

Reddit communities to 'go dark' in protest over third-party app charges

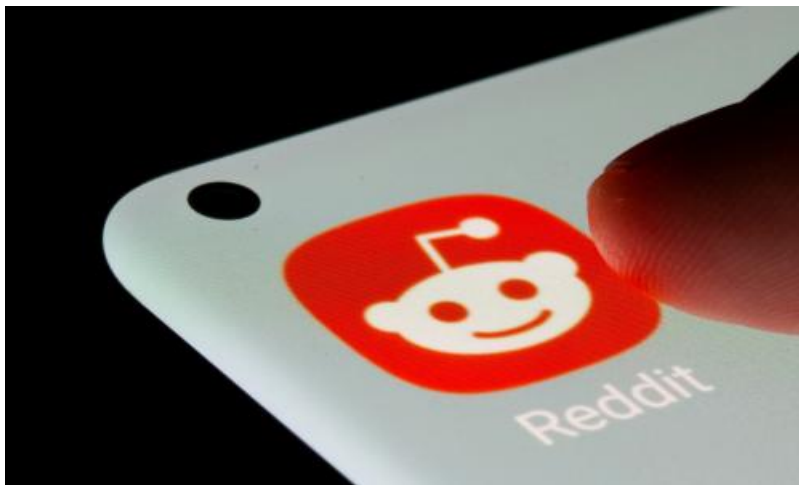
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Some of the largest communities on Reddit will lock their doors in protest at the social news site's decision to try to monetise access to its data. More than 3,000 subreddits have joined the protest, and will go "private" on Monday, preventing anyone outside the community from seeing their posts. Forums such as r/todayilearned, r/funny and r/gaming, with more than 30 million subscribers apiece, have signed up to join the campaign, while others with 1 million plus members, including r/iPhone and r/unexpected, have already closed their doors in anticipation of the strike. The protest is over a set of forthcoming changes to the site's "API", which lets other companies use reddit data in their own products and services. The changes will introduce huge charges for "premium access", effectively killing off popular third-party Reddit apps such as Apollo, which lets users browse the site with a customisable interface. Such apps would need to charge about \$5 (£4) a user each month simply to pay the new fees to Reddit, Apollo's sole developer, Christian Selig, has estimated. A similar conflict played out at Twitter in the 2010s. Both services have a core of diehard users who rely on third-party apps, which ultimately undercut the ad-supported business model of the social network. But the Reddit conflict is primarily driven by another clash: that between the social network and AI companies such as OpenAI, which have scraped huge amounts of data from the service to train their systems. "The Reddit corpus of data is really valuable," Steve Huffman, founder and chief executive of Reddit, told the New York Times in April. "But we don't need to give all of that value to some of the largest companies in the world for free." In a group statement, the moderators of the thousands of subreddits that were joining the protest said: "On June 12th, many subreddits will be going dark to protest this policy. Some will return after 48 hours: others will go away permanently unless the issue is adequately addressed, since many moderators aren't able to put in the work they do with the poor tools available through the official app. This isn't something any of us do lightly: we do what we do because we love Reddit, and we truly believe this change will make it impossible to keep doing what we love."