

HG2052

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## Abstract

As of 12<sup>th</sup> September 2014, according to Reddit's official website, Reddit has had 135,017,412 unique visitors from 201 countries and with a total number of 5,548,038,847 page views. Reddit has seemed to become a prime medium of online communication. The various subreddits allow people to immerse themselves into a community that is catered towards their interests, while also giving them the freedom to discover new interests, or learn about the thinking process of a group of people that one does not necessarily agree with. Another reason for Reddit's high traffic is its role in the dispersion of real-time, international news and the phenomena of citizen journalism.

The web has enabled an increase in the use of computer-mediated discourse (CMD) of many different types. Herring (2007) defines CMD as “online language and language use”. CMD is driven by computer-mediated communication (CMC), a “predominantly text-based human-human interaction mediated by networked computers or mobile telephony (Herring, 2007)”. One of this invention is the website Reddit, which content is driven by online users. Content on Reddit is primarily created and controlled by the users. People sitting behind their computer screens are the ones that dictate what is available on Reddit and also what is popular on it. The content is also divided into different subpages, called SUBREDDITS. Reddit is run by a voting system which utilizes UPVOTES and DOWNVOTES. Not only are the posts themselves subjected to this scrutiny and judgement, the comments left on each individual posts are as well. Users are able to collect these scores, called KARMA through leaving comments on posts and having other users upvote them. Karma is derived through the averaging of the total number of upvotes and downvotes that a particular comment generates. For example, if a comment has 100 upvotes and 20 downvotes, the comment’s karma will be displayed as 80 points.

The main form of communication on Reddit is through the comment threads. People have conversations that are open to everyone on the internet, and people can join in at any time and direct their response to any person. Comments that have more karma or seen as soon one enters the page of an individual post, while sub-comments with a lower karma are hidden under a ‘load more comments’ link. The user also has the freedom to choose how the comments are arranged from four different options: new, hot, controversial and top.



Figure 1. Layout of a comment thread.

Figure 1 shows the layout of a typical comment posted on a Reddit. This comment thread was taken from a popular subreddit called R/ASKREDDIT. This subreddit's content is completely user generated, with posts asking questions ranging from humorous and casual to more serious and solemn. The subreddit also utilizes another feature of posts on Reddit – the TAG system. Individual posts on each subreddit can be assigned specific tags that the moderators for each subreddits have created. On r/askreddit, there is a serious tag, which requires the comments on the posts to be answering the question asked and for the comments directed at individual answers to not contain jokes and be relevant to the content of the answer. The serious tag is especially important considering the ease of commenting on Reddit, and helps to minimize the amount of possible problems.



Figure 2. Ranges of questions and use of the serious tag.

As of 12<sup>th</sup> September 2014, according to Reddit's official website, Reddit has had 135,017,412 unique visitors from 201 countries and with a total number of 5,548,038,847 page views. Reddit has seemed to become a prime medium of online communication. The various subreddits allow people to immerse themselves into a community that is catered towards their interests, while also giving them the freedom to discover new interests, or learn about the thinking process of a group of people that one does not necessarily agree with. Another reason for Reddit's high traffic is its role in the dispersion of real-time, international news and the phenomena of citizen journalism. Posts that are garnering upvotes exponentially are pinned on to the front page, and subreddits like R/NEWS allow users access to global and local events quickly and easily. Additionally, they are given a real-time platform to discuss about ongoing happenings in the world with others from all over the world. They might even have the opportunity to get a first-hand account from someone who was involved in a particular event, even though they are on the other side of the world.

Research done on Reddit or using Reddit as a case study has centralized around the nature of the communication that happens on Reddit, and the consequences of such a nature, be it good or bad. The concept of TROLLING and the subsequent analysis of its discourse and language use is one major part of the research. Merritt (2012) worked on this in her thesis, through the application of traditional conversation and discourse analysis methods on to such computer-mediated discourse. Reddit has also been in the centre of research that focused on the reliance of its information collection, through more empirical studies (Lerman, 2006) and through studies that also focus on the nature of the Reddit community (Mills, 2011). Much research can still be done using specific computer-mediated discourse skills to tackle the intricate use of language on Reddit and its impact on its community.

The nature of Reddit – user-generated content and an emphasis on earning scores for the simple act of communication – means that communication on Reddit, along with its language use, contains differences from other mediums of communications that are based off a more traditional style of communication, such as email. Crystal in his 2001 book, *Language and The Internet*, came up with seven features to differentiate between speech-like and text-like mediums of communication. Using this seven features, communication on Reddit seems to lean towards being more text-like, though in many contexts, they also embody almost all of the characteristics of speech-like communication. This is due to the various type of discourse found on Reddit itself, due to the range of subreddits that are present on the site. Communication on Reddit can be both spontaneous and contrived, depending on the content and the mood of the post itself. It can also be loosely constructed and socially interactive. However, communication on Reddit is strictly space bounded and visually decontextualized.

Communication on Reddit, primarily done through comment threads (though there are existence of private messages (PMs)) seems to sit in between a continuum bounded by email and instant messaging (IM). If we were to compare Reddit to IM, both are almost instantaneous in their transference of messages. However, it is similar to email as there are no expectations for the recipient of comment to reply quickly or even at all. Comment threads resemble replies on a discussion board, except for the fact that they are more interactive on a larger scale due to the organization of the replies. It can be argued, however, that they do not facilitate long conversations as much.

Directing our attention back to the interaction between language and such new forms of communication, Reddit's system of communication does seem to affect the way language – predominantly English – is used in discourse. A key thing that drives communication on Reddit is the karma system. Since people are judged on everything little thing they comment and say on the site, people strive to make themselves either funny or likable. A funny quip towards a comment can give one more karma than the original comment itself garners. On Reddit, especially on subreddits that are heavily populated, being short, funny and sweet is how communication goes.



Figure 3. Example of the type of humour on Reddit.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are also more serious subreddits like R/ASKHISTORIANS, a place for people to ask questions about history and whose rules contain a strict guideline on how the answers given and even the questions asked should be. Answers are expected to be insightful but not personal, and preferably with sources and the corresponding citations. Subreddits and their seriousness exist on a spectrum, and even the most serious of them have people garnering karma through a witty one-liner, unless of course, the subreddit moderators have established a rule that only relevant and informative comments should be made.

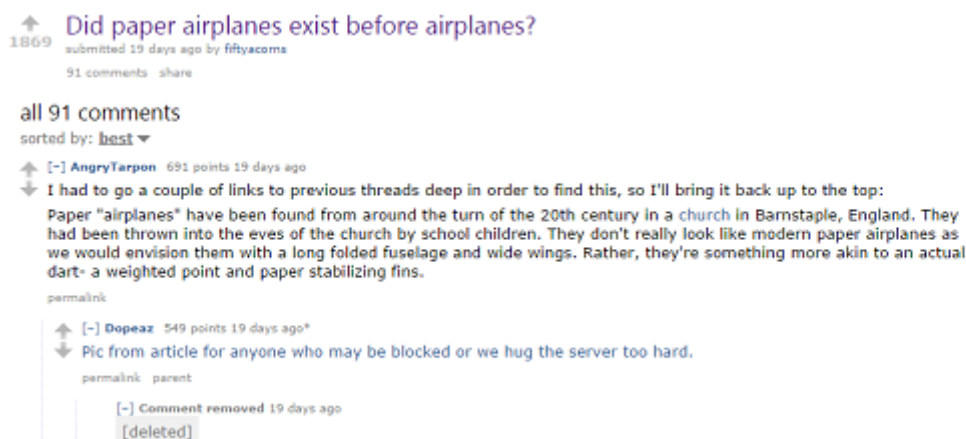


Figure 4. Example of a serious subreddit, with an irrelevant comment deleted.

While the incentive of accumulating karma and even possibly being gifted GOLD works as a way to guarantee that the best insights and the funniest comments of a post are generated and seen, it is also the source of multiple attempts by users to manipulate the voting system so as to generate more karma and thus give themselves more recognition.

The existence of such a large number of subreddits and the ease of accessing the majority of them also results in the formation of “inside jokes”. A comment or idea that has caught on in a subreddit can be referenced in another in reference to something said in that subreddit that links back or has a hint of what the original “joke” contained. Jokes can even be utilized in the same post itself, especially if the post has garnered a large amount of comments. Users define this phenomena as GOING META.

As a medium of communication, specifically online, computer-mediated communication, Reddit is continuously growing in use and popularity. More research should be done on Reddit in the future, to further our understanding of how people interact through a medium like this. It might just prove useful to further our knowledge of computer-mediated discourse.

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