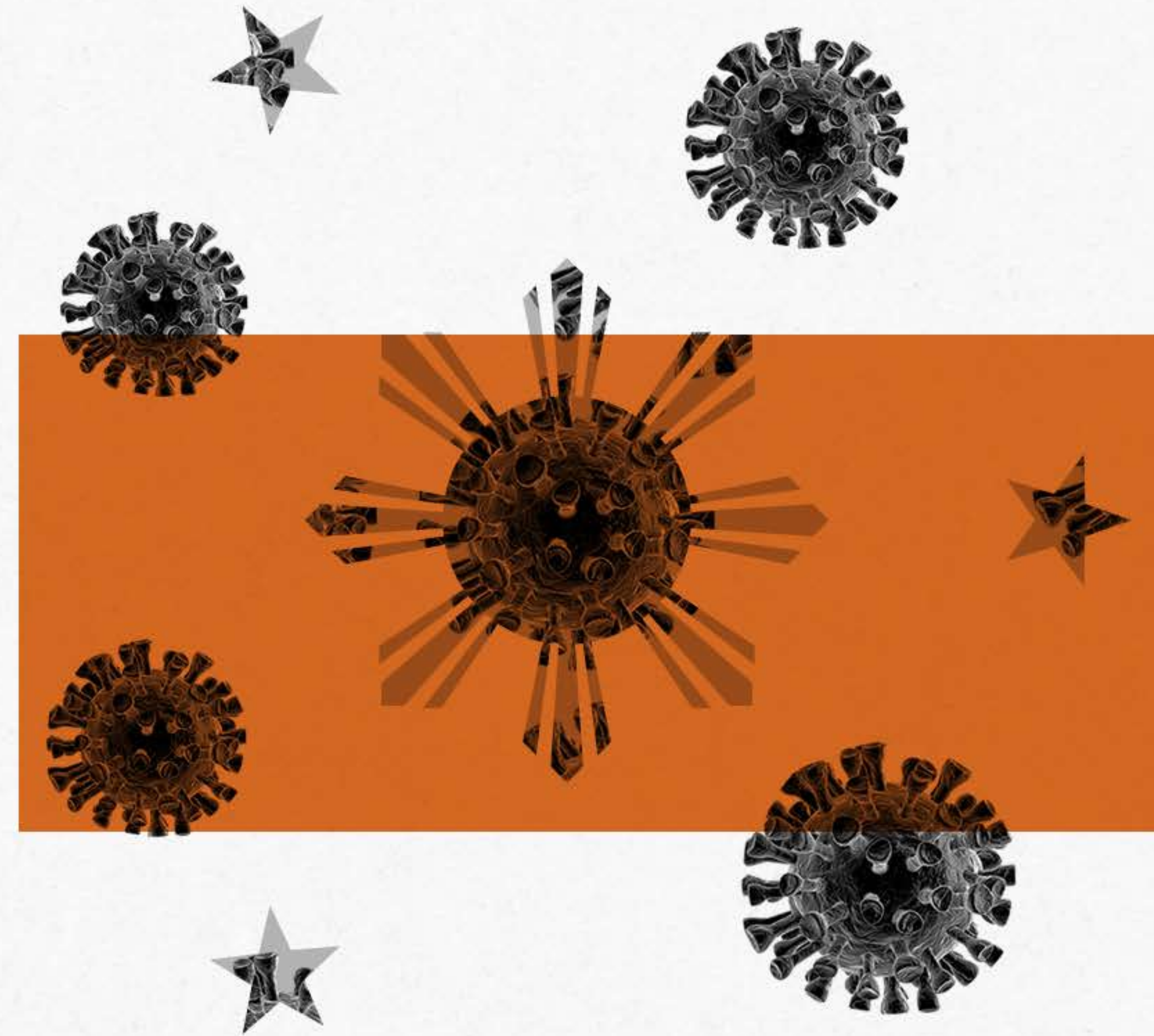


THOUGHTSPARKERS

A PORTRAIT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS AS FILIPINO/

A deep dive into how the Filipino identity is seen through,
and shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic



CAN YOU IMAGINE THE ENDING?

Fast forward to Christmas Season 2020. Jose Mari Chan is playing on mall speakers, as he always has. The lights are twinkling, as they always have. The stalls are cooking Bibingka and Puto Bumbong as they always have. Sales and discounts pepper the store displays as they always have. It's the Christmas Filipinos have always had - and yet not quite.

Somehow, even in the imagination, even if Christmas might be something Filipinos are looking forward to, there is this uneasy knowledge that it will be different. Perhaps not in appearance, but in the sense that there is a spectre hovering over the silent nights.

Indeed, in the aftermath of COVID-19, even if one has not read all the multiple global and local scenarios and predictions that the pundits, experts, and vocal Facebook friends have laid out before us, one is left to wonder, will everything ever be the same again? In a time of restricted movement and wary human interactions, there is a longing to go "back to the way things were." But will we ever?



UNKNOWN WATERS

The havoc that COVID-19 has wreaked upon the world is unprecedented in modern times. School suspensions of this magnitude and durations are often heard of and experienced only in war-torn areas. Even during Martial Law, schools were operational. The Olympics have been cancelled, only for the first time, since the Second World War (incidentally, Tokyo was the original host of the 1940 Games). The medical models that were used to predict this virus might have begun with comparisons to SARS or MERS-COV, but the shocks and shifts will most likely draw comparisons to war.

The scale is global: this is not just "Help Haiti" or "Pray for Paris," or "Save the Amazon." This is "Help us All" and "Save Humanity." The implications are innumerable and interwoven: medical, economic, political (geopolitical, national, local), social, and psychological.

The impact is also telling of a social trauma. Gilad Hirschberger, in his scientific journal article, "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning," says that a collective trauma is a "cataclysmic event that shatters the basic fabric of society." It is not just about the horrific loss of life. One might not even know someone who died because of the event, but one is also impacted by what is happening to society at large. It is "a crisis of meaning."

In these uncharted waters, who is the Filipino? Do we even recognize him still? And will we recognize him after?

THOUGHT SPARKERS/COVID-19 EDITION: A PORTRAIT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS AS FILIPINO

In this special edition of AdSpark's Thought Sparkers, AdSpark intelligence was used to delve deeper into the collective Filipino psyche while in this crisis.

Underneath the numerous changed behaviors that are readily visible and well-reported, there are various motivations, thoughts, and emotions. There are intricate connections that push and pull one another, especially in between and data points that can seem to contradict each other. These are what the study wishes to uncover.

To study the Filipino people during this time of crisis seems to be a study in internal conflict: in desires bound by realities, in hopefulness pulled by hatred, in wishing to go back to the way things were, but fearing it never really will, to wear smiles but hiding the scars of social trauma underneath.

METHODOLOGY

AdSpark Intelligence makes use of various data points gleaned from content consumption, social listening, and online surveys. Different sources will also be utilized where necessary. Online interviews with various people from different industries affected by the Enhanced Community Quarantine were also conducted.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

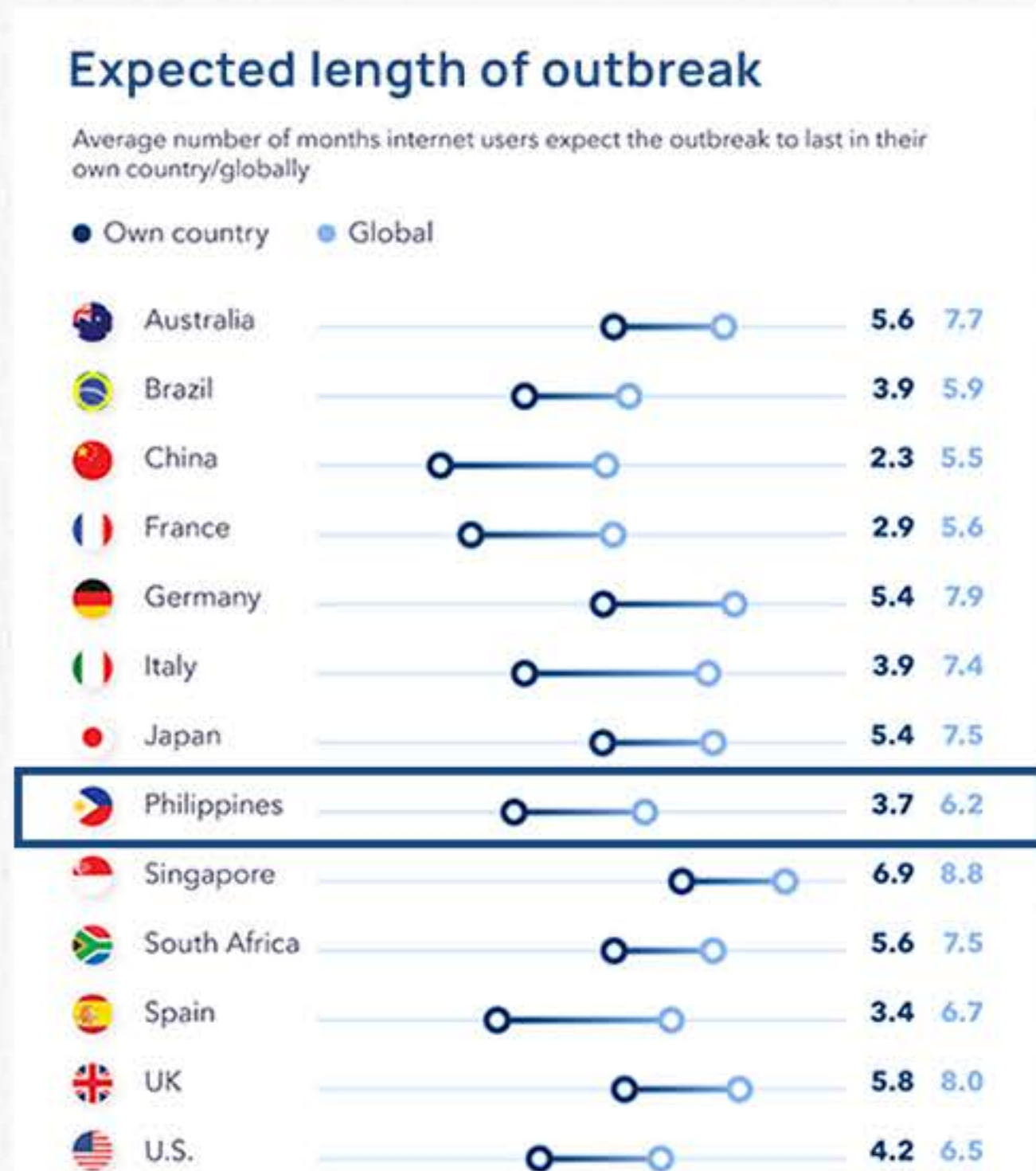
There are five tension points that this Sparker will be exploring. These five were chosen, not only because they appeared in the data, but because they are also very telling of our situation today.

1. Positive but Apprehensive
2. Getting Defensive on Health: Not just now, but maybe forever
3. Fighting for the financially-challenged? Or projecting our own worry?
4. Being Apart Together: Not enough for a social race?
5. Shouting on Social: Making meaning out of madness

01 POSITIVE BUT APPREHENSIVE



Global Web Index reports that Filipinos, on average, think that the coronavirus pandemic will last only 3.7 months in the Philippines. This is slightly on the more optimistic end of the spectrum when compared to other countries.



An overwhelming majority (78.6% upper two boxes) also approve of the Philippine Government's response to the pandemic.

Your country's government

How much do you approve / disapprove of how the following have handled the coronavirus / COVID-19 outbreak so far? - Your country's government

Audience Key: All Internet Users

Answer Option	Data point %	Universe	Index	Responses	Audience %
Strongly approve	100%	21.1M	100	463	43.8%
Somewhat approve	100%	16.8M	100	360	34.8%
Neither approve nor disapprove	100%	3.9M	100	73	8.2%
Somewhat disapprove	100%	3.8M	100	70	7.9%
Strongly disapprove	100%	2.6M	100	42	5.3%

Yet when asked, almost all Filipinos are concerned about the COVID situation in their own country, with 65.5% of Filipinos in the survey saying they are "extremely concerned." The concern of 59.2% in the survey is when this will all end.

Own Country

How concerned are you about the coronavirus / COVID-19 situation in your country?

Audience Key: All Internet Users

Answer Option	Data point %	Universe	Index	Responses	Audience %
Not at all concerned	100%	173k	100	1	0.4%
A little concerned	100%	902k	100	9	1.9%
Quite concerned	100%	2.5M	100	33	5.1%
Very concerned	100%	13.1M	100	201	27.2%
Extremely concerned	100%	31.6M	100	521	65.5%

Sources of Concern

Which of these things are you most concerned about at the moment?

Answer Option	Data point %	Universe	Index	Responses	Audience %
Knowing when this situation will end	100%	28.6M	100	473	59.2%

There seems to be this duality in the Filipino response. At first blush, one might mistake it as denial or flippancy. A simple cursory look at one's Facebook feed will show various memes during this time. Yet, the next downward swipe will show serious, or even urgent posts that laud frontliners or call out what they feel is government ineptness.

“COVID-19 symptoms include having a lack of taste”

People with “live, laugh, love” wall decor:



Engineers for PH 🇵🇭 | #WokeFromHome
@EngrsOfMNL

After this lockdown we deserve to oust this incompetent government



zoella @zoellalalalala · Mar 20

After this lockdown we deserve this fucking samgyupsal



Pam, a restaurant owner, embodies this seemingly dual outlook.

Because her restaurant is in a mall, she has been forced to shut down the brick-and-mortar place. However, she is excited by how she has been able to expand the opportunities to sell. She now delivers via Lalamove. She is reaching customers from places she's never reached before, she's also learning the flexibility of her product.

Yet despite her eagerness, she admits that she is also worried. Sales have plummeted: "We currently are running on whatever we are able to spend, whatever comes in is the only money we have to spend." She fears that it will take 2 months or even a year until she hits her Pre-COVID sales numbers.

It has been said numerous times that the Filipino's usual way to cope is through smiles and jokes. Through Martial Law and 2 EDSA Revolutions, earthquakes and countless storms, the Filipino always finds a reason to smile and hope.

But most probably because of the unprecedented nature of this calamity, the optimism is layered with a never-before felt trepidation. This is after all, an enemy we've never faced before. So as much as Filipinos try to put a brave face and their usual knowing smiles, they are also uncertain, cautious, or even fearful. This fear is not unfounded, especially because of the uncertainty of when and how the pieces of life can be picked up post-lockdown or post-COVID.



02 GETTING DEFENSIVE ON HEALTH: NOT JUST NOW, BUT MAYBE FOREVER



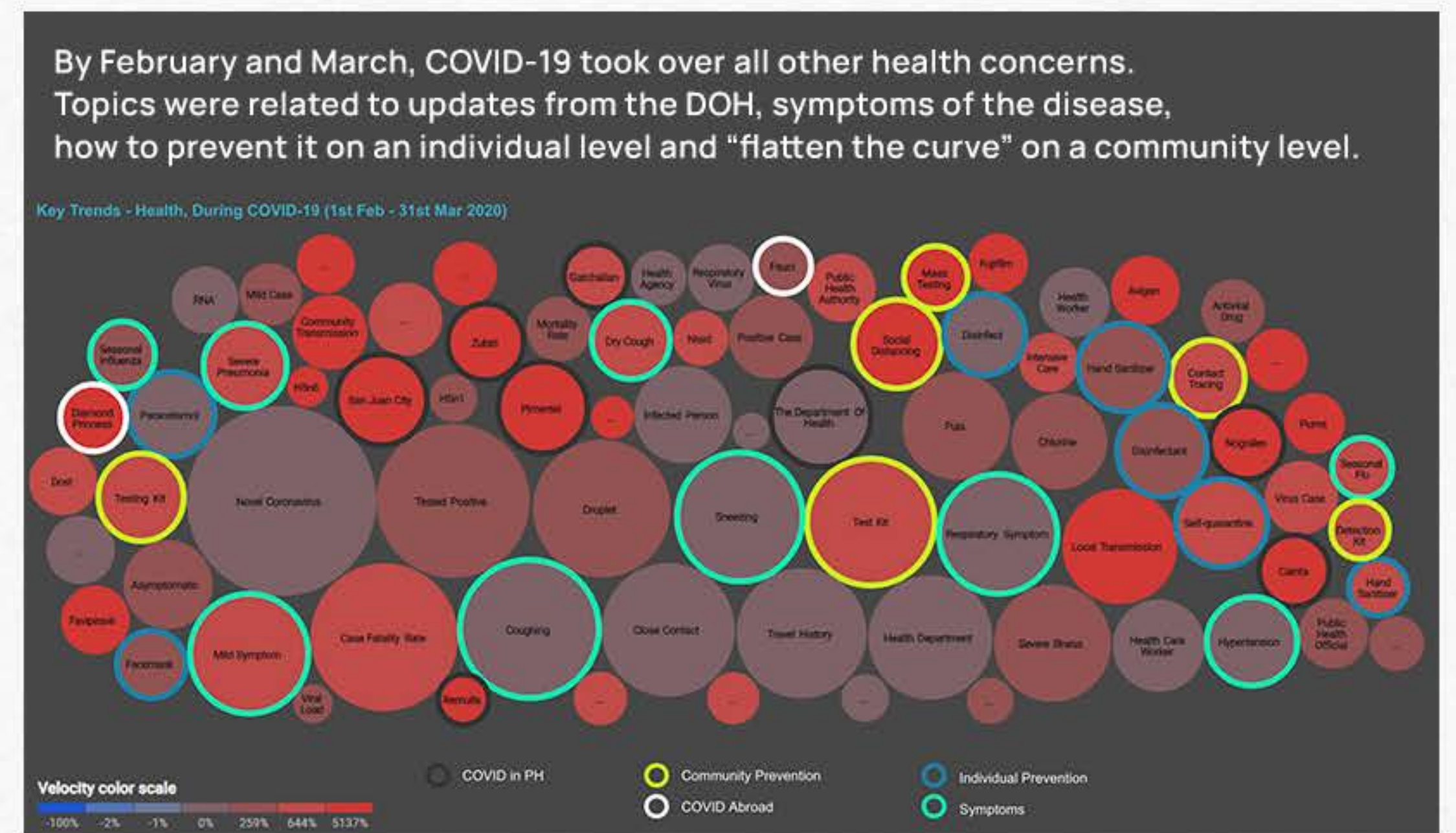
In a pandemic, it is of course natural for people to fear for their own health or their loved ones.

Sources of Concern

Which of these things are you most concerned about at the moment?

Answer Option	Data point %	Universe	Index	Responses	Audience %
Family / friends catching coronavirus	100%	29.3M	100	469	60.6%
Hospitals / healthcare systems being able to cope with coronavirus	100%	26.2M	100	441	54.3%
Catching coronavirus myself	100%	25.5M	100	413	52.9%
Vulnerable people catching coronavirus	100%	24.4M	100	382	50.5%
Hospitals / healthcare systems being able to cope with non-coronavirus conditions	100%	20.9M	100	344	43.3%
My physical health / fitness	100%	18.9M	100	303	39.1%
My mental health / wellbeing	100%	13.9M	100	220	28.9%

From a consumption scan perspective, means to protect one's self and family are of topmost concerns.



Search trends are also telling of how people want to care for their health, aside from what to do in a pandemic.

TOP SEARCH TOPICS

(past 30 days, March 1- April 1) - rising

1. Covid - electrical manufacturer
2. Cubit
3. Quarantine
4. Pandemic
5. Disaster
6. Italy
7. Google Classroom
8. Coronavirus
9. Speedtest.net
10. Tiktok
11. Symptom
12. Netflix
13. Department of Education
14. Minecraft - topic
15. Minecraft - game
16. Virus
17. Minecraft - pocket edition
18. Delivery
19. Prayer
20. Vitamin
21. Korean Drama
22. Television Show
23. Wi-Fi
24. Season
25. PLDT

N

MINECRAFT



The Department of Health has prescribed guidelines on how to keep one's self protected through simple means such as thorough handwashing. It has become a habit-changer for some. Jane Cruz (name changed at her request), 36, takes care of her immunocompromised parents. She said that she was used to sanitizing before, especially because she takes care of seniors who are immunocompromised. Yet it has now taken a whole new level. "Whenever I touch something which I think is dirty, I really find myself stopping whatever I am doing and consciously going to the bathroom just to wash my hands."

Even long after the COVID threat is over, she sees that many of the habits instilled during this time, will stay.

"(Even after COVID), I will sanitize everything and be mindful of my impact on others when I am sick. I need to be so much more careful. I plan to continue sanitizing, even more than before. I plan to continue keeping outside things (like footwear) outside."

For a mom with a newborn like Joanne, access to hospital services is of utmost concern. Yet because of COVID-19, she fears hospitals.

"My baby gets bad rashes, and we can't go to the hospital to get diagnosed because we're afraid we might catch covid."

Even post-COVID, she wants to be able to learn how to care for her baby without needing to go to the hospital as much: "(I will) Make sure first aid kits are readily available, and stock on necessary meds, and baby necessities to avoid unnecessary visits to the hospital".



This is a question for most Filipinos who might be rejoining the sea of commuters soon. Similarly, this is also a question for office workers who need to ride cramped elevators to get to their office floor.

Will the practice of social distancing continue to be observed? Will there be no more raised eyebrows and turned heads when someone coughs? Or will those who cough finally learn to cover their mouths? Will people see hospitals as safe havens?

The permanence of the effect on our habits remains to be seen.

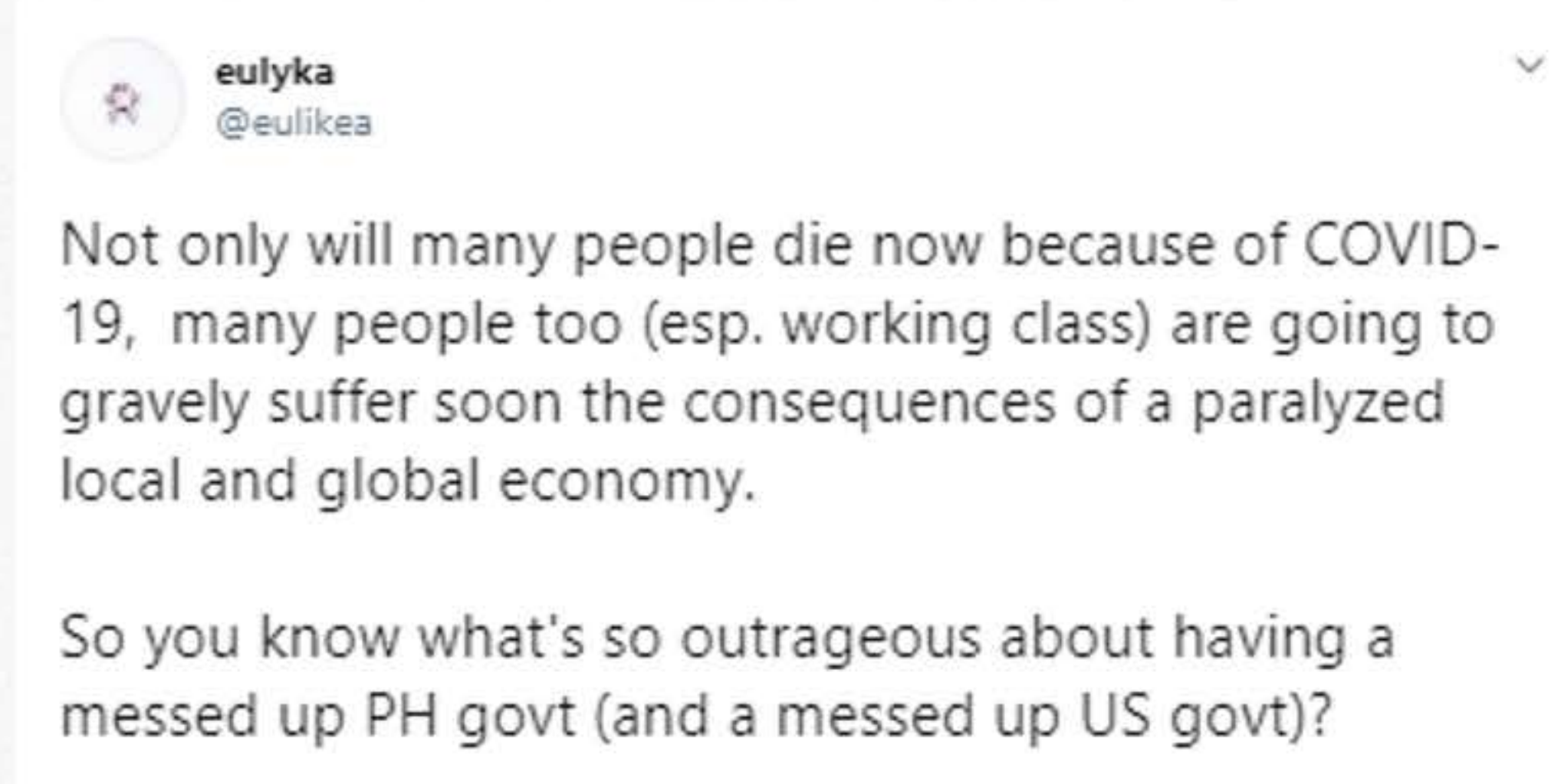


03 FIGHTING FOR THE FINANCIALLY-CHALLENGED? OR PROJECTING OUR OWN WORRY?

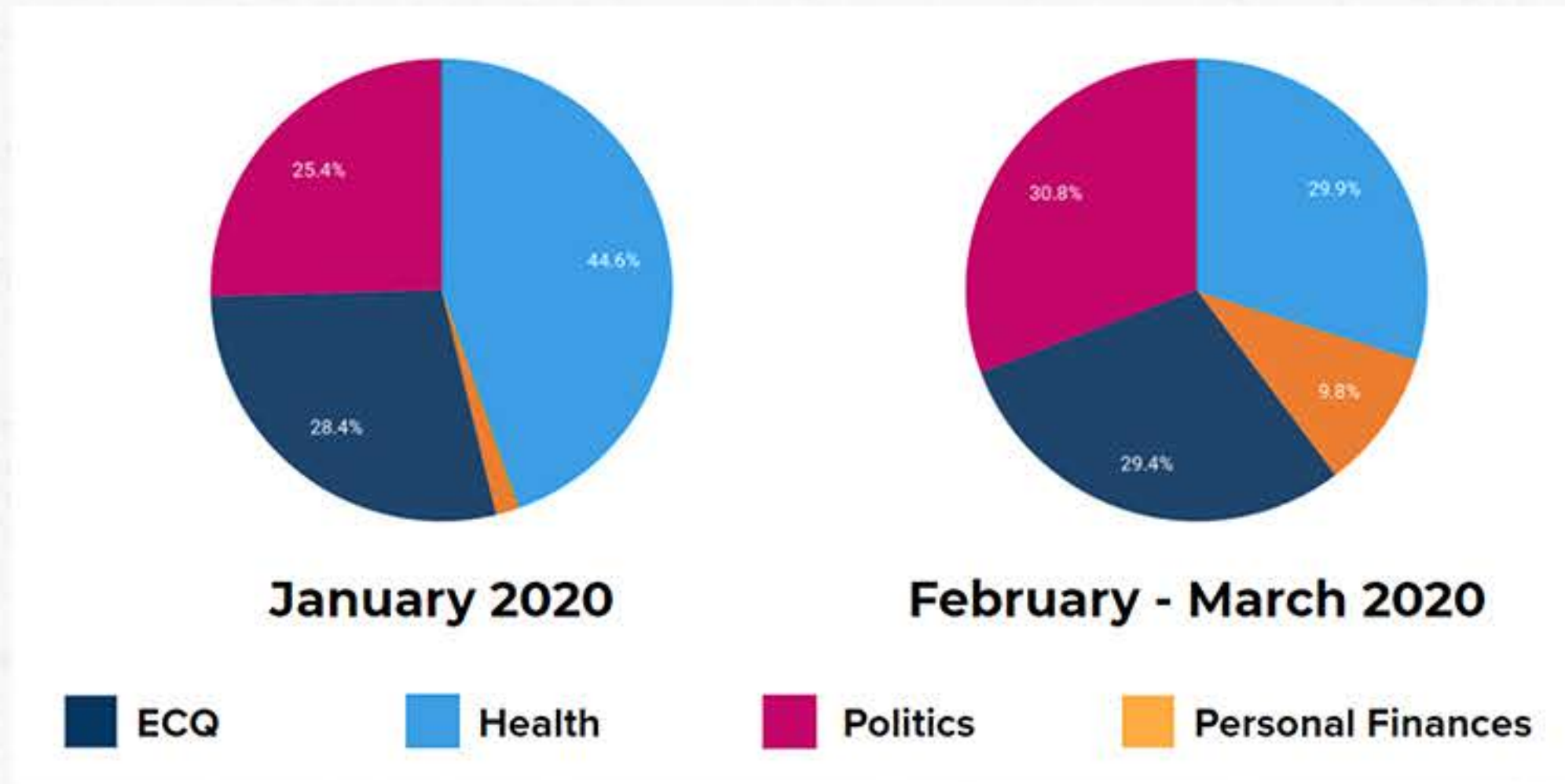


People have taken to social media to state how those who are more financially challenged need more help from the government.

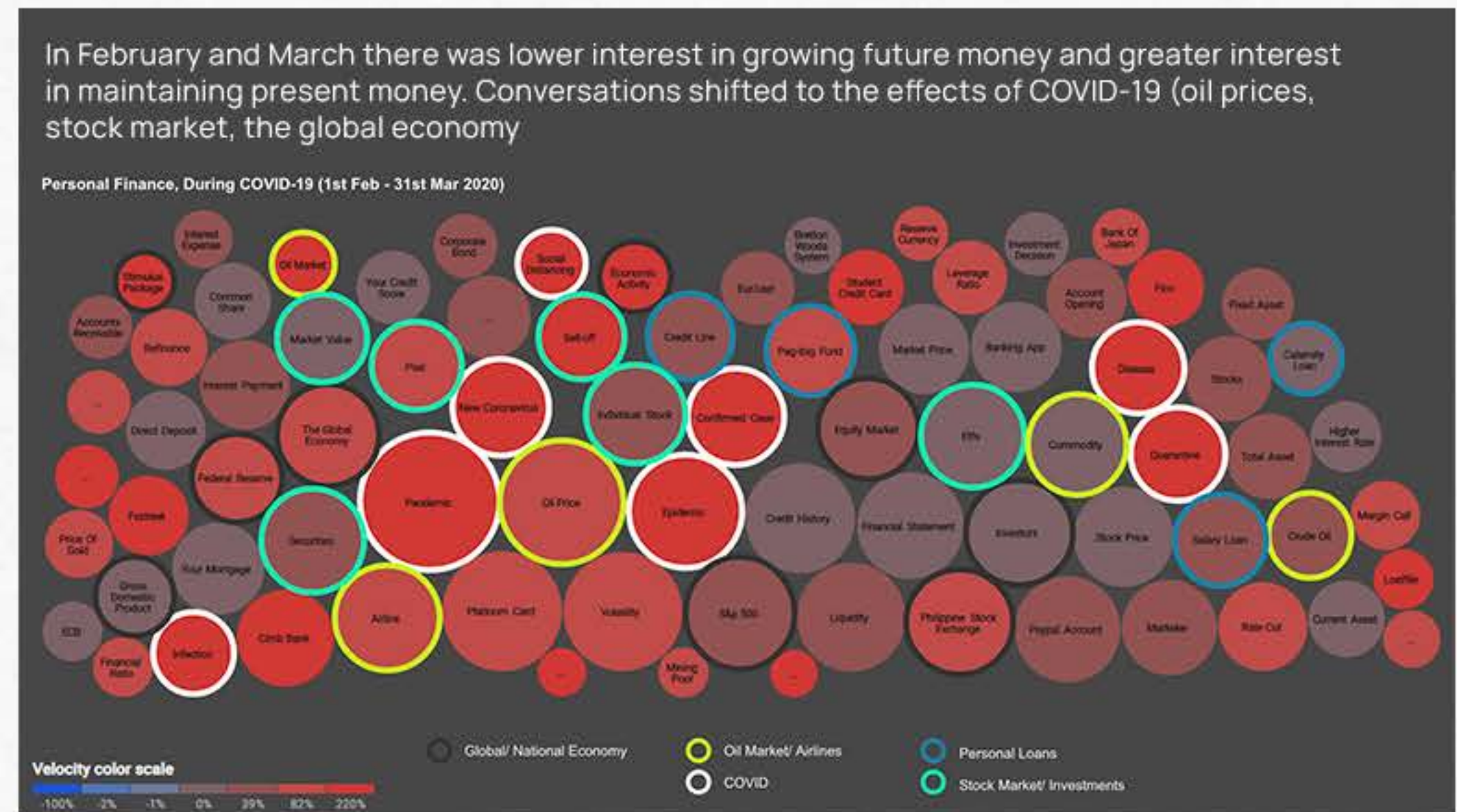
Cautious spending, or a longer time to rebound economically, are included in different scenarios from different experts. Locally, Nielsen has reported that they are also seeing tighter budgets for the masses.



On social media, personal finances are also the least talked about topic. Politics and health take centerstage.



At first blush, those on social media seem to be concerned about those who need to make financial ends meet, and that's it. But what people read about online personally, tells a deeper story: They are of course, concerned with their own financials.



In fact, very much so. Consumption about Personal Finances, as a topic, grew by 800%. People wanted to know about more flexible bill payments, among other things

Global Web Index tells in numbers how people foresee this to have quite an impact on their personal finances.

Looking at most consumed topic since the COVID-19 outbreak, **personal finances** jumped to top of the list, not health or ECQ.



Furthermore, the consumption of Personal Finance content grew by **800%**

Your Personal / Household Finances

How do you expect the coronavirus / COVID-19 outbreak to impact the following? - Your personal / household finances

Audience Key:
All Internet Users

Answer Option	Data point %	Universe	Index	Responses	Audience %
No impact	100%	1.2M	100	17	2.4%
Small impact	100%	7.6M	100	114	15.7%
Big impact	100%	31.8M	100	496	66%
Dramatic impact	100%	7.3M	100	132	15.1%
Not sure	100%	386k	100	6	0.8%

This plays out in the lives of those interviewed for this study. When they were asked to share personal stories, they bravely stated the financial troubles they faced. Jane said, “COVID-19 has shown me I really need to save more... COVID-19 feels like a second chance to me, from now on I want to save more and fast track myself to the road of financial independence”.

And when the proverbial “Rainy Day” finally happened: “If before my savings were simply to prepare for a rainy day, I now look at it in the perspective of preparing finances in case only one person in the household is able to provide income, just like (now in) COVID-19”.

Income is an even bigger concern when you are part of the gig economy. Sam says that her fear now is “Zero client requests, a slowdown in business and less income. Basically no clients equals no pay. Difficult to look for other companies to partner with since most businesses have put their operations on hold too.”

And since this is a global pandemic, Overseas Workers are hit as well. Business Mirror reports that 70,000 OFWs at least, will need help from the government. Will the promised 10,000 pesos be enough? On a national level, remittances will be affected. On a personal level, their families can suffer.

One would also think that logistics as an industry is safe, given that people still need to transfer their goods, or food and personal items need to be delivered. However, Liz (name changed at her request) fears the coming recession: “you cannot expect consumers to spend, and money to just come

pouring in. Both consumers and brands will act more conservatively so the economy will not move as quickly as before”

And Pam isn’t confident, either, that people will be willing to spend on something that is not a necessity, like her chocolates.

Nielsen, in “Prepare for the New Normal,” echoes this sentiment across other consumer groups as well. Shopping even in retail is and might for a while be directed towards necessities. People would go straight for what they need, and not want to spend too much time in store. It is a chore they will want to get over and done with.

Finances for Filipinos seem to be a very personal topic, which is probably why they do not divulge their personal concern on social media. But was their clamoring to help those in financial need a projection of their own, unspeakable worry?

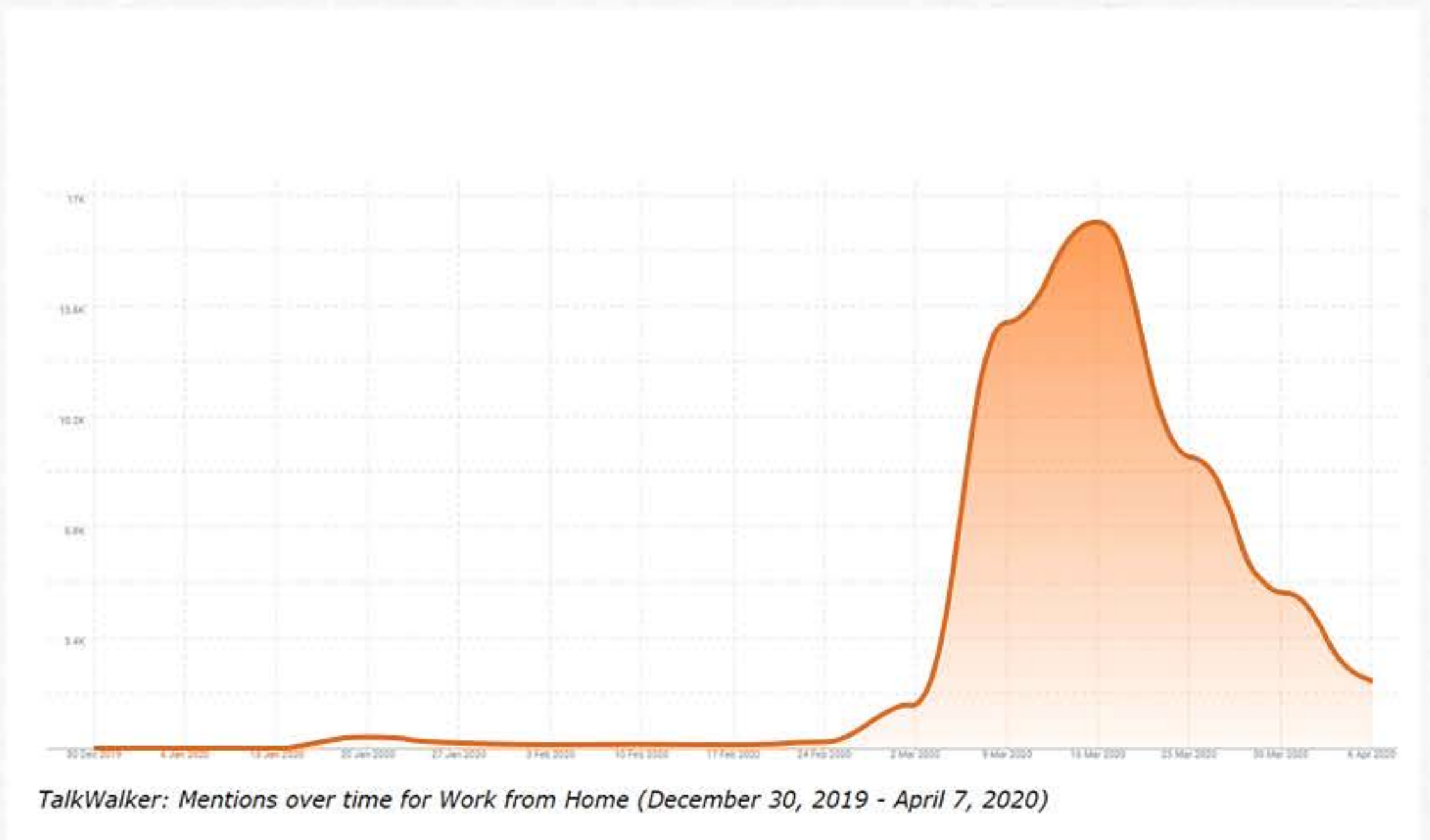
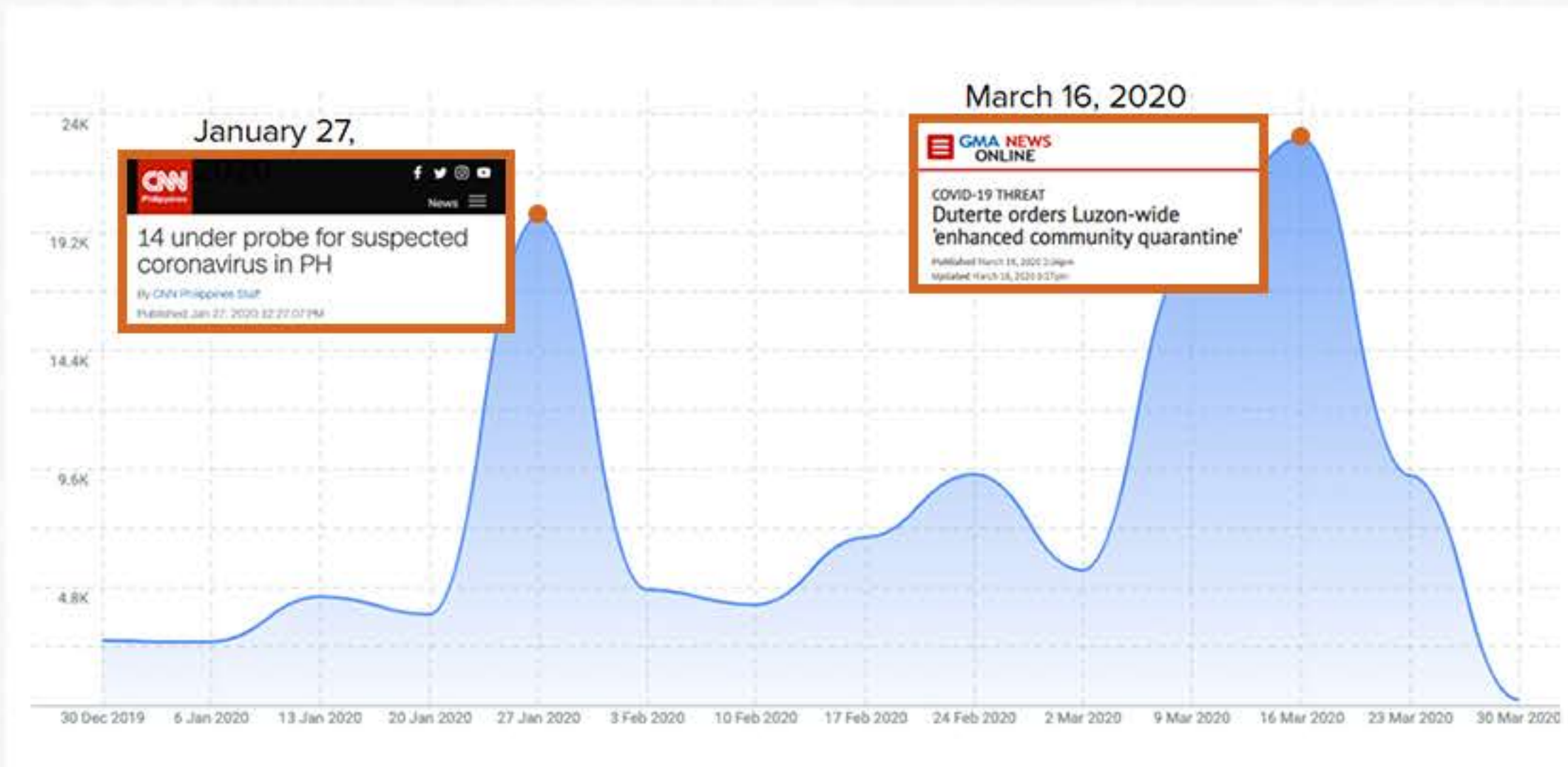


04 BEING APART TOGETHER: NOT ENOUGH FOR A SOCIAL RACE?



As soon as the lockdown and Enhanced Community Quarantines were announced, searches for protecting themselves with vitamins, ECQ itself, school and work from home were announced. Even churches found their footing online.

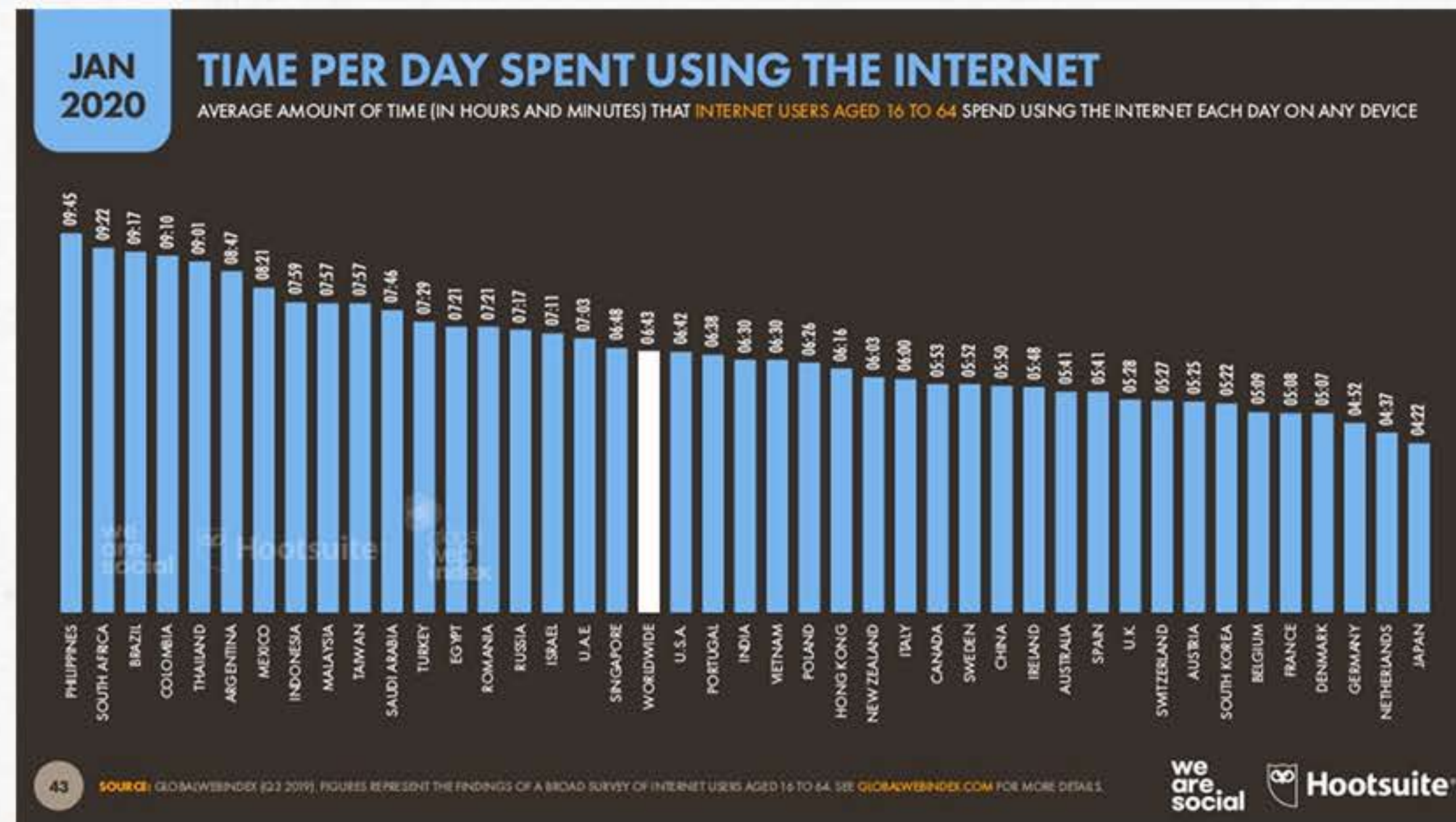
On surface level, it seems that people have adjusted to “gathering apart.” Zoom, Google, Facebook and Viber have found ways to keep people together.



TalkWalker: Mentions over time for Work from Home (December 30, 2019 - April 7, 2020)

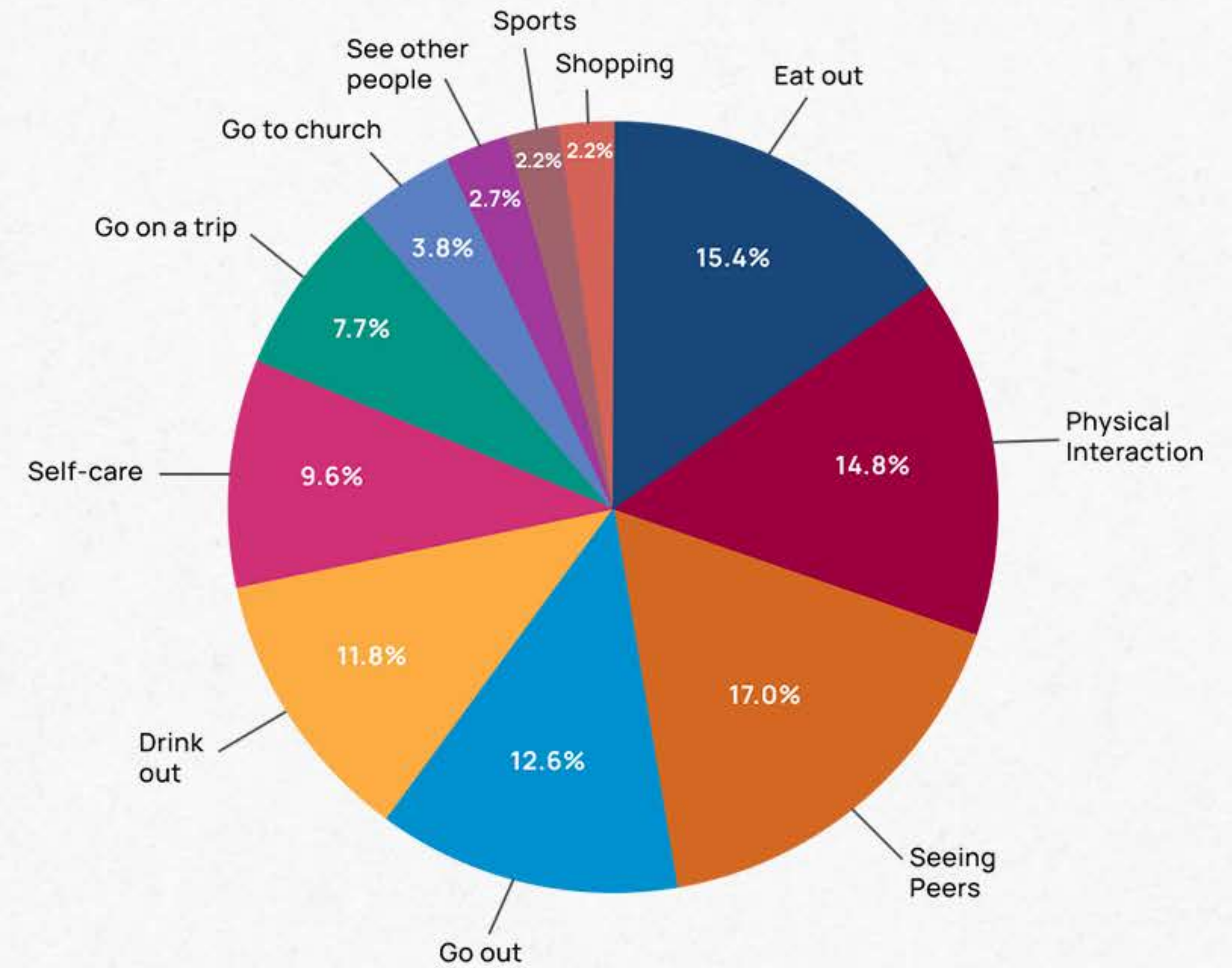
After all, according to Digital 2020 by Hootsuite and WeAreSocial, the Philippines is the “social media capital” of the world with the highest average amount of time per day spent online. Isn’t connecting online almost second nature to this culture?

Known for being a more social culture, one of the key Filipino traits according to Claro R. Ceniza author of Filipino Cultural Traits, do Filipinos not long for the actual social experiences?



People do long for the non-virtual hangouts and hug that are not emoticons nor GIFs.

For a people who are usually touchy-feely, whose gatherings are filled with “besos” and hugs and “mano,” to be conflicted about physical human interaction and to long for relations, is no small indication of our state of being.



In an article on the CBCNews Website, Sandro Galea, dean at Boston University's School of Public Health, says that "the isolation as well as the uncertainty about how long it will last and how the pandemic will play out can all contribute to increased anxiety." Moreover, "We humans are ultimately social. We're social creatures and we do need interaction – physical and social – with others."

In this regard, will there also be more championing of causes having to do with mental health? Will there even be close monitoring and quickly available help for families, students and workers, even in companies where before it was a taboo issue?

On Filipinos, a hyper-social race, whose culture and traditions are predicated upon and foster these close bonds, what will the psychological effect be? As of now, what is seen is that while it looks like it's all going smoothly on top, much desire and a profound longing to reconnect is brewing underneath.



05 SHOUTING ON SOCIAL: MAKING MEANING OUT OF MADNESS



Positive ones are directed toward frontliners, help, and those who are seen to be doing a good job.

Positive sentiments also came from what people are looking forward to.

The Philippine Star
 'WE STAYED AT WORK FOR YOU. PLEASE STAY AT HOME FOR US'
 An emergency doctor from San Juan De Dios Hospital in Pasay City on Wednesday appealed to the public to stay at home amid the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. (Photo courtesy of Lyndon Cosico)

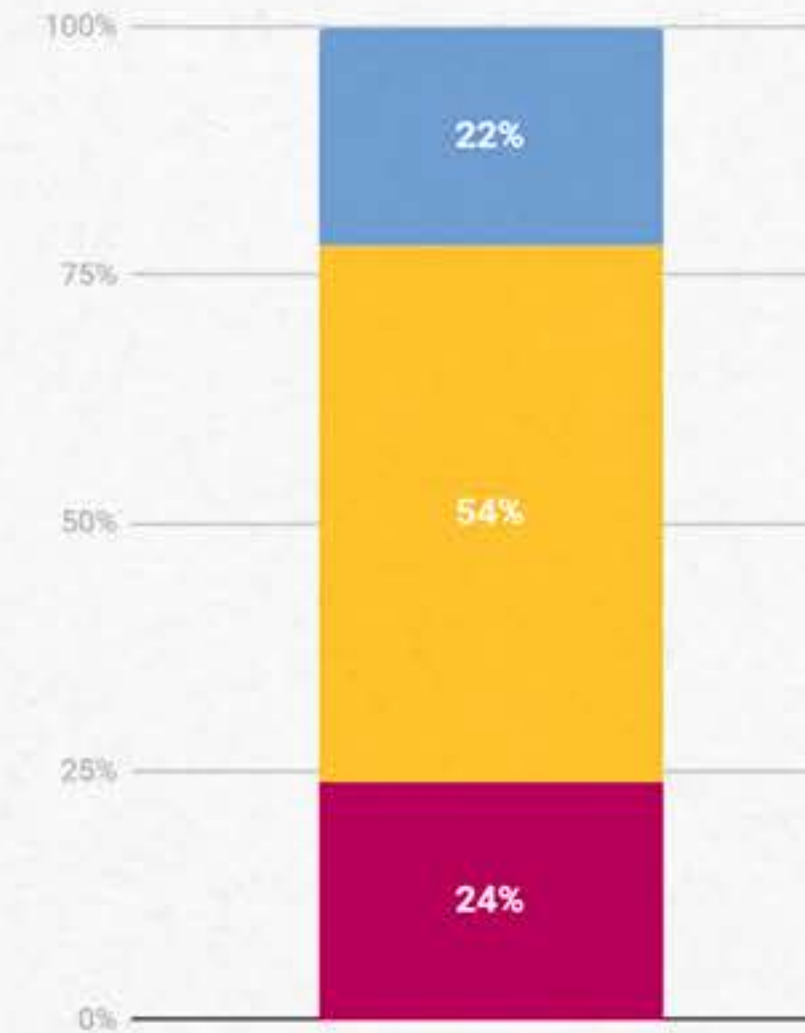
Manila Bulletin News
 Finally, some good news.
 Two more Filipinos have recovered from COVID-19 and is now discharged from the hospital. Only two Filipino COVID-19 positive patients remain in hospital isolation. [via Philippine Consulate General in HK

CNN Philippines
 WATCH: A heartwarming moment at the Unihealth Southwoods Hospital and Medical Center in Biñan, Laguna as its first cured and recovered COVID-19 patient receives an applause from hospital staff.

ANCX
 Meet the Filipino scientist who invented the low-cost COVID-19 testing kits

yahoo! news
 Salute! Over 100 interns at Philippine public hospital stay on duty despite being told to go home

ABS-CBN NEWS
 'Hero doctor': Young cardiologist loses fight vs COVID-19



Positive

- People remained optimistic and looked forward to the end of the lockdown in order to go out and meet up with friends.

Neutral

- Neutral conversations comprised of people sharing what they want to do once the Covid outbreak has ended.

Negative

- Online users expressed that they miss being with their friends or loved ones and the activities they like to engage in.
- They also shared their dissatisfaction with how the government is handling the Covid situation and called for a change in leadership.

sesen @nitroyougen_
 After this lockdown, we deserve a drink and good hangout.

Gabriel Bitao @gabrielbitao
 Gusto ko magpa full body massage after ng lockdown 😞

joven @jovenginamo
 After this lockdown? Gusto ko muna pumunta ng church para magpasalamat sa lahat dahil hindi nya tayo pinababayaan.

alexALT @alt_alex
 I'm definitely going to the beach after this quarantine, get drunk and breathe that fresh breeze of ocean air.

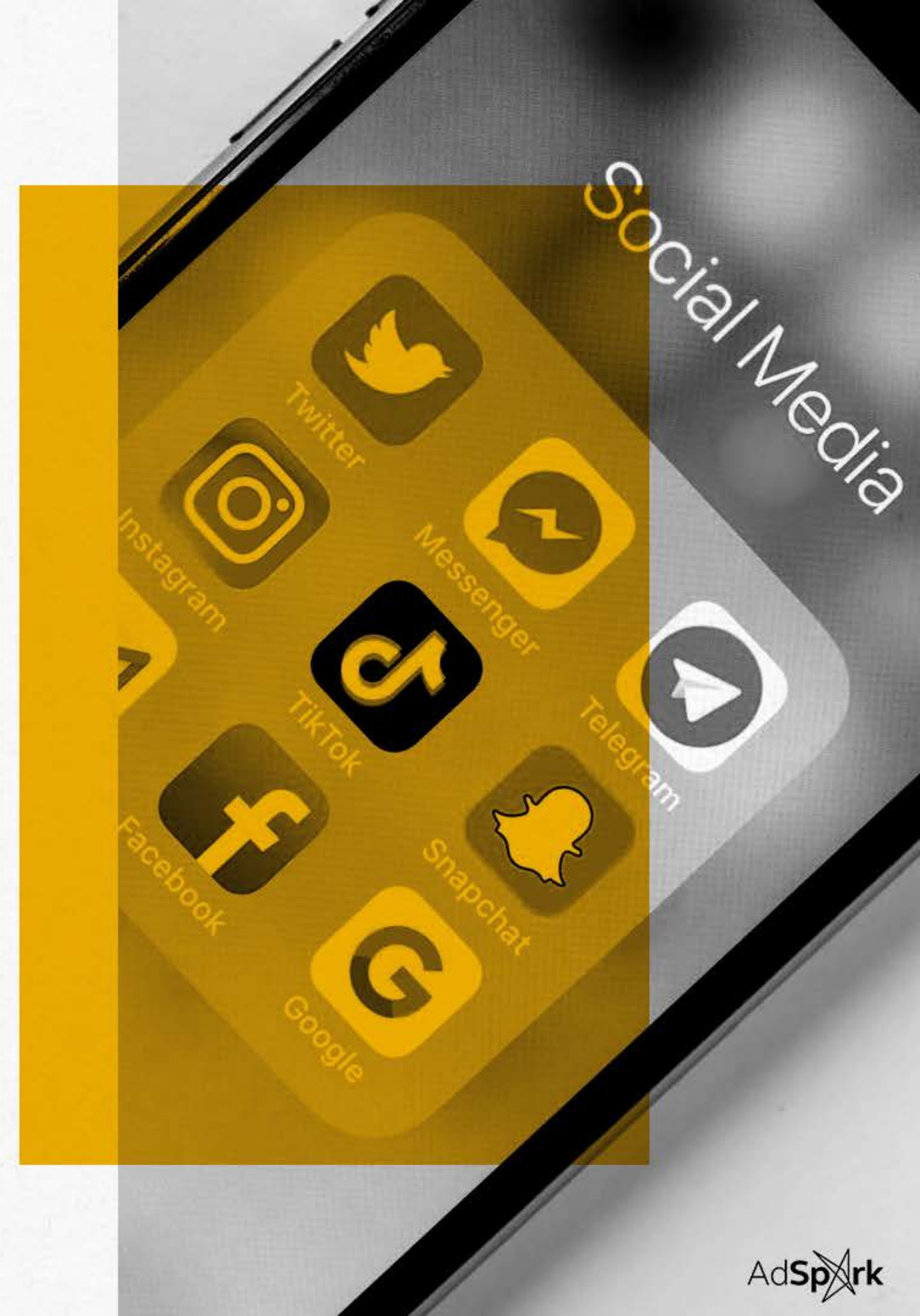
They exist together, in an already volatile environment.

Events seem to quickly trigger both the outdoors against perceived wrong, and outpouring of support.

Social Media has perhaps become the way to voice out opinions and be heard, especially now when people are facing more restrictions. Compared to the much-constricted physical realms, the online world offers no restrictions.

More importantly, though, the voicing out and even confusion of the cacophony, are necessary. It is possible that it is indicative of how the Filipinos are now trying to construct meaning out of the collective trauma we are experiencing. To reiterate, social trauma is not just about the event, but about the social construction of meaning.

The posts on social, therefore, could be an attempt in trying to assign meaning to situations, roles, and causes and effects. Each member of society - aggrieved, helper, bystander, observer - is trying to write the story.



CONCLUSION: WHO ARE WE?

The five tension points discussed in the Sparker seem to leave a lot more questions, not just in the sense of finding out more about the current situation. Rather, they raise questions for who we will be as a people. (1) Will our optimism, our long-time weapon against calamities, be shrouded now with apprehension? Will it bring us down maybe to a closer sense of reality? (2) Will how we protect our health be on hyper-mode? For how long? When flu season comes back, will we rush back on a self-mandated Quarantine? Will “quarantine” actually make it to everyday lingo? (3) Will the economies - global, local and personal - sustain our hopes and allay our fears? Or will we plunge into tougher days and tighter pockets? But if that is such a personal issue, how else will it play out in more visible channels? (4) Will our longings to reconnect be met? Where and how will we be meeting again? Or will we find it difficult to trust contact? (5) What meaning are we constructing? What story will this all tell when it's said and done?

The drastic and deep changes throughout this pandemic may be reshaping the Filipino fabric of life as we know it, yet much of who we (think we) are, shines through.

Love for country in how we want government to work. The sense of kapwa in how we still want to help and applaud those who do a good job of helping of others. A deep sense of family and belonging, in how we care for those we live with, and long for those apart from us.

The question, perhaps, lies in how these values will exhibit themselves in different ways in the days, months, or even years to come.



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Joanne Camille Natividad, 28, Mother of 2 month old baby

Sam Lara, 23, Art Freelancer

Shelly (Name changed at her request), Business Owner

Jane (Name changed at her request), 36, BPO manager

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