



Deplatforming and its determinants

Presentation

By Murad Ahmed



What is Deplatforming?

- “Deplatforming” emerged as a new “form” of private censorship that is usually concerned with the internet (social media) and to lesser degree mass media
- Online platforms such as Twitter have been engaging in “Deplatforming” Lebanese politicians, Burmese generals and even some right-wing US politicians for a long time [New York Times, 2021].
- The most notable recent example of Deplatforming is the banning of then-US President Donald Trump from using Twitter.



The problem with Deplatforming

- The motivating context: Deplatforming of political leaders/groups
- Do people support Deplatforming in principle?
- Do people view different dimensions, social, financial and technical, of Deplatforming differently or equally?
- What are the determinants of the attitudes towards Deplatforming?



Research Approach

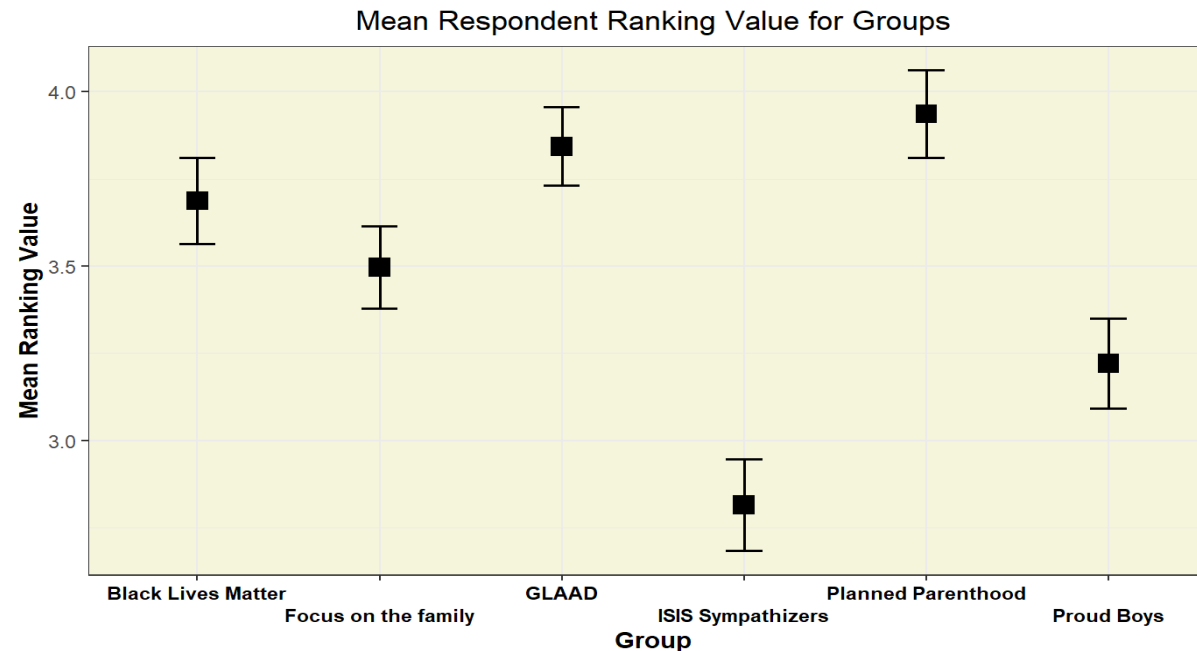
- Online survey (Amazon MTurk) of 688 American respondents
- Asking respondents to rank 6 groups from least to most liked
- Treatment/control experimental design such that respondents were randomly assigned either treatment or control
- Treatment is asking respondents questions about deplatforming their least liked group while control is asking respondents questions about deplatforming their most liked group in accordance with the Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus methodology (1979, 1982)
- Comparing attitudes before and after experiment as well as treatment vs control.

Basic demographics and determinants

Variable/Covariate								
Age	Under 18	18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55 – 64	65 – 74	75 – 84
	0.145%	3.49%	42.3%	30.6%	13.4%	7.7%	2.18%	0.145%
Gender	Male 62.5%	Female 37.5%						
Education	Less than high school	High school graduate	Some college	2-year degree	4-year degree	Professional degree	Doctorate	
	0.145%	7.27%	11.8%	7.85%	57%	14.1%	1.89%	
Liberal /conservative measure	Extremely liberal	Moderately liberal	Slightly liberal	Neither liberal nor conservative	Slightly conservative	Moderately conservative	Extremely conservative	
	16.3%	23.7%	14.8%	11%	11%	13.7%	9.44%	
Party Leaning	Republican	Democrat	Independent	Something else				
	24.1%	56%	18.8%	1.16%				
Political Activity in the past year*	0	1	2	3	4			
	8.28%	26.7%	19.9%	21.2%	23.8%			
Ethnicity	White, Non-Hispanic	African American	Latino or Hispanic	Asian	Native American	Two or more	Other/Prefer not to say	
	76.6%	8.87%	4.07%	6.1%	1.89%	1.6%	0.87%	
Religion	Buddhism	Christianity	Hinduism	Islam	Judaism	None	Other	
	1.16%	64.4%	1.01%	0.87%	1.02%	28.3%	3.2%	
Degree of religiousness	Not religious	Slightly religious	Moderately religious	Very religious				
	32.8%	18%	23.8%	25.3%				

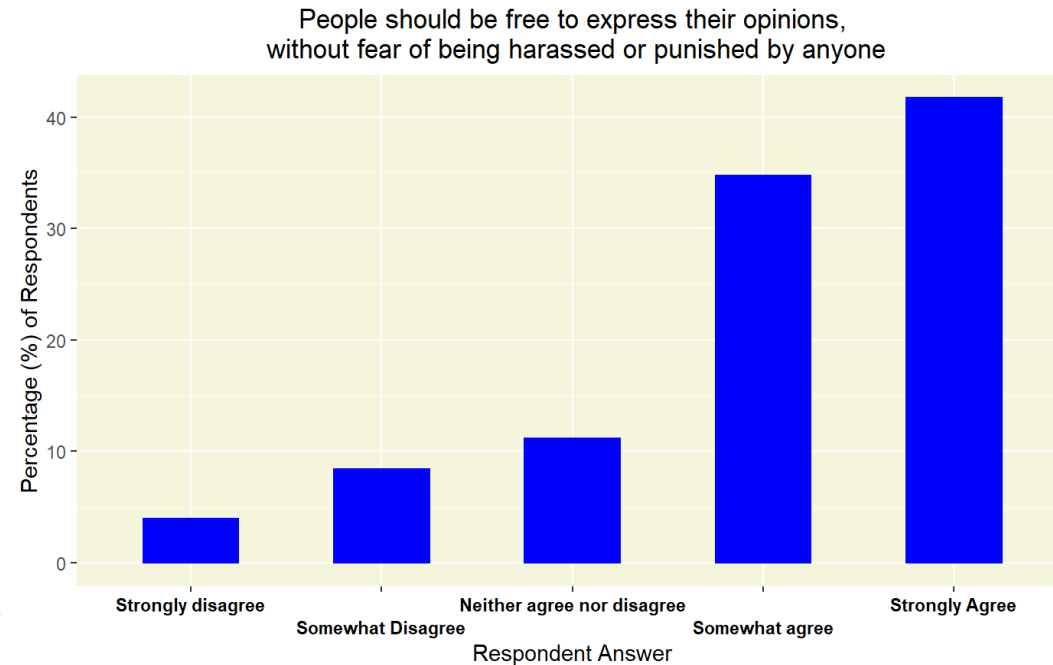
Group ranking

We observe that on average, Planned Parenthood and GLAAD rank the highest among respondents. The mean rankings between those groups are not significantly different as we observe from their overlapping confidence intervals. They are followed by Black Lives Matter and a bit below it is the Focus on the Family organization. The lowest ranked group is the ISIS Sympathizers group. It is neither right or left leaning and comprises of people in the US who support the Islamic terrorist organization, ISIS, and its activities. The Proud Boys, an extreme right-wing group preaching white nationalism, is ranked higher; however, overall, fifth.



Deplatforming in principle

We observe that about 40% of the respondents strongly agree with the sentiment that people should voice their opinions freely, followed by 35% who somewhat agree. Overall, about 75% of our respondents agree to some extent with that sentiment while about 12% neither agree nor disagree and only about 13% overall at least somewhat disagree. We move to the experiment to see if these numbers or sentiments are reciprocated or not towards Deplatforming.

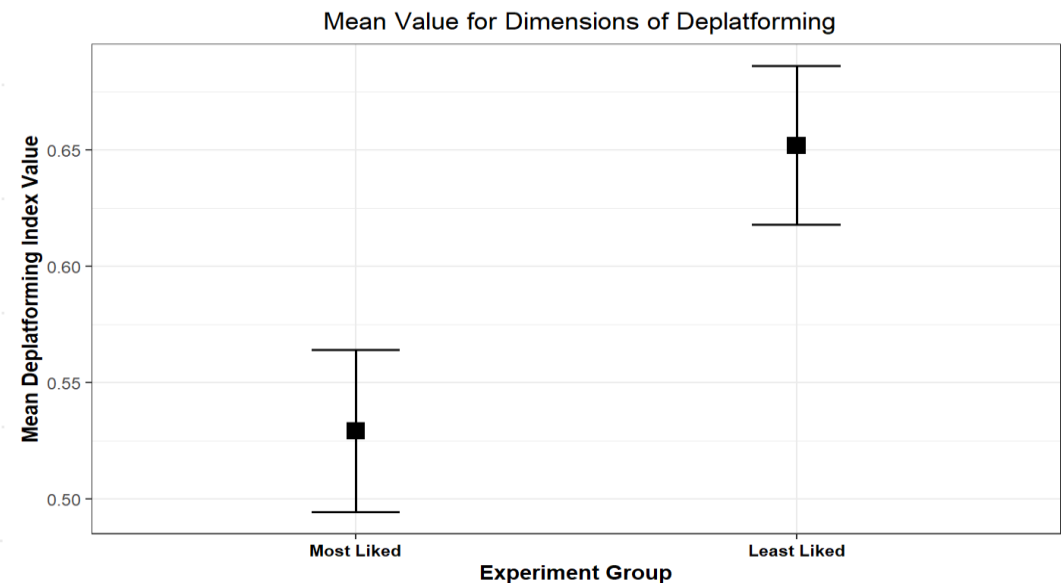


Deplatforming within the experiment

The table shows that the difference between the two experimental groups among all three dimensions of Deplatforming is significant. This indicates that the people become more supportive of Deplatforming on social media when asked about their least liked groups than when asked about their most liked groups with an effect of 0.49, about a half point on the Likert scale.

Dimension of Deplatforming	Average Treatment Effect (Mean of Least – Mean of Most)	T-Test p-value	Statistical Significance at the 95% confidence level
Social Media	$3.6 - 3.11 = 0.49$	Approx. Zero	Significant
Online Financial Services	$3.67 - 3.06 = 0.61$	Approx. Zero	Significant
Application Development	$3.56 - 3.18 = 0.38$	0.000615	Significant
Deplatforming Index	$3.61 - 3.12 = 0.49$	Approx. Zero	Significant

The plot clearly shows the effect that we previously calculated in the table but on a new (0-1) scale reflecting all three dimensions. We observe that on average those in the most liked group have a Deplatforming Index of about 0.53 which is a neutral attitude towards Deplatforming; however, the average Deplatforming Index for the least liked groups is about 0.65 which corresponds to accepting Deplatforming. The difference between the two groups is significant



Regression Analysis (linear regression)

Regression Table

Variable Name	Coefficient	Standard Error	P-value	Significance
Gender (Male)	0.091022	0.038175	0.0174	95%
Moderately Conservative	-0.143167	0.072836	0.0489	95%
Political Activity	0.035798	0.017479	0.0410	95%

Insignificant potential determinants included in the model: age, education, political affiliation/leaning, ethnicity, religion, degree of religiousness.



Conclusions

- People's views on Deplatforming mainly vary according to their preference towards the deplatformed group; this contradicts their pre-treatment opposition to Deplatforming in principle
- ISIS Sympathizers and the Proud Boys are the least liked groups on average
- Gender, ideological leaning and the frequency of political activity are determinants of the Deplatforming index
- Males and those frequently engaged in political activity are more likely to support Deplatforming, while moderate conservatives are less likely to support Deplatforming.

Experiment integrity test

This plot reflects the differences between the most liked and least liked groups before exposing them to the deplatforming experimental questions. We can see that there is no significant difference between the groups before treatment assignment, indicating that any significant different would be most likely attribute to the treatment assignment and not any potential confounding variables.

