

Researchers find tweeting in cities lower than expected

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A team led by University of Illinois researcher Lav Varshney, found that there was less tweeting per capita in larger cities Credit: University of Illinois Coordinated Science Laboratory

Studying data from Twitter, University of Illinois researchers found that less people tweet per capita from larger cities than in smaller ones, indicating an unexpected trend that has implications in understanding urban pace of life.

They identified that while there are less people tweeting, there are a group of people who tweet prolifically. This suggests there is a concentrated core of more active users that may serve as information

broadcasters for larger cities.

Researchers have long studied the pace of life in cities. The more people there are in a [city](#), the faster the pace of life: people walk faster, clocks are faster, there are more phone calls, and more crime. But not everything is bigger in cities: per capita, smaller cities have more roads, more newspapers, and more gas stations, for example.

The team, led by professor Lav Varshney, assistant professor of electrical and computer engineering affiliated with the Coordinated Science Laboratory, wanted to investigate this sociological phenomena when it came to [social media platforms](#), particularly tweeting behavior on Twitter. Previous results on telephony (the study of telecommunication) suggested there should be more tweeting per capita in larger cities than in smaller. Surprisingly, the researchers found the opposite, detailed in a paper published in *SAGE Open*.

"After calculating tweet volumes from 50 American cities of varying sizes, we found there was less tweeting per capita in larger cities," said Varshney, professor of electrical and computer engineering.

The interesting component with tweeting behavior, according to the researchers, is that they could not only look at the aggregate data of the city, but also dig into tweeting on an individual level.

"We found that a small number of people in cities were tweeting a lot more than the average. In cities, lots of people were not tweeting at all," said Varshney. "What we determined is that a small number of people are tweeting and carrying information throughout the city."

Much like newspapers, a few entities are responsible for spreading information through a large city. The researchers dubbed these [people](#) "town tweeters."

"This information is useful in urban studies. We study [information](#) flow as a function of city size and density, and this study is different than previous studies from a statistical methodology perspective, able to look not only at ecological correlation but also dig into individual behavior to resolve the ecological fallacy," said Varshney.

More information: Alexander Jones Gross et al, Pace of Life in Cities and the Emergence of Town Tweeters, *SAGE Open* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/2158244017745113](#)

Provided by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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