Project: Collective Indicators of Community: Community Supported Agriculture and Social Media

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Need:
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is growing as a strategy to produce safe food in an environmentally sustainable and economically vitalizing manner. Individual CSAs have highly variable rates of success, however. One explanation is limited information on the size and receptivity of local markets. Most CSAs require payment in advance of the growing season for varieties its members do not choose. The novelty of this method can lead to confusion or dissatisfaction for new members. Tools for measuring the local "appetite" for these arrangements can help farms evaluate the extent to which there is interest in supporting local agriculture.

Approach:
Under his Hatch project (NYC-131406), Drew Margolin and his team of graduate and undergraduate researchers began development of a novel approach to estimate community receptivity for CSAs by examining the extent to which the public dialogue about food indicates strong, communal commitment to CSA principles of fresh, safe, and local food at a fair price. They used data from Yelp.com to infer community properties from the way in which people write about restaurants. Their analyses included comparisons of local versus "out-of-town" reviewers, socioeconomic factors, and CSA density.

Results and Impact:
Inspection of Yelp.com restaurant reviews revealed differences between local and visiting reviewers; locals tended to write more dynamic, story-like reviews. Researchers also found that the socioeconomic status of the community is important in defining expectations of reviewers. Inferring these expectations is key to inferring the normative identity of the community, understanding reviewers' perspectives when they describe their experiences, and uncovering the local perception of a given restaurant in its community. For example, when reviewers expect food to be locally sourced, they are disappointed when it is not. If there is no expectation, they may be pleasantly surprised at the discovery; these expectations influence the reviewer's experience and how they describe it in their reviews. The team produced a visualization town-level review metrics:
http://margolin.cac.cornell.edu/Yelp_Projection_Porter/Yelp_Projection.html

Related Information: Cornell Computational Communication Lab