Twitter's top swear words revealed: Researchers find one in 13 tweets contains a curse

2/20/2014

- Swearing peaks at 12 a.m. to 1:30 a.m.
- top seven curses accounted for over 90% of offensive tweets
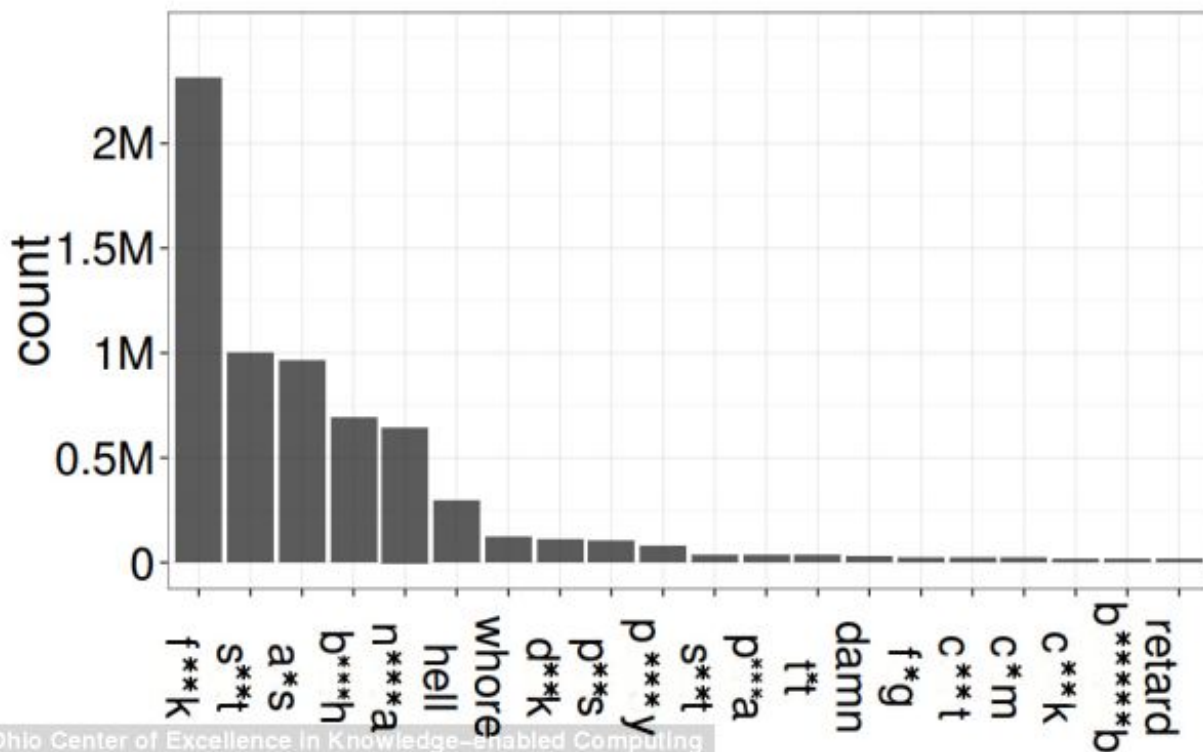- one-month sample of 51 million English-language tweets analysed

By Mark Prigg

Published: 12:51 EST, 20 February 2014 | Updated: 12:30 EST, 21 February 2014

We swear far more on Twitter than in the real world, researchers have found.

A major analysis of 51 million English language tweets revealed that one in 13 contains a curse.

Researchers were also able to rank the most popular words, finding f**k was the most popular - and the top seven accounted for over 90% of offensive tweets.

The most popular curse words on Twitter: Researchers examined a random one-month sample of 51 million English-language tweets from 14 million distinct user accounts

WHEN WE CURSE

People curse more and more as the day passes, reaching a peak at 12 a.m. to 1:30 a.m. just before they go to bed, the researchers found.

They also found people swore earlier in the week - Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays contained the most curse words relative to tweet volume.

'It's a sizable fraction of the words we use,' Wenbo Wang, a PhD researcher at the Kno.e.sis lab at Wright State University who led the study, told Fastco.

'On average, one tweet out of 13 tweets will contain at least one cursing word,'

'Because of social media, people don't see each other.

'They can say things they wouldn't say in the physical world.'

The team at Wright State University examined a random one-month sample of 51 million English-language tweets from 14 million distinct user accounts.
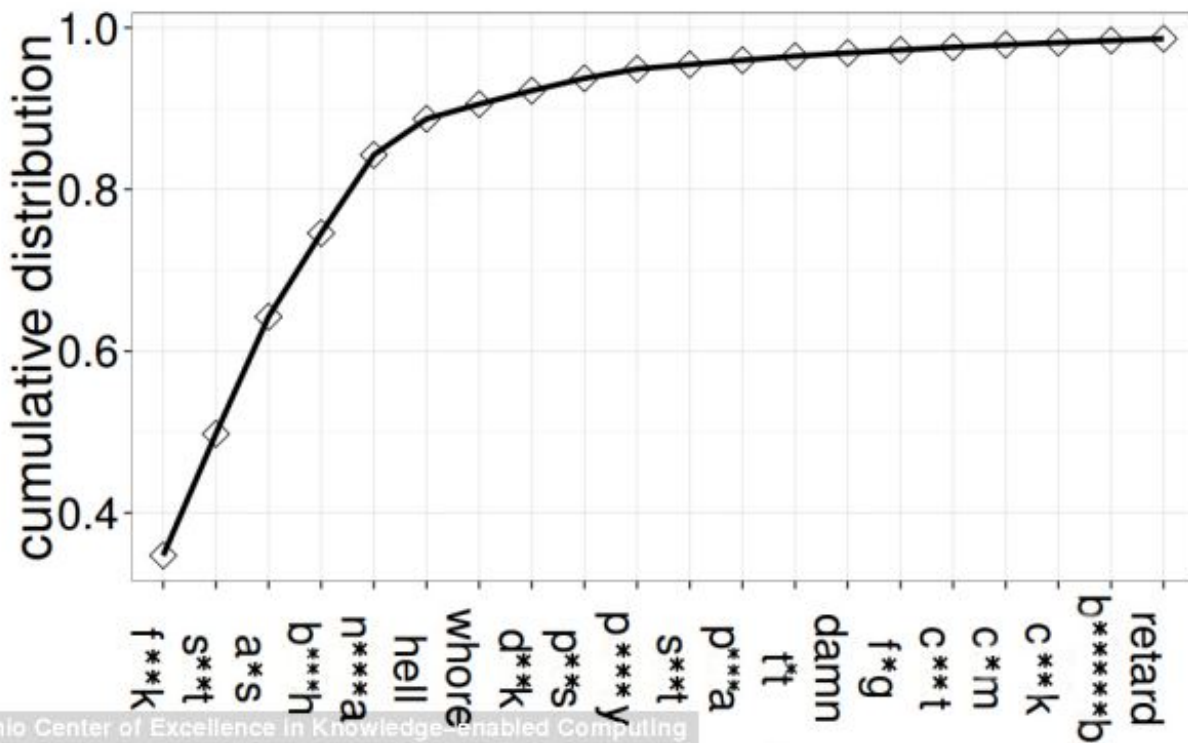
They found that we curse more on Twitter than in real life, but tend to use only a few words.

'We found that the curse words occurred at the rate of 1.15% on Twitter, and 7.73% of all the tweets in our dataset contained curse words,' the team wrote in their paper, which was presented this week at the ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing.

'We also found that seven most frequently used curse words accounted for more than 90% of all the cursing occurrences.'

The team say they wanted to find out it we cursed more on Twitter.

'Cursing is not uncommon during conversations in the physical world: 0.5% to 0.7% of all the words we speak are curse words, given that 1% of all the words are first-person plural pronouns (e.g., we, us, our),' the researchers wrote.

Lack of imagination: The top seven curse words accounted for 90% of all curses, the researchers found

'On social media, people can instantly chat with friends without face-to-face interaction, usually in a more public fashion and broadly disseminated through highly connected social network.'

They also classified the cursing, and identified five different emotions from tweets - anger, joy, sadness, love, and thankfulness.

'Based on the classification results, we found that cursing on Twitter was

most closely associated with two negative emotions: sadness and anger.

'However, curse words could also be used to emphasize positive emotions such as joy or love.'

Other insights in the paper involved timing, location, gender, and level of influence of the tweeters.

People curse more and more as the day passes, reaching a peak at 12 a.m. to 1:30 a.m. before bedtime, and Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays contain the most curse words relative to tweet volume.

Researcher say the hour before we go to sleep is when we are most likely to swear in a tweet
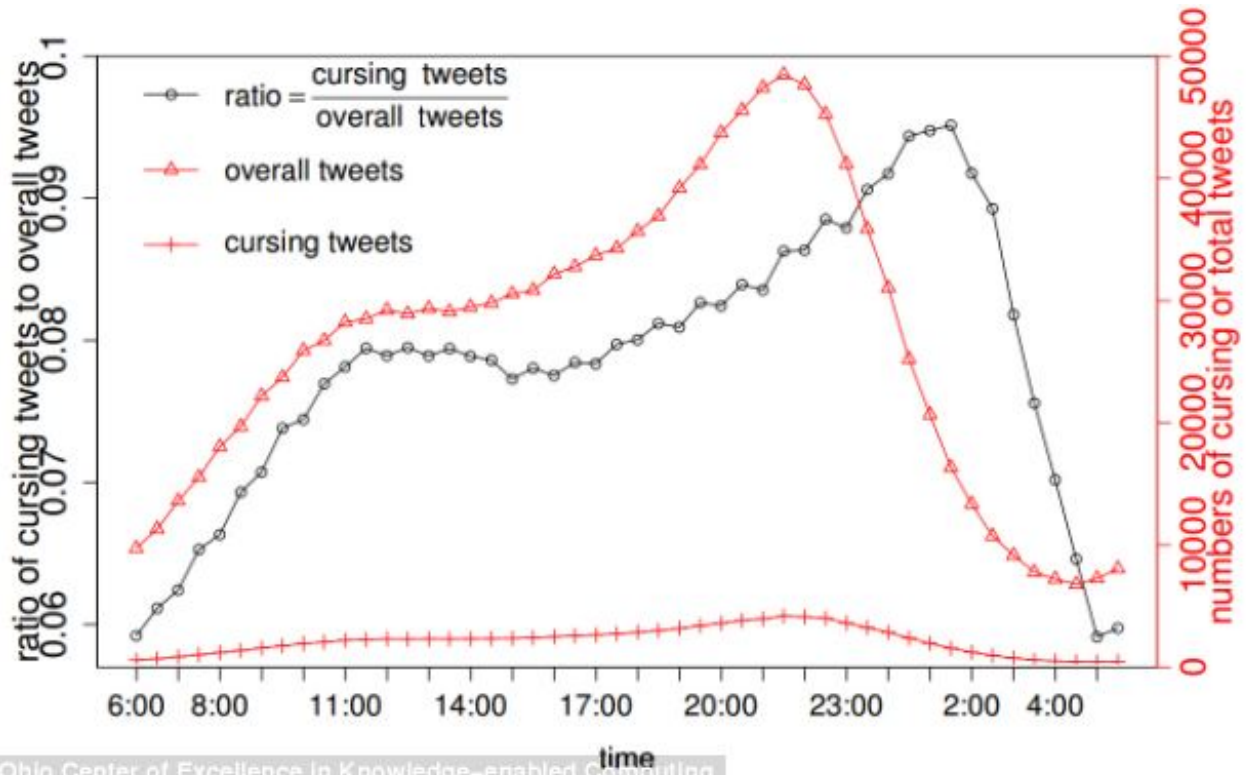
They also found user swore less when talking directly to another user.

'Our study of the relation between cursing and message types suggests that users perform self-censorship when they talk directly to other users.

'We find that users do curse more in relaxed environments, but the differences across different environments are very small, partly due to the fact that Twitter messages are posted in virtual digital world.
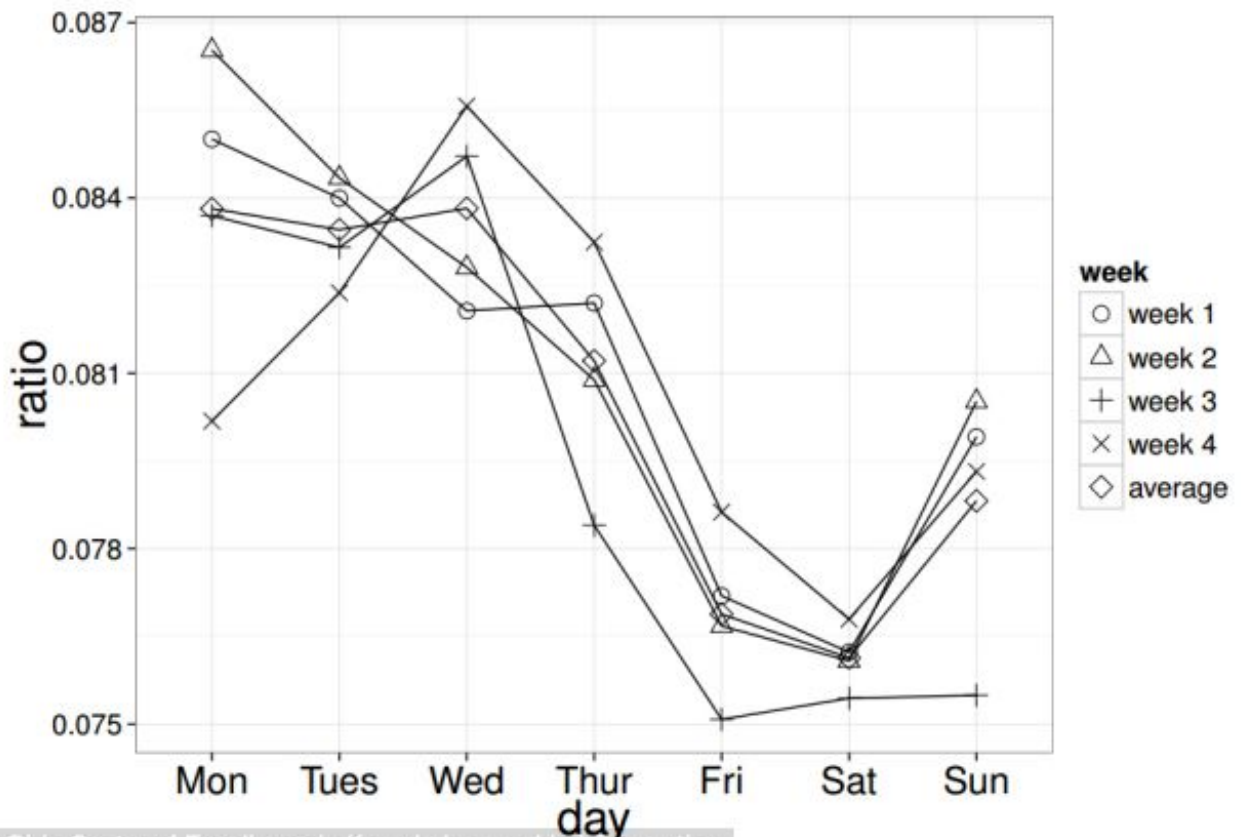
They also found men tended to swear more.

'Men curse more than women, men overuse some curse words different from what women use and vice versa, and both men and women are more likely to curse in the same-gender contexts.

Curses rises late at night just before people go to bed

A case of the Mondays? The study revealed we swear more in the early part of the week