this audience. Google Translate is another frequently visited destination for persuadables.

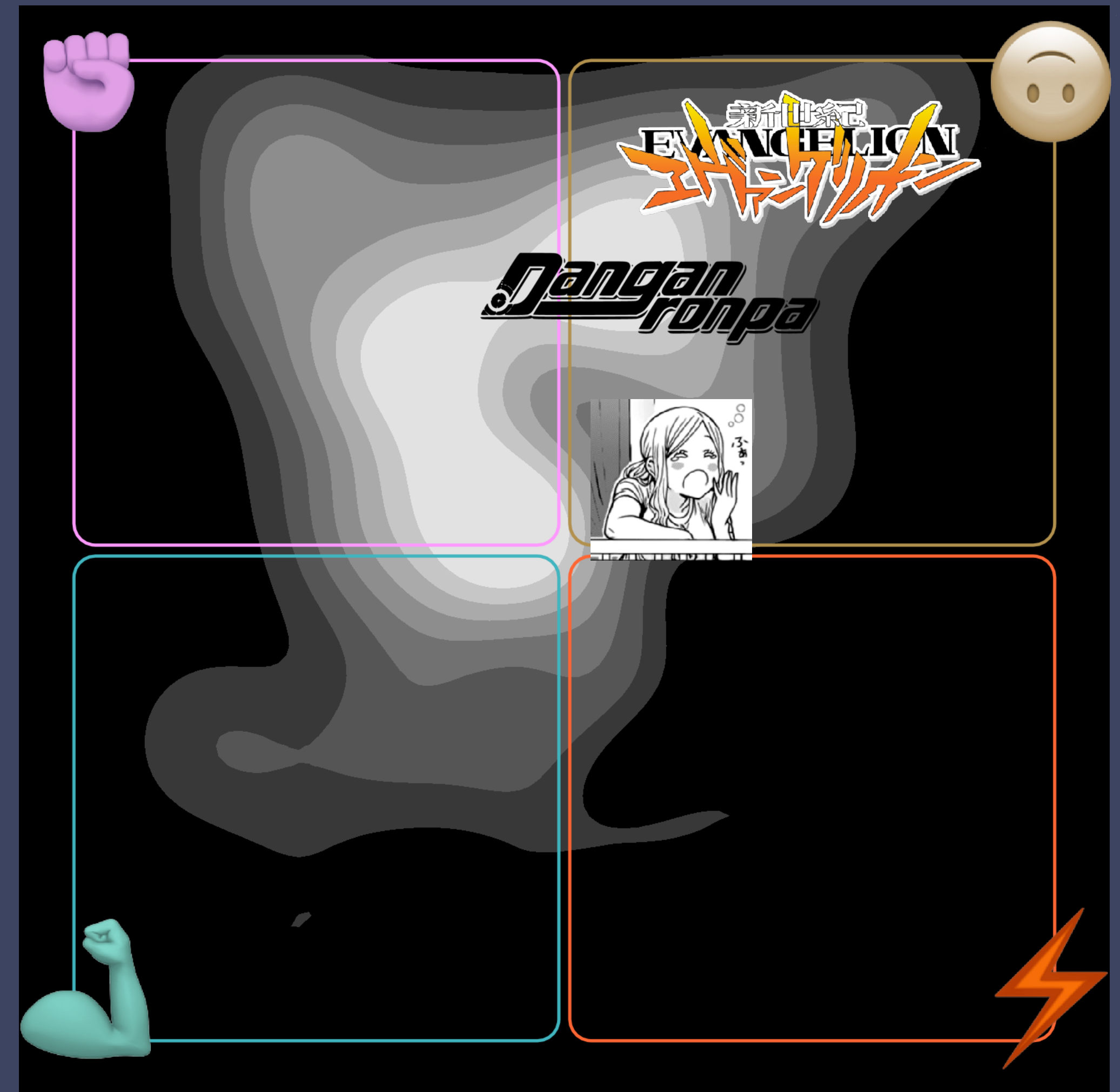


OPPORTUNITY AREAS

CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

PERSUADABLES: ASIAN MEDIA

Anime and anime-inspired games like the Danganronpa Trilogy also have substantial reach with IF YOU SAY SO persuadables in particular. Much of the engagement around this type of media—like Manga and Evangelion—happens within Reddit subs, a platform that represents a significant opportunity to reach this audience in and of itself.

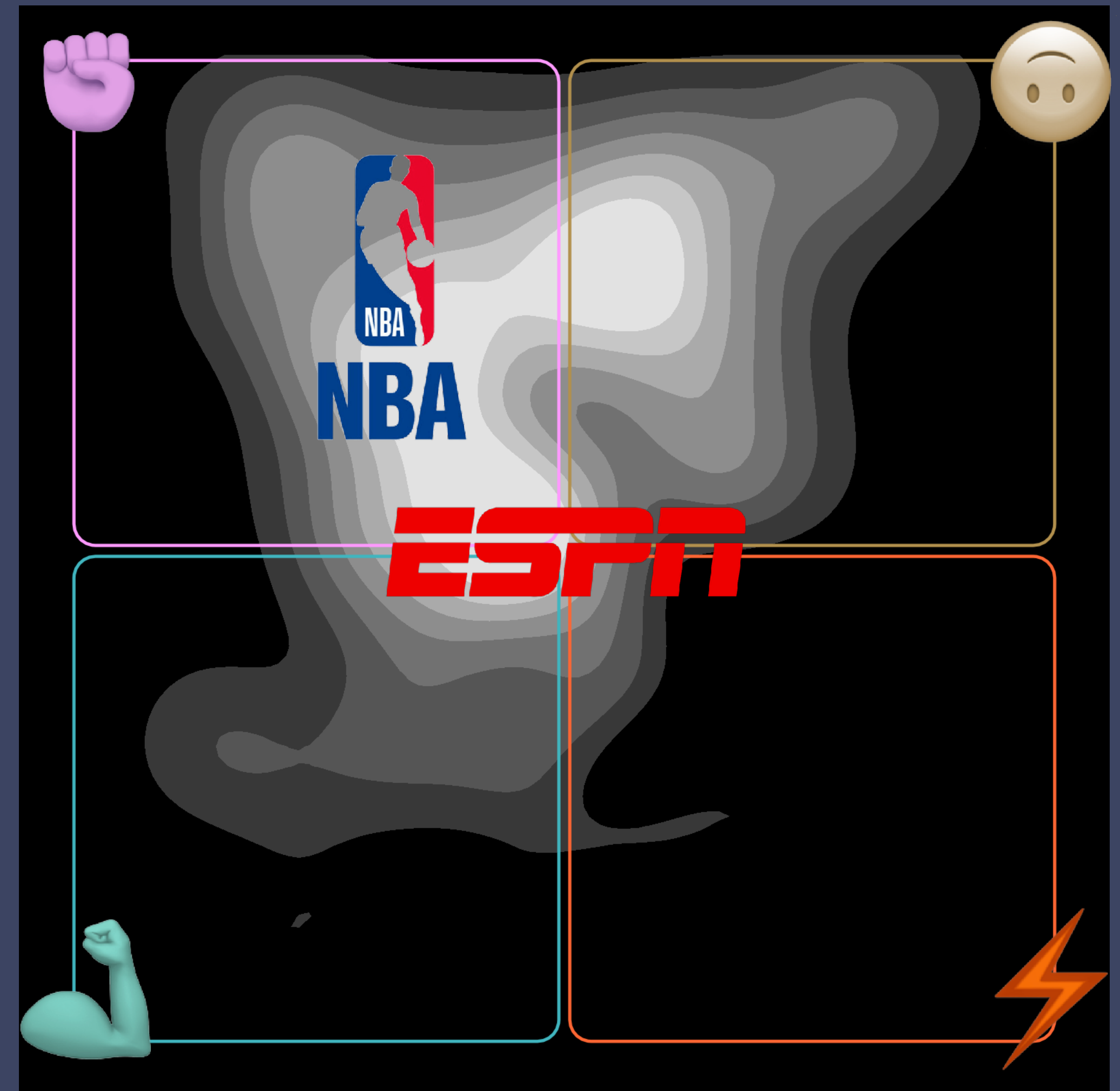


OPPORTUNITY AREAS

CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

PERSUADABLES: SPORTS

Sports are uniquely positioned to reach persuadables across all the audiences, and ESPN is the premier destination for those audiences to engage with all things sports. For PEOPLE POWER, the NBA is particularly popular.



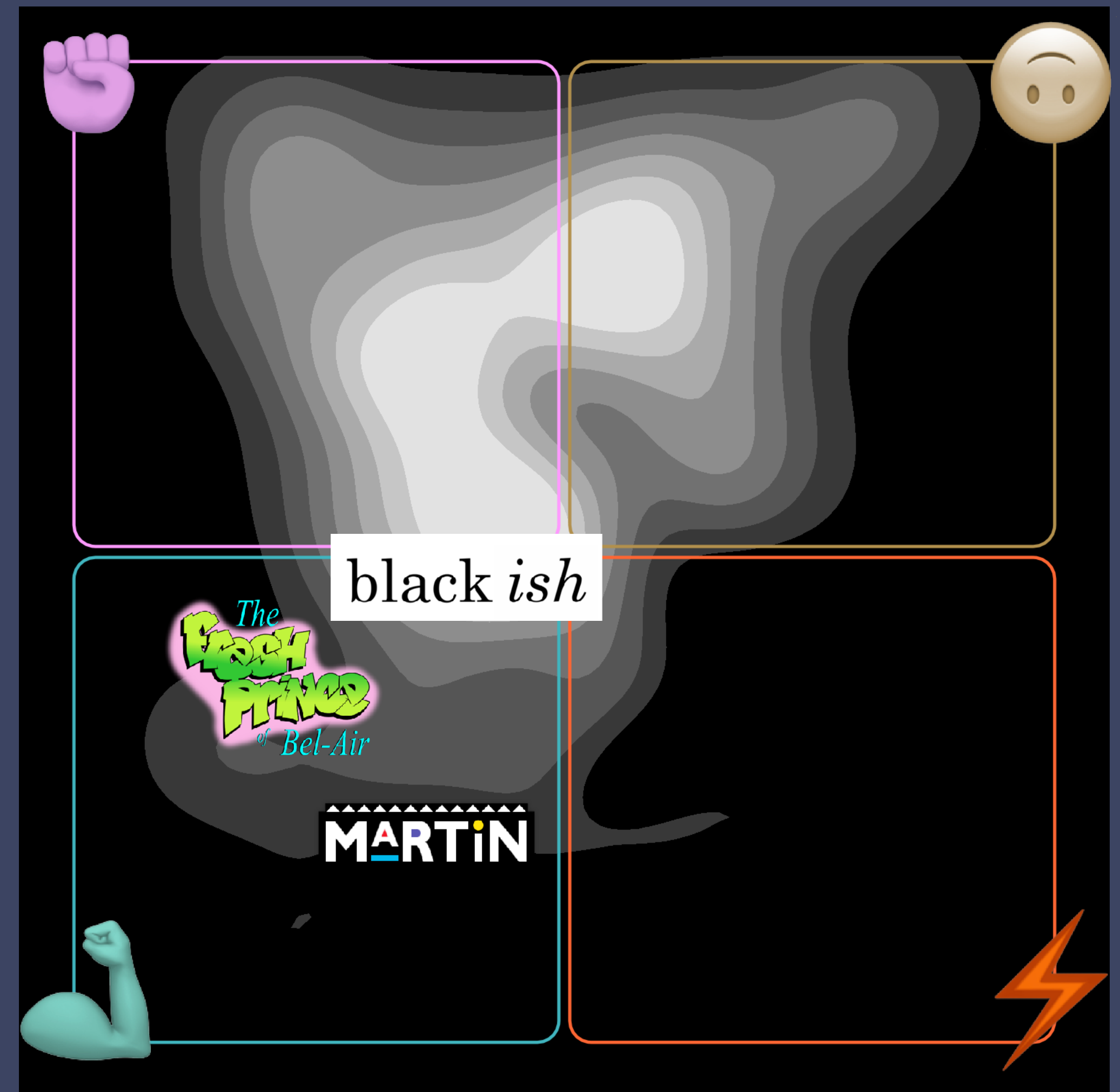
OPPORTUNITY AREAS

CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

PERSUADABLES: SITCOMS W/ DIVERSE FAMILIES

TOUGH COOKIE persuadables spend more time watching TV than the other audiences, so it's a great opportunity to reach this audience. What they watch are often sitcoms like black-ish, The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, and Martin.

These shows reflect the family focus of this audience. Turning this into stories that emphasize caring for future generations, especially children and grandchildren, is an opportunity to resonate with TOUGH COOKIE values.



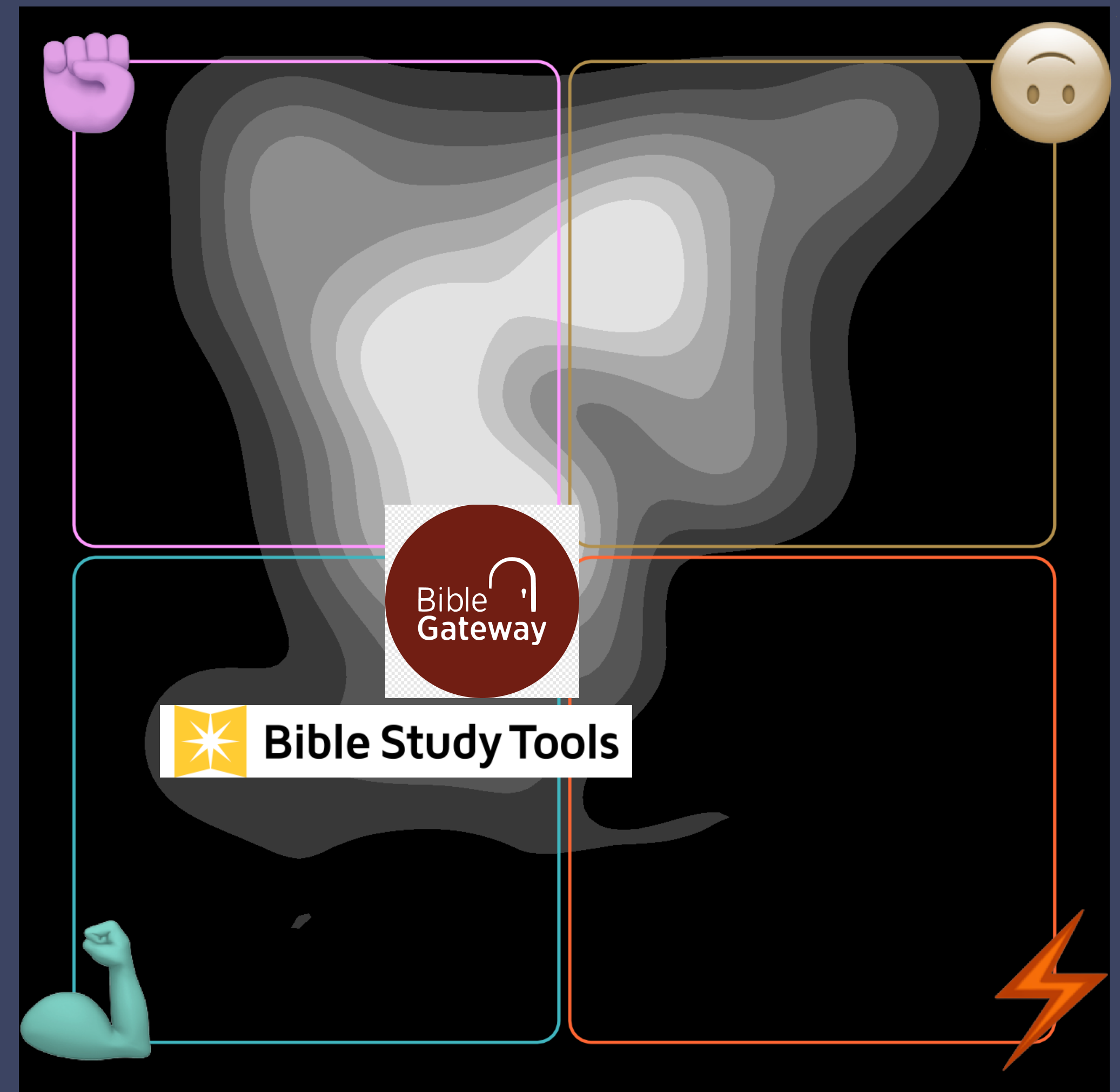
OPPORTUNITY AREAS

CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

PERSUADABLES: BIBLE STUDY

Religiosity is also higher among TOUGH COOKIE persuadables compared to the other audiences, and faith-based content has significant reach here with sites like Bible Study Tool and Bible Gateway being amongst the most popular.

The opportunity here is that they are already bought into the urgency and nature of the threat; the challenge is that they don't believe the apocalypse is avoidable. Interventions here need to tell a story of a more hopeful future.



OPPORTUNITY AREAS

The Upshot

America is already convinced that nuclear weapons are a real and present threat, and they are represented that way in culture. However, persuadable audiences aren't convinced that denuclearization is possible.

The next step is to show them what a post-nuclear weapons world looks like.

Thanks for listening

For more info, contact:

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