

# How Coronavirus has Changed the Way Cities and Residents Communicate on Social Media

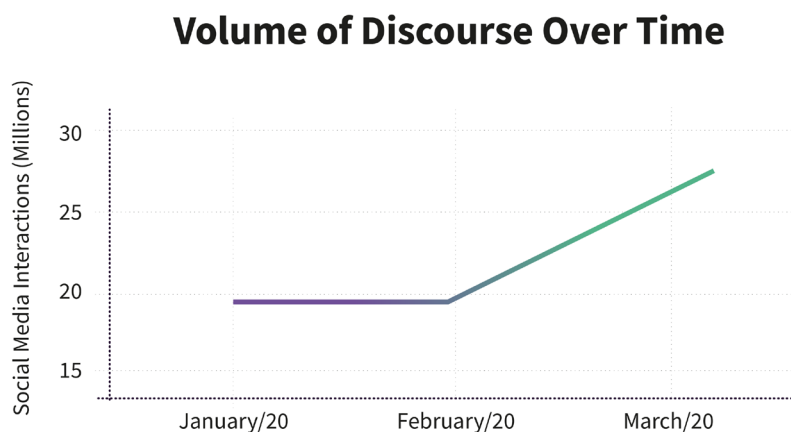
When trying to get a handle on the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, one key realization comes to light – local communities have to work together to combat the spread of the virus – practice social distancing, support vulnerable members and even local businesses. Considering this, cities and local government agencies play a huge role in consistently creating and sharing reliable community-facing information, and taking immediate action around the issues that concern residents. Concurrently, residents have taken to social media in order to stay up to date on the latest news, meaning government leaders can reach practically **their entire community base online** (even the less “tech savvy”).

Therefore, in championing their communities through this crisis, it is crucial for local governments to understand their residents behaviour online. What are the proven best channels for cities to reach them on? How do local governments effectively cut through the noise? And more.

To help answer these questions, the Zencity team analyzed **over 86 million social media data points** from the past 4 months (December 2019 – March 2020), from over 75 cities and counties, across 18 US states.

Here is what we found:

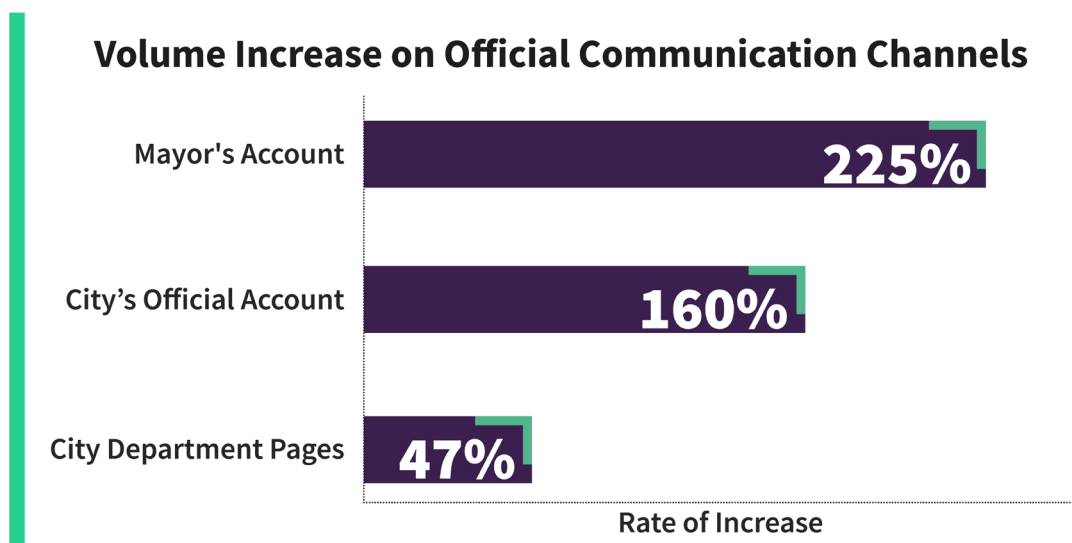
## 1. Social distancing has residents turning to social media and discourse has skyrocketed



With new movement restrictions and residents being urged to practice physical social distancing, the COVID-19 outbreak has further amplified social media as an essential communication channel with and about one’s city. In other words, the town square has officially become digital.

A data-based comparison between social media activity during the COVID-19 crisis and prior months reflects the significant rise in resident's engagement with the city. While the average volume of social media discourse in the cities analyzed was almost 20M interactions across January and February, March's online discourse soared to nearly 27M interactions. **This >35% increase in the volume of online conversations comes to show that residents are using digital channels more than ever to find relevant information and to raise their concerns, thoughts and ideas.** Cities have the ability now more than ever to reach the majority of their community, with real-time updates and misinformation corrections.

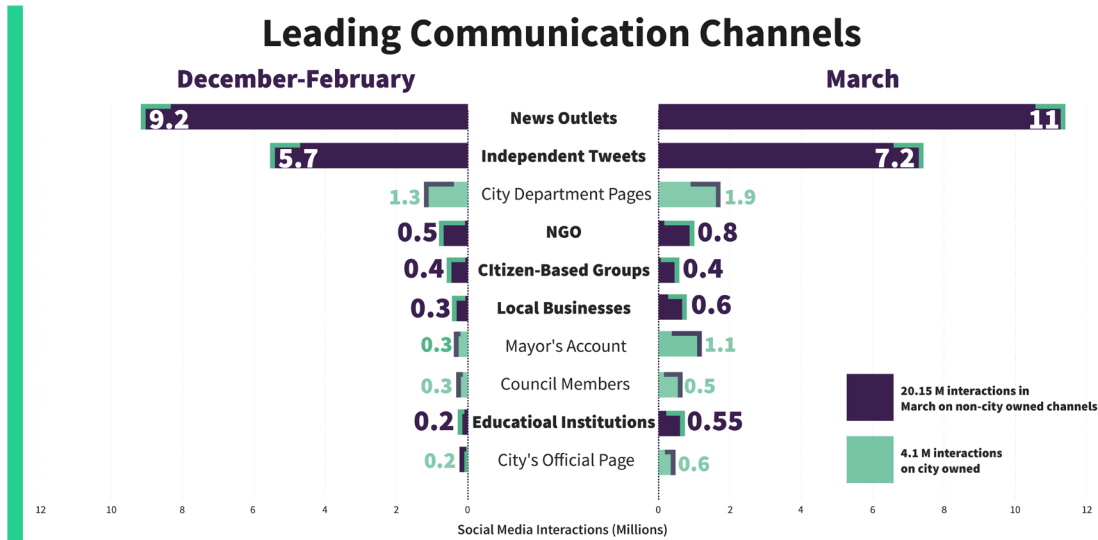
## 2. Among city-owned channels, mayors' accounts experienced largest volume increase



From our analysis of March 2020, we saw that all types of city-owned channels, from department-focused pages to mayors' accounts saw an increase in public discourse volume. Since the beginning of March, the volume of discourse on **mayors' official accounts increased by 225% and by 160% on cities' official pages.** Comparatively, conversations on news outlets and independent tweets only increased by 25%.

These numbers clearly exemplify the significance of the mayor's role in COVID-19 communication efforts. We see now, more than ever that communities are turning to their leaders for guidance and information. That means that **local governments need to be making use of their elected official's account(s)** to share relevant, reliable information. Also, even more importantly – **Mayors must be aware of their community's real concerns** as they need to address them in their messaging and action more than ever before – because more people than ever are listening.

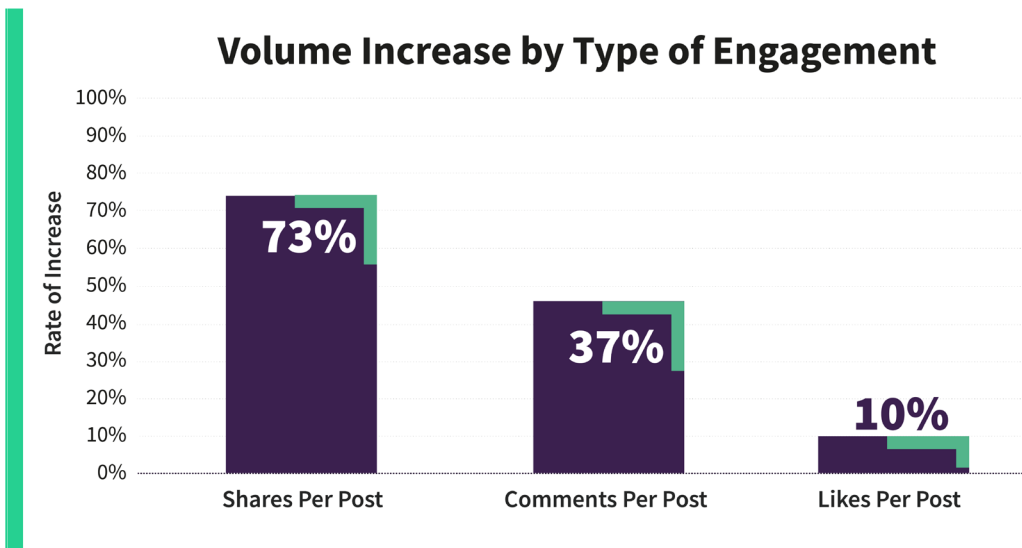
### 3. Residents consume most of their COVID-19 information from non-city owned channels



Even though we saw an increase in activity across city-owned channels, **we still see that residents get most of their information and interact significantly more with non city-owned channels.** In particular, news outlets remain as the primary source of information followed by tweets and posts by independent individuals. In total, we tracked approximately **20.15 M interactions on non-city owned channels about COVID-19.** In juxtaposition, **we tracked only 4.1 M interactions on city-owned channels.** This reveals that despite the rise in engagement on channels that are a direct line to the city, **the majority of residents continue to raise, discuss and consume coronavirus-related topics on non-city owned channels.**

Considering this data and the **rise in misinformation and disinformation** across non-city owned channels, cities and local government agencies need to actively track discourse on these channels to get the full picture of what their community is talking about when it comes to COVID-19. Looking just at official, city owned accounts will create a skewed view of communities' needs. Without an ability to **easily monitor these channels in real-time**, it can be challenging to quickly pinpoint residents' needs and manage rumors, especially during this unprecedented pandemic.

## 4. Shares, likes and comments - residents are actively engaging with their city's communications



In conjunction with an increase in the number of posts published by city-owned channels (an increase of 49%), we also see a boost in residents' engagement (reactions, comments, shares) with these posts. In particular, **we noted an 73% increase in the number of shares per post, and a 37% rise in the number of comments during the COVID-19 outbreak.** Residents appear to find true value in the information provided by their city. Many residents are also taking an active part in disseminating these updates by actively "sharing" this information with their community and close social circles.

Notably, residents are not only engaging more with the cities' posts, but they are also actively reaching out to the city. **This is indicated by an increase in the number of tags and mentions of city channels and officials by residents – 2.2X more during the COVID-19 crisis than average.**

Looking at this data, a clear takeaway is that cities have to be stronger than ever on their messaging. They also need to have the ability to easily track, manage and understand what's going on across all channels to respond to all different inquiries.

# In Summary

Our analysis of the 80+ million social media interactions from the past 4 months proves that now more than ever, residents are looking to their city's leaders as trusted and authoritative sources of information. As the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases rapidly increase and residents adjust to a new normal of quarantines and social distancing, local government teams are utilizing social media platforms more than ever before to keep their residents informed in real time.

We hope that the learnings from this analysis could help the incredible men and women in local government leadership and communication roles better plan and craft their actions and messaging.

As this is an unprecedented pandemic, there are no set guidelines in place when it comes to COVID-19 communication and response efforts. This is why the Zencity team continues to monitor public online discourse and create data-backed resources for our partner cities and the greater local government community. Our team is dedicated to helping cities and counties continue to provide endless support for their residents, enhance communication efforts, and reinforce solidarity.

Check out our latest [report on residents' key concerns for the week of March 25th to the 31st](#).

**To learn more about how our 130+ partner cities and counties leverage our technology to track non-city owned channels, pinpoint their community's needs, and improve crisis management and communications, check out our [COVID-19 Action Plan](#).**