

Global sentiments towards COVID-19 shifting from fear to anger: NTU study

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The fear that people developed at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak has given way to anger over the course of the pandemic, according to a study led by Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

An international team of communication researchers analysed over 20 million tweets in English related to the coronavirus. Tweets reflecting fear were found to be dominant at the start of the outbreak due to the uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus. They have since tapered off over the course of the pandemic.

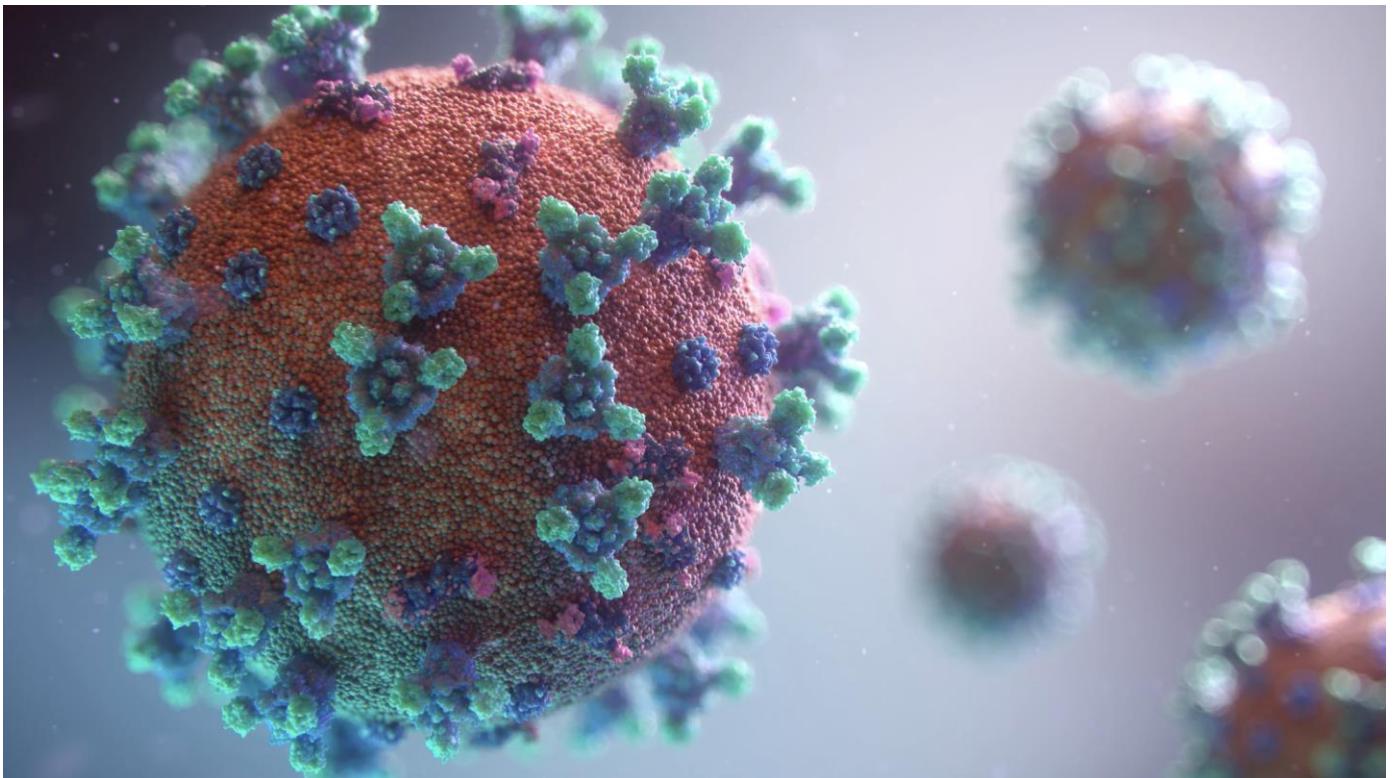


Photo courtesy: Unsplash

Xenophobia was a common theme among anger-related tweets, which progressively increased and on March 12 – a day after the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. The anger then evolved to reflect feelings arising from isolation and social seclusion.

Accompanying this later shift is the emergence of tweets that show joy, which the researchers say suggested a sense of pride, gratitude, hope, and happiness. Tweets that reflected sadness doubled, although they remain proportionally lower than the other emotions.

Professor May O. Lwin of NTU's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, who led the team representing four countries, said, "Our findings suggest that collective issues driven by emotions, such as shared experiences of distress of the COVID-19 pandemic including large-scale social isolation and the loss of human lives, are developing."

She added that these overbearing public emotions need to be addressed through clear and decisive communication by authorities, citizen groups and social media stakeholders. Else, "there is potential for the emergence of issues such as breeding mistrust in the handling of the disease, and a belief in online falsehoods that could hinder the ongoing control of the disease."