

Pop-up political advocacy communities on reddit.com: SandersForPresident and The Donald

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Abstract This paper explores two reddit communities that supported Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, respectively, in the run up to the 2016 US Presidential election campaign. Much of the paper is dedicated to explaining how reddit functions, describing the behaviour of the subreddit communities in question and then asking whether these demonstrated collective intelligence. Subreddit communities submit and vote on content, through their votes they make collective decisions about which content will be broadcast to their community. Large subreddit communities that formed rapidly to support a candidate in an election have not previously been observed on reddit—these offered an interesting context for the consideration of whether subreddit communities demonstrate collective intelligence. Voting is a key determinant of what happens on each subreddit and it is conducted anonymously, it is, therefore, not possible to understand the role(s) that every individual plays in the functioning of the subreddit. The behaviour of these subreddit communities can only be understood as a collective of submitting, commenting, voting and moderating participants. Whether these collectives behave intelligently is a matter of how one defines intelligence—but it is clear that they can be effective in pursuing certain ends. These collectives encounter and sometimes oppose each other on reddit. The community of Trump supporters in particular were in conflict with a number of other high-profile communities on the site, and also the platform's administrators.

Keywords Collective intelligence · Common good · Social news · Reddit.com · Distributed moderation · Public sphere · Presidential election

1 Introduction

Reddit is a social news platform that served 82.5 billion pageviews in 2015¹ and is now one of the top 30 most visited websites globally². Users (redditors) sign up for pseudonymous accounts and submit posts, comment on the posts of others, and vote content up or down. Votes are used to rank each item of content and determine how visibly it will be displayed. Reddit is composed of many subreddits (87,000 in 2015), each dedicated to a specific topic or purpose and operating with a degree of autonomy and independence.

Reddit's algorithms and pages are configured such that the votes of users select a small fraction of the submitted posts and broadcast these to the community at large. The participants in a subreddit make collective decisions about which posts will be broadcast to that subreddit's subscribers. The defining feature of a subreddit 'community' is that its members will tend to have been exposed to a similar set of posts, and these high-attention posts can be the basis of shared experiences (Sunstein 2009). This, I argue, is what allows communities on reddit to form quickly, reach large sizes, and still demonstrate a degree of cohesion.

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¹ <https://redditblog.com/2015/12/31/reddit-in-2015/>.

² Alexa.com, September 2016.

I looked initially at the */r/SandersForPresident*³ (*/r/SFP*) subreddit, which started growing rapidly in April 2015 and reached 176,000 subscribers by January 2016. During 2015, support for Bernie Sanders seemed to permeate reddit's user-base quite broadly, with many posts in favour of Sanders receiving high scores and appearing in visible locations. Section two of the paper considers */r/SFP* during this period.

Beginning in February 2016, a community of Donald Trump supporters began to make its presence felt on reddit through the */r/the_donald* subreddit. Sections three and four make comparisons between */r/SFP* and */r/the_donald*, while section five considers the nature of content and action on */r/the_donald*.

Although relatively small pro-Clinton communities existed on reddit (*/r/HillaryClinton* with 32,000 subscribers and */r/HillaryForAmerica* with 3000 subscribers in October 2016) these have not managed to grow or make themselves visible in the same way that */r/SFP* and */r/the_donald* have.

In addressing the theme of collective intelligence for the common good, I first consider what constitutes a collective and how the affordances and limitations of the reddit platform affect the communities that form there. I then consider whether these communities demonstrated collective intelligence. Finally, I consider whether the communities in question could be said to be acting for the common good.

The research presented here builds upon previous work investigating how reddit functions in practice generally (Mills 2014) and how it facilitated collective action in opposition to the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) in 2011/2012 (Mills and Fish 2015). The manner in which reddit's voting system and 'Hot' ranking algorithm function appeared to be unchanged since these were investigated in detail in 2011–2013 (Mills 2014), aside from a change in August 2015 that was quickly reverted (redd.it/3nv4v6⁴). However in June 2016 the way that the */r/all* page selects posts was changed, partly in response to */r/the_donald* seemingly gaming the system (see Sect. 4).

2 */r/SandersForPresident*: April 2015 to January 2016

The research reported in this section is based primarily on records of 62,981 posts submitted to the */r/SFP* subreddit between June 2014 and January 2016. I consider how */r/SFP* members approached the task of campaigning for Sanders, what they used their subreddit for and how they organised (or not).

³ The */r/* prefix is a way of referring to a subreddit on reddit, <http://www.reddit.com/r/SandersForPresident> will take one directly to the 'Hot' page for that subreddit.

⁴ This is a short-form link to a specific reddit post.

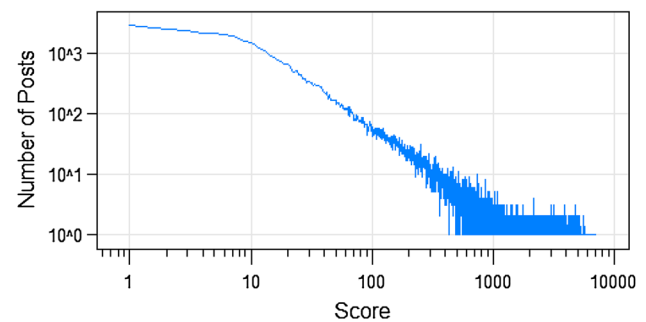


Fig. 1 Distribution of score between */r/SandersForPresident* posts, April 2015–January 2016. Both of the axes are logarithmically scaled, the y axis shows the number of posts that were last observed with a certain score. A *diagonal line* is indicative of a power law distribution. Subreddit score distributions tend to have a point where the slope of the line changes. This inflection point occurs because many submitted posts quickly slide into obscurity as they are pushed down the New page by subsequent submissions. Unless a post receives enough up-votes to earn a place on the Rising page before this happens they will no longer be seen and voted on (Mills 2014)

Many of the */r/SFP* community dynamics are similar to those observed in a similar case study of anti-SOPA activism on reddit conducted in 2011/2012 (Mills and Fish 2015). When posts are submitted on reddit they begin on a New page where the level of community attention and voting tends to be low, before a post is pushed down this page by subsequent submissions it must receive enough votes to appear on the Rising page if it is to remain active. Posts which score⁵ well initially are also shown on the Rising page, where visibility tends to be higher. Reddit's Hot algorithm is used to select posts for display on the site's 'Front Page'⁶, */r/all*⁷, and for the 'Hot' page shown when a user browses to a particular subreddit (e.g., <http://www.reddit.com/r/SandersForPresident>).

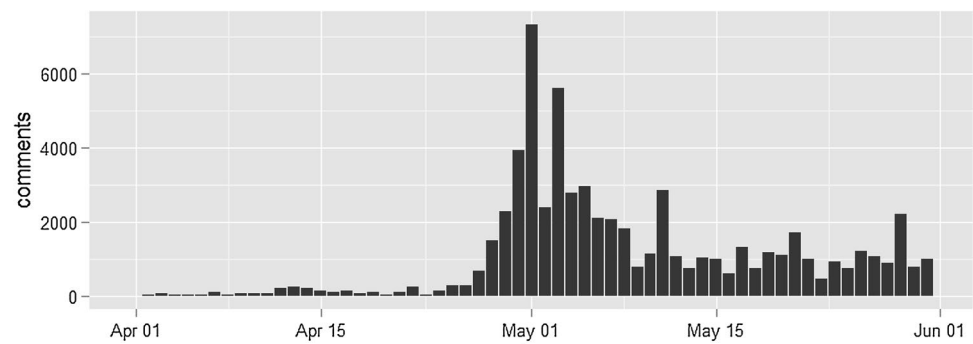
The 'Hot' pages are by far the most visible on reddit, and the algorithm used to select posts imposes a time penalty such that posts 'age' at a set rate, advantaging new posts and diminishing old posts. Posts that score very well early in their lifespan appear on Hot pages, and when they do the increased voting rates on these pages tends to keep them there for a number of hours, but the time penalty imposes an upper limit of around 24 h on the age of posts that can appear on these pages (Mills 2014). The way that the Hot algorithm works leads to a highly skewed distribution of

⁵ Number of up-votes less number of down-votes.

⁶ For people signed into an account, this shows "Hot" posts from subreddits they subscribe to. For people who aren't signed into an account it shows posts from a set of "default" subreddits.

⁷ Shows posts from all (excluding "adult" flagged) subreddits as determined by "Hot" ranking.

Fig. 2 Number of comments per day on /r/SFP in April and May 2015



votes (and attention) between posts (see Fig. 1)—for /r/SFP the top scoring 1000 posts (2% of all submitted) accounted for 47% of all up-votes and 36% of all comments on the subreddit.

2.1 Early stages on /r/SFP (up to 30th April 2015)

/r/SFP was until April 2015 a small subreddit with around 50 posts and 500 comments per month. It should be noted that Bernie Sanders was a relatively familiar figure to /r/politics subscribers and had been warmly welcomed by redditors in an /r/IAmA⁸ interview the previous year (redd.it/24zdnn).

When Sanders announced his candidacy on April 30th he posted an announcement linking to his official site on /r/SFP (redd.it/34epu3). This was an important choice, and one which was likely reasoned out by Sanders' campaign. By making this post to /r/SFP, Sanders granted that subreddit a kind of endorsement, and when his post appeared at the top of /r/all this directed substantial numbers of redditors to that subreddit—many of whom would not have previously been aware of its existence. Levels of activity on the subreddit increased markedly in a few days—where it had been receiving less than 100 comments per day it was now receiving over 1000 comments daily on a regular basis (Fig. 2).

One can assume that a member of Sanders' campaign staff was 'reddit-savvy' and understood that a post to /r/SFP by Sanders himself would be up-voted enough to assure placement at the top of /r/all for a considerable period of time. The alternative would have been to submit the post to /r/politics, where it would probably have reached a larger reddit audience (being shown to politics subscribers, default Front page readers and /r/all readers)—but the members of this audience who were the most enthused

would have had nowhere to go and nothing to join. Sanders' act of submitting the announcement post to /r/SFP determined that subreddit as the place to go and community to join for redditors who were already "feeling the Bern". Posts on reddit are transient, even posts that attract millions of views and thousands of comments today will slip into obscurity and be difficult to find tomorrow. By posting his announcement on /r/SFP, Sanders raised the profile of this subreddit, and everyone who saw this post (and the enthusiasm in its comments) had an option to subscribe to the subreddit and make pro-Sanders content a part of their reddit experience going forward.

Sanders cemented the position of /r/SFP further when he participated in a second /r/IamA interview on 19th May and referenced the subreddit in his header post (redd.it/36j690). Again, this belies a strategy to Sanders' actions on reddit, capitalising on broadcast-level visibility in the short period when it is available—by channelling people who have just been won over or enthused by some of his answers on a popular /r/IamA post to a place where they can have a more sustained engagement with his campaign.

2.2 Considering the nature of content and action on /r/SFP

As /r/SFP is effectively a sub-community within the larger reddit user-base, moderators had the power to set and enforce rules about the type of content which was allowed. It was clear from the start that this was not a subreddit for debating the merits of Sanders' candidacy, but rather a community of activists seeking Sanders' election. The remainder of this section considers the ways in which the /r/SFP community and moderators used the tools available in their environment to pursue that end.

/r/SFP had one key rule that exerted significant influence over the nature of the content observed there—posts must relate to Sanders or his campaign—the subreddit's moderators took a firm stance on negative information about other candidates, seeking to emulate Sanders' own position on negative campaigning. These rules have been present since the first version of /r/SFP's rules were written

⁸ /r/IAmA is a subreddit where in each post a specific individual or group invites redditors to "Ask Me Anything", users submit questions as comments and vote on these to rank them, with the Original Poster (OP) answering the most popular questions.

Table 1 Percentage of /r/SFP posts linking to common social media domains, and the percentage of score and comments these posts accounted for

Domain	Youtube. com (%)	Imgur. com (%)	Twitter. com (%)	Facebook. com (%)	Self (%)
Posts	9	8	3	1.5	49
Score	6	12	11	2	30
Comments	5	9	7	1.1	50

on 3rd May 2015. They also appear to have been enforced, either through member voting or direct moderator action—because among the top-scoring posts reviewed not one was found that violated these rules.

Two observation periods were defined (April–June and July–August 2015) and the 200 top-scoring posts from each period were selected to be reviewed and coded in temporal sequence. Selecting the posts with the highest scores (or the most comments) allows one to review the posts which were most visible and influential during the period. The disadvantage of this approach is that one doesn't get a sense of which types of post are unpopular or poorly received by the community.

I paid particular attention to the period of the subreddit's most prolific growth from mid-April to early May—when a burgeoning community appeared over a period of days and began figuring out how they could coordinate to pursue their goal.

2.2.1 Social media

Almost half of all posts to /r/SFP in 2015 were 'self' posts (49%)—these are posts that do not link to an external URL, but contain a text entry written by the submitting user. Self posts accounted for 30% of all up-votes cast in the subreddit and 50% of all comments. Self posts do not link to an external source for the purpose of bringing this to the attention of community members, instead they are created directly by a community member and are often used to spark discussions and propose ideas. Self posts will be considered further in Sect. 2.2.4.

The remainder of this section considers more familiar forms of social media. Youtube (9%), Imgur⁹ (8%), twitter (3%) and Facebook (1.5%) links together accounted for 21.5% of posts submitted to /r/SFP. Twitter posts received higher scores and more comments on average than the three other types, although Imgur posts also scored well and received many comments. The level of discussion on Youtube posts was lowest (see Table 1).

⁹ Imgur is an image-hosting platform that is frequently used by redditors who want to submit a post that shows an image.

There is considerable variety in the type of content being linked to by these posts, within as well as between platforms. The use of Imgur is particularly varied, prominent post types including photographs of Sanders with a superimposed quote, photographs of newspaper pages that bear articles about Sanders (to inform others about this change in the media landscape), and photographs taken at Sanders' events by members, sometimes of/with Sanders himself.

Imgur was also being used as a means of reporting on campaigning actions taken by members, for example sharing an infographic they created about Sanders and Clintons' policies (redd.it/3jqot7), or a poster image they created (redd.it/3lkvr9). In common with all other domains, a post linking to imgur.com could also represent a call to action, for example by signing up for an event (redd.it/3afhlu).

A post linking to Twitter could also be a call to act, either by re-tweeting a particular message for some tactical purpose (redd.it/3gd9db—asking for re-tweets to promote Sanders' racial justice plan) or by contacting an individual through twitter (3redd.it/kgezb—to convince Ellen DeGeneres that Sanders is as strong on gender equality as Clinton).

The majority of high-scoring posts that linked to Twitter were tweets by well known individuals/groups that endorsed Sanders or made a positive comment about him (e.g., redd.it/3h76uq, redd.it/3ghz73).

Figure 3 shows a substantial increase in the number and prominence of posts linking to Twitter in late 2015. Underlying this is a trend which is common to all social media domains, but particularly strong for Twitter—a small, but significant proportion of content comes directly from Sanders or official channels. In total there were 320 posts in the period from April 2015 to January 2016 linking to tweets from Sanders' twitter accounts. These posts represent 0.5% of submissions to /r/SFP, but accounted for 2.2% of all comments and 3.4% of all up-votes cast in the subreddit. /r/SFP acted as an amplifier for this content, re-circulating it to /r/SFP subscribers who are primed to interact with it (Like, Retweet, View), boosting its visibility on the platform where it is hosted.

2.2.2 Official

In 2015 and January 2016, 810 posts to /r/SFP linked to the official berniesanders.com campaign website, accounting for 2.1% of all up-votes and 1.8% of all comments. These posts linked to information about Sanders' campaign, about his policies, or about events—successful posts linking to event pages tended to call on readers to attend the event.

Fig. 3 Levels of posting, voting and commenting activity for social media domains on /r/SFP by month

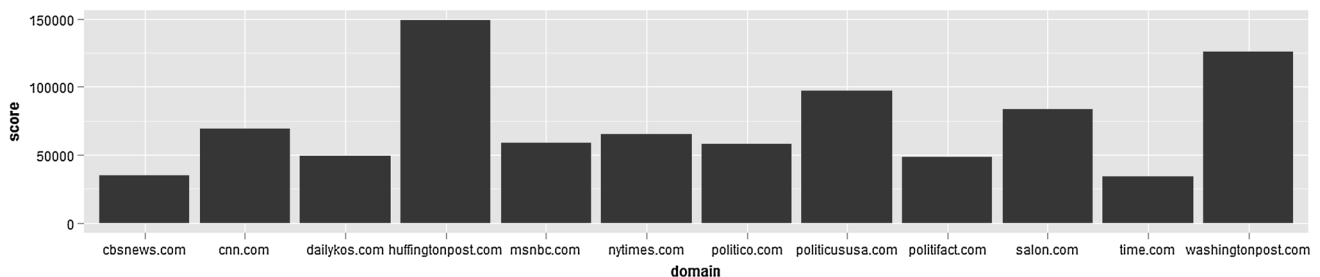
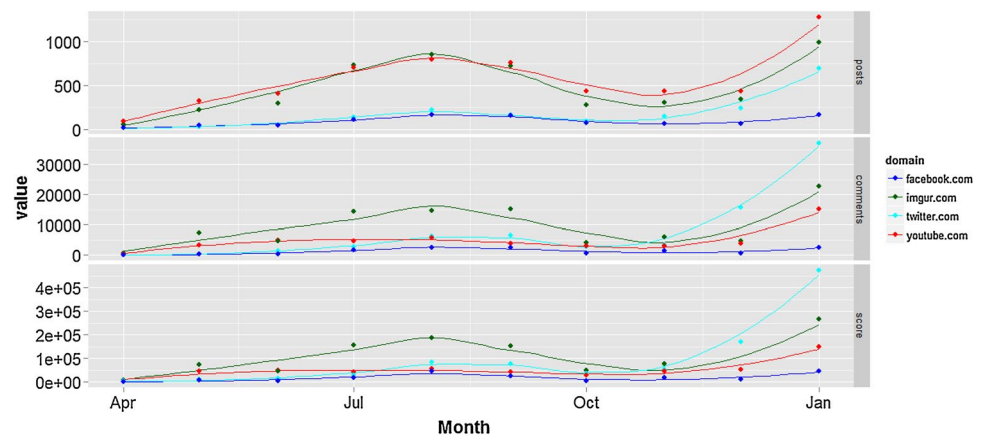


Fig. 4 Top-scoring news-related domains on /r/SFP

2.2.3 Information about Sanders and his campaign

Aside from self posts and posts linking to social media or official domains, the domains linked to most frequently on /r/SFP were news outlets. Figure 4 shows the domains with the highest aggregate scores on the subreddit.

There are several strong themes to news/information posts on /r/SFP. Of the top scoring 400 posts that were coded, 35 relate to polling and 44 posts link to write-ups about Sanders' campaign—by collectively up-voting these posts the /r/SFP community was choosing to broadcast information about the progress of the campaign to all of its members.

33 posts linked to information about Sanders' policies or a specific policy, and 21 linked to write-ups about Sanders' history. These “historical” posts are interesting because through them /r/SFP members explored their candidate's track-record back through the decades. Many posts also link to video recordings of old Sanders interviews or debates, and the /r/SFP community can be seen (in comments on these posts) to take pride in the fact that their candidate has consistently advocated for the issues they care about.

In the early stages, posts linking to articles about Sanders' policies and history served to inform /r/SFP subscribers and arm with them knowledge that they could use in

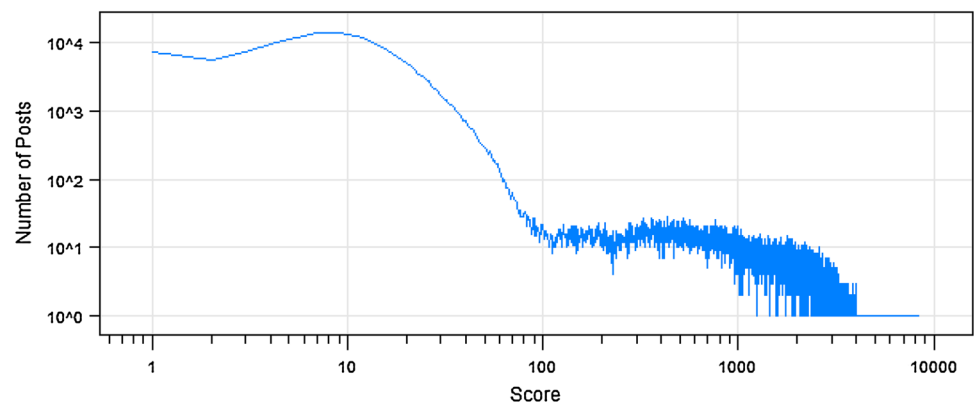
their campaigning. As /r/SFP's activity levels grew and it began to feature on /r/all (see Sect. 4) up-voting these posts also served to make pro-Sanders content visible to the population of reddit users who were not /r/SFP subscribers.

2.2.4 Community-generated content

Previous sections have explored how the /r/SFP community used the attention-directing tools at their disposal to promote pro-Sanders information from across the web. Around 50% of /r/SFP posts linked outside the subreddit, and the other 50% were self posts. This section considers how /r/SFP members attempted to organise and act in pursuit of their shared goal.

From the beginning of the observation period in April 2015, there are a steady stream of posts that attempt to organise the efforts of the newly forming /r/SFP community. On April 22nd, before the surge of activity when Sanders posted about his candidacy on the subreddit, its members were organising to promote their subreddit within the wider reddit user-base - through a successful \$1000 donation drive and advertising campaign (redd.it/33f0pu). The /r/SFP community effectively crowd-sourced the money, targeting strategy, copy and image for this campaign. This campaign seems to have been successful in

Fig. 5 The distribution of score between posts for /r/the_donald from February to June 2016 on logarithmic axes



raising subscriber numbers, according to a post from TrendingBot¹⁰ on April 29th informing the subreddit that it had the highest growth on the website for the previous day (redd.it/34a80r).

Immediately following Sanders' announcement there are active posts on /r/SFP seeking to organise the community and capitalise on their enthusiasm (e.g., redd.it/34ez82). Soon after the initial burst of activity, as the subreddit's membership swelled daily by the thousands, a high-scoring post made the case that the subreddit should be more active in supporting Sanders' campaign outside reddit (redd.it/36xxtr). Over time that sentiment, that the subreddit must aim for impact outside reddit, grew to become a very strong theme.

Posts about strategy are relatively common throughout the observation period and often scored well, whether these are ideas for a new campaign (redd.it/39aaih) or endeavour (redd.it/3dxnr4), or how to organise more effectively (redd.it/38jnb5). Many of the posts in this vein are not so much strategic discussions as they are direct calls to action, the most common actions being donating (redd.it/37ca90), signing petitions (redd.it/39tgfy), signing up for (redd.it/3afhlu) and attending events (redd.it/3c7ewx).

There are also posts in which people recount their own experience of participating in some pro-Sanders action (redd.it/34ivym) and these can sometimes receive many upvotes and supportive comments. The community's appreciation of these efforts is expressed through their votes and comments, and these become a potential reward for anyone who takes action for Sanders and posts about it on /r/SFP.

As observed with the SOPA case study (Mills and Fish 2015), a post which scored well did not always have the backing of the /r/SFP community. Many proposals that

were up-voted to high-visibility locations attracted critical comments that argued against the action proposed (redd.it/3dsfu2, redd.it/3e376m). There are indications that post voting on reddit tends to be quite fast and shallow, posts that sound exciting often attract big scores—whereas voting for comments, and the 'best' ranking algorithm, seems more able to promote high-quality or consensus opinions to the top of the list (Mills 2014). When a course of action is proposed on reddit, to stand any chance of being followed through with the backing of the community it must: (1) attract a high score and appear visibly for a long period, (2) receive many comments that endorse it (the more enthusiastically the better), and (3) have a means to capitalise on that enthusiasm, either immediately (sign a petition, donate) or over a longer period (invitation to join something that allows for sustained communication within a newly forming sub-group, like a new subreddit or some off-site group).

One of the more impressive 'products' of the /r/SFP community is a website (FeelTheBern.org) presenting Sanders' stances in relation to issues. On July 9th, a post (redd.it/3cpspg) was made asking for help to build a website showcasing Sanders' policies and history in relation to a wide variety of issues. On 12th August the same user returned to announce the launch of feelthebern.org (redd.it/3gpyxt), thanking over 125 volunteers for their help with creating it. Feelthebern.org is a significant resource that members of /SFP and other pro-Sanders groups could subsequently use when advocating for Sanders—in February 2016 it was still being maintained and linked to prominently within the subreddit.

Another theme familiar to reddit and found within /r/SFP relates to users conducting investigations or writing reports about a particular phenomenon. For example, redd.it/3hwa7h presents analysis of Hillary Clinton's Facebook likes and notes that most recent Likes come from countries where it is possible to buy cheap Likes.

¹⁰ A bot that looks up subreddit growth statistics (among other things) and makes posts about these at timed intervals. On reddit, content created by humans and machines co-exists undifferentiated within the same post and comment structures and regularly appears within close proximity.

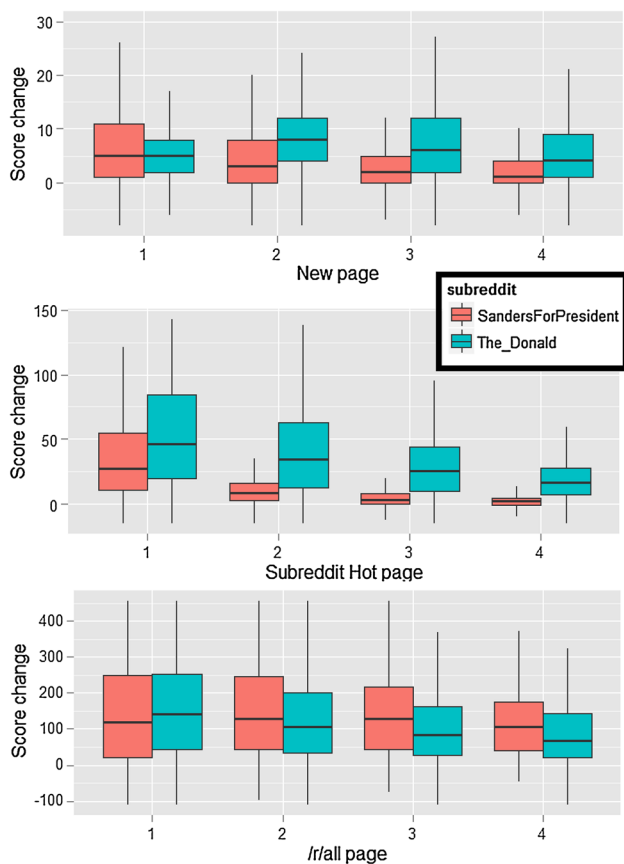


Fig. 6 Box plots showing median and quartile score changes (outliers omitted) for posts observed on the New and Hot pages for each subreddit, and the /r/all page. Observations were recorded at 30-min intervals, so the score change values reflect the number of up-votes (less down-votes) a post received in the previous 30 min. Page numbers assume the default of 25 posts per page, and so page 1 contains the posts ranked 1–25, page 2 contains those ranked 26–50, etc

3 Comparing /r/SFP and /r/the_donald

There are some informative high level comparisons that can be made between /r/the_donald and /r/SFP before considering the nature of the content submitted to /r/the_donald.

Looking at the distribution of voting scores between posts for /r/the_donald (Fig. 5) reveals an unusual pattern. The shape of this distribution on /r/SFP (Fig. 1) is similar to the shape I have observed for every subreddit I have analysed in this way going back to 2010. /r/the_donald's distribution is different, a score of one was not the most common score for a post submitted to /r/the_donald, this distribution peaks at a score of around 10. This suggests that there is something different about the way in which /r/the_donald members were voting.

As reddit voting is anonymous, there is no easy way to check whether /r/SFP and /r/the_donald voters behaved differently. Some insights can be derived by considering which page(s) a post appeared on each time it was

Table 2 Showing mean number of posts in April 2016 and their mean (and standard deviation) score, number of comments, and comment length

	/r/SandersForPresident	/r/the_donald
Posts	13,410	69,946
Score	319 (866)	119 (400)
Comments	36.7 (399)	9.7 (58)
Comment length	193 (304)	138 (429)

observed, and how much its score had changed since the previous observation. Observations were recorded every 30 min of the New page and Hot pages for each subreddit, and the /r/all page. For each observation point the post's score was compared to its previously observed score to see how much it had changed. Based on 1 million post observations for /r/the_donald and 725,000 observations for /r/SFP from March to June 2016, Fig. 6 was produced, showing box plots of the change in score observed when a post appeared on certain pages.

/r/SFP followed a familiar pattern whereby the voting rate quickly dropped off as one moves down the ranks on the New and Hot pages (Mills 2014). For /r/the_donald it makes much less difference whether a post appeared on the first, second, third or fourth page showing New or Hot posts. Even when a post appeared on the 4th iteration of these pages showing ranks 75–100, it was still receiving a number of up-votes similar to posts appearing at the top of the list.

On /r/the_donald, voting activity was spread much more evenly between different pages where posts are displayed. This indicates that some users may have been bulk up-voting posts on /r/the_donald—instead of browsing through pages, assessing each post, up-voting good posts and down-voting bad, these users may be quickly up-voting almost everything they see on these pages. This would fit with a strategy that isn't concerned with whether the best posts are up-voted to the top of /r/the_donald, but instead with having as many posts as possible from /r/the_donald appearing on site-wide pages like /r/all. When posts from the two subreddits appeared on /r/all they tended to accrue upvotes at similar rates, through these pages they were displayed to the same audience (while simultaneously being shown to subscribers of the respective subreddits).

Moderators of /r/the_donald were also observed to 'sticky' rising posts at the top of the subreddit, manually selecting posts that they wanted to appear on /r/all and bringing these to the attention of the community—making it clear what members should vote on to achieve a more effective presence on /r/all.

April 2016, a month where both subreddits had around 200 posts appearing on /r/all (Fig. 7), was chosen for closer

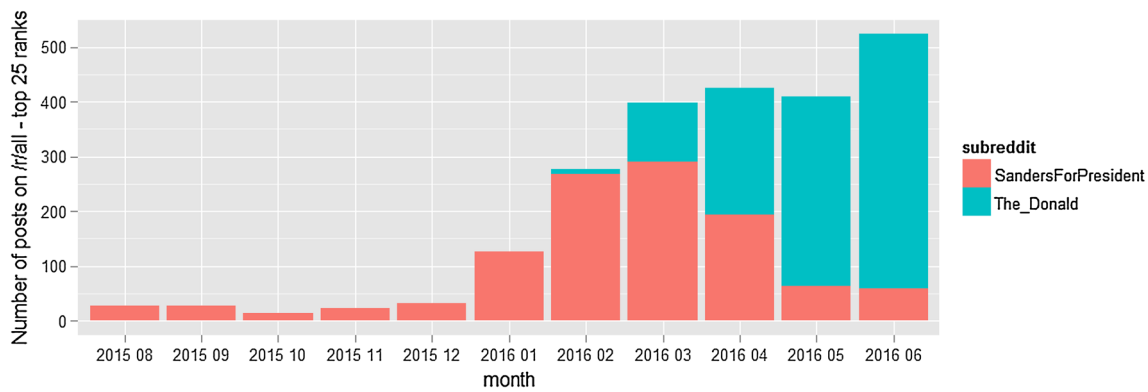


Fig. 7 Number of posts from /r/SFP and /r/the_donald observed within the top 25 ranks on /r/all page each month

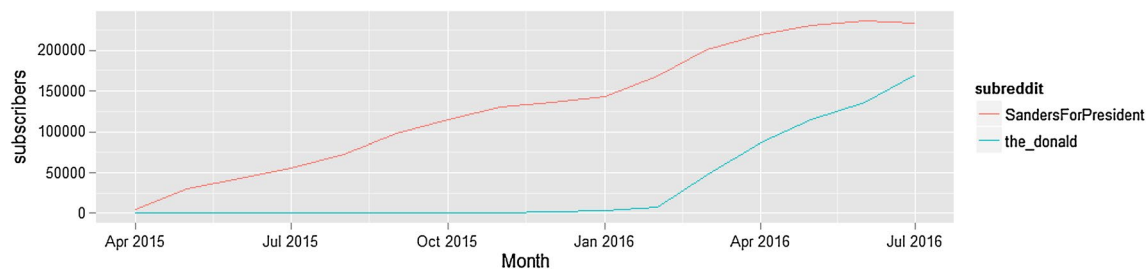


Fig. 8 Number of subscribers to /r/SFP and /r/the_donald

scrutiny, and the comments for all of the posts observed on both subreddits were collected. Table 2 shows some descriptive statistics for posts and comments on these subreddits in April. /r/the_donald saw five times as many post submissions as /r/SFP, but the mean score and number of comments for these was much lower than /r/SFP posts. Comments on /r/the_donald posts also tended to be shorter.

4 The /r/all page

While each subreddit has its own pages and operates with a degree of independence, there are mechanisms through which the content of highly active subreddits can become known to reddit's users more broadly. Chief among these is the /r/all page, which shows the same set of 'hottest' posts from any of the site's subreddits to every user who browses it at a particular point in time.

Both /r/SFP and /r/the_donald have had a significant presence on /r/all. Figure 7 shows that a steady stream of around 25 posts from /r/SFP were being shown prominently on /r/all each month in late 2015. In January and February 2016 /r/SFP's presence on /r/all increased substantially, peaking in March before tailing off in May and June as Sanders' chance of the Democratic nomination faded. February 2016 is when /r/the_donald made its first appearance

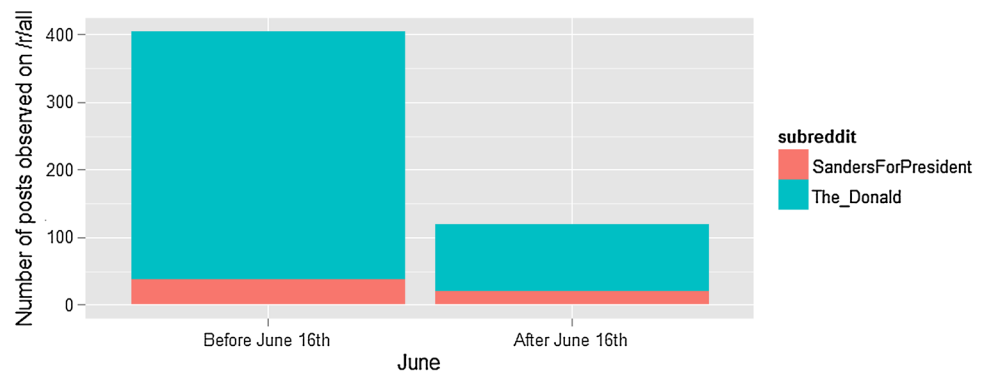
on /r/all, by April it had as much presence there as /r/SFP and by May it was dominating the page.

The reasons why /r/the_donald had such a strong presence on /r/all are not entirely clear, but it is possible that this was the result of a deliberate voting strategy by some members. Discussions of such a strategy have not been observed on the subreddit, but this is not surprising because talking about how to game reddit's voting system on reddit could result in punitive action by administrators. Some /r/the_donald members may have arrived at and disseminated such a strategy to other members off-site, it may have involved the use of scripts that made bulk-voting easier to implement, or even the operation of bot or sock-puppet accounts. This is just speculation, any of these tactics would be in violation of reddit's rules (and unlikely to be openly discussed). It is also possible that many /r/the_donald members understood reddit's voting system well enough to see how /r/the_donald was gaining such visibility, and quietly did their part to contribute without explicitly acknowledging this (and without actually breaking the rules).

Figure 8¹¹ shows the number of subscribers for both subreddits each month, a greater presence on /r/all is associated with faster subscriber growth.

¹¹ Subscriber numbers taken from <http://www.redditmetrics.com>.

Fig. 9 Number of posts from /r/SFP and /r/the_donald appearing on /r/all page (ranks 1–25) in the month of June 2016 before and after the change to /r/all was implemented on June 16th (redd.it/4oedco). This change curtailed /r/the_donald's dominance of /r/all



The dominance of /r/all by /r/the_donald appears to have prompted or hastened a change to how the /r/all page works by reddit's administrators, announced by CEO Steve Huffman on June 16th (redd.it/4oedco). To reddit's administrators, who are the only people with access to voting data, it must also have looked like /r/the_donald's members were gaming the voting system to achieve greater visibility on reddit. Figure 9 shows that this change did curtail the prevalence of /r/the_donald posts on /r/all, but the subreddit still retained a strong presence on the page until October.

5 /r/the_donald: February 2016 to June 2016

Before considering the content submitted to and broadcast by /r/the_donald it should be noted that this content often does not adhere to common norms of socially acceptable discourse. The manner in which topics and people are discussed on the subreddit is irreverent, and often offensive. In studying and reporting on this subreddit, linking to or reproducing content that has the potential to offend is unavoidable.

In this observation period, there were 270,000 posts submitted to /r/the_donald, receiving 2.7 million comments and a cumulative score of 33 million (up-votes less down-votes).

5.1 /r/the_donald's all page debut, February 2016

A post submitted to /r/the_donald subreddit was first observed on the /r/all page on 21st February 2016 (redd.it/46stse—announcing that Trump had won in the North Carolina primary). On February 19, the subreddit had 15,000 subscribers.

By the end of February, a further 58 posts from /r/the_donald were observed within the top 100 ranks of /r/all on at least one occasion. Through frequent placement on /r/all, /r/the_donald was being introduced to many reditors, and some of the posts to appear there were about

clarifying /r/the_donald's position and relationship to other communities.

There were six posts to /r/the_donald that appeared on /r/all on February 23rd and 24th which referenced /r/the_donald's emergence and sought to clarify that it was not a joke subreddit, but a genuine expression of support for Trump.

- redd.it/479aza—"SJW's upset that /r/the_donald is allowed to exist" ("Social Justice Warriors" is a pejorative term used to denote people expressing progressive views and admonishing the behaviour or speech of others)
- redd.it/479bqq: "The great reddit awakening of 2016"
- redd.it/479j8k: "No, THE_DONALD domreddit isn't joke. Here's why".
- redd.it/47bdx7: "To everyone complaining about Donald invading /r/all..." (complains about /r/SFP dominance)
- redd.it/47cnrg: "This Subreddit is Not Satire"
- redd.it/479bqq: "To the Bern victims complaining about /r/The_Donald being on the front page".

Many of the other /r/the_donald posts observed on /r/all in February follow similar themes to the posts on /r/SFP: they celebrate primary wins (redd.it/47aymb), link to (favourable) polls (redd.it/489ttw), decry media bias (redd.it/48bi1s), report endorsements (redd.it/48649k), and there are many images and tweets. While /r/SFP forbade posts that were not about Sanders in some way, /r/the_donald had no such rule and many posts related to Trump's rivals (both Democrat and Republican). Another type of post observed in this set involved attempts to "google bomb" certain search terms¹². For example, redd.it/47mu8l attempted to google bomb the phrase "Donald Trump Polish Workers" with an image of Trump, following allegations that he had hired undocumented Polish workers in the past (redd.it/

¹² Push an image to the top of the google search results so that it appears when a term is searched.

- “HIGH ENERGY” to describe positive content/developments/people, “low energy” as the converse
- “cucks” or “cucked” as a pejorative for liberally minded people, derived from “cuckold”, and often used in relation to Sanders and his supporters
- “centipedes” and “nimble navigators” are terms used to describe /r/the donald members, and a character

Self posts accounted for 25% of submissions to /r/the_donald and these submissions saw 23% of all comments, much lower than the 50% of /r/SFP posts and comments they accounted for. One way to read this is that /r/the_donald members were less interested in discussion topics or ideas submitted by other users. The explanation may be simply that self posts tend to require more effort to create and discuss than links to external content, as /r/the_donald appeared to gravitate towards low-effort contributions. On /r/SFP self posts were used to organise and could represent a call to act—on /r/the_donald calls to act were very rare in the observation period.

Domain	Youtube.com (%)	Imgur.com (%)	Sli.mg (%)	Twitter.com (%)	Facebook.com (%)	Self (%)
Posts	14	12	17	4	0.5	25
Score	7	19	29	8	0.4	13
Comments	11	17	17	6	0.3	23

Fig. 11 Levels of posting, commenting and voting by month for the top social media domains on /r/the_donald

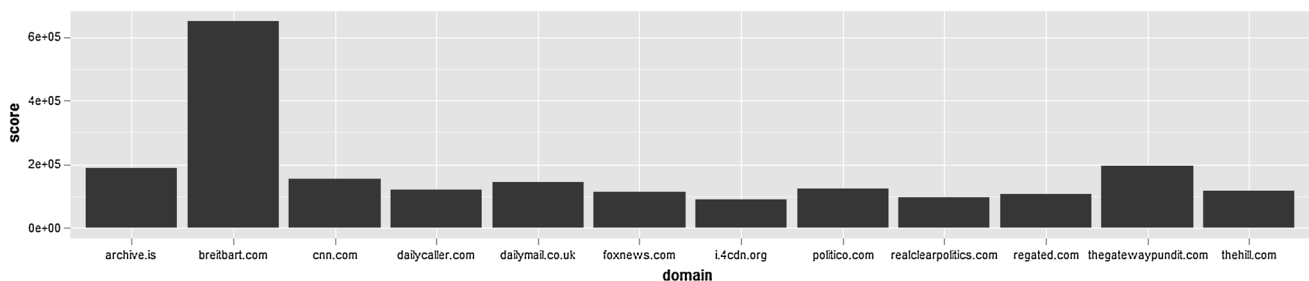
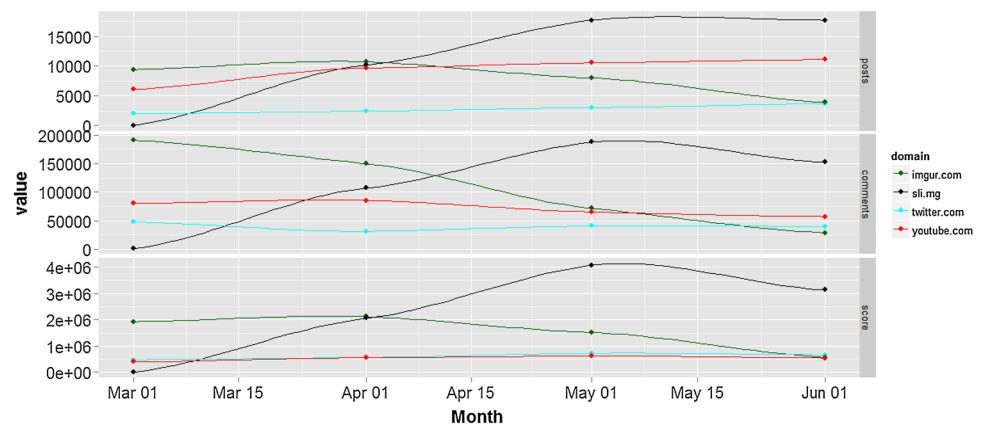


Fig. 12 Popular domains on /r/the_donald

Table 3 shows the percentage of posts linking to popular social media domains, and the percentage of score and comments associated with these posts.

Figure 11 shows the level of submissions, votes and comments per month associated with other social media domains. Facebook has been excluded because it accounted for less than 1% of /r/the_donald submissions. Sli.mg, an alternative image hosting platform to Imgur, has been included in place of Facebook, because as Fig. 11 shows /r/the_donald began migrating from Imgur to sli.mg in April 2016. Image posts hosted on Imgur and Sli.mg accounted for 29% of all /r/the_donald posts (whereas they made up just 8% of posts to /r/SFP), and these posts had 34% of all comments and 48% of all score on the subreddit.

Beginning in March 2016, a number of posts to /r/the_donald were observed which complained about censorship of content on Imgur (e.g., redd.it/4dz9dr—where a user reports that their image was removed because it was anti-Islam). On April 9th a post that suggested that switching to use sli.mg as the preferred image hosting platform reached a score of 1,500 (redd.it/4e18mu). This sparked a cluster of high-scoring pro-sli.mg posts, 17 of which were submitted in April and scored more than 500 points. For example redd.it/4edexv claims that /r/the_donald raised the value of sli.mg by \$44,000 in 1 day, and on April 14th sli.mg staff conducted an AMA interview on /r/the_donald (redd.

it/4erynj) that drew over 500 comments. Notably, these posts about switching to sli.mg as preferred image host did not originate with moderators or even have their explicit backing. Ordinary users of /r/the_donald submitted these posts, others up-voted them so that they were broadcast to the community, and the community subsequently changed its collective behaviour (by hosting images on sli.mg).

Figure 12 shows the 12 most popular domains on /r/the_donald that were not social media. Breitbart.com, a conservative news site, stands out as the most popular domain on /r/SFP by some distance. The only domain to appear in the top 12 for both subreddits was CNN.com—and in both subreddits posts linking to CNN tended to be for the purpose of criticism. Some of the domains in Fig. 12 warrant a description. Archive.is is a platform for archiving a snapshot of a page on another website, /r/the_donald members used it to preserve content that they thought might be amended or censored. The i4cdn.org domain is associated with the 4chan.org boards, posts with this domain linked to content that appeared on 4chan (often the /pol/ board). This is one indication of links between /r/the_donald and the /pol/ community on 4chan, another indication being the general disdain for “political correctness” in both communities.

Unsurprisingly, /r/SFP and /r/the_donald drew on very different sources for news. Neither community had

difficulty finding content to post that fitted their preferred narratives, and this content was accompanied by thousands of high-scoring comments endorsing it.

5.2.2 Moderation and censorship

Early posts from moderators like [redd.it/47e34](https://www.reddit.com/user/47e34) on 24th February and [redd.it/4apox3](https://www.reddit.com/user/4apox3) on 16th March make it clear that [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) is a subreddit that is all about ‘having fun while supporting Trump’, and that any contributions that deviate from this (by, for example, questioning his stances) will result in a ban. The first of these posts sets out a policy of banning all Sanders supporters, the second offers guidance on how Sanders supporters can “assimilate” and join [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald), if they disavow Sanders and follow local norms of discourse. These posts also defend the nature of the discourse on [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald), which rejects anything that appears as “political correctness” in favour of the expression of ideas through memes and “straight talk” (as long as it is pro-Trump). The view expressed on [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) was that the “liberal media” are biased and incapable of “telling it how it is”, especially in relation to subjects like migration, Islam, and terrorism. Large default subreddits like [/r/politics](https://www.reddit.com/r/politics) and [/r/news](https://www.reddit.com/r/news) were perceived as reproducing this liberal bias through the censorship of opinions that are not politically correct.

If one considers the highest-scoring posts submitted to [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) in the observation period, many of these relate to the Orlando nightclub shooting on June 12th. According to my observations of [/r/all](https://www.reddit.com/r/all) recorded every 30 min, five posts from [/r/news](https://www.reddit.com/r/news) about the shooting were observed on [/r/all](https://www.reddit.com/r/all) on 12th June, the first of these ([redd.it/4npcdb](https://www.reddit.com/post/4npcdb)) was displayed there for 10 h and reached 5826 comments. At the point when the shooter’s identity was revealed, posts about this development (e.g., [redd.it/4nqaik](https://www.reddit.com/post/4nqaik), [redd.it/4nqidp](https://www.reddit.com/post/4nqidp), [redd.it/4nql8f](https://www.reddit.com/post/4nql8f)) became very controversial, with many comments being deleted by moderators, and the perception being that moderators were deleting any comment saying that the perpetrator was a Muslim. [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) came to the fore on [/r/all](https://www.reddit.com/r/all) as a place where speculation on the shooter’s motivations was unfettered and labelling the incident one of “radical Islamic terrorism”, and the harsh anti-Islam rhetoric that accompanied that label, was allowed. Thirty different posts about the shooting appeared on [/r/all](https://www.reddit.com/r/all) through [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) on June 12th. There are two strong themes to these posts, labelling the incident one of “radical Islamic terrorism” and decrying the censorship of this information on [/r/news](https://www.reddit.com/r/news). The four top scoring [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) posts from this period are indicative of these themes.

- [redd.it/4nra6a](https://www.reddit.com/post/4nra6a): “Omar Mateen called 911 just before club shooting, swore allegiance to Islamic State, multiple law enforcement officials say—NBC News”

- [redd.it/4nrj12](https://www.reddit.com/post/4nrj12): “Islamic State claims responsibility for Orlando nightclub shooting”
- [redd.it/4nrnyk](https://www.reddit.com/post/4nrnyk): “F**king despicable [/r/news](https://www.reddit.com/r/news) mods even censoring someone asking FOR BLOOD DONATIONS TOWARDS THE SHOOTING VICTIMS!”
- [redd.it/4nq3ib](https://www.reddit.com/post/4nq3ib): “[/r/news](https://www.reddit.com/r/news) LOCKED the thread about Orlando Shooting as soon as fbi said it was a MUSLIM TERRORIST ATTACK. Get this to the front page!”

Prior to this, [/r/politics](https://www.reddit.com/r/politics) had also been lambasted as a subreddit that was being manipulated (by moderators and paid ‘Clinton shells’) to present pro-Clinton and anti-Trump material. [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) moderators posted that they had been warned about ‘brigading’ on [/r/politics](https://www.reddit.com/r/politics) on June 5th ([redd.it/4mnkmb](https://www.reddit.com/post/4mnkmb)). ‘Brigading’ and ‘subreddit invasions’ involve members of one community interacting with content in another subreddit where they do not usually participate. In this case, a post or comment on [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) would identify a post or user on [/r/politics](https://www.reddit.com/r/politics) they disagreed with, and the [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) community would target that user’s contributions for mass down-voting.

Like Trump himself, [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) was not shy about claiming that things were rigged against them. For example, in relation to Trump’s AMA interview post after the observation period ended, on 27th July ([redd.it/4uxdbn](https://www.reddit.com/post/4uxdbn)). Unlike Sanders, Trump conducted his AMA interview on the [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) (and not the dedicated [/r/IAmA](https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA) subreddit)—it is likely that someone in his campaign advised him to conduct the AMA on [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) because it would not have been well received on [/r/IAmA](https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA). This post appeared initially at the top of [/r/all](https://www.reddit.com/r/all) but quickly disappeared from that listing, provoking many accusations that the voting system had been manipulated, and drawing a direct response from reddit’s CEO ([redd.it/4uygib](https://www.reddit.com/post/4uygib)) to explain what had happened. Looking at the comments on this post and related posts from the period, this explanation was not accepted as satisfactory by many [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) members. Brietbart.com ran a story about possible censorship of Trump’s AMA, which was in turn submitted to [/r/the_donald](https://www.reddit.com/r/the_donald) ([redd.it/4ve8tx](https://www.reddit.com/post/4ve8tx)) and scored well.

6 Collective intelligence for the common good

Reddit is interesting from the perspective of collective intelligence because it enables peculiar kinds of collectives that can grow quickly to reach hundreds of thousands of members. While it is debatable whether these collectives can be said to demonstrate collective intelligence, there is no doubt that they can be effective in serving their purpose under certain circumstances.

The experience of membership in a subreddit community is characterised by seeing largely the same posts and

comments that other members see, irrespective of the size of that community. Reddit's algorithms are geared to focus the attention of a subreddit's subscribers on a small proportion of submitted content. Deciding which content becomes highly visible is the domain of voting users (with moderators essentially having a veto through their power to delete content). As voting is anonymous, the decisions that this mass of voting users make are always ambiguous and subject to speculation. When submitting content, a community member's contributions are judged by silent voting users. Any direct replies are likely to be from unrecognised pseudonyms, with only a small number of members achieving enough visibility to be recognised by others. The experience of contributing on reddit is always of interacting with a collective that can never be fully known.

The focusing of attention on a small number of contributions, and the collective decisions about which content receives this attention, allow subreddit communities to scale relatively easily when growth is steady¹³. It is clear to a potential new member what kind of content the community appreciates, what to expect if they subscribe, and what kind of content they should submit if they want it to score well and be seen.

6.1 Collective intelligence

Subreddit communities can grow to large memberships and high activity levels relatively quickly. Whether these communities exhibit collective intelligence depends on the definition one uses. When the definition emphasises the collective, I would argue that /r/SFP and /r/the_donald meet the criteria of definitions like Smith's (1994)—“a group of human beings (carrying) out a task as if the group, itself, were a coherent, intelligent organism working with one mind rather than a collection of independent agents”. Other definitions (e.g., Hiltz and Turoff 1978) focus on making better decisions than any group member could have made on their own, the subreddits considered here cannot be said to meet that criteria, and the shallow nature of post voting on reddit means that decisions about which posts to broadcast are unlikely to be the best possible decisions.

What is clearer is that members of the /r/SFP and /r/the_donald communities were able to achieve things together which they would not have been able to achieve on their own. The most ubiquitous of these achievements was to broadcast positive content about their candidate to reddit users beyond their own subreddits, and in doing so

increase the size of their communities. Both communities also assembled content that could be used to argue the case for their candidate, helping their members to become more effective supporters. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that members also shared content from the subreddits through other social media channels like their facebook and twitter accounts, but this would be difficult to substantiate and quantify.

There are many similarities between the type of content that was selected for broadcast on /r/SFP and /r/the_donald. Perhaps the broadest difference between the two communities was in their aims, /r/SFP quickly reached an understanding that promoting Sanders on reddit was “preaching to the choir” and put a lot of effort into outreach beyond reddit, and supporting Sanders' campaign financially. /r/the_donald's aims appeared much more reddit-centric, carving out some territory for Trump on a platform where there had previously been little sign of support for his candidacy.

6.2 The common good

There is little doubt that the members of these communities felt that the candidate they supported was the right choice for President, and so from their perspective acting to increase the chance of their candidate winning was acting for the common good (of citizens of the United States, at least). If increasing the chance that the “right” candidate is elected can be considered acting for the common good, then the question of whether each community was acting in the broader common good is intractable, as it is likely to be in any manifestation of collective intelligence that relates directly to politics.

A subreddit community could also be said to be acting for the common good if the collective filtering of content resulted in only unbiased and highly reliable information being broadcast. Neither /r/SFP or /r/the_donald met this criterion, but that is not surprising because it was never their aim.

Both of these subreddits are ‘echo chambers’ (Sunstein 2009), almost by definition, because they set, and moderators enforced, strict rules about the nature of allowed content. The literature on the public sphere (Habermas 1991), and the potential fragmentation and balkanization of public discourse (Sunstein 2009), is key to understanding reddit's broader social impact. Each of the site's 87,000 subreddits is potentially a section in a user's ‘Daily Me’—Negroponte's (1996) concept of a newspaper that was tailored to the interests and opinions of its reader. Each subreddit also demonstrates the characteristics of an echo chamber. There is a feedback loop whereby popular posts and comments are broadcast widely, defining the subreddit's identity and educating members on what kind of content they

¹³ If growth occurs too rapidly this can change the nature of a subreddit, there have been cases where a subreddit was added to the ‘default’ set and the immediate influx of new members caused problems (Mills 2014).

should submit if they want to be successful contributors. The areas of agreement between members are accentuated through the broadcasting mechanism, and this is likely to exacerbate the polarisation of views that already occurs when people participate in like-minded communities (Sunstein 2002).

The /r/SFP community sometimes wrestled with the problems of being an echo chamber (as evidenced by many comments asking whether the subreddit and its content was distorting members' perspective on Sanders' likelihood of obtaining the Democratic nomination). /r/the_donald has embraced this principle and sought only to make their subreddit a more effective echo chamber, echoing loudly enough to be heard by neighbouring communities. On /r/the_donald members were even allowed to question the core assumption that Donald Trump should be the next president of the United States, and scepticism about the veracity of any pro-Trump messages or materials was not well received.

The interactions between /r/the_donald and other subreddit communities suggest that 'balkanization', identified in previous research as a likely outcome (Mills 2014), is an ongoing and perhaps accelerating process on reddit. The loose boundaries between communities that allow members of one community to see, vote, and post in the space of another without actually joining complicate this picture further. When a post or comment is perceived to have an unusual score, this often prompts speculation that something underhand is happening, like members of an opposing community 'invading' the subreddit.

If we conceive of reddit as a kind of public sphere (Habermas 1991), /r/the_donald can be understood as a subaltern counterpublic—"parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 1990: 67). This description fits with the observations of /r/the_donald presented here. As a subaltern counterpublic, the unusual thing about /r/the_donald is that it could gain access to mechanisms that broadcast its discourse to the site's majority of more liberally minded users, who had little sympathy for Trump or his policies.

Reddit the platform is largely agnostic with regard to the type of communities it supports, and some of these communities are to the detriment of the common good. There is list of subreddits that have been banned over the years because they catered to objectionable content or the behaviour of their members was problematic in some other way (e.g., /r/jailbait for sexualised images of minors, /r/creepshots for surreptitiously taken images of women in public, and /r/fatpeoplehate for ridicule and hatred of overweight people). /r/fatpeoplehate warrants a particular mention because when it was banned this provoked a revolt among

a segment of reddit's users (Dewey 2015), with one of the hallmarks of this revolt being those users' capacity to up-vote vitriolic and offensive posts to the top of /r/all, despite the fact that the subreddits they created to do to this were being banned almost as quickly as they were created. This is in some ways reminiscent of /r/the_donald's capacity to punch above its weight of subscribers when it came to pushing posts onto /r/all.

There are many active subreddits which do not aim to serve the common good, and many for which the collective's only purpose is to entertain its members. There are some subreddits that seek to inform about or discuss a topic (e.g., /r/AskScience, /r/AskReddit) or share user generated content (e.g., /r/AdviceAnimals, /r/dataisbeautiful), and there are some which are established (or co-opted) as a tool through which a community works toward a common purpose. /r/SFP and /r/the_donald were established to pursue a certain end, previously large default subreddits like /r/politics and /r/technology have been co-opted in campaigns against SOPA and in favour of Wikileaks (Mills 2014). Anti-SOPA activism sprung up on a number of different subreddits over a short period of time. As such, collective action was conducted on a much more ad hoc basis—with post and comment voting being used as governance mechanisms in the absence of designated leaders (Mills and Fish 2015).

The /r/SFP and /r/the_donald communities had clear leadership roles (moderators) and a set of rules that were enforced. Moderators on /r/SFP at several points made posts about new initiatives in the subreddit or attempting to organise members' efforts (e.g., reddit.it/34ez82). /r/SFP represents a more 'managed' intelligence. It is however clear that a lot of the community's 'sensing' and 'reasoning' happened at the level of the collective, mediated through the post and comment voting systems. /r/the_donald was also actively managed by the moderators, who didn't attempt to organise in the same way as /r/SFP moderators, but did lay down and enforce rules about the nature of the discourse, and for a period guide members to up-vote certain posts by adding these as "stickies" at the top of the subreddit.

The adoption of sli.mg as preferred image host by /r/the_donald (Sect. 6) offers an interesting insight into how subreddit communities can modify their collective behaviour over time. This change was not dictated or enforced by moderators, but instead came about because posts suggesting this change were frequently submitted, up-voted and broadcast by the community. The capacity of a subreddit community to make a reasoned judgment and alter their behaviour accordingly has been observed on reddit on a few occasions (Mills 2014). This kind of evolution of subreddit collectives, as they choose which messages to broadcast to themselves, is probably happening in subtle ways on an

ongoing basis. The sli.mg scenario just happened to be one where it was easy to track whether the community were following through with their collectively endorsed suggestion.

A significant barrier to understanding how reddit functions, and how its approach might be adapted to serve some purposes more effectively, is the anonymity of voting. Votes are what determine how the thousands of submitted posts and comments are displayed, but they are obfuscated. In 2009 reddit's administrators provided me with anonymised post voting data for the month of March, 20% of these votes were cast within 10 s of the user's previous vote, and 8% were cast within 2 s of the user's previous vote. These quick votes were more likely to be cast on new posts (giving them more influence on posts' success), and a small minority of highly active voters accounted for a large proportion of these quick early votes.

The way that reddit's voting system works, or at least the way that it is used, makes it more suited to handling content that can be appraised and voted on very quickly. If we compare a hypothetical user assessing articles for an hour who reads and votes on one article per minute, to another user who scans the titles of posts and votes every 5 s, the second user will exert 12 times more influence through their votes than the first. This gives an advantage to shallow content that can be easily consumed, and gives power to users who make shallow decisions based on the title of a post alone without even following the link.

There are a number of possible interventions that may enable reddit to produce more considered judgments about submitted content: (1) limit the number of votes each user can cast in a period, (2) decrease the weight a user's vote carries as they vote more frequently in a period, or (3) make votes a matter of public record. For as long as votes are unlimited and anonymous, users who are minded to make an impact on reddit's collective decisions can increase their influence simply by voting frequently in the right places.

The distribution of score between posts on /r/the_donald, and the estimates of voting activity on different pages, suggest that members of this community may have been aiming to maximise the impact of /r/the_donald through blanket up-voting of posts, especially new or rising posts. Without access to voting data it is impossible to tell, but there is clearly an opportunity to have more of an effect on reddit by voting in a certain way. It is also quite clear that as a community /r/the_donald is not averse to gaming systems, for example by using their subreddit to attempt "google bombings" (still happening in October—redd.it/56l0b4).

Subreddit communities on reddit can wield a certain kind of power, and as the site's user-base grows so does this power. It is, therefore, troubling that these communities

do not have to exhibit collective intelligence to collectively wield power, and that the platform seems equally suited to serving ends which oppose, as well as promote, the common good. There is a need for further research into the strengths and weaknesses of platforms like reddit, which is based on a thorough understanding of how the platform functions, in practice, as it is used. The anonymity of voting on reddit represents a significant obstacle to understanding how it works, if administrators were to release anonymised voting data or some statistics about how users are voting, this would be of enormous benefit to researchers studying the platform. Reddit's approach to large scale many-to-many communication has some merits, and it may be possible to tweak certain parameters such that a similar approach can be fruitfully deployed to the production of resources that have different qualities.

6.3 Latest developments on /r/SFP and /r/the_donald

The /r/SFP subreddit's activity levels started decreasing when it became clear that Bernie Sanders would not be receiving the Democratic party nomination, it was archived on July 29th 2016 when it still had 225,000 subscribers, and a segment of the community migrated to /r/political_revolution to continue working towards the kind of grassroots movement Sanders had called for (in October it has 43,000 subscribers).

/r/the_donald continued to grow its number of subscribers over the course of the campaign (reaching 246,000 in October) and maintain a strong presence on /r/all. Late in the campaign, /r/the_donald started to become more active in its efforts to support Trump, with members sifting through leaked emails from Clinton's campaign on /r/the_donald (e.g., redd.it/59u66w) and a /r/DNCleaks spin-off, contacting their representatives to voice concerns about the election being rigged through voting machines (in an elaborate conspiracy allegedly lead by George Soros—redd.it/59jbcr), and also spawning a spin-off /r/vote_trump subreddit for "get out the vote" activism. /r/the_donald also prompted a number of other subreddits to be created, both in solidarity (/r/HillaryForPrison, /r/AskTrumpSupports) and opposition (/r/EnoughTrumpSpam).

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