"Longform" Twitter: How Twitter threads are used to share COVID-19 information

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How does “longform” info spread on Twitter?

01 Twitter is an important venue for information sharing, especially during disasters, but studies typically focus on individual tweets [1, 2]

02 **We focus on Twitter threads**: linked lists of tweets from a single author

03 We collected ~1000 coronavirus-related Twitter threads and annotated the ones with over 50 likes (163 threads).

04 This project helps:

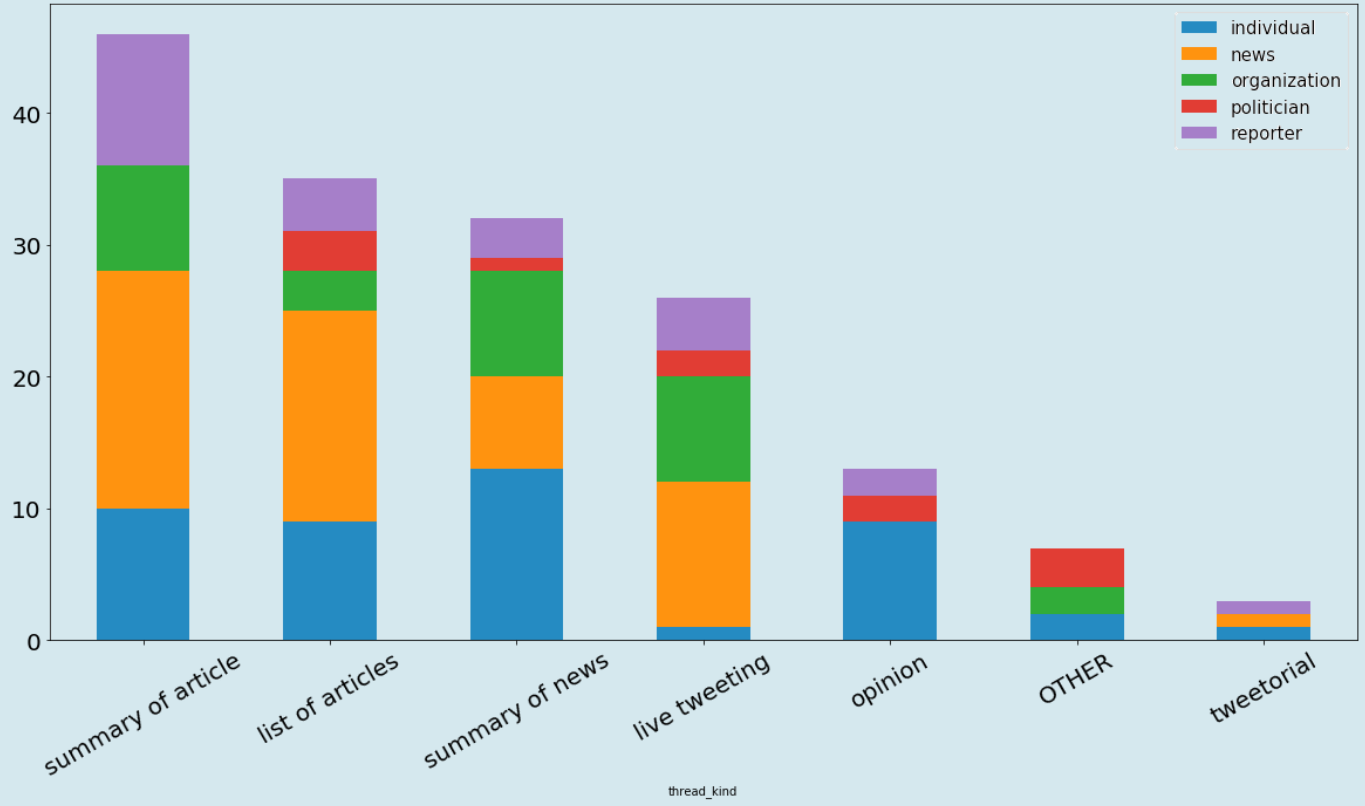
- Organizations understand how they can share info on Twitter
- Researchers understand how info is spreading on Twitter

1. Stowe, Kevin, et al. "Developing and evaluating annotation procedures for Twitter data during hazard events." *Proceedings of the Joint Workshop on Linguistic Annotation, Multiword Expressions and Constructions (LAW-MWE-CxG-2018)*. 2018.
2. Anderson, T. Jennings, et al. "Far Far Away in Far Rockaway: Responses to Risks and Impacts during Hurricane Sandy through First-Person Social Media Narratives." *ISCRAM*. 2016.

Data collection and annotation

- Collected tweets with 'coronavirus' or 'covid19' in the text using twarc
- On a daily basis search for threads: tweets that include 3+ replies from the same author
- **We collected ~1k Twitter threads from 4/9-4/19**
- **We annotated threads with 50+ likes (163 in total) according to**:
  - Locality (focus of content, e.g. USA, global, India)
  - Source (kind of author, e.g. reporter, politician, news organization)
  - Type (structure of content, e.g. summary of article, live tweeting)
- Additional Twitter data includes # retweets, # likes, user profile info

Most Twitter threads are about external news

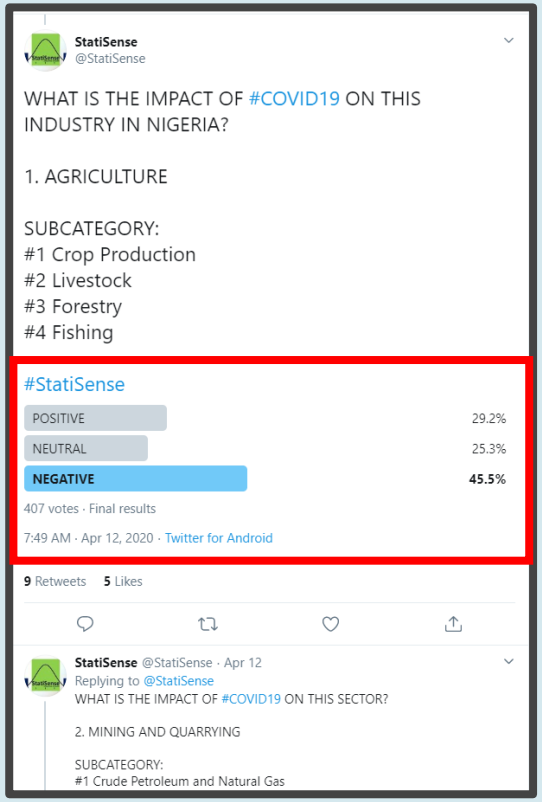


- Most threads summarize or refer to external news sources
- Most threads are tweeted by news organizations

Next steps:

- How many readers read the external sources?
- Are there predictors of likes or retweets other than the author of the thread?

Surprising uses of Twitter threads

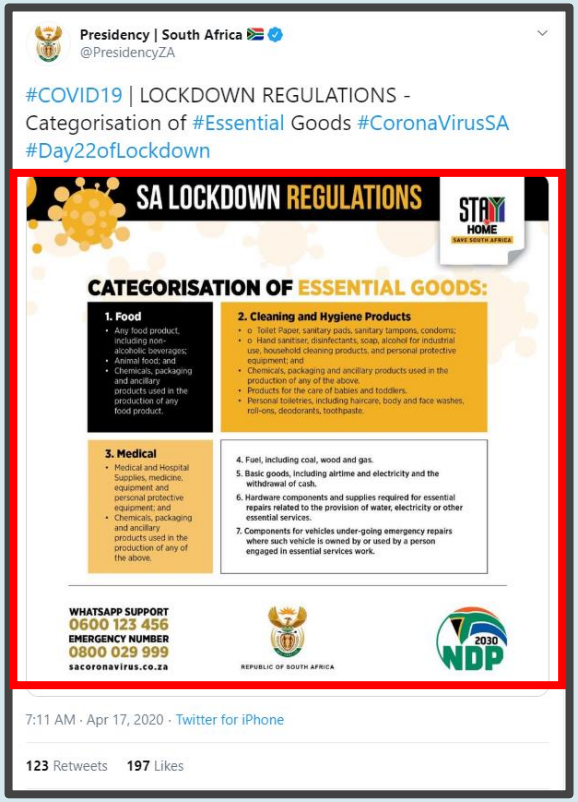


To gather data

This thread was a series of polls from a data science organization

To explain a concept

This thread explains science behind antibodies as protection



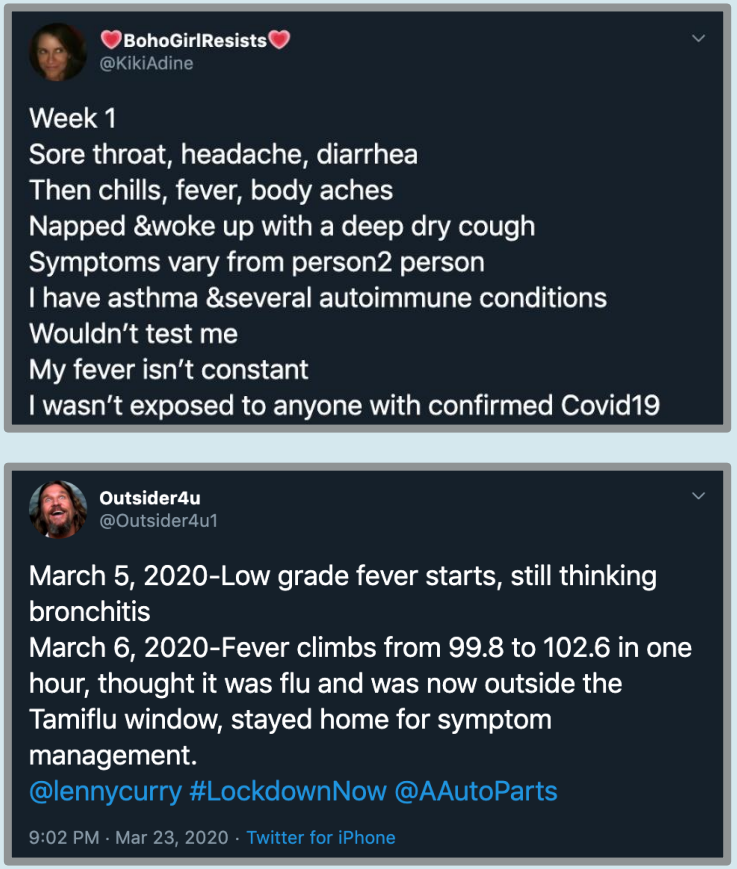
Official gov communication

This is a thread of announcements from South Africa's president

Why were so few personal stories collected?

1. Method of data collection
   - Often people will have a series of Tweets that are not explicitly a thread.
   - Individuals are less likely to have many followers leading to fewer likes.
2. Format of individual tweets
   - Character limit inhibits free-form writing.
   - People may prefer to tweet personal stories on private accounts.

To improve future data collection:

- Expand search to indirect terms (such as “pandemic”, “virus”, “quarantine”, “isolation”)
- Filter out tweets made by news organizations and focus a bigger part of search on individuals

Examples of personal stories not identified by our algorithm: