

Misinformation and Social Distancing: Evidence from 762 Million Tweets

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Abstract

This is a 2000-word excerpt from my dissertation on the impact of misinformation on the spread of COVID-19 in the USA. I introduce the research design, conduct a literature review, and present descriptive statistics on a portion of the dataset.

1 Introduction

The early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic saw an unprecedented shift in behaviour for most citizens of the United States. In a short period of time, a large number changed their habits of working, socialising, and travelling. They did so both as a result of government restriction and as a private response to the spread of the pandemic. Economists have taken interest in how citizens formed these behaviour changes; it has been shown that people largely pre-empted government restrictions and acted as a result of their own assessment of the unfolding pandemic. A key factor in how citizens changed (or failed to change) their behaviour, then, is the source and quality of the information they received. It is plausible that those who consumed more accurate information¹ acted earlier, and were more likely to comply with the government restrictions when they came into place.

183 words in main body, excluding headers and bibliography.

¹And also more cautious information; in this case the two are largely correlated, which is investigated in the full paper.