Significance Systems COVID-19 Press Release

23 April 2020

Tokyo, Japan.

Deep analysis of social emotions sends warning to policy-makers in the UK.

Bulldog Spirit or Despair and Grief?

Researchers specialising in "big-data" analysis of online behaviour suggest that the UK media and government are out of touch with the feelings of the populace.

"Focus groups, press polls and top level reviews of social media are giving decision-makers a misleading picture of the psychological impact of COVID-19 in the UK," says Significance Systems CEO John Ricketts. "Deeper insight provided by a review of petabytes of conversations taking place online suggests a disturbing situation. Our analysis (illustrated in Figure 1 below) shows that although the initial panic around COVID-19 has passed, a high level of fear remains constant among the population. Hope is receding and we are starting to see rising levels of other concerning emotions such as despair, grief and alarm. This has significant implications for decision-makers in business and government in the UK. At the very least, the ongoing impact on mental health resources will be significant."

Figure 1: Affective Response of UK Population 1 March 2020 – 19 April 2020. Source: Significance Systems.
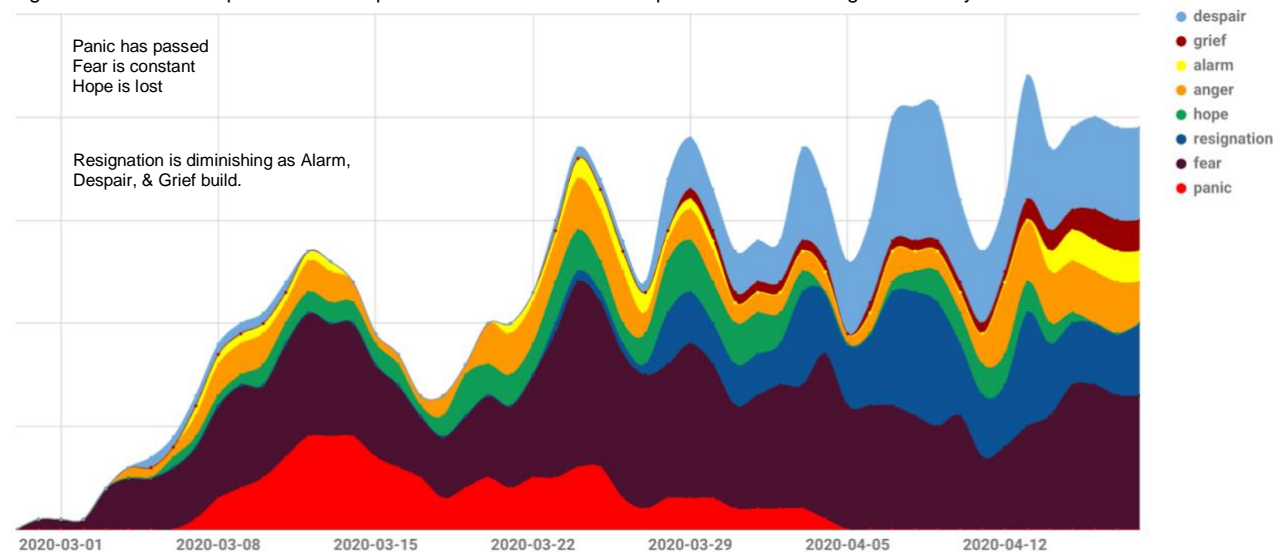
Comments Ricketts, "Our analysis of hundreds of thousands of conversations online over the last month enables us to generate an authentic understanding of how societal groups react at an emotional level in real-time. With emotion being the strongest driver of behaviour, understanding just how people really feel could help ensure the development of pre-emptive policy responses which are targeted and effective, alongside the development of narratives or counter-narratives which are engaging and genuinely transformative. Emotion precedes behavior. Which is why making sense of how populations really feel is critical to decision-making in government, policy-making and business."

"We all know that our world is increasingly online," adds Significance Systems CTO Darrell Berry. "The narratives playing out online are an integral part of today's connected world. These narratives feed our social reality. Our analysis of them provides insight into affect – how people really feel, their true emotions. It provides a lens for the understanding of how people's values and behaviours are changing, driven by the impact of their lived experience. People's online behaviour, properly analysed, gives a true insight into their state-of-mind in a way traditional research cannot. Understanding this can drive timely real-world outcomes."

"COVID-19 is first a human tragedy which has triggered extraordinary social, economic and political unrest", commented Chris Beaumont from The University of Tokyo. "It has completely disrupted the status-quo, changing everyone's daily lives, heightening uncertainty, so that no one can take even the little things in life for granted. Earth.ai uniquely helps understanding of what is significant to people in real-time -- not what commentators, companies, or politicians think is important. Significance Systems's analyses provide invaluable insights as to how leaders can be both more empathetic and better focus their decisions/policy priorities going forward. This UK analysis suggests broader societal health issues will need to be addressed in a timely manner."

About Significance Systems

Significance Systems was founded by Darrell Berry and John Ricketts, who are credited with developing the idea of 'social media' by Forbes magazine, which cited their work as the earliest example of the concept.

Working globally, Significance Systems brings together commercial, mathematical and software engineering expertise, to deliver data-based communications insight which saves clients time, effort and budget.

Significance Systems's Earth.ai platform empowers users to see beyond their media bubble, to cut-through group-think or confirmation bias, and get a full data perspective of real-world emotion and behaviour. Earth.ai analyses vast amounts of unstructured data from across the internet, to an provide authentic, nuanced view of the emotions that drive mass behaviour. These are tangible insights which can underpin the rapid development of meaningful, engaging and effective strategies, solutions and communications.

To understand more about how Significance Systems can help deliver insight that may help your understanding of the population or how your business or organisation should adapt to the circumstances, contact us. John.Ricketts@significancesystems.com.