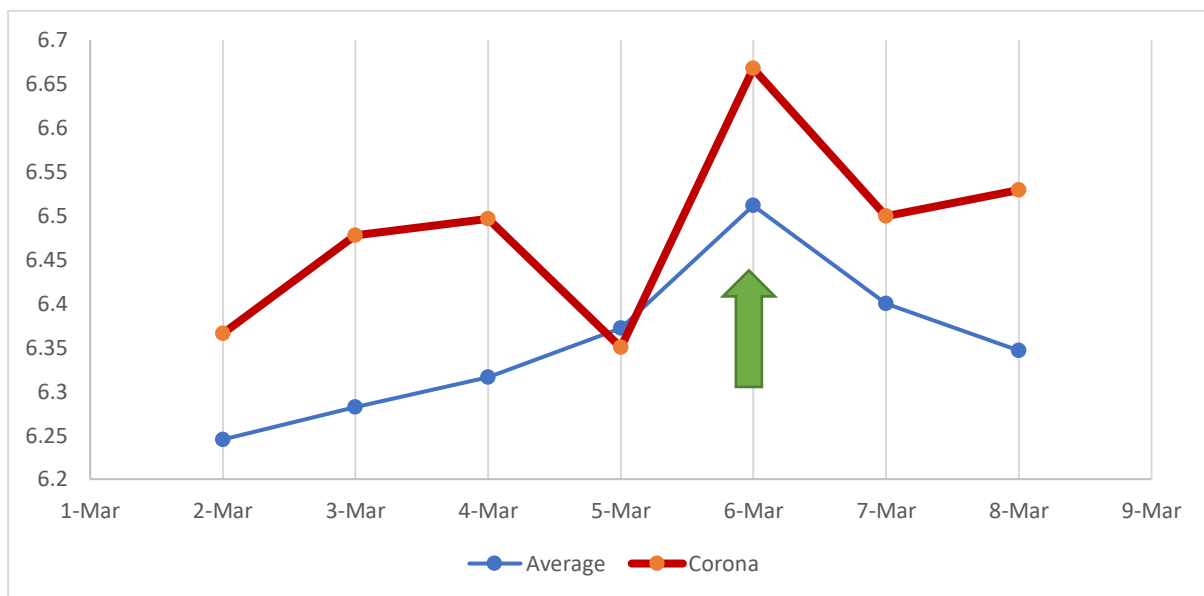


The "Happiness levels of South Africans" - the next confirmed victim of the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

10 March 2020

The Happiness Index (Gross National Happiness) of South Africa increased over the last few days, despite officials confirming the first cases of the COVID-19 virus in the country. This is the finding of Prof Talita Greyling (University of Johannesburg) and Dr Stephanie Rossouw (Auckland University of Technology) who in collaboration with Afstereo launched South Africa's Happiness Index in April 2019. The Happiness Index measures the sentiment levels of South Africans on a scale from zero 😞 to 10 😊, with 5 being neutral (neither happy or unhappy). According to the team, the happiness index was higher on Friday 6 March at 6.67 (day one of COVID-19), compared to the average level of happiness for Fridays that is 6.51 (see the graph below, the green arrow indicates the day the first victim was announced, Friday 6 March). This higher than usual levels of happiness did not taper off, even as the second and third cases were announced.

Happiness Index



What does this imply about South Africans' sentiment, related to the Coronavirus? Are we indifferent to the global health crisis that has claimed more than 4000 lives? Upon further investigation, we are happy to report that the opposite is true; South Africans are extremely concerned about COVID-19. Data shows that 20% of all Tweets, since 4 March (two days before the announcement of the first case), were about the virus. COVID-19 is indeed a "hot Tweet topic".

If South Africans are indeed concerned about COVID-19, how do we then explain the increase in happiness levels? First, during the weekend, there were many highlights in the South African calendar, which invoked Tweets with a positive sentiment, leading up to- and after these events. These 'positive Tweets' outperformed the negative sentiment related to the

Coronavirus, making it seem that South Africans are indifferent to the virus. The 'positive Tweets' were, among other, related to Kaizer Chiefs winning the Soweto Derby, ULTRA South Africa, which boasted the world's top EDM 's DJ's and the Proteas beating Australia.

However, when we only consider the Tweets related to the Coronavirus, we find that the sentiment of South Africans, is deeply affected. As expected, the 'negative Tweets' far outweigh the 'positive Tweets'; thus, the sentiment, related to the Coronavirus, shows that *South African's happiness is indeed a victim of COVID-19*. Ninety-two per cent of all Tweets related to the Coronavirus carries a negative sentiment. Interestingly, a few Tweets related to the virus, are positive. These Tweets claim that people should not be too concerned or stressed about the virus, some Tweets mention that if people drink enough water and wash their hands, there is no threat, others highlight that at least it is not an occurrence unique to South Africa and that we are part of a worldwide problem. Although we only analyse the sentiment of the written word, we noticed that memes bring in a lighter side to this topic, highlighting South Africans coping mechanism, to joke about serious threats. Unfortunately, it is this light heartedness that raises concerns on how well prepared South Africans are to face this pandemic.

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