

Possible Research Question for Project 2: How does ironic and memetic content on the r/aliens subreddit contribute to government distrust?

De Wildt, Lars, and Stef Aupers. “Conspiracy Culture on Reddit: Belief, Doubt, and Play in r/conspiracy.” *New Media & Society*, 2023.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13548565231178914>

This academic article talks about the participatory culture of the r/conspiracy subreddit, saying that it is a heterogeneous space characterized by belief, doubt, and play (ludic conspiracies). The authors support this claim through an ethnography and qualitative analysis of user discussions. This research is recent because it was published in 2023, and I think it’s relevant because it directly addresses the mechanism of non-serious participation in conspiracy communities on Reddit.

I think I can use this article as a framework for analyzing r/aliens. The "play" concept relates to memetic content to the normalization of distrust. I think I can compare the "ludic conspiracies" to the discussions on r/aliens. If users on r/aliens start by joking about government cover ups (play), this article suggests that form of engagement still normalizes the underlying conspiratorial topic among the community.

Gaudette, Tiana, and Ryan Scrivens. “Collective identity formation in r/The_Donald: The role of Reddit’s voting algorithm in ‘othering’ discourse.” *New Media & Society*, vol. 22, no. 12, 2020, pp. 2050-2069.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1461444820958123>

This paper examines the banned r/The_Donald subreddit, and it analyzes how Reddit’s upvoting and downvoting algorithm causes the formation of a collective identity. The authors use thematic analysis on a upvoted sample versus a random sample of comments to show that the upvoting process created an echo chamber that promoted extremist views. I think this article is recent (2020) and relevant because it demonstrates exactly how Reddit’s algorithm can amplify content and reinforce identity, which can increase hostility and distrust toward external groups.

I think I will use this article as a counterpoint for my research on r/aliens. I think the mechanism in r/aliens is similar but softer because of the memetic content. This piece helps establish the precedent that Reddit’s structure can engineer a shared group identity defined by a common enemy (in my case, the government). I think I can use their framework of how upvoting reinforces group narratives to explain how upvoting alien memes reinforces the shared narrative that the government is inherently lying to them.

Proferes, Nicholas, et al. "A systematic review of Reddit research: Disciplines, methods, and ethics." *Social Media + Society*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2021.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/20563051211019004>

This article is a review of 727 academic manuscripts between 2010 and 2020 that used Reddit as a data source. They support their argument using statistics on publication growth and data collection techniques like Pushshift API. This is recent (2021) and relevant because it validates Reddit as a platform for serious research, especially regarding political and sensitive topics. I think it has a useful overview of the existing scholarly landscape.

This article is useful for my introduction and methodology. I think it helps justify why I chose Reddit as my primary research space, as it shows Reddit is a major platform for studying political communication and online communities. I can say that a unique, niche community like **r/aliens**, which blends politics, speculation, and irony, is underrepresented in systematic studies, which is why this research is important.

De Francisci Morales, Gianmarco, et al. "No echo in the chambers of political interactions on Reddit." *Scientific Reports*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2021.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-81531-x>

This study uses logistic regression to investigate political interactions between Clinton and Trump supporters on the r/politics subreddit during the 2016 election. The argument is that the network showed heterophily (cross group interaction) instead of echo chambers. However, the authors noted that these cross cutting interactions were often hostile and might lead to a "backfire effect," where exposure to opposing views increases polarization. This article is credible (Nature, 2021) and relevant because it complicates the "echo chamber" narrative on Reddit.

I think I will use this piece to analyze the type of interaction I see on r/aliens. If I observe memes criticizing government disclosure, I can ask if these are just for internal group affirmation, or are they designed to provoke and interact with external groups? I think this research gives a technical and psychological basis to argue that charged, memetic content intensifies political segregation, which might be contributing to government distrust among users.

Smith, Peter. "NO LAUGHING MATTER: UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINING IRONY POISONING." *Canadian Anti-Hate Network*, 5 Jan. 2023.

https://www.antihate.ca/understanding_defining_irony_poisoning

This article, which isn't academic, talks about the concept of "irony poisoning." It says that this is a phenomenon where individuals become so entangled in layers of irony regarding hateful or extreme content that the distinction between the joke and sincere belief disappears. The author uses interviews with experts in misinformation and examples from extremist figures like Nick

Fuentes. I think it's relevant and recent (2023) because it provides the theoretical vocabulary for the core mechanism of my research question.

I think I can use this article to define the key terms of my argument. I think that the memetic content I observe on r/alien can be described as "irony poisoning," where jokes about the "Deep State" covering up UFOs are initially lighthearted but slowly become internalized as sincere distrust toward authority.