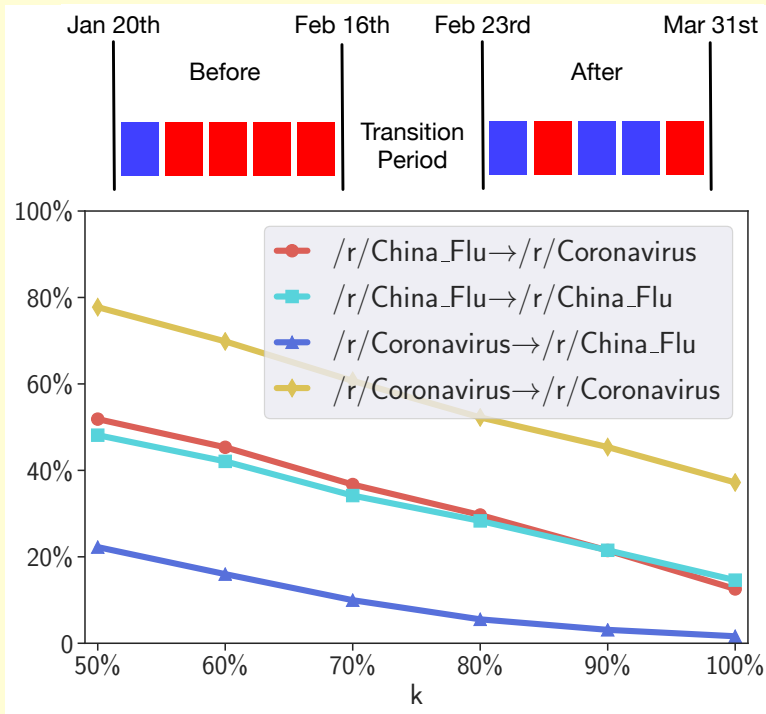




Understanding the Diverging User Trajectories in Highly-related Online Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic



Nearly half of /r/China_Flu members moved to /r/Coronavirus on the week of Feb 17th.

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1. Research questions: How do new users choose between /r/China_Flu and /r/Coronavirus? How do users move between /r/China_Flu and /r/Coronavirus?

2. Data & Results: We characterize user trajectories in /r/China_Flu and /r/Coronavirus from Jan. to Sept. 2020. Results show that new users of /r/China_Flu and /r/Coronavirus were similar from January to March. After that, their differences steadily increased over time. Furthermore, Around 50% of /r/China_Flu members moved to /r/Coronavirus in February. This movement turns out to be highly predictable based on other subreddits that users were previously active in.

3. Significance: Our work demonstrates how two highly-related communities emerge in a crisis through the perspective of their members. Both of them develop their own identities and attract certain types of users. Our work also highlights the important role of existing communities in understanding such an emergence.