

**A VAGUE SENSE OF FOREBODING:
AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL
CONVERSATIONS ON
CORONAVIRUS IN INDIA**

By Geeta Lobo | March 2020

GAME CHANGERS





The first coronavirus case was detected in China sometime in December 2019. By mid-January multiple countries had confirmed cases. As of now there are over one hundred and sixty thousand cases across 150 countries and over six thousand fatalities. This outbreak has been declared a global pandemic. Social media conversations in India are reflecting the growing concern among people reacting to the topic which now dominates headlines everyday, everywhere.

160,000+

CASES

150+

COUNTRIES

6,000+

FATALITIES

The Trend

Reactions were first noted late in January as the news about the crisis in Wuhan emerged. The biggest trigger was the government's decision to evacuate Indian students from Wuhan.

There was a spike in conversations towards the end of January leading into February, as the news and rumours about the Wuhan crisis caught attention. Temporary suspension of e-visa facility for Chinese nationals and residents in Feb 2 drew a lot of comments. There were also speculations about possible causes of the outbreak in China, with some blaming the varied non-vegetarian diet and advocating vegetarianism.

The next few weeks in February saw a lull in the chatter, perhaps crowded out by Delhi elections, CAA/NRC violence and the US President Trump's visit to India. Conversation have picked up again early in March with the Prime Minister's decision to stay away from Holi gatherings in the light of the growing number of cases being reported from India.

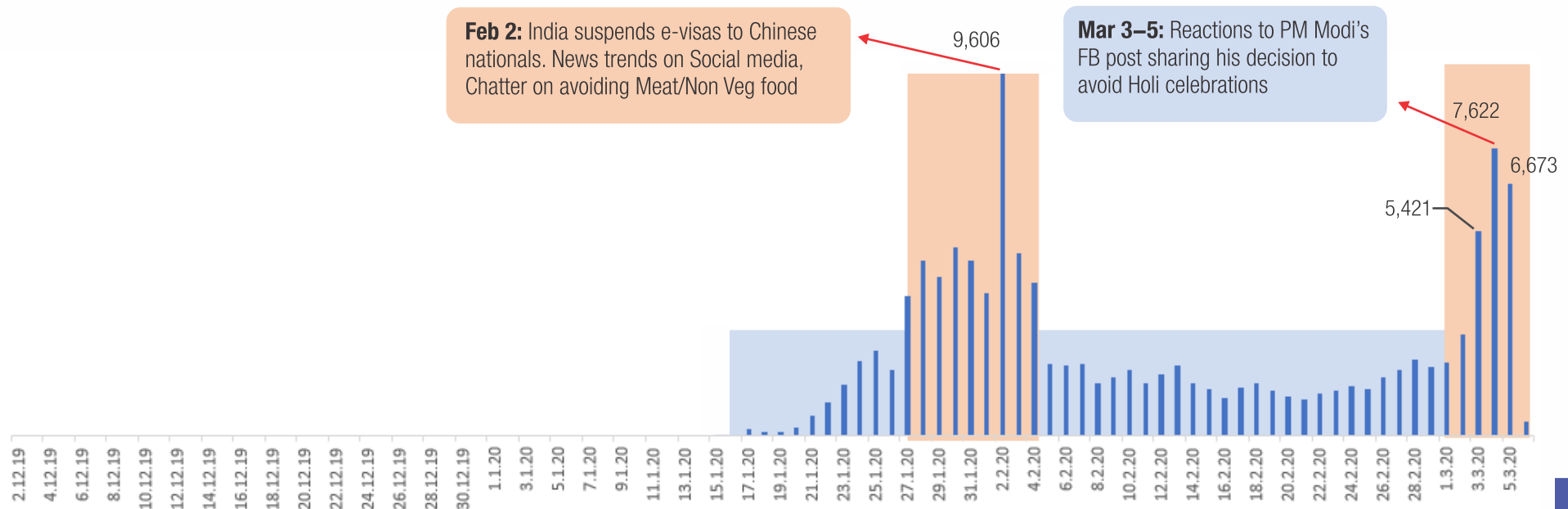


Fig 1: Trend of social media conversations on Coronavirus related themes from December to first week of March

Comparison of the social conversation and news reports online indicates that only in the recent weeks have the two started moving in tandem. The initial spike in conversation was not driven by the news coming in. The initial responses were both to government announcements and information from varied online sources. Most of February saw a lull both in the media reporting of the crisis and conversations on the topic as other news grabbed attention in this period. Off late the conversations are responding to formal reporting from the media.

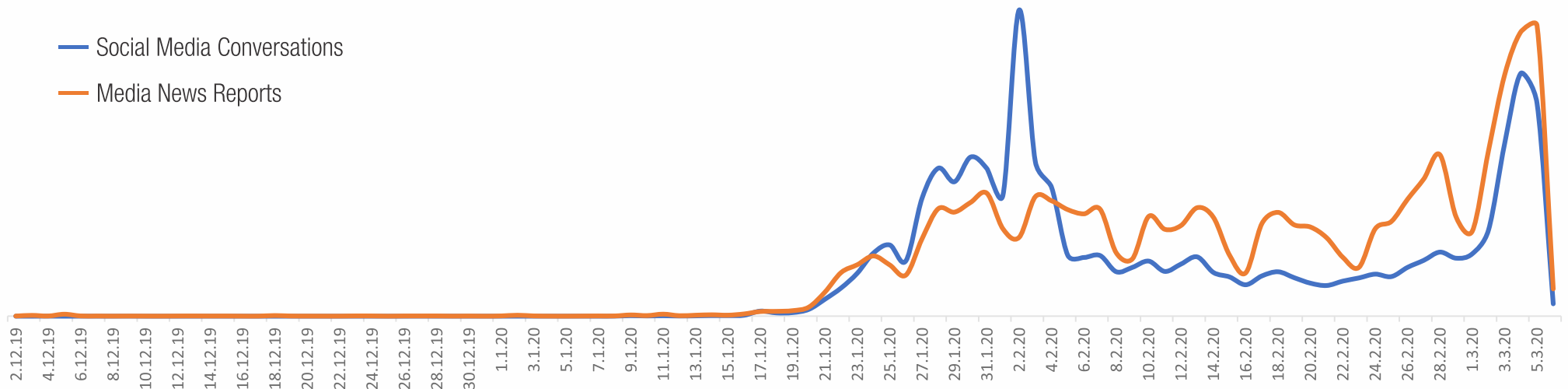
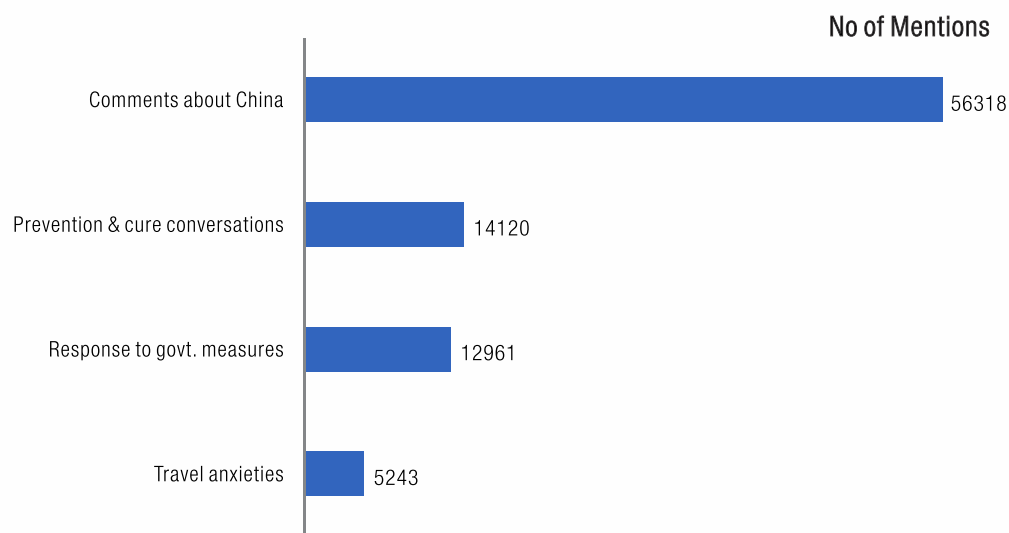


Fig 2: Trend of social media conversations vs News relating to Coronavirus from December to first week of March

KEY CONVERSATION TOPICS

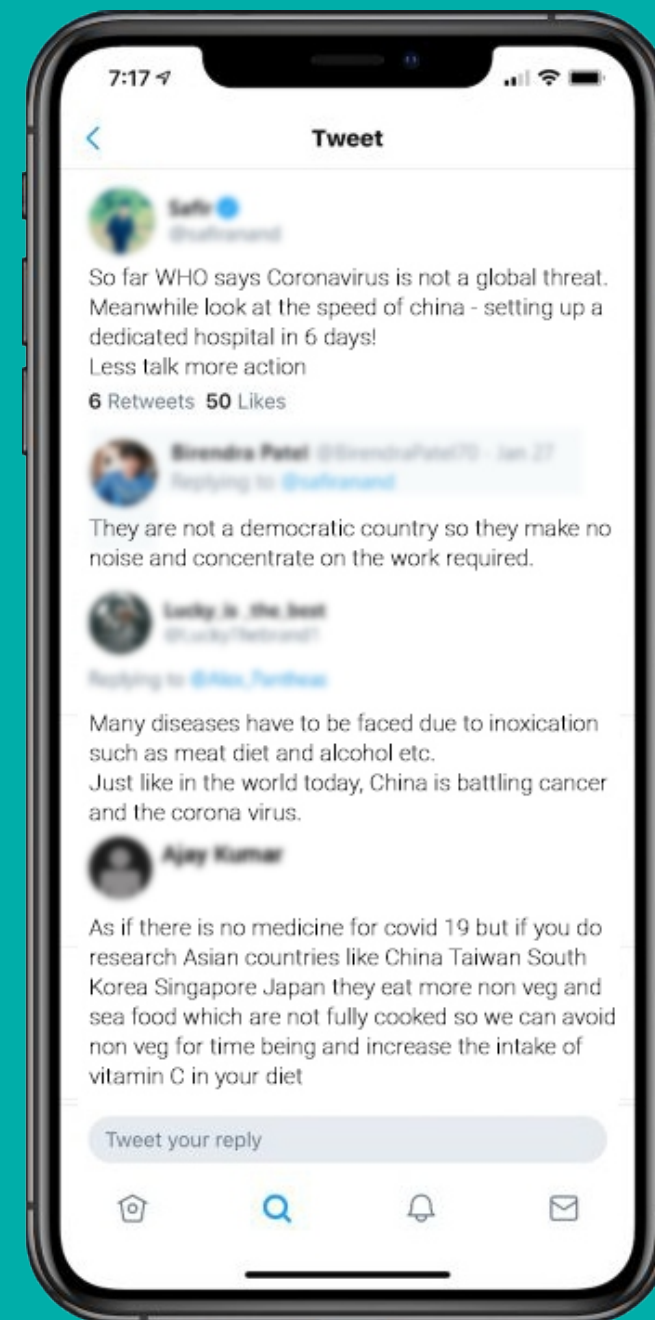
A lot of the conversations especially early reactions are about the situation in China. Two other topics are perspectives on preventive measures & cures, and reactions to various announcements by the Indian authorities. Another notable theme pertains to worries about travel restrictions.



— Fig3: Key Topics in social media conversations on from December to first week of March —

SPOTLIGHT ON CHINA

Most of the conversations are simple sharing of facts as they emerged from Wuhan. The content shared shows that breaking news now flows in from various questionable sources as it does from formal media channels. Comments ranged from admiration for the impossible task of building a hospital in a few days, to praise for the efficiency shown by the Chinese authorities in controlling the outbreak, to antagonistic comments about Chinese culture, especially food habits. People reacted to stories about bats being the source of transmission, by pontificating about the virtues of a vegetarian diet.



There are also calls to ban import of products from China to minimize exposure.



I will not import any phone from china. Who knows [#Corona#virus](#) can come via anywhere..Not joking. [#coronaoutbreak#coronavirusindia](#)

Sir..it's about coronavirus, I am Indian student studying in UK.. I would approach to not only to stop tourism to China but also any kind of import and export from them..since it's contagious it can spread by any medium.Please think about about the same.

Along with these insular thoughts there are some who have voiced worries about the economic impact of the Wuhan crisis, especially on supply of devices & technology products.

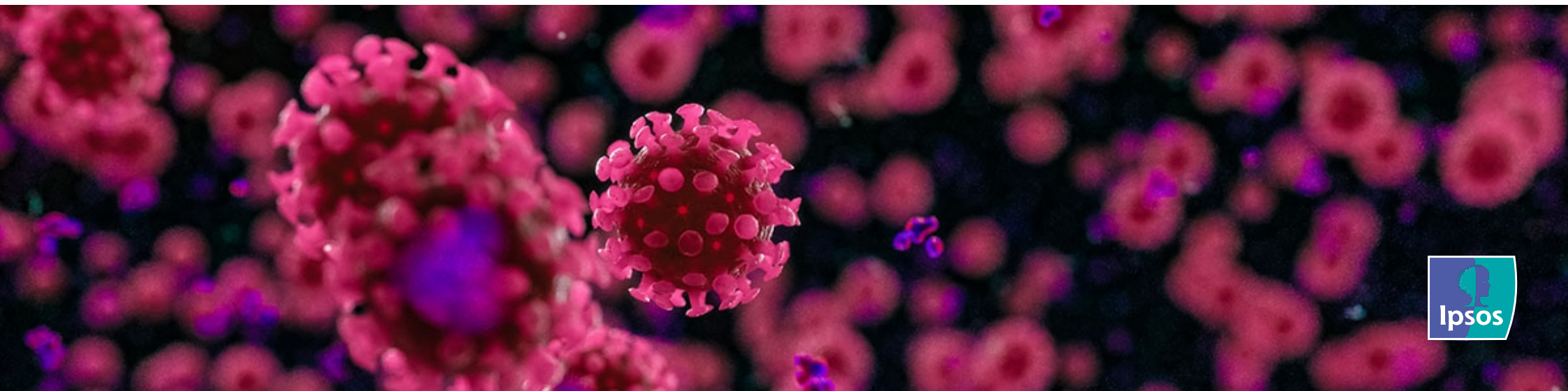


Visited Electronic Market Hub Laminton Road, Mumbai.Very less Footfall, a trader said, "After [#corona](#) in China from last one month we are not getting new supply,every day prices going up by 2-3%if previously 100 were visiting shop now only 10, No hope for next one month" [#Corona](#)

COVID-19 REMEDIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Social media is abuzz with suggestions about treatment and control of the disease. Conversations on products were limited to concerns about availability of masks and sanitizers and profiteering driving prices of these products up. The volume of conversation was low.

A comparison of Indexed search data vs social conversations is interesting. The crisis has spiked a search for products like mask and sanitizers. This has not yet shown up in higher volumes of conversations. In fact, the conversation volumes on masks had peaked in November, presumably around the time when air pollution in northern parts of the country was high. For sanitizers the indexed trends match, though social conversation volumes are low.



Conversations on preventive measures and treatment, is a curious mix of science and faith based prescriptions. While many endorse preventive measures such as wearing masks and avoiding large gatherings, others have offered a range of miracle cures bordering on the bizarre.

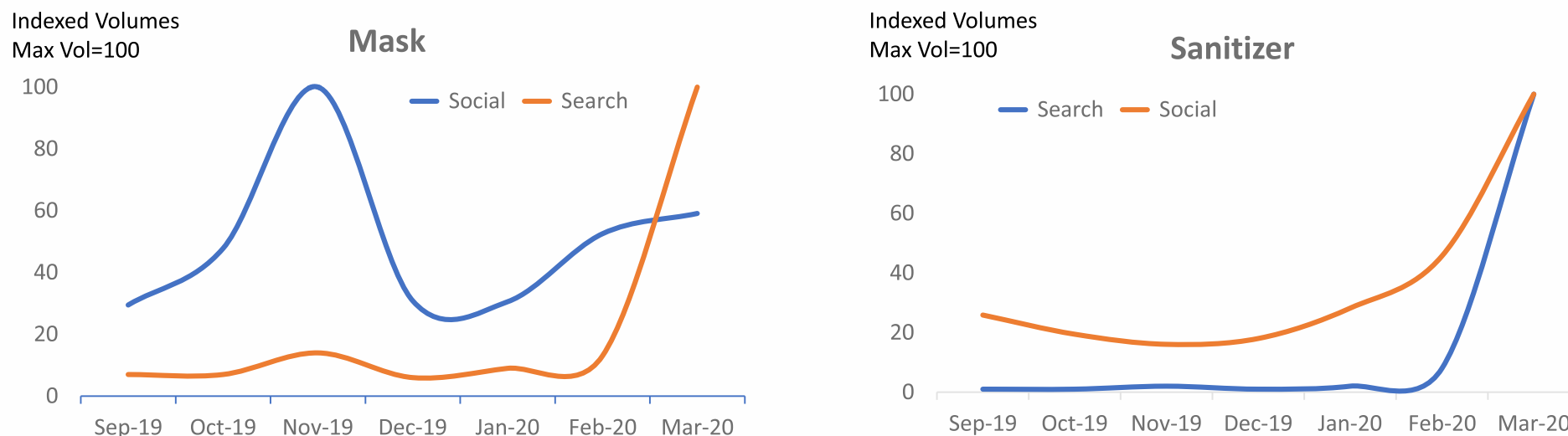


Fig 4: Comparison of Search and Social data trends



Here are few steps to save yourself from corona virus:-
1. Wear a mask on your face

Today China and how many countries are suffering from diseases like Korena due to meat consumption.
Use antibodies such as satbhagati and get rid of every disease

[#homoeopathy_treat_coronavirus#coronavirus](#)
Arsenic alb 30
[#SaturdayMorning](#)

Replying to [@WHO](#)
coronavirus Cure medicines are curry leaves and Honey

Recommendations by health authorities also evoked an absurd sense of pride among some who saw this as an endorsement of 'Indian culture'.



Whole world have to follow Indian rituals (Namastey, Veg food, body cremation) to prevent themselves from corona.
Today I realized how rich we, Indians are in our values. Rich and great values are the real elements of a developed country.
[#coronaAlert#CoronaOutbreak](#)

"the world will realise now why Indian ancients prayed to all animals and trees...including the snake, alligators, vulture - saluting their inherent power. And why we greeted with 🙏"
A response from a dear friend 'NM'
[#CoronavirusReachesDelhi#CoronaAlert](#)
[#coronaAlert#CoronaOutbreak](#)

MIXED REACTIONS TO GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

While people have spoken about the range of measures taken by the government, only a few have evoked any appreciation, many felt that a lot more needs to be done. An exception to this is the response to actions taken by Kerala government, which were held up as an example to be followed by the rest of the country.



It is really a God given Minister for Kerala..Really appreciate the efficient Minister & the health department for taking prompt steps for public health.

Comments made by those in power especially from the Prime Minister and a few MLAs evoked an immediate response. Narendra Modi's tweet about avoiding Holi milan saw a spike in conversations, with most endorsing and appreciating the move. On the other hand a comment by an MLA from Assam about the potency of cow urine in curing coronavirus has evoked sharp criticism and angry reactions.



We still have such people around us from a sector of society. Once she is infected by this virus, let her consume 'Gaumutra' only. Let us see the result. She should be sponsored to visit China to help those suffering from this deadly virus.

TRAVEL ANXIETIES

A smaller yet notable topic which is building up, is conversations about cancellation of international travel and anxieties about travel to other countries.



Hey @ThaiAirways we booked your flight for 17th March but because of Corona Virus scare we r afraid to travel overseas. I spoke to my Indian flight carrier about cancelling my flight they said they will provide us full refund in current scenario. Request you to kindly help us



Just returned from Thailand. This is getting serious. Even the airlines crew advised against traveling. Use mask, keep sanitizers. Not sure they help.

In sum: The current conversations on Coronavirus Covid-19 are largely opinions and comments on an adversity unfolding in another part of the world. The trending pattern also suggests that people are mainly responding to announcements and information coming in, it is still not driven by an inherent concern about the risks and disruptions foreseen in one's immediate circle. Though there is a recognition of the significance of this crisis, it is yet to evoke a sense of alarm. As the reported cases grow, so will the anxiety about the risk posed. The rising trend of conversation on topics such as travel or availability of masks and sanitizers suggests that the nature of conversations can be expected to change soon.

For further information on this study or for Social Listening Insights:

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Social Intelligence Analysis:

Delivering actionable insights from social intelligence and other unstructured data sources. We help brands dive deep into specific business questions using social listening data and have strategies informed by this rich, organic and dynamic source of data.

GAME CHANGERS

