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Twitter may provide hyper-local information to make roads safer during snowstorms, study finds



By **Brian Lada**, Meteorologist
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A new method of incorporating weather-related information from Twitter into traffic models may increase the level of safety on the roads when winter storms hit.

A study conducted by the University of Buffalo examined how weather information that people tweet could be incorporated in traffic models to provide more detailed and accurate road conditions and to increase the safety of drivers during inclement weather.

According to the study, there are often discussions about adverse weather on social media platforms, such as Twitter, allowing researchers to extract weather information to complement traditional weather observations.

Adel Sadek, PhD, director of the University of Buffalo's Institute of Sustainable Transportation and Logistics and the lead author of the study, added to this, explaining that, "Twitter users provide an unparalleled amount of hyper-local data that we can use to improve our ability to direct traffic during snowstorms and adverse weather."



A sedan sits stranded along Interstate 70 while a Colorado Department of Transportation plow works to clear a frontage road as a winter storm packing high winds and snow blankets the plains Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2015, in Aurora, Colo. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

Currently, many traffic models incorporate data from traffic cameras and sensors along the roadways, as well as data from weather stations across the area. However, these methods do not always capture the exact conditions of the road surface.

In the study, the University of Buffalo examined thousands of tweets, using keywords and hashtags to identify relevant, weather-related tweets and to incorporate them in the traffic models.

By using pictures and relevant information provided by people on Twitter, researchers were able to produce more accurate portrayal of travel conditions.

This increase in accuracy can help traffic planners recommend safer travel speeds and restrictions for drivers, as well as determine which roads need to be cleared of snow or ice.

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It may be some time before traffic models utilize information from social media on a regular basis, but people can still use social media to inform others on what type of weather is going on in their area.



Also, people using the AccuWeather universal iOS app can also share live weather reports from their area.

The new AccUcast feature presents the ability to share current conditions including clear, partly cloudy, cloudy, rain, snow, ice and hail. Users can also report hazard conditions such as damaging winds, slippery roads, flooding and reduced visibility.

People are reminded that they should never use their phone to report the weather while driving.

AccUcast is the only crowdsourcing tool with live weather maps that provide current weather conditions submitted by users in a global animation display.

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