

Christopher Puszkar

Professor Longhany

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Literature Review

Introduction:

The defining characteristic of our generation is social networking through the Internet. If desired, essentially every positive, negative, interesting, or mundane piece of information can be shared. The issue, presently, is that many people are also sharing their political views on these sites and subjecting others to their own biases. Over the past eight months this trend drastically increased due to the election. My question is: How are social networking sites, like Reddit, affecting how this generation perceives political discourse. The following is a portfolio displaying ideas formed by multiple scholars on this subject.

The Reddit:

Over the years many different social websites have surfaced and gained popularity. Reddit appears to be among the most unique as its main purpose is to be a collection of information posted by its users. Reddit has changed the way people interact with information by vastly expanding the amount available (Cohen, Haythornthwaite). Caroline Haythornthwaite, a

professor of Information Science at the University of Illinois, also believes that it is “transforming the news medium” because it allows “people to interact with data that would normally be restricted to them” (12).

Political Discourse Outlets:

Scholars agree that knowledge based communities, such as Reddit, have been positive additions to the way people receive information. Reddit is unique in that it has multiple communities called Subreddits. K. Lerman found that these communities always form around topics of mutual interest, like politics (52). Thus, /r/Politics was born and has served as a bipartisan hub for political discussions on Reddit.

/r/Politics:

/r/Politics shows how a central interest is politics, but within this category there are many differing opinions and interests; or are there? (Gaylord, Lerman). K. Lerman did a study on knowledge based communities with point systems (like Reddit), and found that people will post things that contradict what they actually think in order to gain these virtual points. In addition, he discovered that in matters as controversial as politics divisions are created and the sides with more people will win the discussion (87). The subreddit has the third most amount of subscribers out of any other subreddit and articles make the front page of Reddit numerous times a day.

Liberal Bias:

Knowledge based communities thrive on contributions that are agreeable to the masses. (Gaylord, Lerman). In /r/Politics’ case, the masses refer to whichever political party is dominant

through their amount of users. Through textual analysis I have determined that there are more Liberal users than Conservative ones. So much so, that Conservative views were voted down so far that people wouldn't see them. This censorship has caused any and every discussion to be one-sided in favor of Democrats.

The Psychology of Common Appraisal:

Scholars believe that highly popular stories can create a large impact on the population because it is an integral part of many lives within the younger generations (Cohen, Van Miegham). Piet Van Miegham's opinion differs slightly from Cohen's in that he believes even the voting, or appraisal system is biased. He has done extensive research on common appraisal systems where everyone could see how many votes were cast and found that "popularity score causes individual users to be biased in their voting behavior by the current score they observe" (87). Not only do people post what they think everyone will collectively appreciate, but if an article is popular many people will vote it up even further without reading or researching based solely on the score next to it.

The Hive-Mind:

It has been proven that the way people are perceiving political discourse on Reddit is highly biased by factors stemming from the site being a knowledge based community and having an open voting system. In conjunction, this has formed a radically different online community

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from any other. Scholars have coined the term 'The Hive-Mind' to describe it (Haythornthwaite,

Van Miegham). Van Miegham believes that this Hive-Mind is responsible for most biases found on the site (88).

Conclusion:

The topic of bias within the Reddit community has been thoroughly discussed, but how it's affecting the users has not. As shown, the previous scholars have laid the groundwork for my own research. My role in this conversation is to find out exactly how the 'Hive-Mind' is affecting the way users perceive their political discourse. This will translate directly into my research when I begin my textual analysis of articles, comments, and titles on Reddit to discover how it affects people. Once I am done with the textual analysis I will show the research to other people, one from each political viewpoint (Democrat, Republican, and Independent) and ask what they think about each piece of information.

Resources:

Burstein, Paul. "Social Networks And Voting: Some Israeli Data." *Social Forces* 54.4 (1976): 833-847. Academic Search Premier. Web. 7 Oct. 2012.

Cohen, Steven M. "What's In Your 'Buzz' Folder?." *Information Today* 26.9 (2009): 23. Academic Search Premier. Web. 19 Sept. 2012.

Gaylord, Chris. "Reddit Rises as Web's Best Conversation." *Christian Science Monitor* 13 Sept. 2012: 5 – 6

University of Illinois, 31 May 2009. Web. 21 Oct. 2012.

Lerman, K. "Social Information Processing in News Aggregation" Internet Computing, IEEE 6.11 (2007): 16 – 28. Web.

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Van Mieghem, Piet. "Human Psychology of Common Appraisal: The Reddit Score." IEEE Transactions on Multimedia 13.6 (2011): 1404-406. Print.