Jordan Bethea
IMT 547

IDEA 1:
Project title 1 (Descriptive title that captures your idea1)

The Un-United States of America approach to COVID-19

What you want to do?
Your response. Longer response that provides a bit more description than what's in the title.

The theme of this research is news and misinformation. In my research, I'd like to see if there is a geographical element to the information being disseminated about the COVID-19 pandemic and if so, if there is a way to combat the misinformation more strategically. In terms of governmental strategy to handling the pandemic and its spread, it was largely left to individual states. There was a lot of misinformation surrounding how COVID-19 infects people as well as how to protect oneself and others. The media exacerbated this problem at times with misleading or panic inducing headlines. So, to what extent did the local media play a role in spreading misinformation about COVID-19 and were there any "hot spots"? A hot spot would be a place with a higher amount of misinformation than other places.

To scope this down, I'd like to focus on local news on Twitter and see what was being reported and if it was in line with guidance from agencies such as the World Health Organization and the CDC. I want to be able to identify misinformation hot spots around the United States and see if there is any commonality between what was being reported or if the types of misinformation being presented varied. As a step further, I'd like to see if there is a correlation between these places and COVID-19 infection and death rates. Even further, what are the vaccination rates? As Nerghes et al. pointed out, a previous study had found a correlation in states between lower vaccination rates and higher rates of misinformation and conspiracy theories online.

Next, in these hot spots, how can we gently, but firmly, guide the misinformed Twitter users toward the correct information? When aggressively confronted, people tend to stand their ground even further. So how do we reach the people who have been misinformed and create a more scientifically literate society?

Why should we care?
Your response. Provide a motivation of why this project is worth pursuing? That is, if you are successful, what difference will it make?

If this project was successful, it would give health organizations around the United States a way to focus their online strategies and campaigns. It would also give researchers a better idea of how to construct science literacy programs and focus on areas that need the help to focus on a more equitable approach that creates a more scientifically literate society.

Keywords – To mark topic and domain of the idea.
Your response. Comma separated keywords

Misinformation, Twitter, coronavirus, COVID-19, online strategy, science literacy, local news

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IDEA 2:
Project title 2 (Descriptive title that captures your idea2)

Who am I? The evolution of one's identity online and its effect on forming information communities

What you want to do?
Your response. Longer response that provides a bit more description that what you have in the title

The theme of this research is online communities. How does one's online identity evolve over time? And how does it effect the attitudes, behaviors and conversations they engage with online? Specifically, I'd like to focus on actors who spread misinformation and the evolution of their online presence. Everyone has an online footprint. Even deleted posts are known to live in databases somewhere. I'm curious how people's relationship with the online environment evolves over time. Does when someone joins a social media platform, such as Twitter, effect how they interact with it? Do certain personality traits or socioeconomic factors or background contribute to the type of information community they eventually join?

It might also be interesting to take this in the direction of how individuals build information sharing communities and build off of Cheng et al.'s work and see if Future Banned Users or misinformation perpetrators form their own communities or if they only try to infiltrate others. How do these groups of people identify with each other? "Birds of a feather flock together" is a popular phrase to describe how people form friend groups, is the phrase still true for information communities? I'm also curious if the people in these groups are more vulnerable to misinformation and their willingness to believe it.

Also, are the identities these users are creating online similar to their identity in the non-virtual world or completely different? Along that nuance, are people who come to the platform as themselves more or less likely to join a misinformation community or people who come looking to be someone else?

Why should we care?
Your response. Provide a motivation of why this project is worth pursuing? That is, if you are successful, what difference will it make?

If this project was successful, it might be easier to find these clusters of users who spread misinformation and either de-amplify the voices they have to spread problematic information. It might also provide a better understanding of why certain people tend to flock to misinformation communities rather than stay away based on attitudes, behaviors or sentiments they have.

Keywords – To mark topic and domain of the idea.
Your response. Comma separated keywords

Identity, misinformation, identity evolution, community, Twitter, information community

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