COVID-19: How Twitter Promotes a Sense of Safety

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Introduction

For a Twitter user, the hashtag is an essential part of a successful tweet. It's a simple way to group tweets together, and an excellent way to spark conversation among Twitter users, especially if the hashtag is trending. Even though one is significantly limited on how many characters can be packed in a tweet, this does not get in the way of tweeters who pack meaningful content into such short tweets. Due to the novel outbreak of COVID-19, loads of news concerning the virus, factual or not, may be seen on this platform. Various hashtags, such as #COVID19, #maskon, #6feet, and #staysafe have been used by millions of users to spark discussion about the virus. The trending tag #staysafe brings together different types of Twitter users for different purposes. An overwhelming majority of users reveal overall adjustment back to this new normal that is being created; many people are experiencing this virus playout in different ways, although most recognize that the new normal that is currently being created will last for quite a while, so new routines and ways of living are inevitable to occur (Armstrong, 2020). In order to facilitate a smooth transition back to a new normal of going out in public with masks and only going out in public to purchase essential products, many areas of the United States are going about the virus and plans of reopening in different phases (Kim et al., 2020).

The safety of the situation was analyzed by experts to reveal that physical distancing significantly slows the spread of the virus (Cowling, Aiello, 2020). Despite the enforcement of physical distancing, new ways of communication and new trends of entertainment have emerged with recent stay at home orders to keep everyone safe; studies show that the use of Zoom, Netflix (including Netflix party), and Hangouts Meet by Google have been among the most popular ways to stay in touch with other people (Koeze, Popper, 2020).

Methods

In this report, the hashtag #staysafe was used from Twitter. In order to collect a sample of tweets, the Twitter Archiving Google Spreadsheet (TAGS) was used to accumulate recent tweets with that hashtag. The settings were narrowed down in order to have a better sample of tweets to analyzed; this was done by requiring every tweeter that tweeted to have a minimum of 1000 followers, to ensure that robotic accounts and other potential scam accounts would not be included. The maximum tweets collected was set at around 600 tweets so there was not an overflow of content. In order to receive a proper amount of content in the first place, the achieve spreadsheet was set to update every hour; thus, new tweets with the hashtag #staysafe would be added to the spreadsheet every hour. The TAGS spreadsheet not only collected the text of the tweet, but also the username, user's followers, number of users the user is following, date and time of tweet, location of tweet, and a link to the tweet to view on Twitter. Additionally, any retweets were filtered out to reduce duplicate content.

In order to start to analyze the tweets collected, I began to code the tweets. I had different columns for different types of codes such as open codes which were for any miscellaneous notes, the poster whether this be an organizational or individual account, the logical or emotional appeal, the type of communication, potential political stance, user estimated age, and rationale. Overall, determining the political affiliation of the Twitter account was the most difficult. A majority of the Twitter accounts were organizational accounts, so a political affiliation could not be designated to this type of account. Although, determining the political affiliation of individual accounts was quite subjective and required much guesswork that was not the most reliable.

After going through and coding each tweet mentioned in the various categories above, I came across 2-3 tweets that were written in different languages. Instead of throwing these tweets

out, I used the information within the tweet by translating it into English. These tweets were essentially quite valuable as they reveal the perspective of the hashtag #staysafe from a point of view and physical location in which English was not the primary language used.

Data Analysis

Figure 1 reveals how a majority of the tweets that were tweeted with the hashtag #staysafe were meant for safety reasons. A majority of the other tweets were for entertainment purposes, whether this be celebrating the start of a new day, revealing positive COVID-19 updates, or showing a new song released in quarantine. Political, financial, and assistance rationales were not used heavily, revealing how the hashtag was used to inform Twitter users by educating people on safety and precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the virus, while the other majority serves to entertain Twitter users.

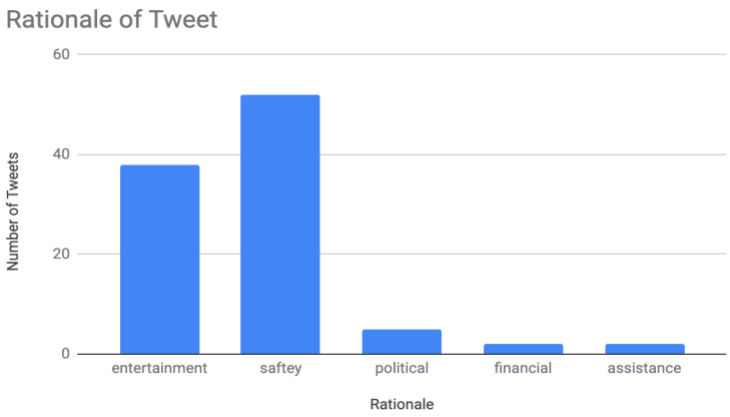

FIGURE 1

Figure 2 shows how a majority of the tweets came from organizational accounts; few tweets with this hashtag were made by creative, individual users. Even though I did not create a code for this, a lot of tweets come from countries outside of the United States, such as India and Kenya. This would make sense as the spread of COVID-19 is a global issue and anyone in the

world with Twitter can use the hashtag #staysafe. This additionally makes sense because the Tweets started to collect on the TAGS spreadsheet archive at night on Eastern Time Zone, which is the start of a new day across the world. Thus, as the highest volume of tweets occur in the morning, this reveals how many foreign organizational Twitter accounts were used to promote safety from COVID-19 in various countries.

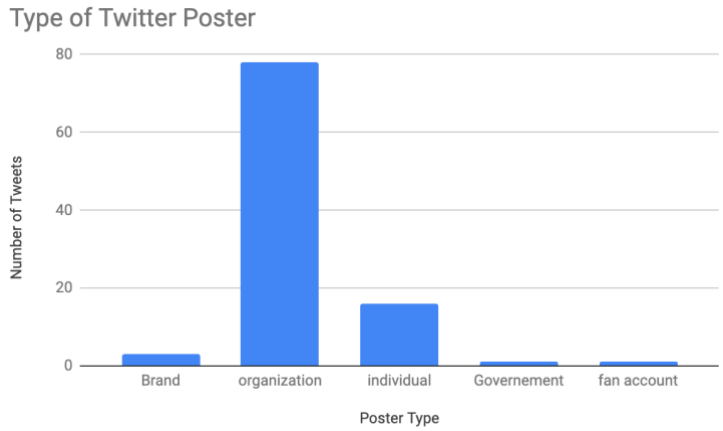

FIGURE 2

Figure 3 reveals how the organizations that tweeted using the hashtag #staysafe tend to prefer logic by stating facts about COVID-19, while individual accounts lean toward emotion, describing the outbreak from a very personal and humane level.

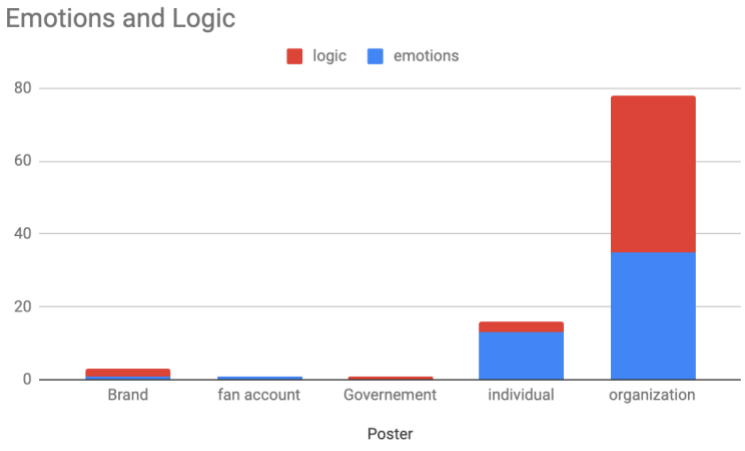

FIGURE 3

Conclusion

By using a smaller sample size, this report represents a minute proportion of all of the tweets with the hashtag #staysafe. The peak use of this hashtag is predicted to be around March or April of 2020 when the fear of the virus was much higher, regardless of the number of cases present. Thus, there has been a recent trend in the ability of Americans to not want to stay home any longer; toward the end of April, on average for 18-44 year olds, the percentage that were willing to stay home was only 63%, compared to the peak toward the end of March in which nearly 70% of people were willing to stay home (Kluch, 2020).

By using the hashtag #staysafe on Twitter, this ultimately brings Twitter users together to promote a sense of safety, regardless of how one is experiencing the outbreaks of COVID-19. Organizational accounts as well as individual users generally encourage safety precautions, such as in the following tweet: “Stay aware and make others around you aware, let’s all spread the word that we all need masks to stay healthy and safe. #usemask #staysafe”. This provides the Twitter users with information that encourages the use of a mask which can effectively slow the spread of the virus. Additionally, the general trend of adjusting to a new normal was present, as almost 40 tweets (as seen in Figure 1) were made for entertainment purposes, many showing new ways of entertainment that can be facilitated at home through online streaming services. Thus, the hashtag #staysafe on Twitter brought together different Twitter users, all united through different perspectives regarding the COVID-19 outbreak.

Work Cited

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