Happiness According to Twitter

In today’s modern world most people spend hours a day on websites like Facebook and Twitter expressing their inner most thoughts, and communicating with friends and family. While some may take it too far, the good news is that all of this information is out there making it very easy to conduct studies about almost anything. Using people’s thoughts and feelings from a raw state where the people are not biased by being a part of a study, makes the data gathered more reliable.

Armed with this information, Peter Dodd looked at Twitter and analyzed forty-six billion words Tweeted by sixty- three million users to try and determine if the people of the Twitter world were happy. The results were surprising, not good, and could cause some of us to become even sadder. This study showed that over all people’s happiness has been declining since 2009, and that trend still continues.

This study analyzed words like hahaha or lol, and assigned them a numerical value between one and nine, the study then looked for a happiness tend, and it found that worldwide the trend was not that people were tweeting happier messages, but more and more sad tweets. One of the more interesting findings was that people tend to tweet happier thoughts in anticipation of events, things like a night out on Friday or holidays had happier tweets before the events took place than after.

Also there were definitely sadder tweets after major world events, like natural disasters, or other world events. Since this study was conducted world wide the results are even more interesting since this means that the results are not controlled by cultures or the current economic situations of various countries. This trend is not contained to anyone place, and that makes information such as this very useful in looking at what people are feeling in general.

Happiness is very hard to study since it is ever changing and can become more and more elusive as people experience more and more of life. Another reason that happiness is difficult to study is that humans tend to only talk about sadness and happiness is expected, making it not as interesting to discuss.

Obviously there are some definite limitations to this study, because not everyone is a part of the Twitterverse. Are the non Tweeters the happier people in the world, or are people that are more emotional more likely to be on twitter? That being said, there are a lot of words being studied, and these words are coming from a pretty large sample size.

Dodd hopes to start a web site where people can examine this information and data for themselves and draw their own conclusions. The overall hope is that by studying the happiness of something like messages on Twitter can help us as humans understand the impact of world events, and how they actually affect us emotionally and socially.

Having all this information at our finger tips certainly makes understanding something like world happiness easier and it puts the possibilities of these results in a place where we may be able to understand how to help people that just need something good to happen.

Sources: Moore, Elizabeth *The World is Getting Unhappier According to Twitter* Access: <http://news.cnet.com/8301-27083_3-57345765-247/the-world-is-getting-unhappier-according-to-twitter/>