*How does text provide insight into the workings of online communities? What are possible pitfalls in analyzing text obtained from social media platforms?*

The authors of this article focused on the large number of communities, or subreddits, found on the online Reddit platform. The authors found that norms are not only existent and followed in communities, but also emerge and can vary significantly depending on a particular audience. By analyzing moderated comments and text, the authors were able to gain insights into the workings of online communities. The authors found that there were macro norms that governed behavior across Reddit, meso norms that governed behavior within clusters of Reddit, and, lastly, micro norms that governed behavior and interactions in small pockets/communities within Reddit. Regarding possible pitfalls in analyzing text and attempting to understand community norms, text often poorly presents sarcasm and the context in which the comment was posted in. However, by using text to understand communities, despite these pitfalls, powerful tools could be created that aid in online moderation of a wide range of communities within the platform.

While this was a very interesting and unique article digging into the dynamics present within online communities, the authors made a note that perhaps was worthy of critique. The authors noted that “in an effort to protect Reddit itself from harm, we used only public data collected via Reddit’s official API.” This seems in contrast to a lot of the earlier readings and ethical considerations that have been raised throughout this course. While the authors did have an ethical consideration section in the paper that walked through their process and decision-making around using this form of data, they made no note that even though the data is public, Reddit users may not be aware their data is being used this way and most likely provided no consent for it to be used. While I do believe that the authors minimized harm, these ethical considerations will always be important to consider when pulling public data, especially in ways that ordinary platform users may not be aware of or would consent to if they were aware of the process.

While the authors do note that norms can change overtime, this research has clear benefits for moderating and perhaps even creating online communities moving forward. With the identified macro, meso, and micro norms, it’d be possible to design online communities with these serving as an effective framework. However, someone attempting to establish this framework would need to be wary of some of the less desirable norms that exist, such as comment removal associated with moderator approval, etc. Overall, this was unique research that would play an important role in future online community development. With current day discussions often centered around free speech and moderation on social media platforms, how norms emerge and how moderation is applied based on these norms will continue to be relevant.