

# “Did you suspect the post would be removed?": Understanding User Reactions to Content Removals on Reddit

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# Goal

Understand content moderation  
from the perspective of  
moderated end-users

# Why Study Moderated Users?

- End-users are the central actors
- Crucial to have users who are invested
- Understanding concerns may open opportunities for nurturing valuable contributors

# Factors That May Shape User Reactions

- Elements of submission
  - e.g., Are there community rules?
- Elements of removal
  - e.g., Removal explanations

# Research Questions

- How do users perceive post removals?
- How do factors like community rules and removal explanations affect:
  - Perceptions of **fairness** of post removals
  - Attitudes about **posting again** in the future

# Main Contributions

From the perspective of end-users, fairness is associated with:

- Clear set of rules
- Getting informed when post removals occur
- Receiving explanations for post removals



reddit

# Why Reddit?

- 1000's of sub-communities
- Variety of approaches to content moderation
- Provides a rich site to study how these differences affect attitudes

# Survey

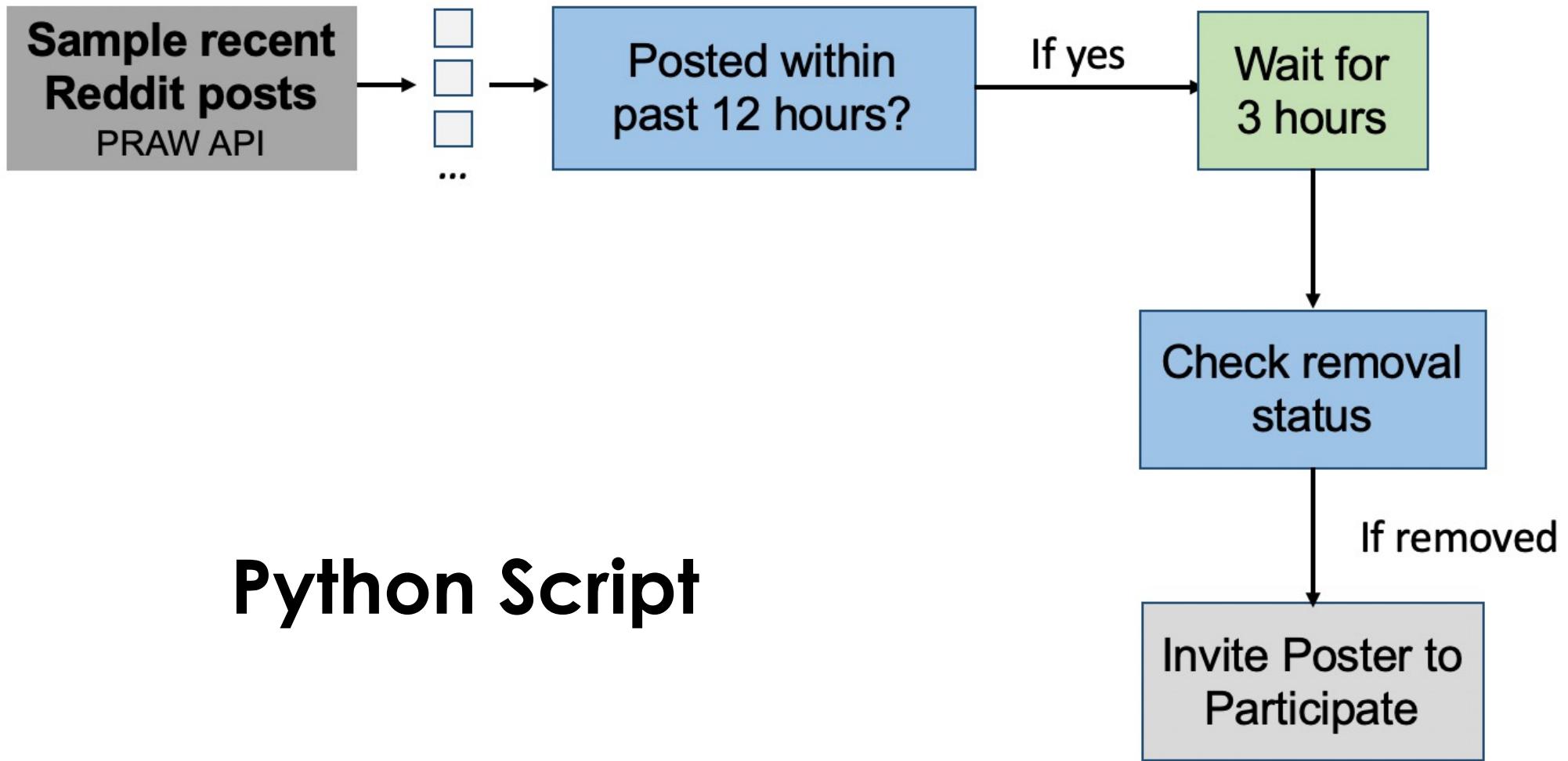
907 Reddit users who experienced  
content removals

# Data Collection Goals

- Submission should be recent
- Enough time should have passed for moderators to review post



Survey request sent 3-10 hours  
after post submission



# Python Script

# Survey Questions

- Multiple Choice Questions
- Quantitative analyses
- Open-ended Questions:
  - e.g., “Please explain how you feel about the post removal”
  - Qualitative analyses

# Quantitative Analysis

**How are different contextual factors  
associated with:  
(1) Perceptions of fairness of post removals, &  
(2) Attitudes about posting again in the future**

Linear Regression Models

# Dependent Variables

## ○ Fairness

Q - I think that the removal was fair:

- a) Strongly Agree    b) Agree    c) Neutral
- d) Disagree    e) Strongly Disagree

## ○ Post Again?

Q - How likely are you to post again on this subreddit after this experience?

- a) Very likely    b) Likely    c) Neutral
- d) Not likely    e) Very unlikely

# Independent Variables: Groups

- Posting Context
- Community Guidelines
- Removal Explanations

# Selection of Independent Variables

- Open to direct interpretation
- Based on Intuitions developed through serving as moderators
- Our analytic approach is primarily exploratory

# Control Variables

- Demographics (collected through survey)
  - Age
  - Education
  - Gender
- Prior History (collected using Reddit API)
  - Reddit karma
  - Time on Reddit (in days)
  - Number of submissions posted on Reddit
- Not controlled for other relevant factors

# Insights

# Posting Context

Q – Before you started this survey, did you notice that this submission was removed?:

- a) Yes
- b) No

Fairness	Post Again?
$\beta = 0.265^{***}$	Not significant

# Community Rules

Q – Does the subreddit you posted to contain rules?:

- a) Yes
- b) No

Fairness	Post Again?
$\beta = 0.068^*$	Not significant

# Community Rules

Q – Did you read the rules of the subreddit before posting?:

- a) *Strongly Agree* b) *Agree* c) *Neutral* d) *Disagree* e) *Strongly Disagree*

Fairness	Post Again?
$\beta = -0.314^{***}$	Not significant

# Community Rules

Q – Are the rules of the subreddit clear?

- a) *Strongly Agree* b) *Agree* c) *Neutral* d) *Disagree* e) *Strongly Disagree*

Fairness	Post Again?
$\beta = 0.170^{***}$	$\beta = 0.223^{***}$

# Removal Explanations

Q - Did you receive an explanation for why your post was removed?:

a) Yes b) No

Good news for mods who provide explanations!

Fairness	Post Again?
$\beta = 0.384^{***}$	$\beta = 0.088^*$

# Qualitative Findings

# Frustration about the Post Removals

*“I am autistic and it takes significant effort for me to write up things to communicate effectively and in a way that will be received well. I feel sad that my effort in making that post was for nothing and that no one will see it and no one will reply with any help or advice.”* - Poster on r/disability sub

# Perception of moderation as unjust

- Folk theories about content moderation
  - Folk theories are intuitive, informal theories that individuals develop to explain the outcomes of technological systems (Devito et al.)
- Suspicions of political bias

# Acceptance of Removal as Appropriate

- “I felt bad that I had not read the rules and posted inappropriately.”

# Difficulties Complying with the Rules

- Difficult to follow rules that are:
  - imprecise,
  - subjective, or
  - require a lot of effort to comply with
- Reasoning behind rule creation unclear.

# Takeaways

# Community Rules

- We add evidence to the value of establishing community rules
- Attributes of rules that are important to end-users:
  - Clarity
  - Reason why each rule is created
  - Effort needed to comply with the rules

# Accounting for users' folk theories

- Users often develop folk theories about moderation
- Folk theories influence user behavior
- More examination is needed for how users create folk theories
- Best practices should account for folk theories

# Transparency of Moderation

- Transparency is a key concern
- Explanations ~ Better attitudes
- Explanation can be an educational experience

# Did you suspect the post would be removed?"

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Questions?



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