

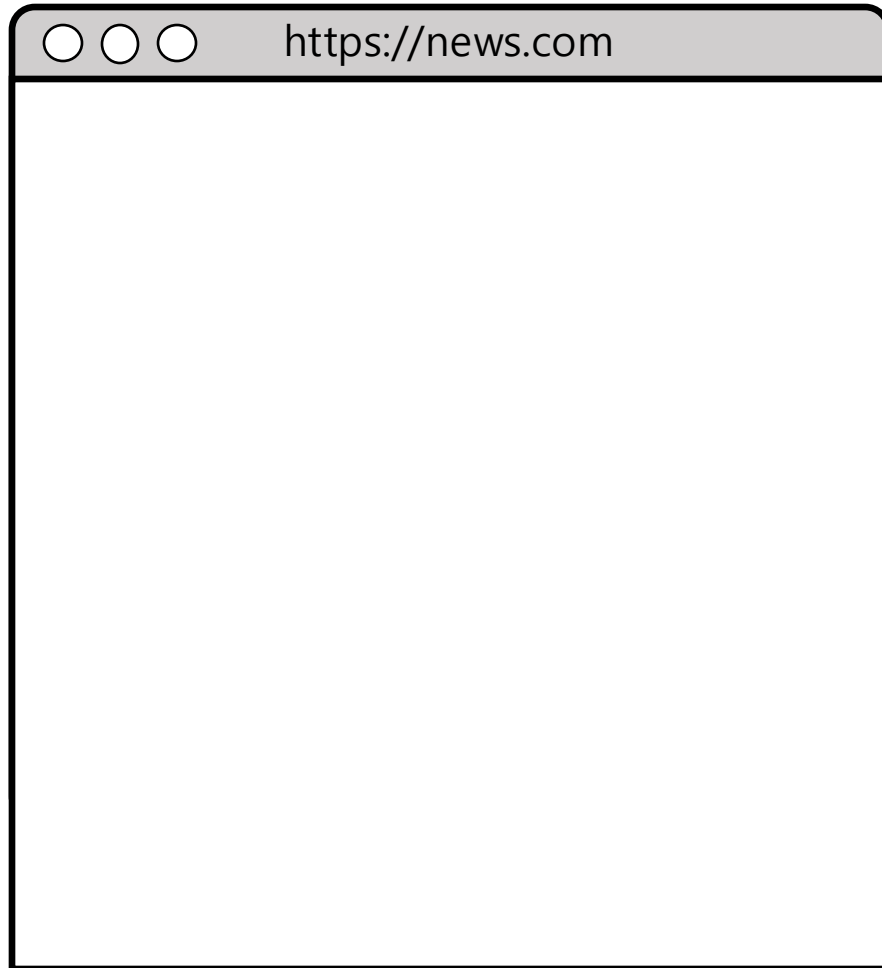
You Only Perturb Once: Bypassing (Robust) Ad-Blockers Using Universal Adversarial Perturbations

Dongwon Shin*, Suyoung Lee*, Sanghyun Hong† and Soeul Son*

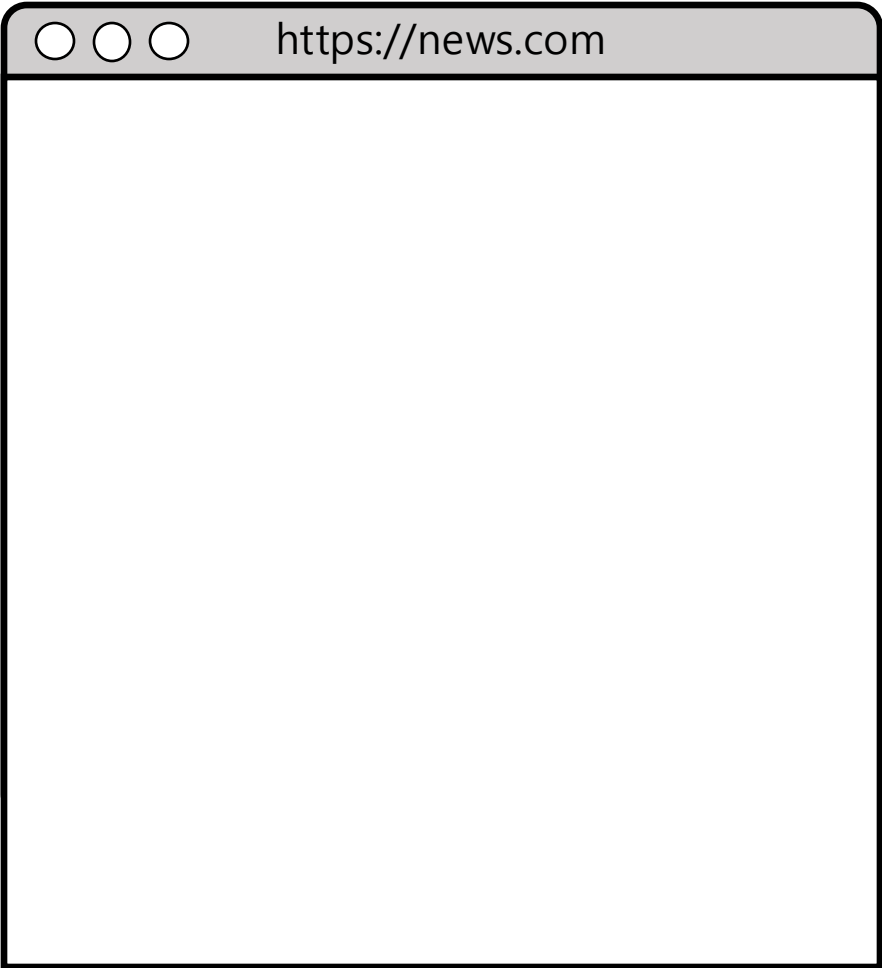
*KAIST, †Oregon State University

ACSAC 2024

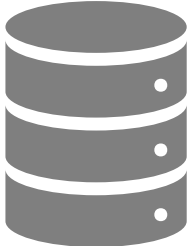
Online Advertising & Tracking Service (ATS)



Online Advertising & Tracking Service (ATS)



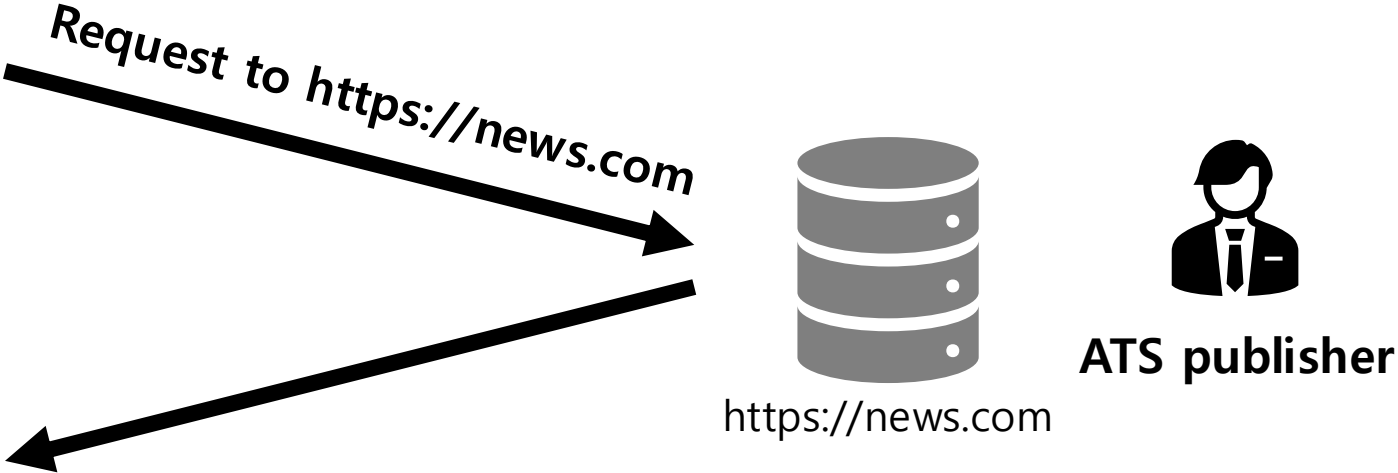
Request to https://news.com

A thick black arrow originates from the right side of the browser window and points towards the server icon.

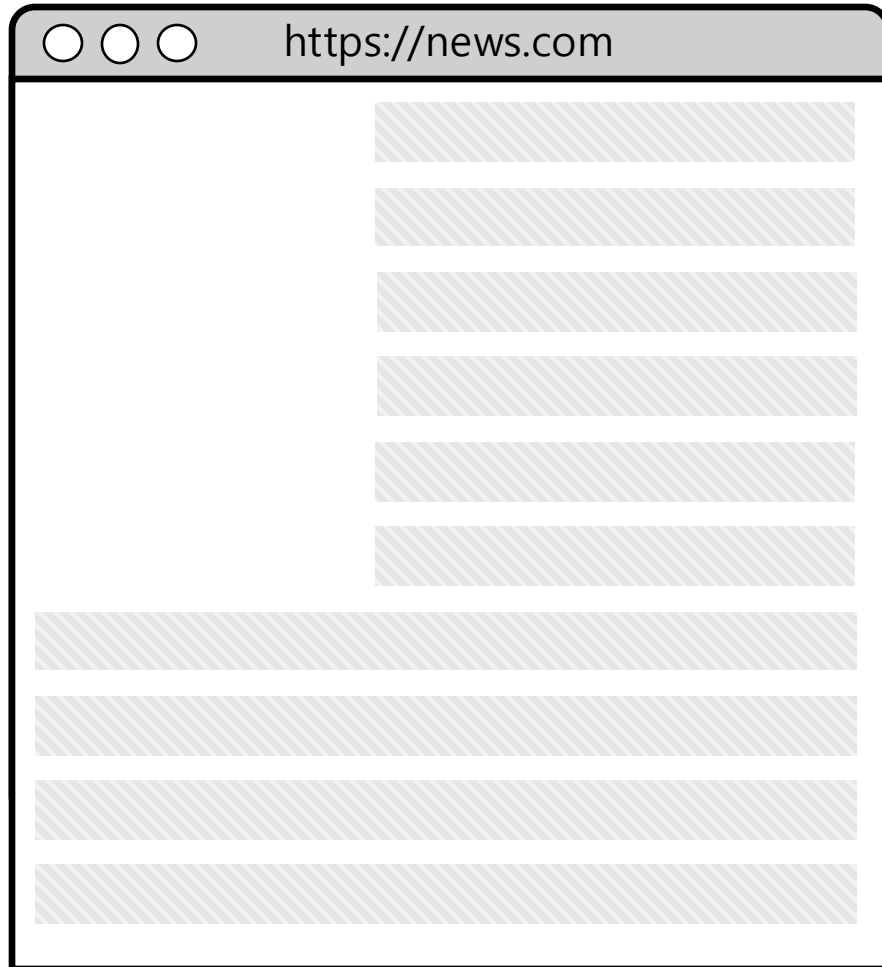
ATS publisher

https://news.com

Online Advertising & Tracking Service (ATS)

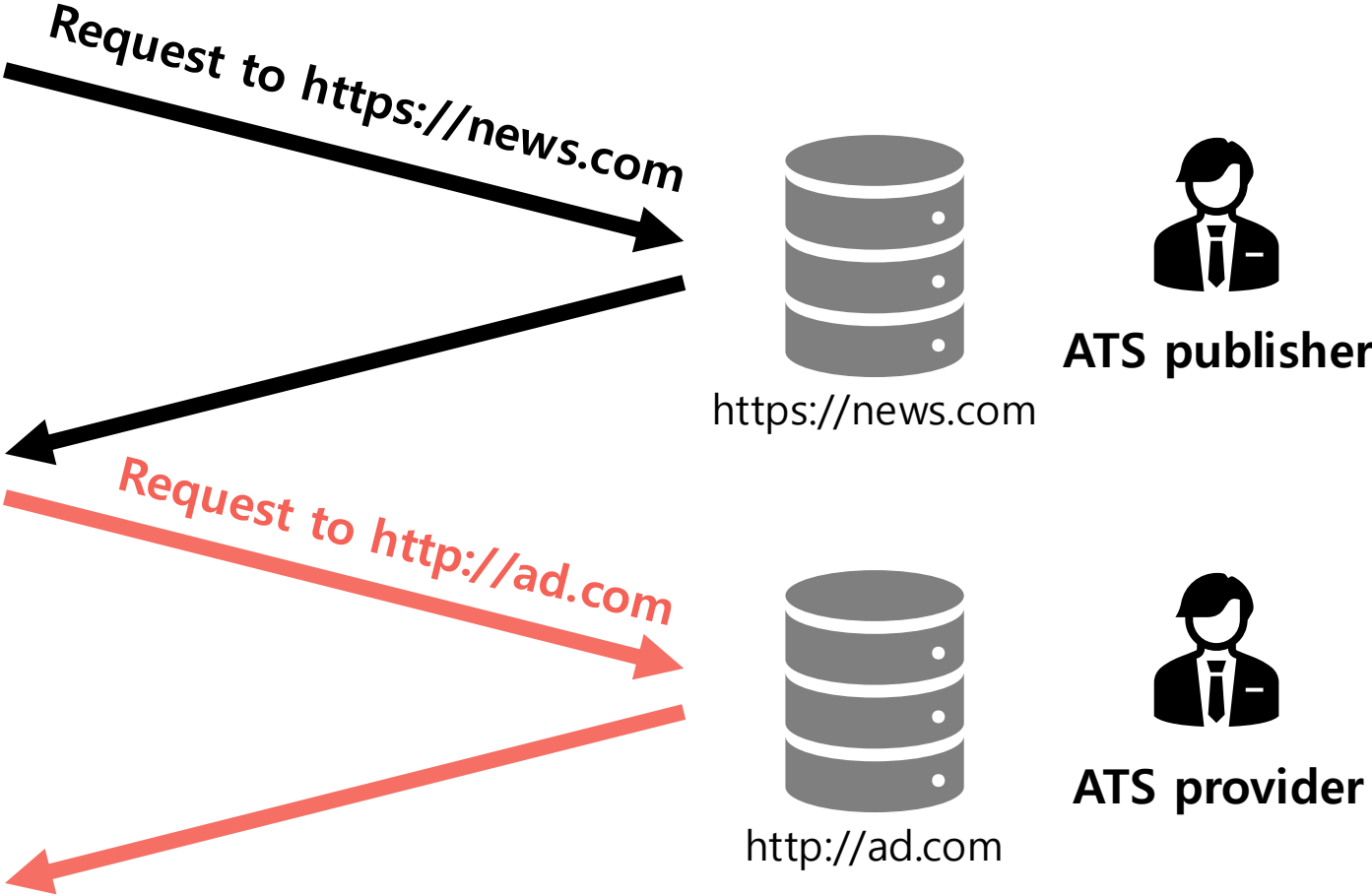
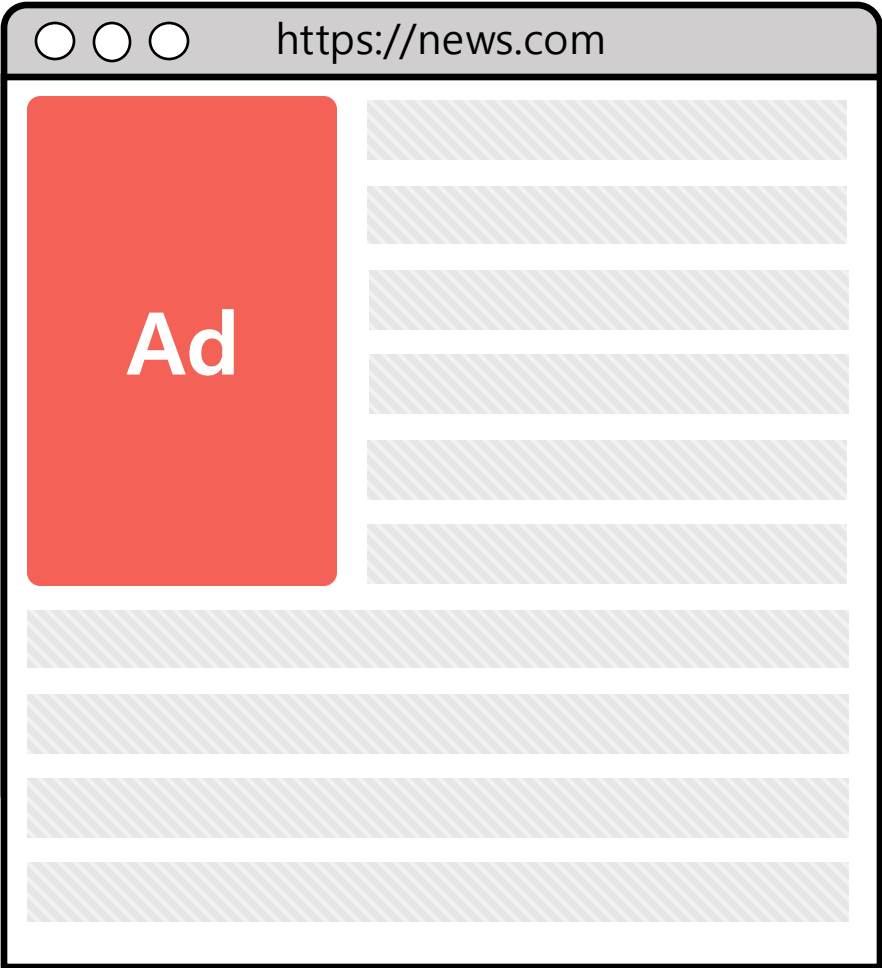


Online Advertising & Tracking Service (ATS)

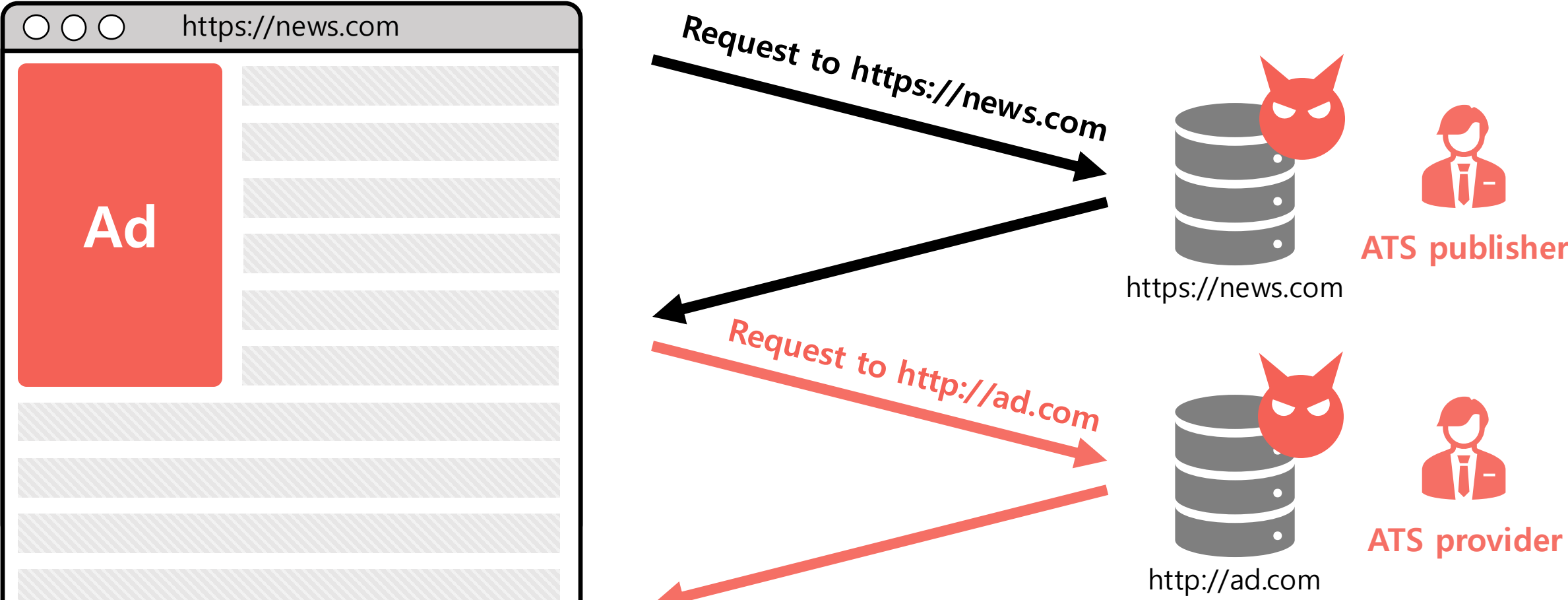


```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad' >
  ...
  <script src = 'http://ad.com/track_user.js' >
  ...
</body>
```

Online Advertising & Tracking Service (ATS)

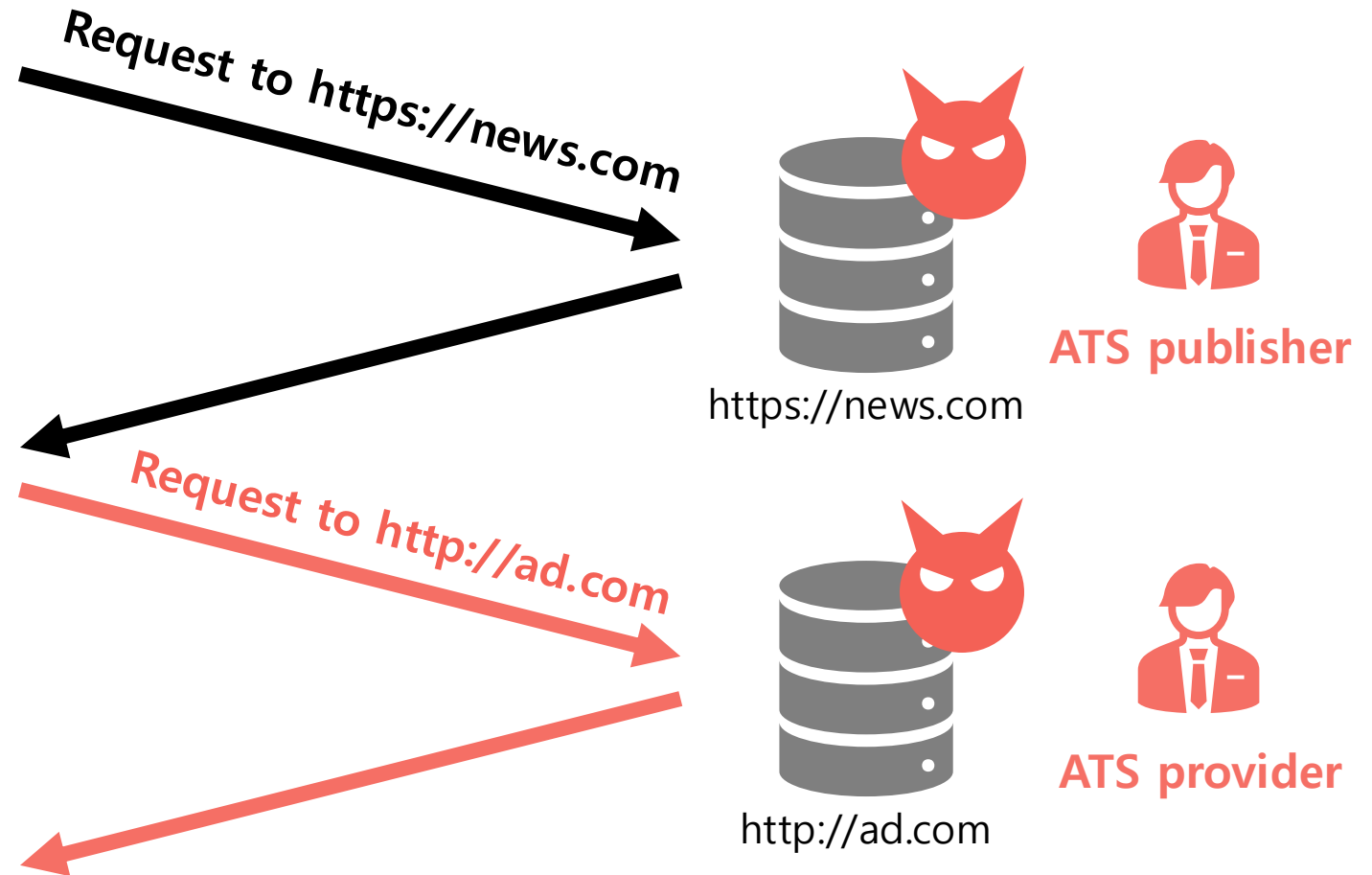
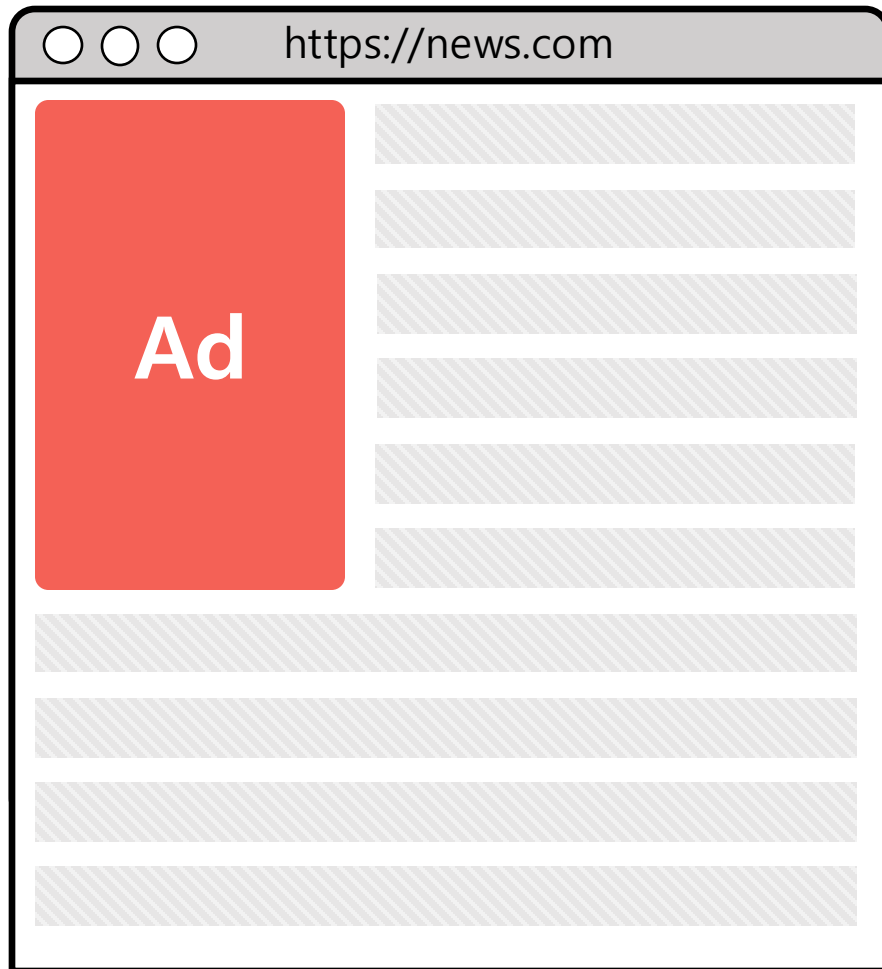


Online Advertising & Tracking Service (ATS)

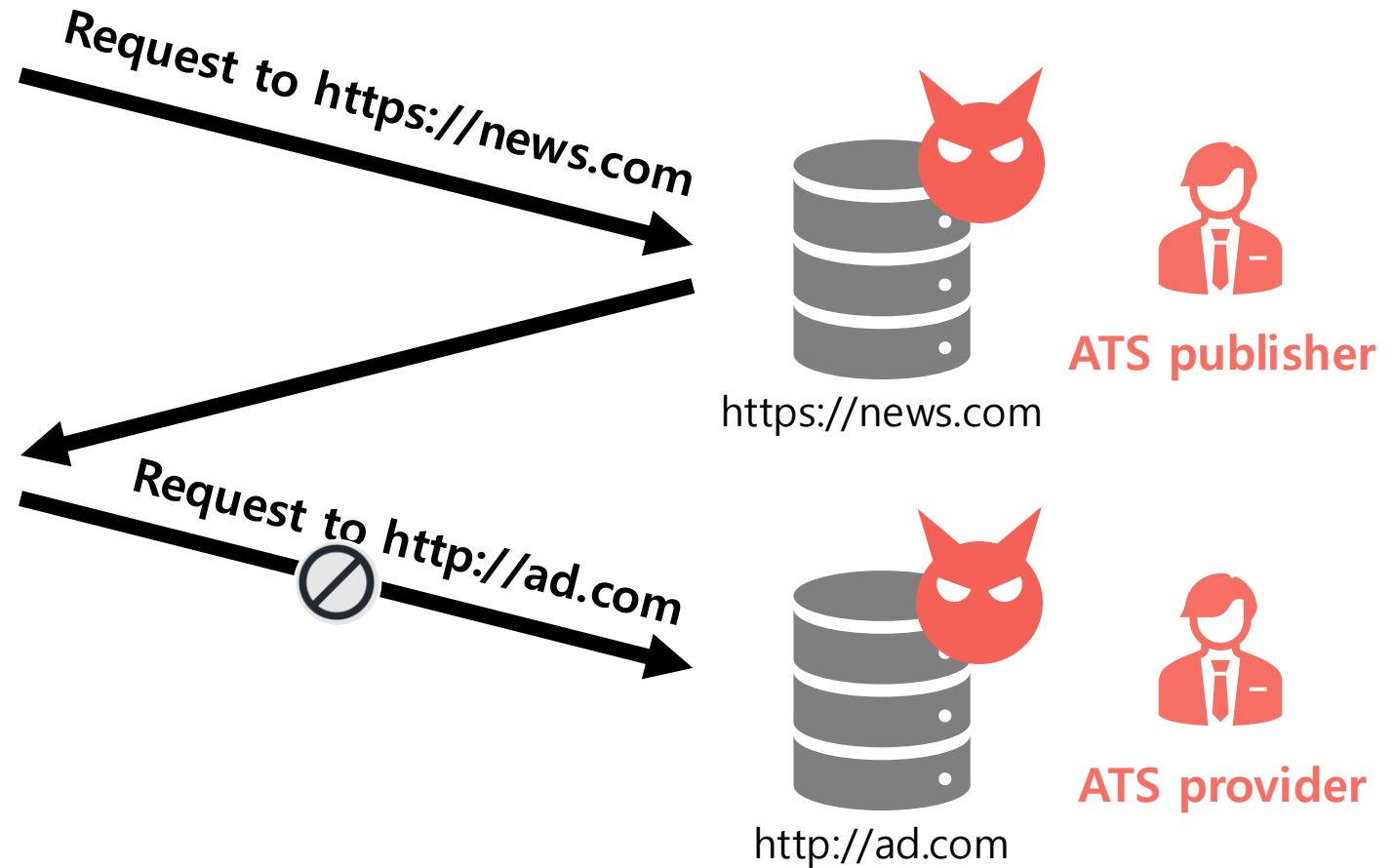


They track users' browsing history!

ATS blockers



ATS blockers

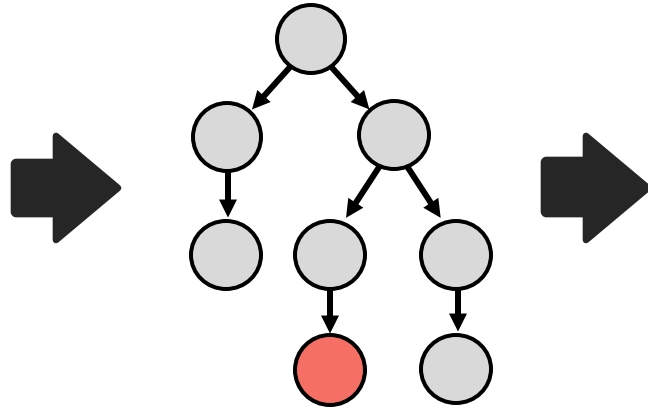


ATS blockers block resources fetched from ATS providers!

ML-based ATS Blockers



Webpage



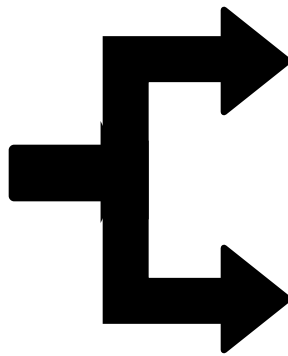
Graph representation

Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/show_ad	97	21	...

Extracted features



Random forest classifier



Non-ATS

ATS

All these steps take place in the client-side

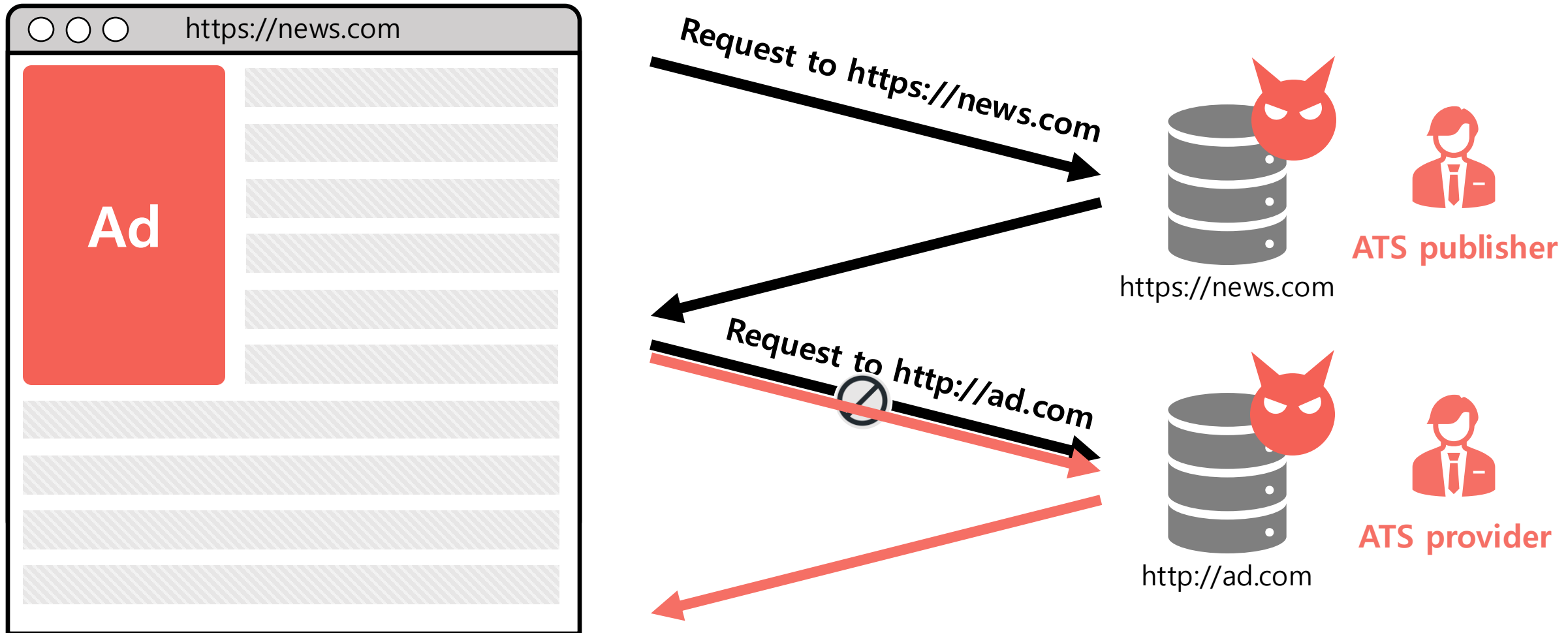
[1] Iqbal et al. AdGraph: A graph-based approach to ad and tracker blocking. S&P '20

[2] Sjosten et al. Filter list generation for underserved regions. WWW '20

[3] Siby et al. WebGraph: Capturing advertising and tracking information flows for robust blocking. Security '22

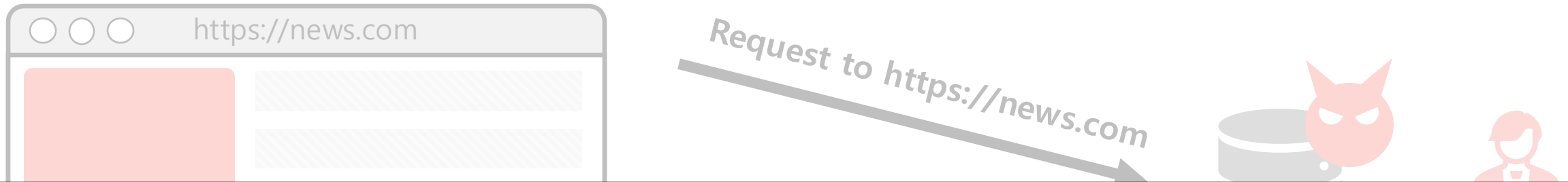
[4] Lee et al. AdFlush: A real-world deployable machine learning solution for effective advertisement and web tracker prevention. WWW '24

Adversarial Attacks against ML-based ATS Blockers

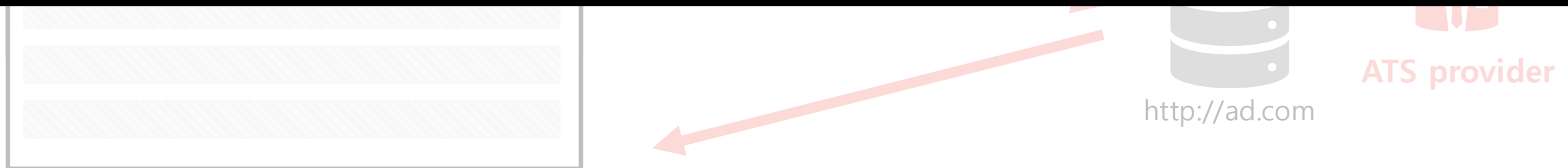


Abusive ATS publishers and providers may seek to **bypass ATS blockers** to maximize their profit!

Adversarial Attacks against ML-based ATS Blockers



Can ATS publishers/providers bypass these ATS blockers?


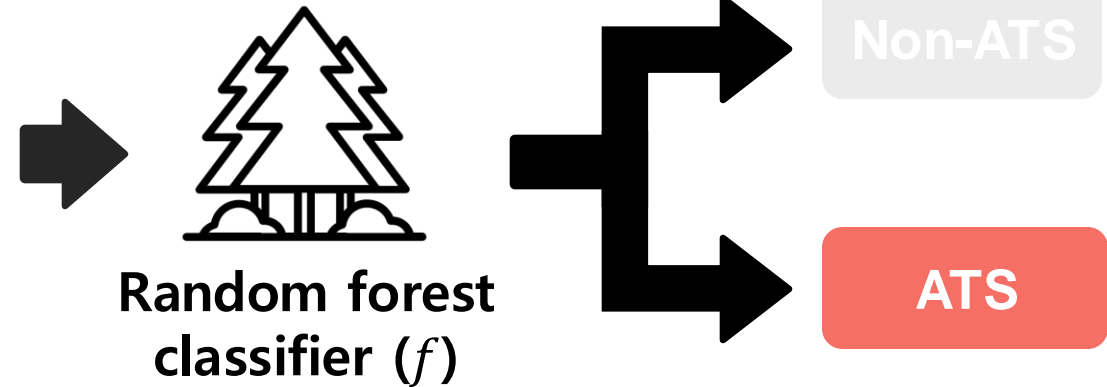


Abusive ATS publishers and providers may seek to bypass ATS blockers to maximize their profit!

Adversarial Attacks against ML-based ATS Blockers

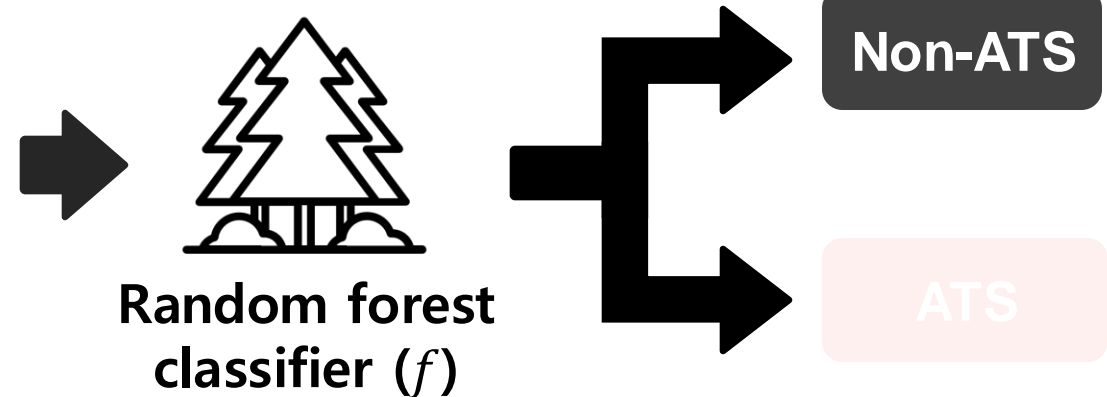
Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/show_ad	97	21	...

Extracted features (x)



Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/show_ad	98	81	...

Perturbed features ($x + \delta$)



Optimize perturbation (δ) on this request node to bypass the ATS blocker!

Adversarial Attacks against ML-based ATS Blockers

Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/track_user.js	97	27	...

Extracted features (x')



However, what if the adversary wants to attack **another network request?**

Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/show_ad	98	81	...

Perturbed features ($x + \delta$)



Optimize perturbation (δ) on this request node to bypass the ATS blocker!

Limitation of Per-Sample Attacks

Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/track_user.js	97	27	...

Extracted features (x')



Random forest classifier (f)



Non-ATS

ATS



Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/track_user.js	101	72	...

Perturbed features ($x' + \delta'$)



Random forest classifier (f)



Non-ATS

ATS

The adversary has to optimize perturbation (δ')
again on this network request node!

Limitation of Per-Sample Attacks

Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/track_user.js	97	27	...



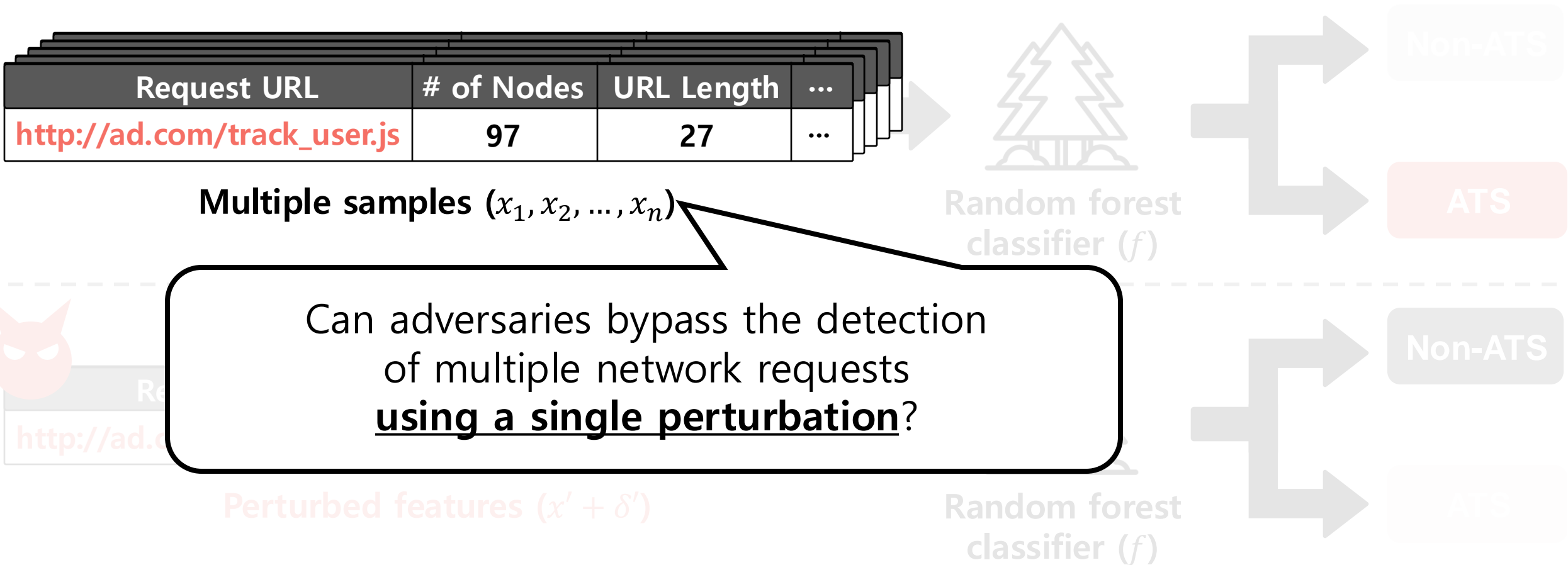
Can adversaries bypass a target ATS blocker at scale?

http://ad.com/track_user.js	101	72	...
---	-----	----	-----

Perturbed features ($x' + \delta'$)



Limitation of Per-Sample Attacks



You Only Perturb Once



We propose YOPO!

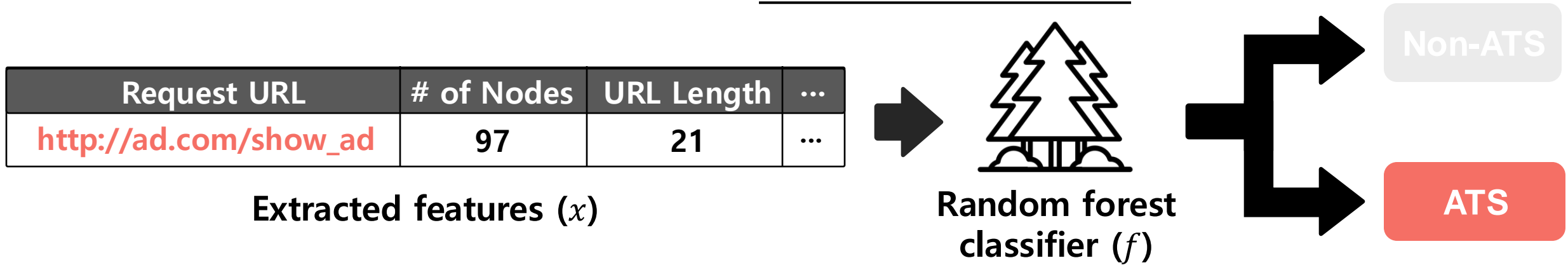


Our Contributions

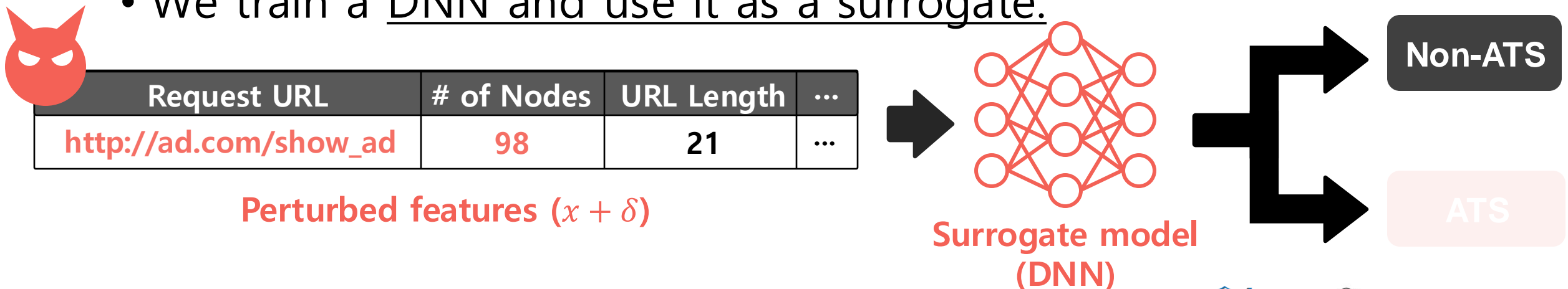
- We show that an adversary can generate **a single and cost-effective universal perturbation** that bypasses recent ML-based ATS blockers.
- We design and implement a novel framework (YOPO) where one can **generate a universal adversarial perturbation (UAP)** against these ATS blockers.
- We propose two new **mitigation strategies** by analyzing the factors attributing to this vulnerability.

Challenge #1: Perturbation Optimization

- Random forest classifiers are not differentiable.



- We train a DNN and use it as a surrogate.

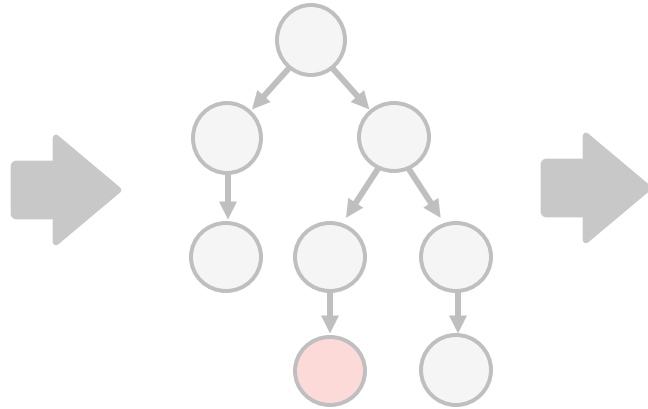


Challenge #2: HTML Manipulation

- Perturbed features should be reflected in an HTML format.



Webpage



Graph representation

Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/show_ad	98	21	...

Perturbed features ($x + \delta$)



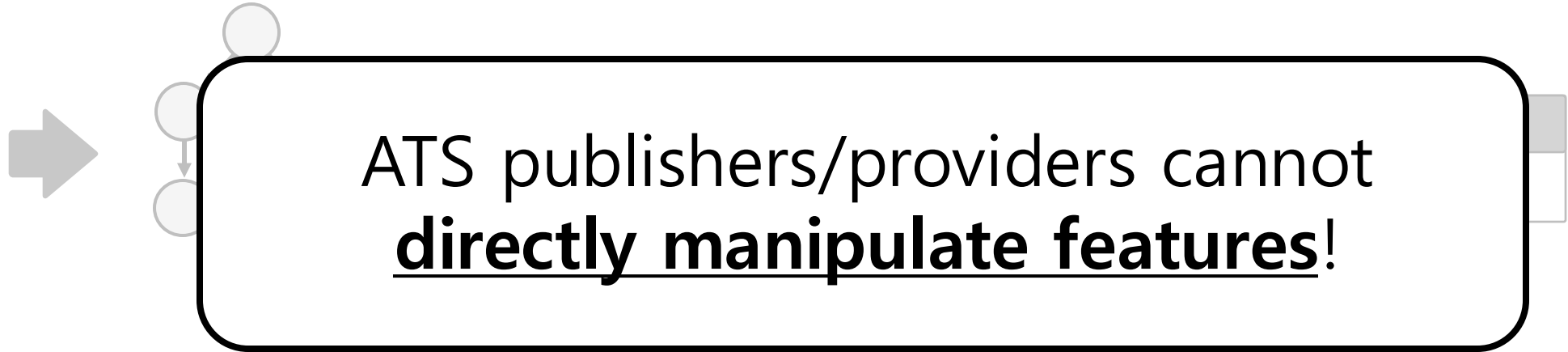
Random forest classifier

Challenge #2: HTML Manipulation

- Perturbed features should be reflected in an HTML format.



Webpage



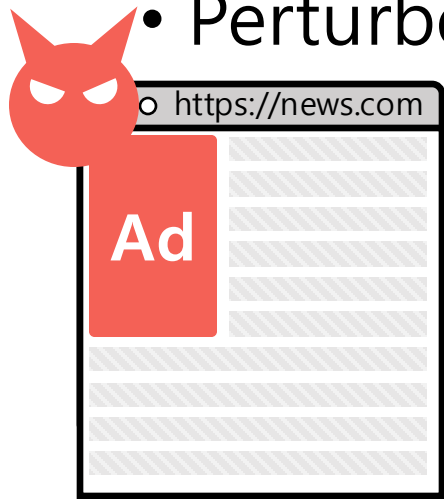
Graph representation



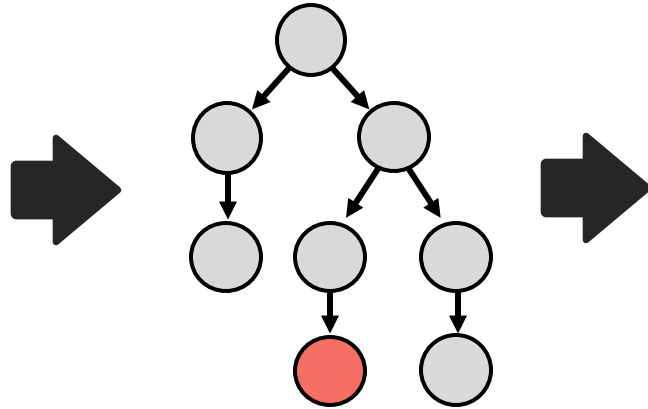
Random forest classifier

Challenge #2: HTML Manipulation

- Perturbed features should be reflected in an HTML format.



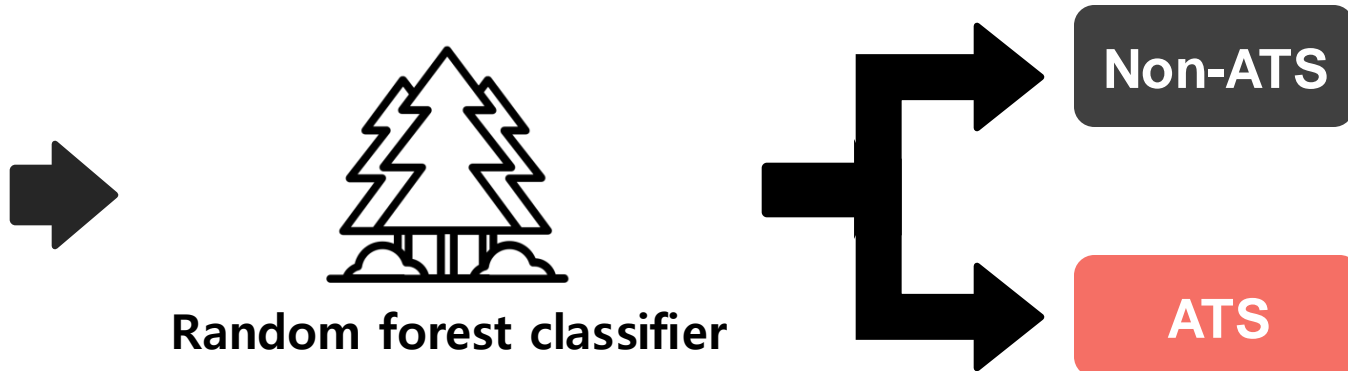
Webpage
(Manipulated)



Graph representation

Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/show_ad	97	21	...

Extracted features



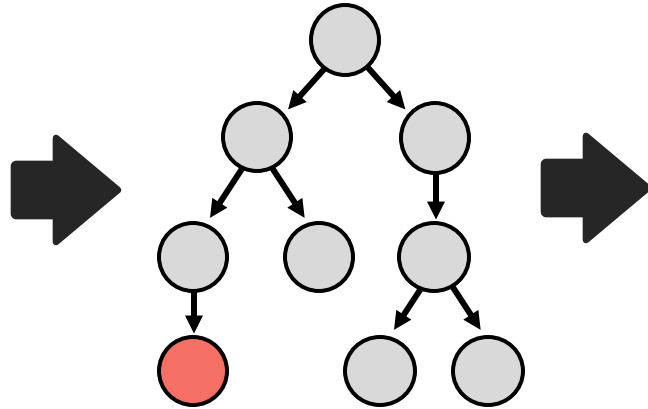
Random forest classifier

Challenge #2: HTML Manipulation

- Perturbed features should be reflected in an HTML format.



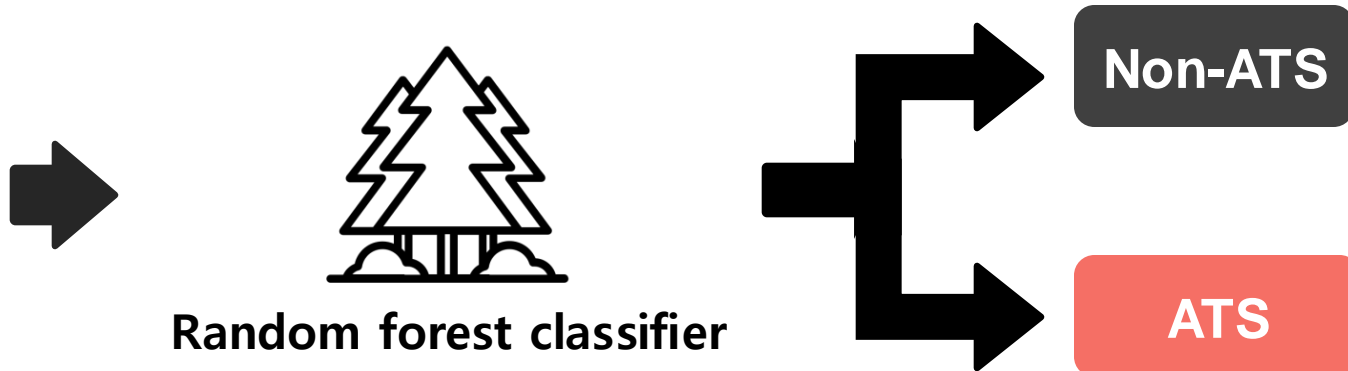
Webpage
(Manipulated)



Graph representation
(Manipulated)

Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/show_ad	97	21	...

Extracted features



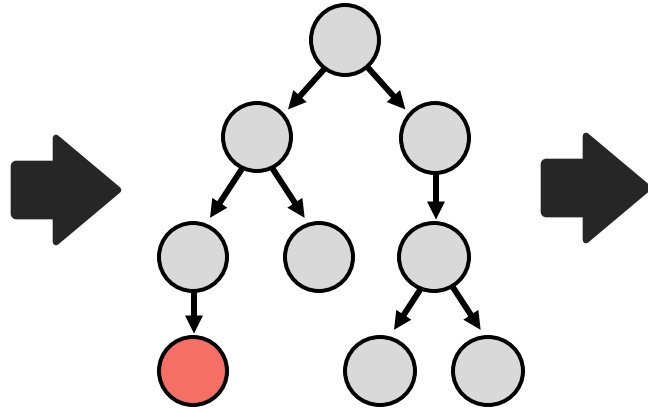
Random forest classifier

Challenge #2: HTML Manipulation

- Perturbed features should be reflected in an HTML format.



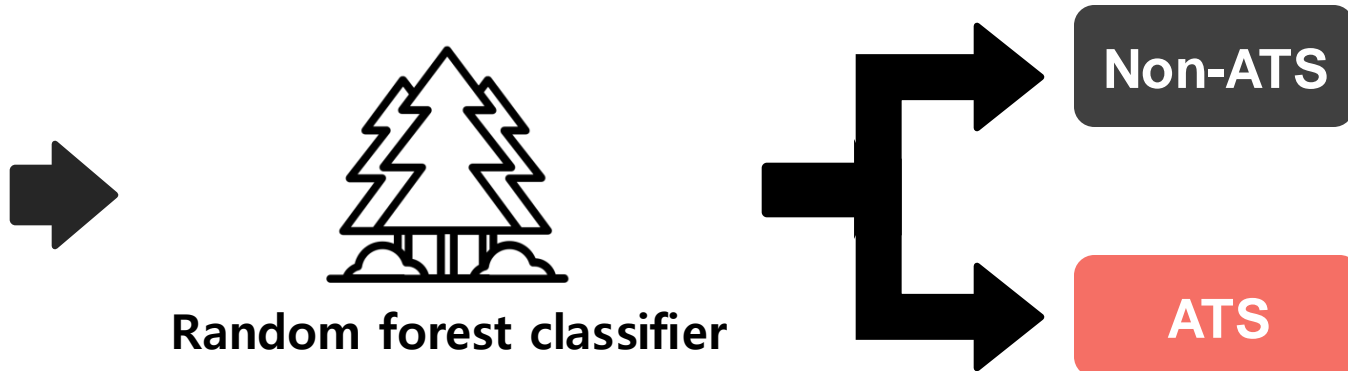
Webpage
(Manipulated)



Graph representation
(Manipulated)

Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/show_ad	98	21	...

Perturbed features ($x + \delta$)



Random forest classifier

Non-ATS

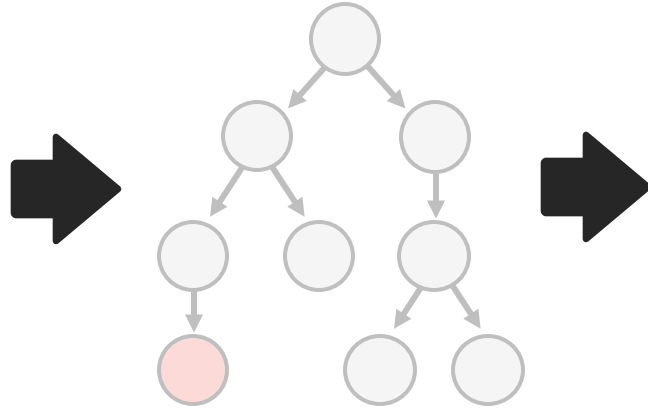
ATS

Challenge #2: HTML Manipulation

- Perturbed features should be reflected in an HTML format.



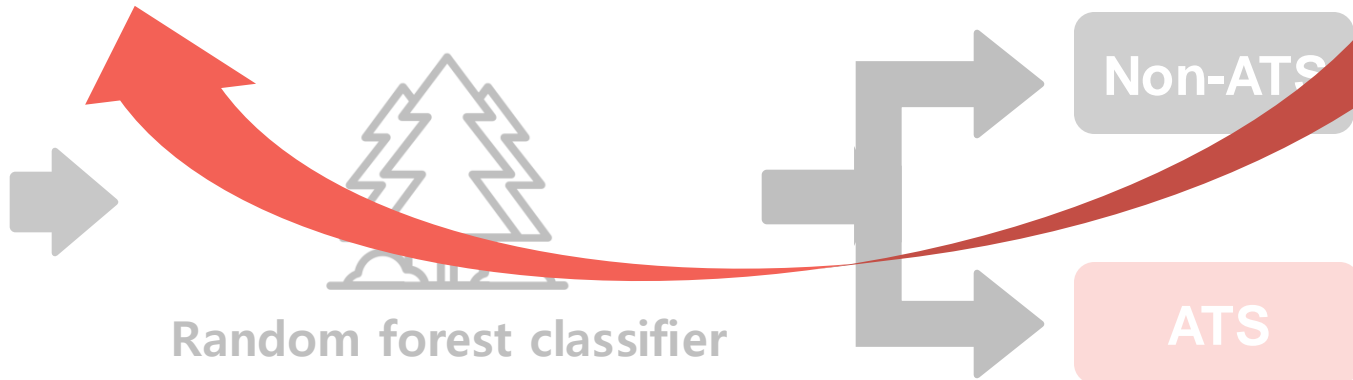
Webpage
(Manipulated)



Graph representation
(Manipulated)

Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	...
http://ad.com/show_ad	98	21	...

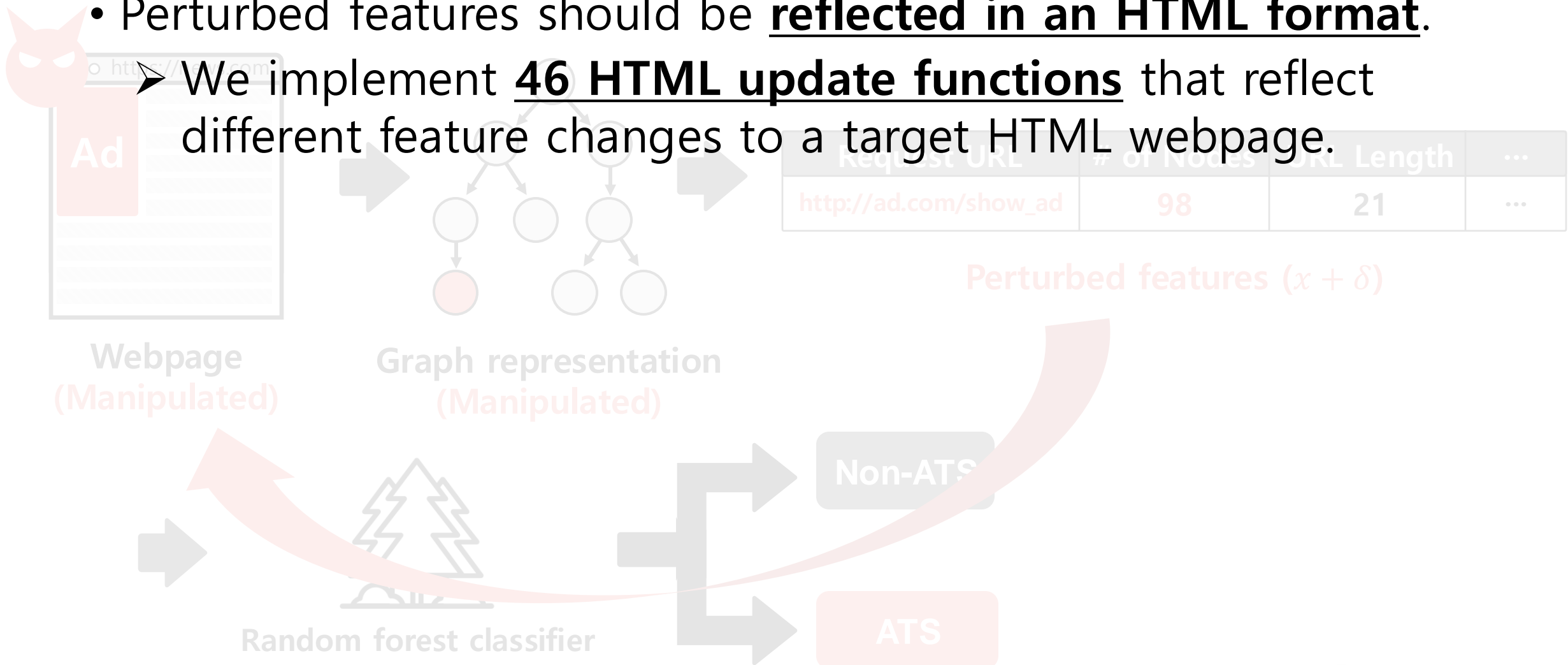
Perturbed features ($x + \delta$)



Challenge #2: HTML Manipulation

- Perturbed features should be reflected in an HTML format.

➤ We implement 46 HTML update functions that reflect different feature changes to a target HTML webpage.



Challenge #3: Preserving Functionalities

- Each feature has a different functionality breakage risk of manipulating it.

HTML
<pre><body> <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'> </body></pre>

Original webpage

HTML
<pre><body> <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad?1234'> </body></pre>

Increased the URL length

😊 Preserves the functionality!

Challenge #3: Preserving Functionalities

- Each feature has a different functionality breakage risk of manipulating it.
 - We designed a cost model that prioritizes which features to manipulate first.

```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
</body>
```

Original webpage

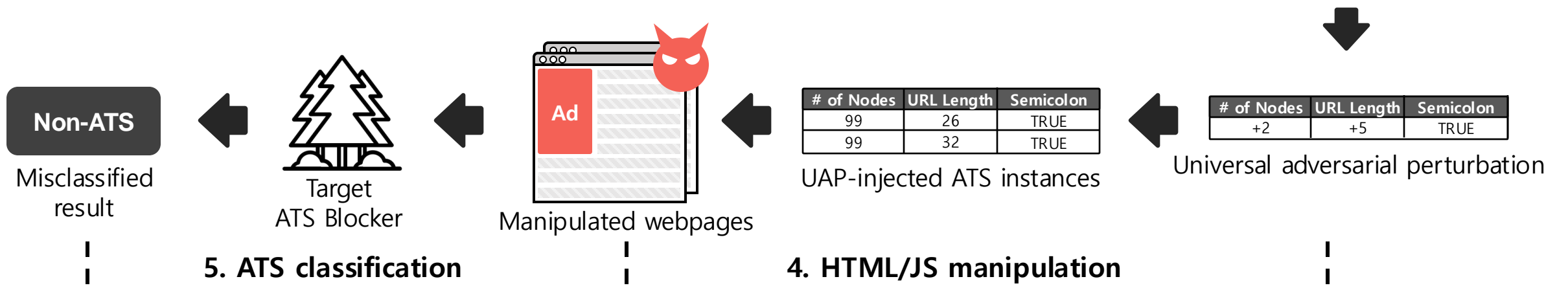
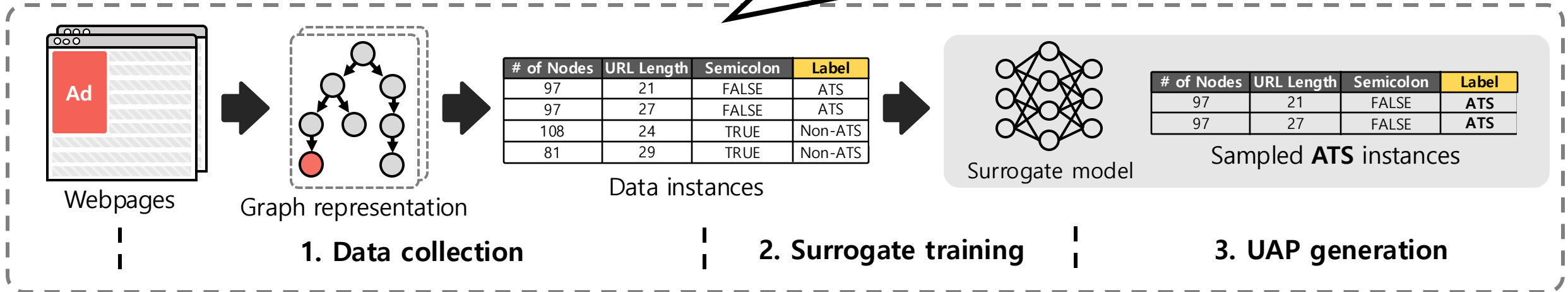
```
HTML
<script>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
</script>
```

Changed its parent tag name

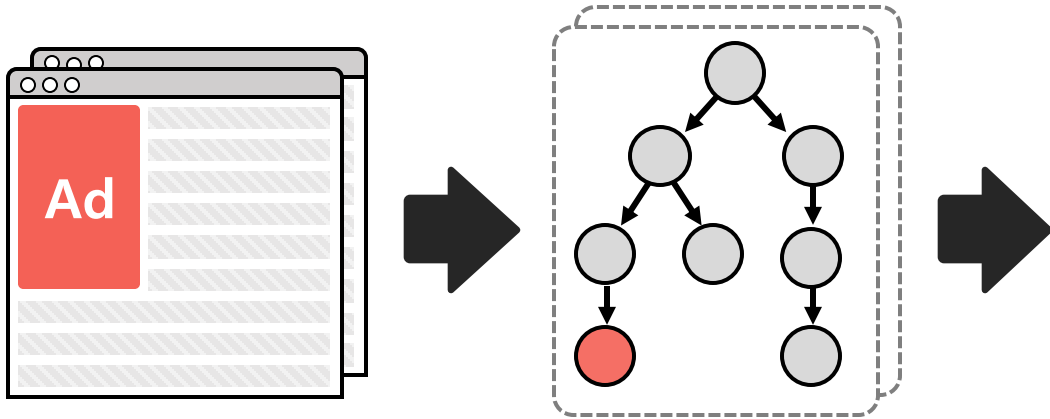
 **Breaks the functionality!**

YOPO Overview

One-time preparation step!

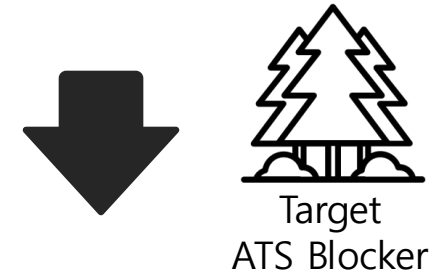


Data Collection for Training a Surrogate Model



Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
http://ad.com/show_ad	97	21	FALSE	0
http://ad.com/track_user.js	97	27	FALSE	1
https://sec.com/logo.png	108	24	TRUE	0
https://acsac.org/favicon.ico	81	29	TRUE	3

Extracted features



Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read	Label
http://ad.com/show_ad	97	21	FALSE	0	ATS
http://ad.com/track_user.js	97	27	FALSE	1	ATS
https://sec.com/logo.png	108	24	TRUE	0	Non-ATS
https://acsac.org/favicon.ico	81	29	TRUE	3	Non-ATS

Labeled features

Tranco's Top-10K Webpages

Graph representation

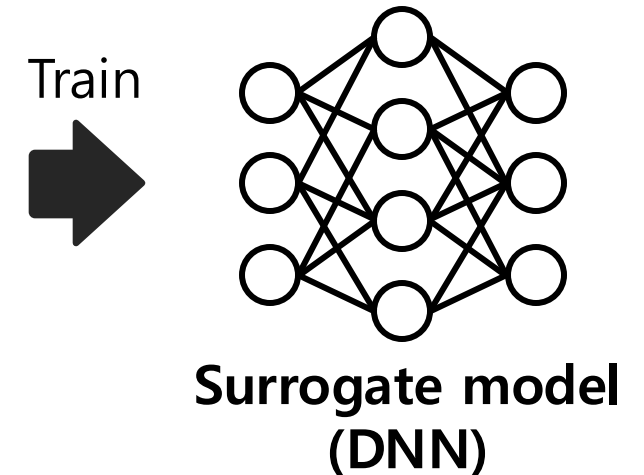
ATS blockers classify network request nodes!

Surrogate Model Training

- We selected a four-layer feed-forward neural network as our surrogate.

Request URL	# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read	Label
http://ad.com/show_ad	97	21	FALSE	0	ATS
http://ad.com/track_user.js	97	27	FALSE	1	ATS
https://sec.com/logo.png	108	24	TRUE	0	Non-ATS
https://acsac.org/favicon.ico	81	29	TRUE	3	Non-ATS

Data instances



UAP Generation

# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read	Label
97	21	FALSE	0	ATS
97	27	FALSE	1	ATS

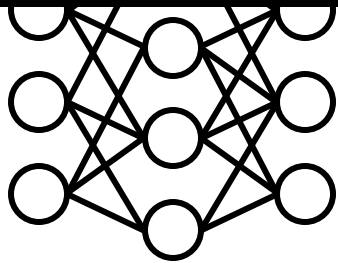


# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
+0	+0	FALSE	+0

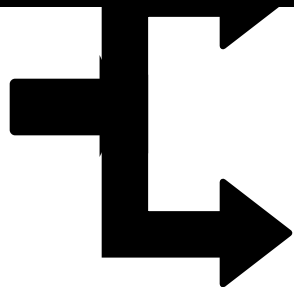
Sampled 40K ATS instances (x)

Universal Adversarial Perturbation (δ)

We optimize the perturbation over all these instances to make it universal!



Surrogate model
(DNN)



ATS

UAP Generation

- Optimization goal

1) Bypass the target ATS blocker with a single perturbation

$$\operatorname{argmax}_{\delta} \mathbf{E}_{(x,y) \sim D_{ATS}} [L_{CE}(f'(\theta, x + \delta), ATS)]$$

δ : Perturbation

$f'(\theta)$: Surrogate model (DNN)

D_{ATS} : Data instances labeled as ATS

L_{CE} : Cross-Entropy Loss

UAP Generation

- Optimization goal

- 1) Bypass the target ATS blocker with a single perturbation
- 2) Minimize the breakage risk of manipulating each feature

How can we achieve this goal?

$$\operatorname{argmax}_{\delta} \mathbf{E}_{(x,y) \sim D_{ATS}} [L_{CE}(f'(\theta, x + \delta), ATS)]$$

δ : Perturbation

$f'(\theta)$: Surrogate model (DNN)

D_{ATS} : Data instances labeled as ATS

L_{CE} : Cross-Entropy Loss

UAP Generation

- Optimization goal

- 1) Bypass the target ATS blocker with a single perturbation
- 2) Minimize the breakage risk of manipulating each feature

Simply minimizing the perturbation size is **insufficient!**

$$\operatorname{argmax}_{\delta} \mathbf{E}_{(x,y) \sim D_{ATS}} [L_{CE}(f'(\theta, x + \delta), ATS)] - \|\delta\|$$

δ : Perturbation

$f'(\theta)$: Surrogate model (DNN)

D_{ATS} : Data instances labeled as ATS

L_{CE} : Cross-Entropy Loss

Cost Model

- Optimization goal

- 1) Bypass the target ATS blocker with a single perturbation
- 2) Minimize the breakage risk of manipulating each feature

Considered a web-specific cost!

$$\operatorname{argmax}_{\delta} \mathbf{E}_{(x,y) \sim D_{ATS}} [L_{CE}(f'(\theta, x + \delta), ATS)] - C \cdot \|\delta\|$$

δ : Perturbation

$f'(\theta)$: Surrogate model (DNN)

D_{ATS} : Data instances labeled as ATS

L_{CE} : Cross-Entropy Loss

Cost Model

Perturbation	Assigned Cost
URL_LENGTH	0.2

Prioritize with a lower cost value!

Cost model

```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
</body>
```

Original webpage

```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad?1234'>
</body>
```

Increased the URL length

😊 Preserves the functionality!

Cost Model

Perturbation	Assigned
URL_LENGTH	0.2
PARENT_TAG_NAME	3

Deprioritize with a higher cost value!

Cost model

```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
</body>
```

Original webpage

```
HTML
<script>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
</script>
```

Changed its parent tag name

! Breaks the functionality!

Cost Model

Perturbation	Assigned Cost
URL_LENGTH	0.2
PARENT_TAG_NAME	3
...	...

Cost model

The cost model represents a relative risk of manipulating it.

```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
</body>
```

Original webpage

```
HTML
<script>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
</script>
```

Changed its parent tag name

! Breaks the functionality!

HTML/JS Manipulation

# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
+2	+5	TRUE	+4

Universal Adversarial Perturbation (δ)



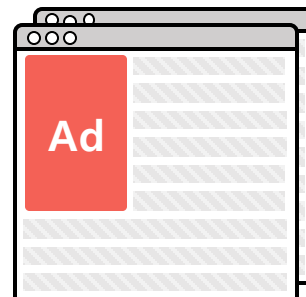
# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
97	21	FALSE	0
97	27	FALSE	1

Target ATS instances (x)

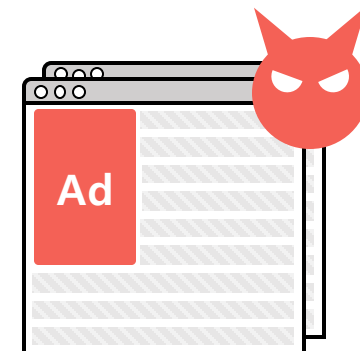


# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
99	26	TRUE	4
99	32	TRUE	5

UAP-injected ATS instances ($x + \delta$)



Webpages



Manipulated Webpages

HTML/JS Manipulation

```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
  ...
  <script src = 'http://ad.com/track_user.js'>
  ...
</body>
```

```
track_user.js
...
// Tracking Users
user_cookie = document.cookie;
```

Webpage

# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
+2	+5	TRUE	+4

UAP

Target network request!

HTML/JS Manipulation

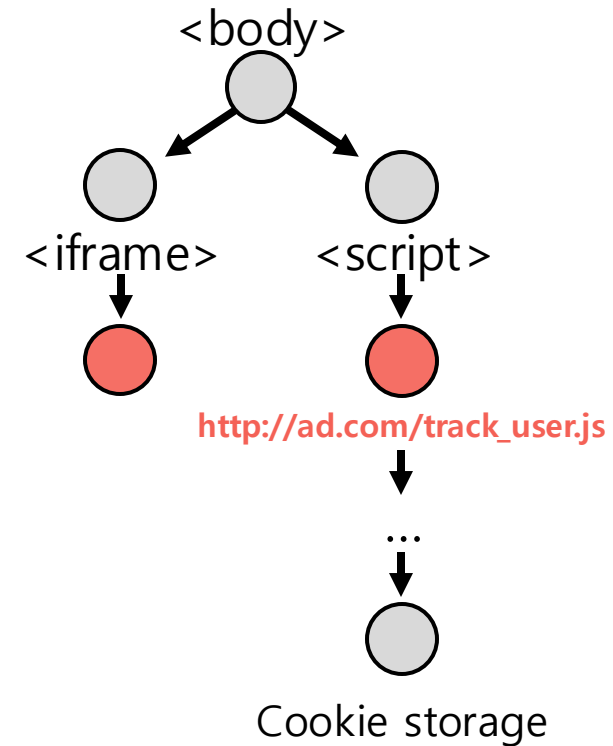
```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
  ...
  <script src = 'http://ad.com/track_user.js'>
  ...
</body>
```

```
track_user.js
...
// Tracking Users
user_cookie = document.cookie;
```

Webpage

# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
+2	+5	TRUE	+4

UAP



Graph representation

HTML/JS Manipulation

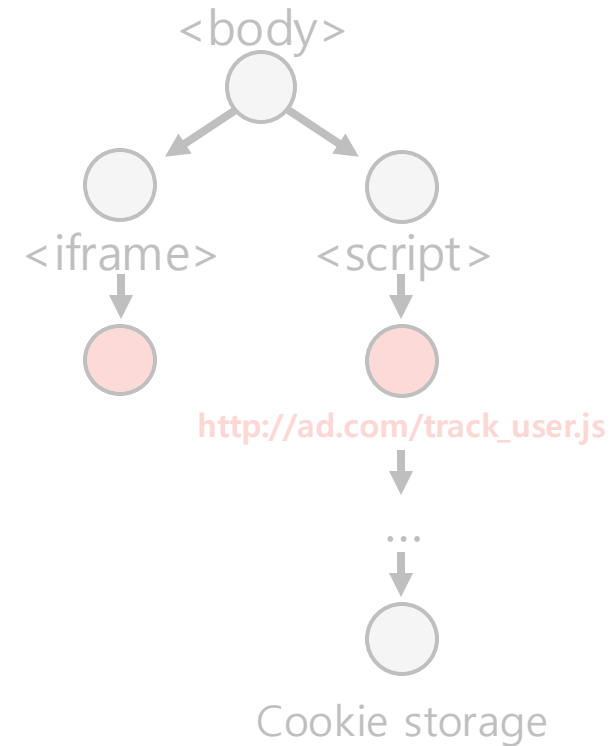
```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
  ...
  <script src = 'http://ad.com/track_user.js'>
  ...
</body>
```

```
track_user.js
...
// Tracking Users
user_cookie = document.cookie;
```

Webpage

# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
+2	+5	TRUE	+4

UAP



Graph representation

HTML/JS Manipulation

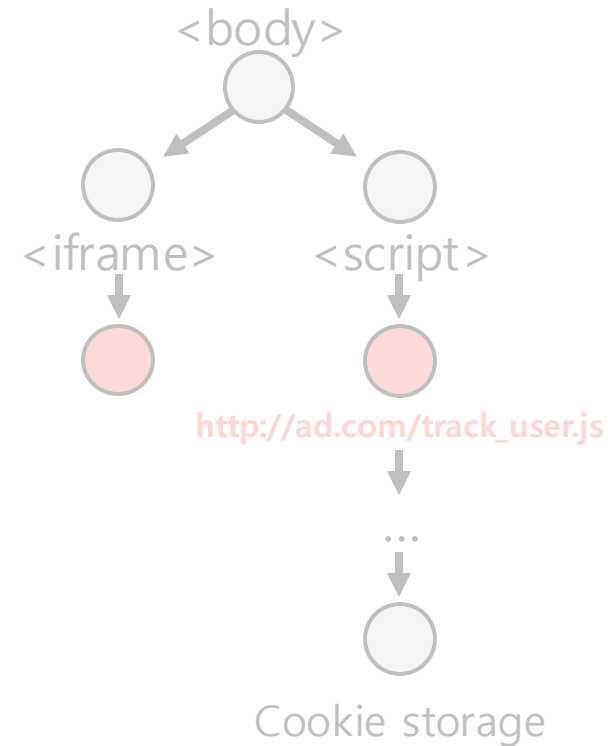
```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
  ...
  <script src = 'http://ad.com/track_user.js'>
  ...
  <div hidden=""></div>
  <p hidden=""></p>
</body>
```

```
track_user.js
...
// Tracking Users
user_cookie = document.cookie;
```

Webpage

# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
+2	+5	TRUE	+4

UAP



Graph representation

HTML/JS Manipulation

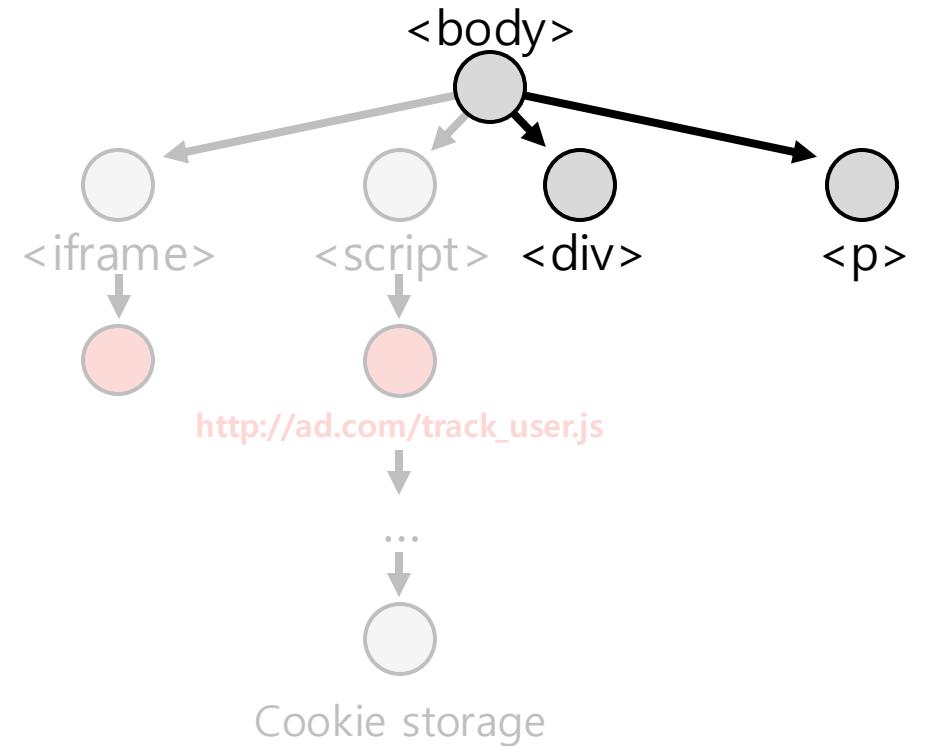
```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
  ...
  <script src = 'http://ad.com/track_user.js'>
  ...
  <div hidden=""></div>
  <p hidden=""></p>
</body>
```

```
track_user.js
...
// Tracking Users
user_cookie = document.cookie;
```

Webpage

# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
+2	+5	TRUE	+4

UAP



Graph representation

HTML/JS Manipulation

```

HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
  ...
  <script src = 'http://ad.com/track_user.js?123;'>
  ...
  <div hidden=""></div>
  <p hidden=""></p>
</body>

```

```

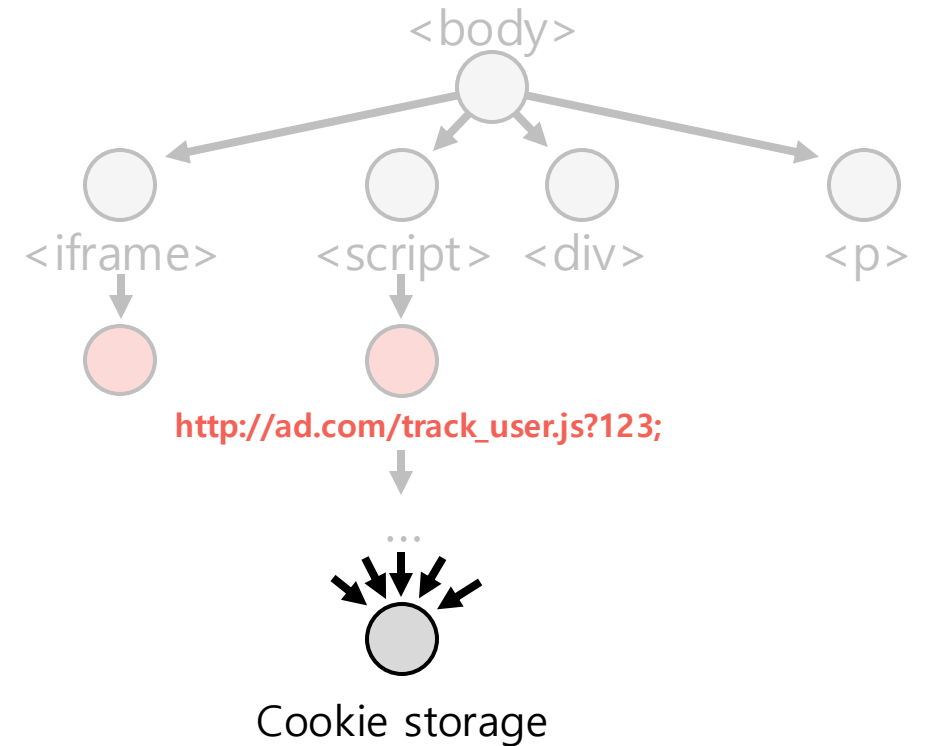
track_user.js
...
// Tracking Users
user_cookie = document.cookie;
for (let i = 1; i <= 4; i++) {
  getCookie();
}

```

Webpage

# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
+2	+5	TRUE	+4

UAP



Graph representation

HTML/JS Manipulation

```
HTML
<body>
  <iframe src = 'http://ad.com/show_ad'>
  ...
```

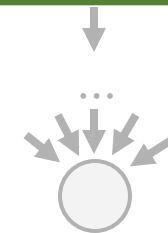
# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
+2	+5	TRUE	+4

UAP

YOPO implements 46 HTML/JS manipulation functions!

```
...
// Tracking Users
user_cookie = document.cookie;
for (let i = 1; i <= 4; i++) {
  getCookie();
}
```

Webpage



Cookie storage

Graph representation

Experimental Setup

- Target ATS blockers
 - 1) **AdGraph** [S&P '20]
 - 2) **WebGraph*** [Security '22]
 - 3) **AdFlush** [WWW '24]
 - 4) **PageGraph**** [WWW '20]
 - * We used all content, structural, and flow features for WebGraph.
 - ** We revised PageGraph to support all ATS resource types.
- We measured **attack success rate (ASR)** against 2,000 target ATS requests.

Attack Success Rate

- ASRs measured against target ATS blockers

ATS blockers	Attack success rate (%)
AdGraph	89.27
WebGraph	71.21
AdFlush	61.91
PageGraph	84.16

Recent ML-based ATS blockers are **vulnerable to universal attacks** using a single perturbation!

Attack Success Rate

- ASRs measured against target ATS blockers

Adversaries can launch attacks against these ATS blockers at scale!

PageGraph

84.16

Recent ML-based ATS blockers are vulnerable to universal attacks using a single perturbation!

Attack Success Rate

- ASRs measured against target ATS blockers

Where does this vulnerability stem from?

PageGraph

84.16

Recent ML-based ATS blockers are vulnerable to universal attacks using a single perturbation!

Top-5 Most Influential Features

Features	Type	ASR drop (↓)
PARENT_ATTR_ASYNC	Binary	-19.87%
SEMICOLON_IN_URL	Binary	-8.28%
PARENT_ATTR_DEFER	Binary	-5.83%
DOMAIN_NAME_IN_QS	Binary	-5.52%
URL_LENGTH	Numerical	-1.89%

Top-5 most influential features for attacking AdGraph

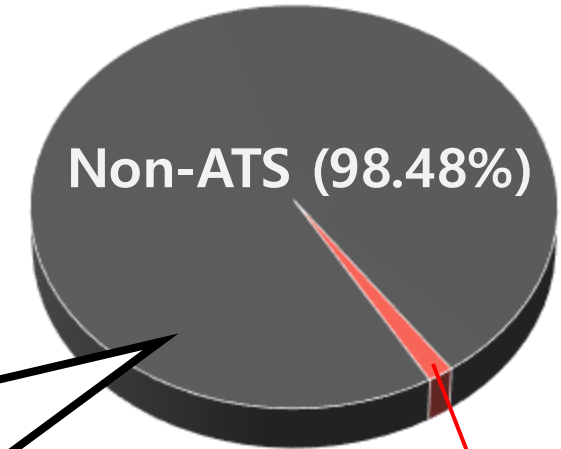
Top-5 Most Influential Features

Features	Type	ASR drop (↓)
PARENT_ATTR_ASYNC	Binary	-19.87%
SEMICOLON_IN_URL	Binary	-8.28%
PARENT_ATTR_DEFER	Binary	-5.83%
DOMAIN_NAME_IN_QS	Binary	-5.52%
URL_LENGTH	Numerical	-1.89%

When applying a UAP, YOPO overwrites binary features to have a specific combination of values!

Top-5 Most Influential Features

Features	UAP Values	ASR drop (↓)
PARENT_ATTR_ASYNC	TRUE	-19.87%
SEMICOLON_IN_URL	TRUE	-8.28%
PARENT_ATTR_DEFER	FALSE	-5.83%
DOMAIN_NAME_IN_QS	FALSE	-5.52%
URL_LENGTH	+9	-1.0

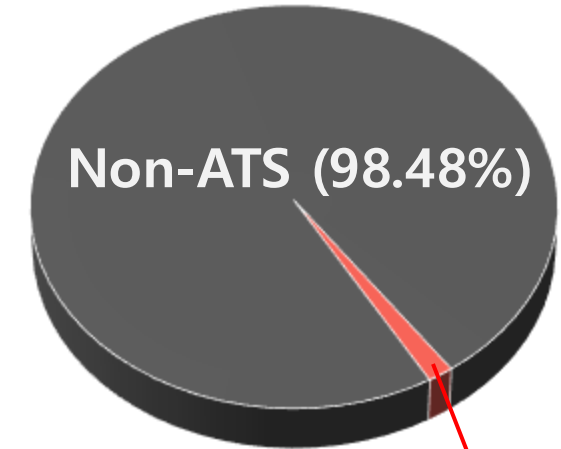


ATS (1.52%)

98.48% of network requests that have **this combination** in our training set are **non-ATS!**

Top-5 Most Influential Features

Features	UAP Values	ASR drop (↓)
PARENT_ATTR_ASYNC	TRUE	-19.87%
SEMICOLON_IN_URL	TRUE	-8.28%
PARENT_ATTR_DEFER	FALSE	-5.83%
DOMAIN_NAME_IN_QS	FALSE	-5.52%
URL_LENGTH	+9	-1.89%



ATS (1.52%)

PARENT_ATTR_ASYNC	SEMICOLON_IN_URL	PARENT_ATTR_DEFER	DOMAIN_NAME_IN_QS
FALSE	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE

ATS



PARENT_ATTR_ASYNC	SEMICOLON_IN_URL	PARENT_ATTR_DEFER	DOMAIN_NAME_IN_QS
TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE

Non-ATS

Top-5 Most Influential Features

Features	UAP Values	ASR drop (↓)
PARENT_ATTR_ASYNC	TRUE	-19.87%

Non-ATS (98.48%)

This arises from the inherent imbalance of binary features in real-world webpages!

FALSE	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE
-------	-------	-------	------

ATS

PARENT_ATTR_ASYNC	SEMICOLON_IN_URL	PARENT_ATTR_DEFER	DOMAIN_NAME_IN_QS
TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE

Non-ATS

Mitigation #1: Nullifying Binary Features

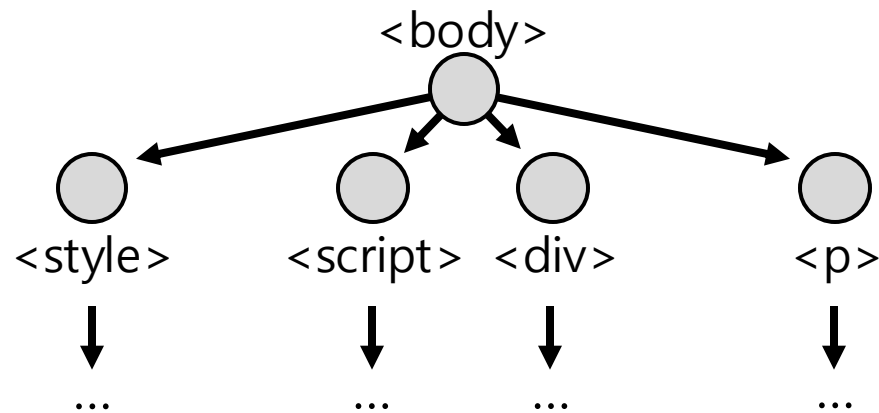
- We nullified binary features when training each ATS

Reduced the ASR by at most 27.52% without any performance drop!

ATS blockers	ASR	Accuracy	Precision	Recall
AdGraph	61.75 (27.52 ↓)	92.15 (0.49 ↓)	89.11 (0.79 ↓)	84.43 (0.87 ↓)
WebGraph	63.90 (7.31 ↓)	95.39 (0.29 ↓)	92.52 (0.74 ↓)	92.08 (0.19 ↓)
AdFlush	49.82 (12.09 ↓)	95.79 (0.14 ↓)	93.99 (0.35 ↓)	90.77 (0.10 ↓)
PageGraph	70.28 (13.88 ↓)	95.78 (0.11 ↓)	92.66 (0.24 ↓)	93.06 (0.39 ↓)

Mitigation #2: Misleading Perturbation Directions

- HTML manipulation decreasing feature values is more likely to break webpages.



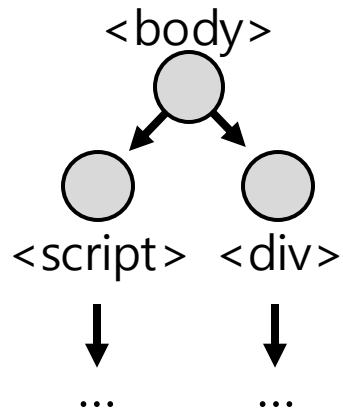
Graph representation

# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
-2	+5	TRUE	+4

UAP

Mitigation #2: Misleading Perturbation Directions

- HTML manipulation decreasing feature values is more likely to break webpages.



Graph representation

! Breaks the functionality!

# of Nodes	URL Length	Semicolon	# of Cookie Read
-2	+5	TRUE	+4

UAP

Mitigation #2: Misleading Perturbation Directions

- HTML manipulation **decreasing feature values** is more likely to **break webpages**.
- We **preprocessed input features** before training ATS blockers, thus **misleading perturbations to decrease feature values**.
- As a result, adversaries **cannot reflect such manipulation** at an HTML level.

Mitigation #2: Misleading Perturbation Directions

Applying both mitigation strategies reduced the ASR **by at most 48.86%** without any performance drop!

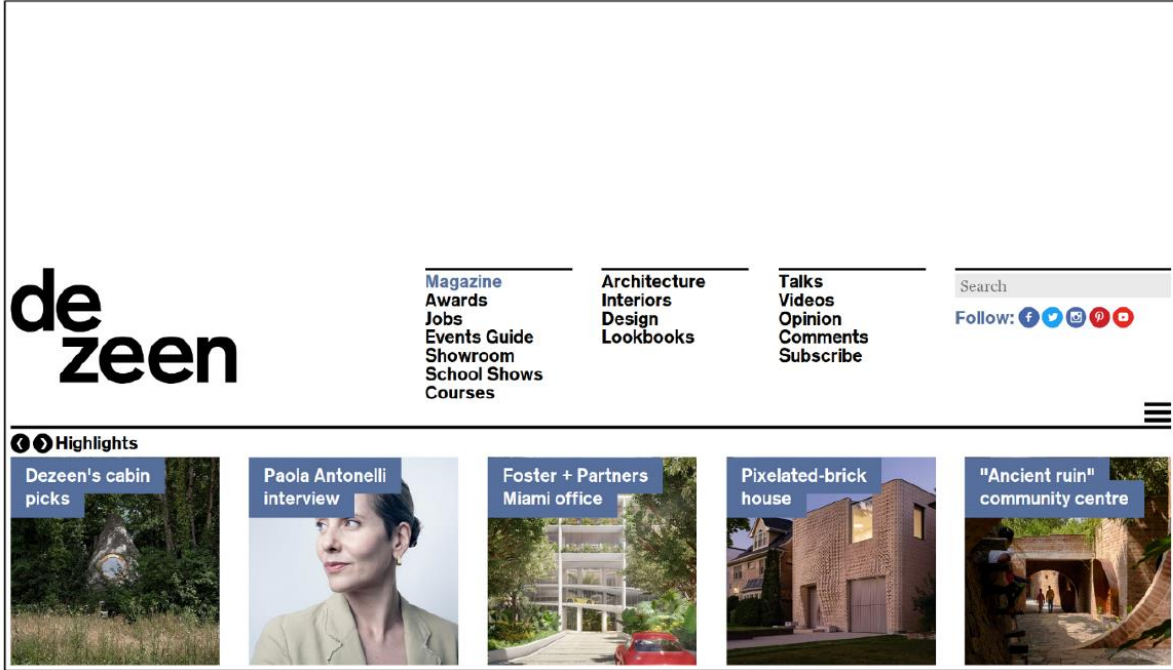
ATS blockers	ASR	Accuracy	Precision	Recall
AdGraph	40.41 (48.86 ↓)	91.59 (1.05 ↓)	85.49 (4.41 ↓)	87.05 (1.75 ↑)
WebGraph	48.55 (22.66 ↓)	95.19 (0.49 ↓)	91.64 (1.62 ↓)	92.38 (0.11 ↑)
AdFlush	42.74 (19.17 ↓)	95.68 (0.25 ↓)	95.00 (0.34 ↓)	90.34 (0.53 ↓)
PageGraph	64.51 (19.65 ↓)	95.74 (0.15 ↓)	92.59 (0.31 ↓)	93.26 (0.19 ↓)

Breakage Analysis

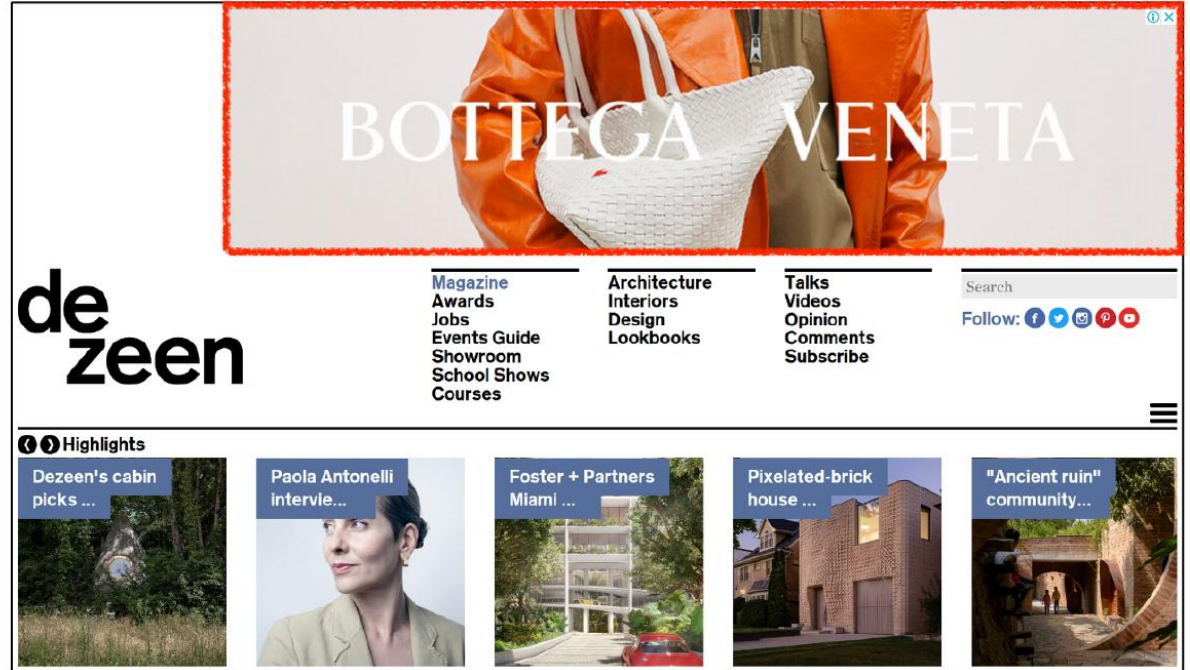
- We manually inspected 400 webpages manipulated by YOPO.
- We defined 4 breakage types following prior studies.
- Only 14 webpages out of 400 exhibited functionality disruption.

Breakage Analysis

Successfully bypassed AdGraph!



Original webpage



Manipulated webpage

No functional breakage

For More Details

- Case study
- Effect of the attack hyperparameters
- Attacking multiple requests
- Different cost models
- <https://github.com/WSP-LAB/YOPO>

Question?