



REDDIT: A PROFILE PLATFORM



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Reddit is a massively popular social media platform which is based on forums, where users post anything from text posts asking “Am I the Asshole?” to images, links, or videos. It was created in 2005 by Steve Huffman, Alexis Ohanian, and Aaron Swartz, but is now a publicly owned. It is organized into subreddits are specific forums in which users can post and comment on things related to the topic of choice, whether it be recipes, gaming, music, cute animals. With more than 100,000 subreddits, if a topic exists, there is a subreddit for it. Posts or submissions that gain popularity, in Reddit’s case “upvotes”, appear higher on the subreddit’s page, and if popular enough, on the site’s front page. Reddit is the seventh most visited website in the world, with 88.6 million active users daily (<https://sqmagazine.co.uk/reddit-statistics/>).

1. ALGORITHMS AND THE ALT-RIGHT PIPELINE

Reddit’s algorithm prioritizes posts based on a voting system. Simply put, users can “up” or “down” vote any post they come across, including comments. This means that users are the ones controlling the algorithm and what becomes popular on any given subreddit. Additional factors taken into account by the algorithm include engagement velocity and adherence to subreddit rules, according to Reddit Upvote, 2025. Posts which gain positive, quick feedback by other users are pushed by the algorithm more often. Due to the simplicity of this user-controlled algorithm, some subreddits such as r/The_Donald have become infamous for leading people, specifically adolescents, down the “alt-right pipeline”, defined as “the path people follow as they engage with online content, forums, and peers that take them further to the right-wing political extreme” (Mariash, 2022). The reason reddit specifically is suited for bringing people into extremism is due to the algorithm producing “in groups”- popular content is deemed so by the audience, which shapes discourse and collective identity in subreddits (Gaudette et. al, 2021). This, in turn, encourages rhetoric which is agreed upon by the masses- and within a subreddit such as r/The_Donald, the masses are right-wing extremists. Dangerously, disagreement or discussion is not something fostered and protected by this algorithm. As the article states, “It is clear that there was a complete absence of dissenting views among the most visible content in [the subreddit]... rather than encouraging a variety of perspectives within discussions on r/The_Donald, Reddit’s voting algorithm seemed to allow members to create an echo chamber by shaping the discourse within their communities in ways that reflected a specific set of values, norms, and attitudes about the in-group” (Gaudette et. al, 2021). Therefore, when users engage with this type of content, it becomes the norm- the content is wholly one-sided and meant to be engaging, leading people to agree with the posts.

2. DATA SCRAPING AND PRIVACY

The richness of information and conversation available on Reddit has made it a hotbed for research especially on topics like sociology and media studies. However, questions about the ethics surrounding these studies have begun to surface, namely on whether the data being referenced is participatory. Proponents of data “scraping” argue that “...materials lie in public domain...persons posting to Reddit and subreddits chose to do so in the knowledge that the information they share is bound by a specific local user-agreement” (Adams, 2024). On the other hand, reddit users who may wish to delete posts that have been “scraped” are not able to revoke consent, and therefore are not in control of their own content, which violates ethical consent. Research studies are not the only factor, either. Search engines such as Google have begun to decrease in popularity for searching for answers, as Reddit browsing or adding the word “Reddit” to the end of their searches becomes a more popular phenomenon (O’Brien, 2025). Additionally, Reddit has sued Anthropic AI and, more recently, Perplexity AI for “alleging that it illegally scraped user posts to train its AI model” (Butts, 2025). Which is problematic because “...They are evading Reddit’s own anti-scraping measures while also ‘circumventing Google’s controls and scraping Reddit content directly from Google’s search engine results.’ [Ben] Lee said that... Perplexity is a willing customer of at least one of these scrapers, choosing to buy stolen data rather than enter into a lawful agreement with Reddit itself.”(O’Brien, 2025). User participation does not seem to be the main issue in this context, but should still be regarded as a concern, as the same ethical concerns apply when scraping data in any form.

FIG. 1

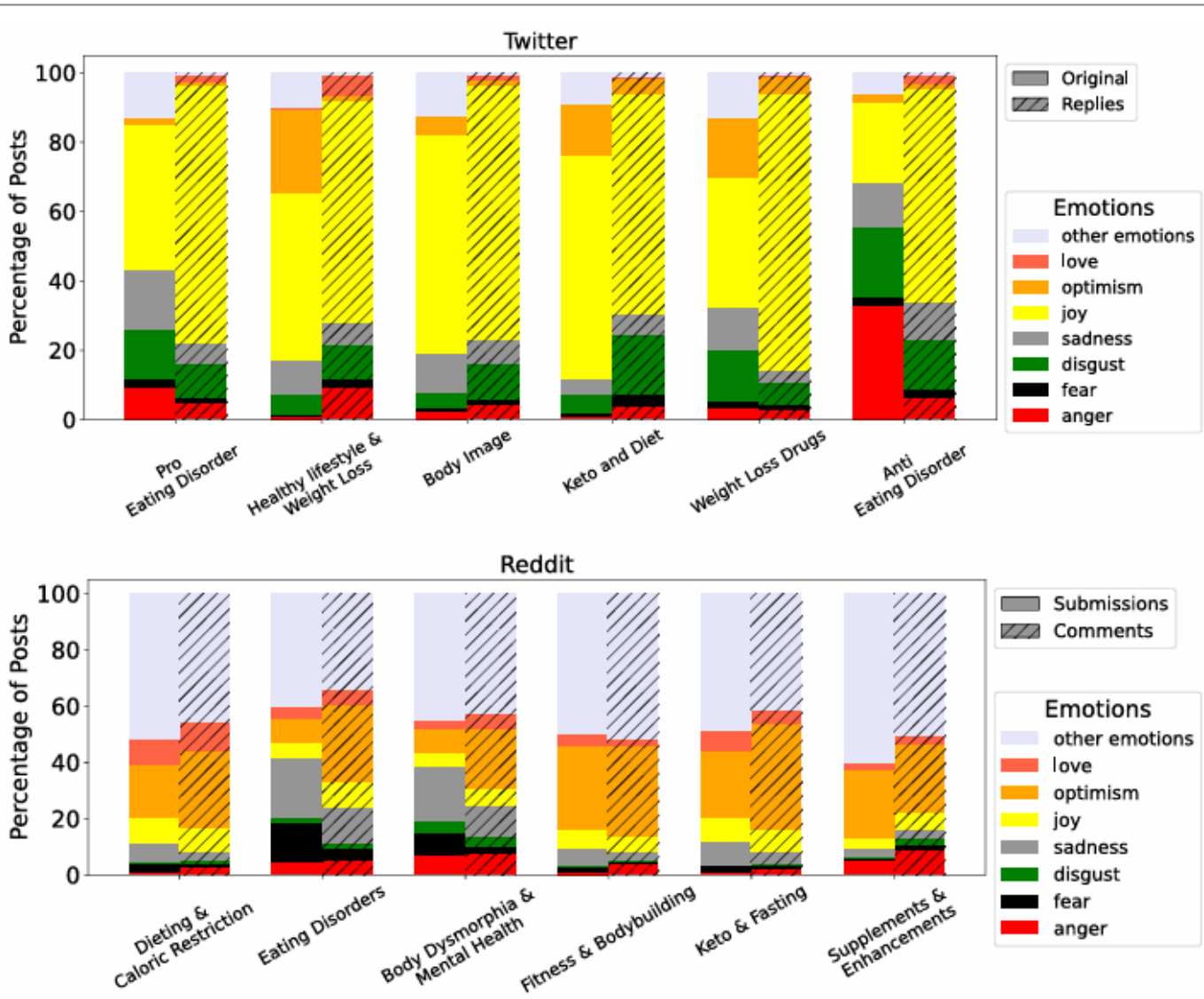


Figure 5 Community emotion analysis. For each (a) community on Twitter, (b) Reddit discussion forum, or (c) TikTok hashtag, we aggregate the emotion confidence scores across all original tweets/submissions (open bars) and replies/comments (hashed bars) and show the share of posts with each emotion

3. MODERATION AND AFFORDANCES

There are two entities on Reddit which enforce rules in two separate sectors. Admins, which enforce the 8 base rules of the platform, which include no bullying, spam, doxing, impersonation, etc. The approach to these rules being broken is seemingly not serious, though, as the list of the ways admins may enforce these rules naming “Asking you nicely to knock it off, Asking you less nicely”(Reddit, 2024). The second body of government within Reddit is moderators or “mods”, “volunteer redditors who help ensure that your favorite communities are fun, interesting, and well-organized places to discuss and share content with other redditors”, according to Reddit Help. Ways to become a moderator include creating a community yourself, finding an unmoderated community to take over, being invited by a different mod, or applying when able to a community. Thus, all moderators of Reddit control and enforce community rules, which vary greatly by subreddit. Bots are also employed as moderators on Reddit, automating the process. This “decentralized” moderation has been, in some cases, proven very effective when compared to platforms like X which use centralized moderation (i.e. filtering certain words and phrases). In a study focused on moderation effectiveness on eating disorder communities, it was found that decentralized, user-based moderation was more intensely more effective in blocking and limiting pro-anorexia content and focusing on positive emotions (Fig. 1). However, in cases such as r/The_Donald, as mentioned previously, where moderators are only interested in upholding the status quo, rules are bent to be enforceable in a way that allows hateful content- “while the “rules” of r/The_Donald made it clear that “racism and Anti-Semitism will not be tolerated,” they also specified that “Muslim and illegal immigrants are not races” (r/The_Donald Wiki, n.d.). These rules suggest, then, that moderators would most likely not remove discussions related to anti-Muslim or anti-immigrant out-groups within the community” (Gaudette et. al , 2021). The only remedy offered in this particular case by Reddit was to “Quarantine” the subreddit, meaning that users must opt-in to viewing the content and that it does not generate revenue, appear in search results or recommendations (Reddit, 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, Reddit’s main focus seems to be on being for the public, a site used and run by users. The platform itself has a very hands-off approach to the site, leaving most of the responsibility to posters and moderators. There are clear benefits to being so public-facing, evidenced by the thousands of communities and richness of information

that, in some cases, contributes to research. However, problems lie in letting users control so much, too. Algorithms can be manipulated, especially in certain communities, exacerbated by moderators enforcing status quos to create echo chambers. The main takeaway is that users and moderators are able to engage with content that interests and mirrors them, and in some cases it may lead to negative consequences. Finally, data scraping by companies such as Perplexity AI or academic researchers may take advantage of the huge amounts of information and interaction on Reddit. The issues presented here are difficult to “fix”, as there are pros and cons for each issue. For example, not allowing researchers to scrape data from Reddit users would “fix” the privacy and ethical concerns, but would be removing a large portion of potentially important information from bodies of research like sociology. All in all, Redditors need to be cautious of both what they post and the content that they consume on Reddit, taking special consideration to note that a platform controlled by users is one which depends on users.



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