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Twitter research targets safer commutes

By [JAY MORAN \(/PEOPLE/JAY-MORAN\)](#) • JAN 8, 2016

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Using Twitter to complain about the weather may seem like another of the mundane topics that can dominate social media conversations. However, UB researchers are mining value from the data as they try to transform it into useful commuter information.



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UB researchers believe Twitter information could make it safer to navigate the snowy roads of Western New York.

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A recent published study from UB's Institute for Sustainable Transportation and Logistics explored how weather-related tweets could provide an invaluable assessment of road conditions.

According to Professor Adel Sadek, the study analyzed 360,000 tweets from a 19-day period in December 2013. A pool of 3,000 posts offered relevant information regarding road conditions along some of Western New York's wintry roads.

and sensors that have been installed along area highways, Sadek says the tweets contributed to a more accurate image of road conditions

"The biggest advantage of Twitter is that it is free and that it universal," Sadek said. "When you use cameras or sensors you're tied to a specific place." Add the cost of installing and monitoring traffic cameras and sensors and the potential benefits of the research become more evident.

Institute researchers are developing models that combine all the available information---camera images, traffic sensors, tweets--- along the road to making apps that could help commuters safely navigate area highways.

Sadek envisions quick, easy access to "information about the best route you could use to get to your destination. Best time of departure to try to ease out the peak that occurs during rush hour. The best bridge to cross the border. Road surface conditions during inclement weather."

The study was recently posted in the journal Transportation Research Record.

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