



# ONE COUNTRY

“COVID-19”

Snapshot of Online and Social Media Analysis in Rural  
Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire,  
Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin

March 15 – 21, 2020

# Rural Citizens



166,000 original posts



54,000 unique authors

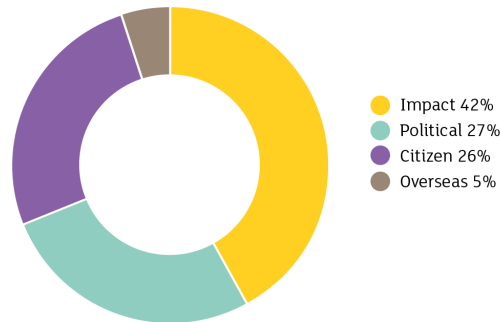
## Overview

There is a sense of resignation about closures and cancellations that have taken place in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Accompanying this is a feeling of severe anxiety as to what this means for jobs and businesses.

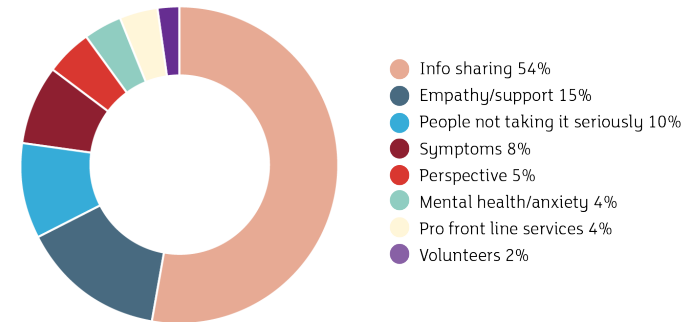
Peer-to-peer is the most trusted form of communication as people update each other on the latest information and answer each other's questions about how the disease spreads and how to stay safe.

President Trump comes under a lot of criticism for his handling of the disease. Much of the political discussion is based on partisanship with Reps attempting to shift the blame for the crisis to the Dems. Meanwhile state governors receive praise for their decisive action.

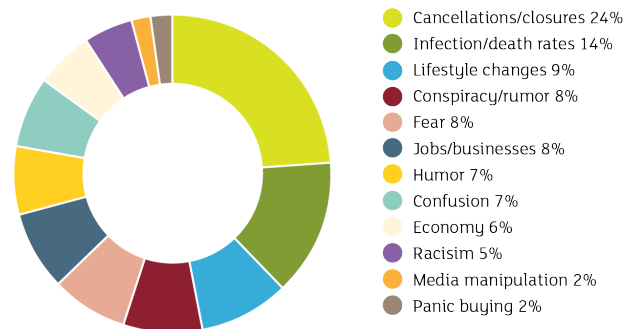
## DISCUSSION SPLIT



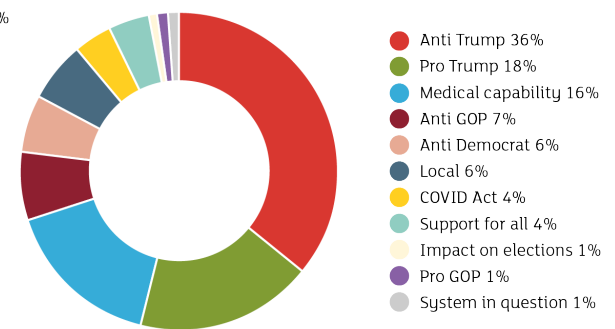
## CITIZEN DISCUSSION



## IMPACT DISCUSSION



## POLITICAL DISCUSSION



ONE COUNTRY

# Analysis: Key Takeaways

## Impact Discussion

- As these states shut down, information about cancellations and closures is shared quickly. Although disappointment and a relatively small amount of anger is expressed, the overall feeling is resignation. Many had clearly anticipated this situation and the conversation is therefore more factual than emotional. People regularly exchange the latest infection/death rates in their state and others across the US which may explain why they have quickly accepted the significant measures taken by the authorities.
- Discussion of the economic impact of the closures is much more emotional. Many are terrified of what this will do to their jobs and businesses and how they will make ends meet. At the same time, others are using the virus to remarket their firms by offering a delivery service.
- Many speak of their lifestyle changes, such as child care, and what they are doing to try to take their mind away from the crisis. Elsewhere, some are confused as to what impact the virus will have on them personally and whether they should be worried. This results in some expressing a blasé attitude towards their own health and of others.
- Meanwhile others use the time to either create or exchange conspiracy theories where scientific explanations for the disease are dismissed and replaced by more sinister 'deep state' origins.
- Finally, discussion of racism appears in the conversation. While most of this is a reaction to Trump naming COVID-19 the 'Chinese Virus,' there are also people hoping a 'positive' impact of the disease will be that the 'x' race gets infected, or that it forces that demographic out of business.



# Analysis: Key Takeaways

## **Citizen Discussion**

- Overall this is a community-building conversation which shows people coming together to share information and offer one another support. This discussion acts as a cheap and effective communication channel for state governments. It is clear who rural Americans trust most - one another. They readily share information on the disease or answer each other's questions. While this can cause the spread of misinformation, on the whole this discussion appears relatively well informed. As part of this discussion, citizens share their symptoms and are quickly supported and reassured by their online peer group.
- Similarly, people readily show one another empathy and support, calling for their family/friends to stay strong and emphasizing that they are here for them. Much of this is driven by people's concern with regards mental health.
- Meanwhile, others express annoyance that some people are not taking the issue seriously and call on them to stop being so stupid/ignorant/reckless and think of others.
- There are some who are trying to offer perspective in relation to the disease. However, while the intention may be to reassure, such posts are also serving to undermine the seriousness of the disease.



# Analysis: Key Takeaways

## Political Discussion

- There are many rural people who are extremely angry at how the federal government is dealing with the crisis. Many will simply never forgive Trump for suggesting that COVID-19 is a hoax or that it would just go away. They feel strongly that by failing to take the virus seriously, vital time was lost, which will result in more lives being lost.
- It is clear that many don't feel they are being led properly and suggest the president should listen to the scientists and not Mike Pence. They also feel that Trump and the GOP are politicizing the crisis when they should be bringing the country together to fight the disease.
- On reading these conversations, much of this anger – though genuine – is also based on partisan rivalry. In other words many of these people hated Trump before COVID-19, and the president's handling of the crisis has merely reinforced this feeling.
- Similarly, the defense of Trump is equally ideological. MAGA supporters completely disregard what Trump said at the outset of the crisis and focus instead on the actions taken since. They praise the president as a man who is prepared to do whatever it takes to protect lives and the economy, while criticizing Democrats for their perceived weakness. Some go so far as to blame Democrats due to their alleged willingness to keep borders open and their wrecking of the health system.
- Amid all the negative back and forth, state administrations receive praise for being quick and decisive, with Gov. Whitmer in particular receiving visible support.
- One area which seems to cross political boundaries is the capability of the health system to cope with COVID-19 patients. Many are also angry that tests are unavailable and that nurses on the front line do not have the proper protection. Much of the blame for this situation is directed at the White House.



# Sample Posts

## Impact Discussion

💡 *Businesses and organizations are making daily announcements about closures and operations during the ongoing concern about COVID-19. Here are some of the latest updates:*

💡 *I know... its the "invisible disease" however the average person who has died from COVID-19 is around 80yrs old. Not much different from influenza aka the flu*

💡 *The only way to take down President Trump is through the economy. Coronavirus was no mistake but a weapon used by deep state and global elites. Sad lives lost for a political agenda*

💡 *No lie, I want this pandemic to last long enough to put these Asian businesses out of business ( that are in our hoods)*

💡 *Also please pray my husband doesn't bring home the coronavirus bc he is not quarantining. He works in Montco...the hotbed in PA. His boss won't let him work remotely full time and I am immunodeficient*

💡 *I am 17-years-old and a Type One Diabetic. I live with an autoimmune disease. People like me have a 7% mortality rate from COVID-19. If you do not social distance, you could kill me.*



# Sample Posts

## Citizen Discussion

- 💡 *7 ways to avoid misinformation during the coronavirus pandemic*
- 💡 *Be honest: how long do you think til this #COVID2019 pandemic is over and we resume life again?*
- 💡 *Everyone, please look out for the elderly around you. Older family members, friends, neighbors, even strangers. If they need help or supplies, lend a hand.*
- 💡 *Coronavirus anxiety and fear – How to interrupt the downward spiral*
- 💡 *You be safe in your travels when your out and about with the coronavirus creeping around*
- 💡 *I'm getting a little tired of all the posts on my Facebook detailing all the "adventures" people are having followed by "tee-hee. I'm bad at social distancing." You aren't cute. You are the problem. #COVID—19*



# Sample Posts

## Political Discussion

💡 *#COVID19 "President "it's a hoax"" gave himself a 10/10 for his handling of the virus. #WorstPresidentEver*

💡 *WOULD SOMEONE TELL THE BRAIN DEAD @GOP THAT COVID-19 HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH PARTY AFFILIATION!! However dear leader's pathetically anemic "leadership " has monumentally exacerbated EVERYTHING*

💡 *More #PromisesMadePromisesKept by @realDonaldTrump. He always looks for the common sense, expedient solution - and he DELIVERS IT. #coronavirus #COVID19 #China #WuhanCoronavirus #ChinaWuhanVirus*

💡 *Obama waited until over 1000 deaths in 2009 from H1N1 virus before declaring state of emergency. Trump has done that already & instituted travel bans & economic stimulus. The truth is elusive to you Democrats*

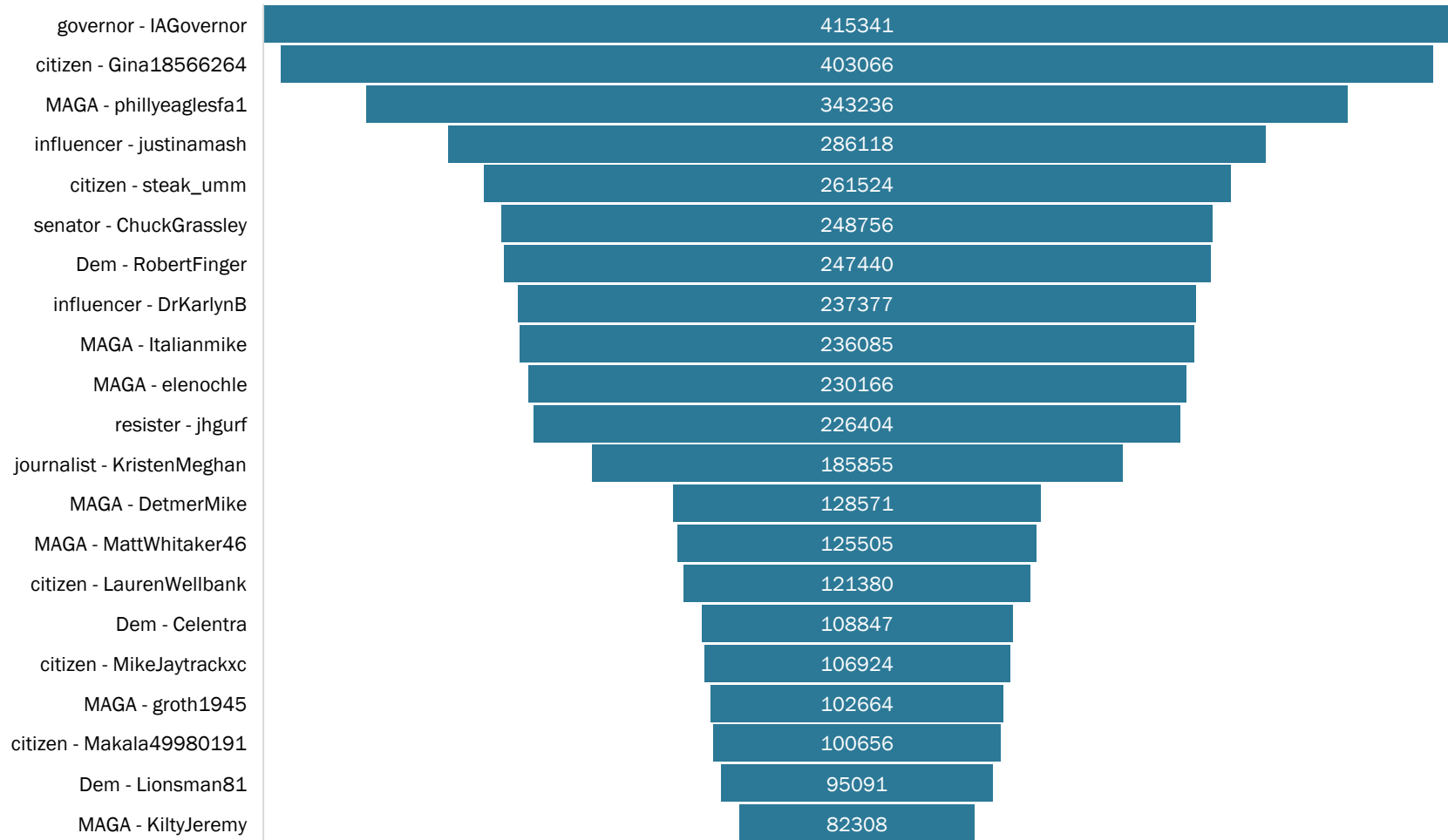
💡 *GovWhitmer is ahead of the curve. She has been very proactive in taking drastic actions to prevent further spread of coronavirus in Michigan.*

💡 *Real heroes are on medical frontlines! Give them tests capability & protection they need now. Without that, this pandemic is guaranteed disaster, with huge mortality & morbidity if management continues to falter in WH! Trump is not competent to make health decisions! Let experts do!*





# Who is Driving the Conversation?



**Notes on the data:** The funnel chart above shows the most influential authors in the discussions across the six states by the reach of their posts on the topic of COVID19. The figures in the middle of the chart show the number of impressions for the author's relevant posts. An impression is counted every time a post is seen in a user's social media feed.



# Prepared for One Country Project

by  **impact**Social



# Methodology

This analysis is based on collected, publicly available, online data geo-located to rural populations in the six states from March 15 – 21, 2020, related to COVID-19. In total, 166,000 posts from 54,000 authors were collected across the six states.

Randomized, representative samples of these conversations were analyzed after removing shares, retweets, repetition, media, and influencers from the dataset to focus solely on the views of local citizens. These conversations were then scored – positive, negative, or neutral .

