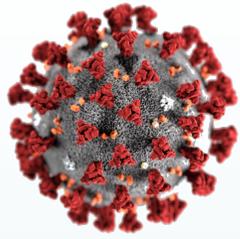


Tweeting to Return to “Normalcy” During COVID-19: Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors



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Abstract

Covid-19 has taken hundreds of thousands of people's lives. It is a real virus, but so many people do not believe in its severity. This could be happening for many reasons, but in this research study, we use cognitive dissonance as the foundation. The research begins with twitter analytics to identify themes emerging within the discourse about the government lockdown and health/safety precautions. The themes that come from Twitter guide the questions asked in a survey to understand better attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to COVID-19. It will also look at the correlation of where those beliefs come from, and why there is dissonance. This proposed study hopes to understand how people rationalize their beliefs and behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

R1: What are the rationale and justifications for people avoiding CDC health and safety precautions such as wearing a mask, social distancing, and staying in lockdown?

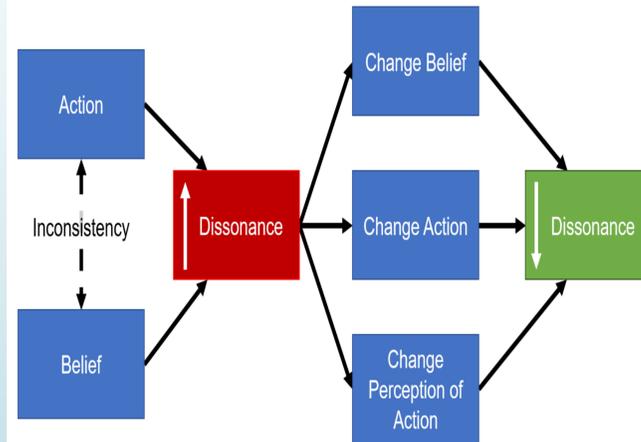
R2: Why do some people believe COVID-19 is a “hoax”?

R3: What are people’s motivations for disbelieving in COVID-19? Where does this come from?

H1: There will be a correlation between people who distrust mainstream media & view alternative media and lack of health precautions.

H2: There will be a correlation between republicans and lack of health precautions.

H3: There will be a correlation between lack of trust in the government and lack of health precautions.



Literature & Theories

Cognitive Dissonance Theory: The tendency for individuals to seek consistency and work toward alleviating inconsistencies through change that eliminates the dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

Theory of Anomie (Classical): A theory that refers to a lack of normal ethical or social standards (Durkheim, 1893).

Self-Determination Theory: A macro theory of motivation and personality that concern innate psychological needs and growth (Deci, et al., 2012).

Reasoned Action Theory: Seeks to explain the relation between attitudes and behaviors in human action (Fishbein, et al., 1967).

Emotional Contagion Theory: A phenomenon by which an individual’s emotions and behaviors trigger similar emotions and behaviors in others (Hatfield, et al., 1993).

Inoculation Theory: A method by which an attitude or belief can be protected against influence or persuasion (Compton, 2013).

Methods

Phase One - Twitter Data:

Using Netlytic, we pulled 1,000 tweets each from the following hashtags:

1. #Antilockdown
2. #Wakeupamerica
3. #Openamericanow
4. #Endtheshutdown

We used Twitter's streaming API. These hashtags were all trending and had the connotation of being against the recommended government guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The data was pulled on May 19th, 2020, before the #BlackLivesMatter protests began.

We will conduct a network analysis and check Bot O'Meter for bot activity.

A codebook will be created to conduct a thematic analysis.

Phase Two - Survey:

With the big data results, it will drive our questions asked in a survey. The questions will ask in depth questions about people's ideology, attitudes, and behaviors from March 2020 to June 2020.

Examples will measure where people get their news, how much they believe in mainstream media or alternative media sites, and how much they fact check what they read.

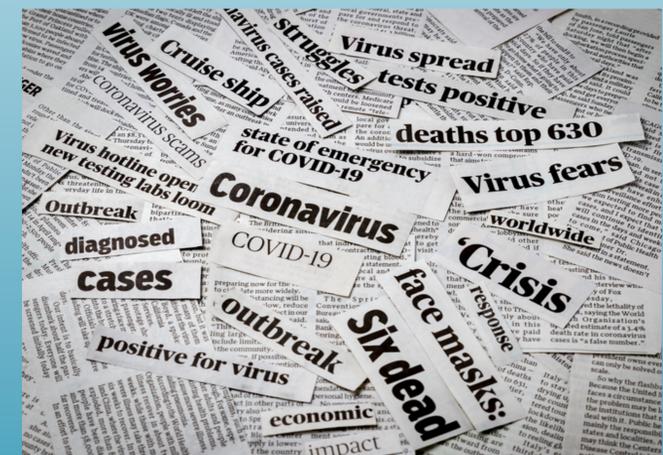
Another element of questions will ask about their trust in the government and political ideology. It will also ask questions related to their beliefs in COVID-19. The last part of the survey will ask about their behaviors during this time frame and how serious they take CDC guidelines.

Preliminary Results & Discussion

Our preliminary results show many emerging themes in the discourse on Twitter. Some of these themes are:

- Individual rights and freedom
- Religion and God
- Not living in fear
- The belief that the pandemic is a hoax
- Bill Gates
- Anti-Vaccines
- The media is lying
- Numbers and statistics are not as bad as it seems

Our goal in this study is to understand how people rationalize their disbelief in a global pandemic. We hope this research provides greater insight into the cognitive domains and how external factors such as the media can create an ideology that turns into a behavior.



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