

### Public Attitudes to Science 2014: Social Listening

Quarter 1: January – April 2013 report

### **Objectives**

Ipsos MORI, on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, are conducting a year long research exercise into how people talk about science. Using our social media tracking programme we are able to see who is talking about science online, what they are talking about, and when. In essence –

what makes science 'sticky'?

#### January – April (Q1) objectives:

Exploring how people react on social media to the biggest science stories
Search subjects – the horsemeat scandal and the meteor strike over Russia







### Method

Using our in-house social media platform we are able to measure internet traffic volumes on different subjects across a range of online sources, including Twitter, forums, blogs, news sites, etc.

Over the period January-April we searched for mentions of science, scientists and trust close to two of the biggest science-related stories of the period – the horsemeat contamination scandal and the meteor strike over Russia

#### Our search terms:

•(horsemeat OR "horse meat") NEAR/10 (scien\* OR expert\* OR tests)

•"predict meteor"~5 OR "see meteor coming"~5 OR "didn't spot the meteor" OR (("meteor strike" OR meteorstrike OR "meteor explosion" OR (meteor\* NEAR/5 (russia\* OR siberia\* OR chelyabinsk))) NEAR/10 (scien\* OR expert\* OR astronom\*))

N.B. the meteor search term required more iterations as meteors are discussed more generally on many websites



### **Headline findings**

Different types of coverage



### Different *types* of coverage



The meteor story was reported more traditionally – news sources and scientists acted as authority figures and distributed information The horsemeat scandal took off on Twitter – the science of the story took second place to humour and people shared jokes, rather than facts



### Horsemeat and meteors – global internet traffic





### Horsemeat and meteors – UK traffic



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### The horsemeat scandal

A case of food fraud

### 100% Horsemeat Burgers!

Refuse to accept the pale imitations being offered by the Supermarket chains! We promise not a trace of beef, pork, lamb or badger in our GENUINE HORSE MEAT BURGERS! Also available in unlimited quantities on our unique eat-all-you-like BBQ Buffet!

Burgers available Fridays & Saturdays from noon till 4!





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### Sources of Horsemeat in the UK – Twitter-heavy



### **Different peaks – Twitter volume and news volume**





### The Chelyabinsk meteor

A scientific spectacle





### The Meteor – a more global story





### UK in focus – the same pattern but lower volume





# Much more 'traditional' dissemination – news volume usually highest





# Horsemeat and the meteor – two different types of story



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# The meteor story was reported and talked about scientifically – with a few notable exceptions



#### Russia Meteor: Did UFO stop disaster by blowing up meteor?

In a twist to the Urals <mark>meteor strike</mark> in <mark>Russia</mark>, new footage has sparked claims that the space rock was blown up by a UFO. In reports from the remote part of <mark>Russia</mark> where the <mark>meteor</mark> exploded in February, ufologists claimed they have discovered video evidence that shows the rock being struck by an object before it exploded.

There is video as well



# A world cloud of Twitter findings reveals a predominance of scientific and factual phrases



Word clouds are a representation of the frequency with which particular terms are present in the data



# By contrast, non-scientific sources were much more strongly represented in the horsemeat scandal

### The most mentioned Tweeters were a split between traditional news sources and individuals

Most Mentioned Tweeters @bbcbreaking	A	pe to Publish a Book			
@skynewsbreak		Gı	u <b>y Kawasaki </b> @GuyKawasaki	Author · Publisher Entrepreneur	
@badkidandrew	Author of APE: Author, Publisher, Entrepreneur, Former chief evangelist of Apple. My tweets are repeated 4 times to reach all timezones				
@hauzofsam	Silicon Valley, California apethebook.com				
@guykawasaki	114,598	293,704	1,357,160	Sellow	
@queen_uk	IWEEIS	FULLOWING	FULLOWERS		
@bbcnews		Elizabeth	Windsor @Queen	_UK	11
@cp24	Tests show Tesco Everyday Value Spaghetti Bolognese containe				
@itvnews			or semeat or more.	anan 00%. High in <b>a</b> i	ier gan.
@mailonline		Expand			



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### Looking at the 500 most prolific tweeters from each story...





### **On retweets – #horsemeat is leagues ahead**



By contrast, the "#meteor" hashtag, which was the most commonly employed hashtag for meteor coverage, was retweeted more infrequently, with the total number of retweets reflecting only 2% of the total for original tweets

#### #meteor

**Retweets** 

## The story unfolded in chapters with a different household name implicated each time



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# The story unfolded in chapters with a different household name implicated each time



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## The story unfolded in chapters with a different household name implicated each time



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# A word cloud of the horsemeat findings reveals a 'brand' element to the story too



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Word clouds are a representation of the frequency with which particular terms are present in the data

### Conclusions

#### The way in which people talked about the meteor story was much more scientific

- Scientific sources and scientists took a central role in dissemination, and people usually just reported facts
- **Twitter discussion amongst peers was limited** for a variety of factors the death toll and destruction, the remoteness of the event, and its sudden occurrence could all be factors

#### By contrast, the horsemeat story was more colloquial and took off in a big way

- Twitter took up the largest proportion of traffic, and a large proportion of the twitter traffic was humorous
- The following factors all contributed to making the story more widely talked about :
  - The progressive revelation of household names implicated in the scandal
  - The lack of any illness or injury arising from the contamination
  - Traditional taboos and stereotypes around eating horse meat all contributed to making the story more widely talked about

The down side is that very little information of a scientific nature was shared in the horsemeat story...





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