Title:
Social connections with COVID-19-affected areas increase compliance with mobility restrictions

Authors:
Ben Charoenwong, National University of Singapore - Department of Finance
Alan Kwan, The University of Hong Kong
Vesa Pursiainen, The University of Hong Kong and University of Zurich

Abstract:
We study the role of social connections in households’ responses to mobility restrictions imposed amid the COVID-19 epidemic, using aggregated and anonymized Facebook data on social connections and mobile phone data for tracking movement. Measured at the US county level, a one-standard-deviation increase in social connections with China and Italy - the first countries with major outbreaks of the virus - roughly doubles the effectiveness of mobility restrictions. The effect of social connections on compliance is stronger for Republican counties but exists regardless of political orientation. It is also stronger for counties with older and less educated populations. Groups at higher risk from COVID-19 comply with restrictions better and are less affected by social connections. Our findings are consistent with social networks contributing to households’ information acquisition about the pandemic.

Data:
We use US county-level data on social distancing based on mobile phones and aggregated data on social connections from Facebook.

Keywords: social networks, mobility restrictions, COVID-19
JEL Classification: D83, D85, H75, I12, I18

Link to paper: