

# **Reddit Users Perception on Russia-Ukraine Conflict (1475 words)**

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**Abstract – The aim of this paper is to present a categorical classification of comments and analyze reactions of users on each category of comments in a community driven discussion platform like Reddit. The reason to choose Reddit as the platform for this study is because of its large and diverse user base which helped in getting different opinions from users spread across the world. The specific online community called ‘Subreddit’ makes it easier to find the topics I needed for my paper. I have selected two subreddits for my study and collected 25 comments from each of them randomly. Further, I present a method to categorize the comments into each category and determine the majority perception of users regarding the Russia-Ukraine Conflict.**

**Index Terms – Reddit, Subreddit, Comment Analysis**

## **1 Introduction**

Comments on a subreddit post have previously been used to identify and analyze the majority perception of people on specific topics like Body Image (Sowles SJ, McLeary M, Optican A 2018) and Political campaigns (Hale BJ, Grabe ME 2016). However, no such analysis has been done on topics related to conflicts between countries or on-going war-like situation. My work attempts to cover this untouched area to understand the majority perception of people on highly sensitive political issues like the current ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict.

In a different study, that explores if social media can mitigate the effects of military and government restriction of information (Sacco,

Vittoria & Bossio, Diana. 2015). The findings highlight that in context of active conflict and war-like situations, the dynamism of social media platforms like Reddit creates opportunities for faster news dissemination, pluralized voices, and extended audience reach. Inspired from such studies, the study presented here aims to understand the perception of people on Russia-Ukraine conflict in current time when social media aids in faster reach of news. The study will answer the following questions.

1. How are comments and reactions distributed on Russia-Ukraine conflict articles on Reddit?
2. Does the length of comments relate to user engagement?

## **2 Methods**

To find the answers to the research questions outlined above comments were collected from two subreddits r/worldnews and r/UkrainianConflict. The reason to choose these two subreddits for data collection was the comments under r/worldnews were very diverse and reflected global views on the issue whereas r/UkrainianConflict had majority users commenting from Russia and Ukraine, thus giving more informative comments and views from the users who are currently being affected by the ongoing conflict. 25 comments were randomly picked from posts pertaining to Russia-Ukraine

conflict from r/worldnews and same was done with the r/UkrainianConflict subreddit. To keep the comments focused on the main issue, only the comments which were made under the main article or post were picked, sub-comments under these comments were not picked as they tend to deviate a lot from the main topic. The comments selected for this study were from January 2022 to Mid-February 2022. The subreddit, text of the comment and the number of upvotes on the comment were manually recorded for this analysis.

Since the selected topic is quite new and has very limited literature to build on, so in this case the emergent coding approach, based on the notion of grounded theory, is used. Grounded theory method generally consists of four stages:

- Open coding
- Development of concepts
- Grouping concepts into categories
- Formation of a theory

The comments were open coded and using an iterative approach, concepts were developed using *Axial coding* (Preece et al. 2015; Corbin and Strauss, 2014) – a process where definition of concepts and categories are constructed during the phase of the analysis. After this process, four categories of comments were defined: Informative, Political, Sympathetic and Sarcastic. The sarcastic category also included funny or trolling comments. In the next step, *selective coding* was used to map the comments to the obtained categories.

Each comment can only be mapped to one category. Definition of each category and examples for each is listed in Table 1 (right).

Comment Category	Definition	Example
Political	Comments that contain political theories which are not backed by sources and could be hoax.	<p>“They’re building domestic support for the war effort. Their buildup is painted as a response to western aggression (evidenced by support for Ukraine, more NATO troops, etc.), which makes the eventual war an easier sell”</p> <p>“This why authoritarianism is a double-edged sword. If the ruler decides on constructive policy, it can be established quickly and efficiently whereas in a democracy, a consensus has to be reached which always requires compromise. But if the ruler decides to go to war for their own reasons, the people are only in for the ride and have no say over the outcome of their fate”</p>
Informative	Comments that contain extra information regarding a specific topic or citing authentic news sources.	
Sympathetic	Comments from people who are sympathetic	<p>“Well I respect your decision and and pray that you won’t have to see</p>

	to the situation.	<i>warfare this time”</i>
<b>Sarcastic/Trolls/ Funny</b>	Comments that are funny, sarcastic, and insensitive.	<i>“We found this bag of cocaine; we had no other choice to invade and get to the bottom of it. – Putin.”</i>

Table 1. Comment Category definition and Examples

To get a better understanding of people’s perception on the issue the number of comments, upvotes on each comment were aggregated to create a total engagement score. Also, to further analyze each category of comments and their relationship with user engagement, word count was calculated for each comment to establish a possible relation between the category and word count in comments. The analysis on comments and their results are described in the following section.

### 3 Results

From the comments category, the most frequently appearing category was *Informative* (38 %), which contained comments that had elaborated information about an event or cited authentic news sources to support their claims. The second most popular comment category was Sarcastic, Funny and Troll comments (28%), which often were comments that made fun of the issue or made sarcastic comments. The least frequent comment category was *Sympathetic* (14%), which contained comments from people who were sympathetic to the situation and wished that situation improves soon, and the conflict ends.

#### 3.1 Relation between category and upvotes

*Informative* comments were the most frequent comments, but it did not have the highest upvote

score. Informative category had total **83 upvotes** across **19 comments**, with a mean score of **4.36**. The second most frequent category of Sarcastic and Funny comments had total **184 upvotes** across **14 comments**, with a mean score of **13.14**, which is the highest across all 4 categories. Meanwhile, Sympathetic comments were least frequent and had the least upvotes, with total **25 upvotes** across **7 comments**, with a mean score of **3.57**.

#### 3.2 Relation between category and length of comments

Total number of words and the character count was also calculated for each category of comments. The *Informative* category had a total count of 877 words and character count of 5027 across 19 comments. This was the highest among the 4 categories. Secondly, *Political* category had a total of 455 words and 2759 characters across 10 comments, followed by *Sarcastic/Funny* category with total 206 words and character count of 1080 across 14 comments. The category with the least word count was the *Sympathetic* category with 188 words and 1035 characters across 7 comments. The average comment length for each category –

1. Informative – 46.15 words
2. Political – 45.5 words
3. Sarcastic/Funny – 14.71 words
4. Sympathetic – 26.8 words

Despite having the lowest average comment length, the category of Sarcastic/Funny comments had the highest mean upvote score of 13.14. This shows people tend to engage and like Sarcastic and Funny comments.

Category	Freq	%	Mean Upvote Score	Mean Word Count
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Informative	19	38.0	4.36	46.15
Political	10	20.0	6.6	45.5
Sarcastic	14	28.0	13.14	14.71
Sympathetic	7	14.0	3.57	26.8

Table 2. Frequency and percentage distribution of categories and their mean upvote score and mean word count.

#### 4. Discussions

After analyzing the comments on r/worldnews and r/UkraineConflict subreddit, four dominant comment categories emerged. The analysis shows that there is a considerable amount of variation across these categories based on frequency and mean upvote score. As seen from the results, Informative comments comprised of 38 % of the total comments indicating that users on Reddit tend to share information and facts, and that's why discussion section on Reddit is considered informative by majority social media users. Also, Informative comments tend to have the highest mean word count which does makes sense as users share more information and facts which results in longer comments.

However, in the case of Sarcastic and Funny comments which comprised of 28 % of the total comments, it was observed that the mean word count was relatively low i.e., 14.71 but it has the highest upvote score of 13.41 across the four categories. This demonstrates that people tend to like and engage with sarcastic/funny comments even when the issue in focus concerns possible war and conflict between two nations.

The category of political comments comprised 20 % of the total comments and had similar mean word count to Informative comments, but a

slightly higher mean upvote score. There is a substantial lack of sympathetic comments as this category comprised only 14 % of the total comments and had the least mean word count and upvote score.

#### 5. Limitations

Although this analysis tends to answer some questions about the perception of users on an ongoing serious issue and the results seem to resonate with the current social media feelings and trends. But the scope of the data collection is still very limited. Even though the comments were collected from two separate subreddits to capture views and opinions from a larger audience, but a large-scale collection of data would be a much better method to capture the true sentiments of public.

Furthermore, this study uses category which are mutually exclusive, but there were comments which could be placed under both Informative and Political category. So, this study and the results are limited to the researcher's bias on placing the comments under a specific category.

In conclusion, the study aims to demonstrate the people perception on issues like ongoing war situation and it shows that people tend to share substantial information for others to read about. However, with the modern age social media trends sarcastic and funny comments are now part of people's opinion irrespective of the issue being discussed.

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