

# Discovering the impact of the horse meat scandal using social media

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Cardiff University researchers will discover public perceptions of the recent horse meat scandal for the first time by analysing social media data.

The [horse meat](#) scandal last year revealed a major breakdown in the traceability of the [food supply](#) chain and the adulteration of meat.

The extensive media coverage revealed not only widespread fraud but

also the complexity of the UK meat supply chain and the extent of meat imports.

The project will investigate how the growing complexity of international food supply chains is giving rise to a new generation of risks and concerns.

The University's Collaborative Online Social Media Observatory (COSMOS) has been awarded an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant under their Global Food Security Programme; a joint initiative with the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The project is in collaboration with NatCen, the University of Warwick and the University of Westminster.

Dr Pete Burnap, Computer Scientist and expert in Risk in Distributed and Collaborative Online Networks, said: "COSMOS provides a unique opportunity to study the story arc of crises in unprecedented detail. We have collected data from public Twitter accounts since 2012 and our database of more than three billion tweets will allow us to trace the unfolding of the horse meat scandal; pinpointing moments of escalation, de-escalation and duration.

"We can also mine the data to discover variation in levels of public sentiment and tension around the topic, as well as identify demographic characteristics of those involved and the geographic spread of the scare. This study will enhance understanding of the potential of social media analysis to both access [public perceptions](#) and how these evolve and to establish how [social media](#) analysis can be used in risk governance and engagement with the public about risks more generally" Dr Burnap added.

Dr Luke Sloan from the Cardiff School of Social Sciences, said: "We are delighted to be working on this trail-blazing project funded under the

Understanding the Challenges of the UK Food System call. The research will generate new empirical findings on public perceptions of UK food supply chains, what people's concerns are, what influences these and how they may be best managed in the future."

Dr Matthew Williams, who was recently appointed to the ESRC's Social Media Experts working group to represent COSMOS, said: "We are honoured to be part of the Global Food Security Programme and look forward to deploying the COSMOS platform and lending our social science expertise in relation to big data to this innovative project."

The project team are Dr Luke Sloan, Dr Matthew Williams (COSMOS, Cardiff School of Social Sciences), Dr Pete Burnap (COSMOS, Cardiff School of Computer Science and Informatics), Caireen Roberts (NatCen), Professor Elizabeth Dowler (University of Warwick) and Dr Alizon Draper (University of Westminster).

**More information:** [cosmosproject.net/](http://cosmosproject.net/)

Provided by Cardiff University

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