

Data mining study identifies Twitter as lifeline for people with Coeliac Disease

November 27 2014

Painstaking analysis of hundreds of thousands of tweets by a researcher from the University of Warwick has revealed how Twitter is acting as a lifeline for those with gut-related chronic illness.

Sam Martin, a PhD student from the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies (CIM), has used big data mining techniques to reveal a previously unobserved online network of people with Coeliac Disease.

She will present her doctoral research at the British Sociological Society's Ageing, Body and Society Study Group Conference in London on Friday (28 November).

Harvesting 1,800 messages per hour, from a 15km radius of two cities – London and New York, Sam studied the data and identified an information network discussing the availability of gluten-free food. She not only discovered an information hub, but also found that gaps in knowledge - about where to find gluten free food in the city, how to manage symptoms, and how to avoid risk of cross-contamination - were being filled by the very people who are reliant on the missing material – those with Coeliac Disease, who used hashtags like #coeliac #glutenfree and more to make connections online.

As a Coeliac herself, with a background in web development and data visualisation, Sam has also produced information-sharing smartphone apps based on her own searches for gluten free venues and resources, which allow users to identify suitable cafes and restaurants nearby in

London and Paris.

"Having previously lived in London, I know how hard it is to find places that provide gluten free food while on the move in the city but it was only when I started using [data mining techniques](#) on Twitter that I began to fully understand how many other people there are out there like me," said Sam.

"Using co-word and sentiment analysis, I was able to quantify to what extent patients use social networking as a knowledge finding, decision-making or risk aversion tool.

Provided by University of Warwick

Citation: Data mining study identifies Twitter as lifeline for people with Coeliac Disease (2014, November 27) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-11-twitter-lifeline-people-coeliac-disease.html>

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