1. **Title:** Viral Narratives: Evidence from media outlets during COVID

2. **Authors:**
   ◦ Arthur Blouin, University of Toronto, a.blouin@utoronto.ca
   ◦ Julian Dyer, University of Exeter, julian.dyer@mail.utoronto.ca

3. **Abstract:**
   Culture provides heuristics for decision-making that are developed as part of the evolutionary process (Richardson and Boyd, 1985, Nunn 2015). In this project, we aim to trace the evolution of narratives as a particular form of heuristic regarding the roles of different agents. We seek to show that the narratives or mental shortcuts people rely on persist, are applied to various different contexts, and can be shifted by economic shocks.

   We apply this to the current coronavirus pandemic and seek to test whether the China trade shock (Autor, Dorn and Hanson, 2013) influences the mental model people use to understand this pandemic. In particular, we hypothesize that areas more negatively impacted historically by Chinese trade, today hold a worldview where China plays an active role in creating or facilitating the pandemic.

   We do this by using newspaper and Twitter data from January-March 2020, matched to Chinese trade data from Autor, Dorn and Hanson. Methodologically, we apply quantitative narrative analysis techniques to create a representation of the subjective causal networks of different actors relevant to a given topic. We measure how central different actors are in the network implied by the text analysis. This allows us to measure regional variation in a worldview in which China caused the damaging coronavirus pandemic - either directly or indirectly.

   The project makes the conceptual point that narratives act as heuristics or mental models that apply across different contexts. In doing so, it introduces an empirical methodology to quantify types of mental models held by individuals.

   References
   


4. **Data Description:**
   Newspaper articles and Twitter data for the United States, matched to trade shock data from Autor, Dorn and Hanson (2013).

5. **JEL Codes:**
   F1, F14, D83

6. **Keywords:**
   Narratives, Causal Models, Beliefs, Text Analysis, China Trade Shock, Coronavirus