

National Post

Moods at lowest in afternoon, Twitter study finds



Sure these people look happy now, but just wait until you read their afternoon tweets.

fotolia

Sarah Boesveld Sep 29, 2011 – 3:10 PM ET | Last Updated: Sep 29, 2011 7:15 PM ET

People all over the world wake up in a good mood that gradually sours during the day and then brightens in the evening, a massive new study of Twitter users purports to have gleaned from more than two million twitter users pumped out and analyzed over a two year period.

Researchers at Cornell University in New York state say they were able to pinpoint how work, sleep and the amount of daylight affects people's attitudes and emotions by interpreting half a billion tweets from 2.4 million people in 84 countries — one of the first studies of this scale to collect data on how we're feeling in real time and deliver conclusive results published Thursday in the journal *Science*.

Using the publicly available tweets, collected within the span of one hour each day, they found people tend to communicate “positive affect” in the mornings —they're more likely to be alert and express delight — and “negative affect” such as feelings of depression or sadness in the afternoon. Their moods saw an uptick at night, however, after working hours have ended, leading one to believe that the barrage of information or work-related stress could explain a drop in mood during the day, said lead study author Scott Golder, a graduate student at Cornell University.

“I'd talk about it with people and they'd say ‘Of course it's going to decrease, they hate going to work!’” he said. “At first blush, that's a positive intuitive explanation. But it turns out to be wrong.”

It's wrong, he says, because the pattern is the same on weekends even in the United Arab Emirates where they work both Friday and Saturday.

“It can't be that work is explaining the [dip during the day] because most people work in the west during the week and not on Saturday,” he said.

Adds his co-author, Cornell sociology professor Michael Macy, “The pattern is very robust from day to day. We even see the same pattern on the weekends where people are happier in the morning and it's all downhill from there. At the end of the day, it's rebound.”

The research team used language monitoring software to identify words from the tweets such as “agree, awesome, definitely, outgoing, pleasing, special, fantastic, super and virtue” as positive, while words such as “afraid, cynical, fear, fury, abandon, panic,

remorse and vulnerable” had negative associations.

The study authors were also able to test the theory of whether people become more negative in general as the days get shorter. By measuring time stamps in each country and the time each message was sent, they found people tended to be more positive as the days started getting longer, Mr. Golder said.

Despite the global reach of the study, researchers caution that the Twitter sample is not representative of the world’s population or of people in any particular country. They couldn’t tell the gender, race or age of the Twitter user by their tweets, nor could they tell how much money they make or what they do for a living. In a accompanying their study, they cite a recent survey by Arbitron and Edison Research which finds Twitter users are 51% white, 24% African American and 17% Hispanic. People with college and advanced degrees are also overrepresented.

Gathering sociological information via social media has become “somewhat of a cottage industry,” Prof. Macy said. It’s even allowed researchers to track a person’s activity —something Mr. Golder has done with a [time track analysis](#) that, for example, shows a major spike around 4 p.m. globally when a person types in ‘Oprah.’

“In general, it makes it possible for social and behavioural scientists to monitor human behaviour at a level of temporal granularity that is unprecedented. And that’s really quite exciting,” Prof. Macy said.

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Graton

I think the results of this study are not surprising because it's not new information. Did they really need a study to confirm it?

I've always taken it for granted that this was common knowledge already. Most people have more energy and higher spirits just after sunrise; people feel sluggish after lunch, but feel better at the end of the day when the works done.

I wonder how much money they spent on this?

4 days ago

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