



Mining Reddit

Description

Reddit is a platform that supports themed community discussion forums called *subreddits*. I recently joined one of the over 100,000 active subreddits. It goes by the name `r/artificialintelligence`. Reddit is very popular, with over 95 million active daily users who post, reply and comment anonymously using aliases.

Typically, a user of Reddit will post a query or provocation, such as `I'm in need of real human opinions about how I've been using ChatGPT`. This particular post was by someone (alias: *Several-Hyena2347*) who related concern about his/her over-dependence on the chatbot for personal advice about life decisions, personal relationships etc.

Posting to Reddit is a bit like communicating with an LLM (large language model) chatbot, except for the obvious point that with a discussion forum you are communicating with other human beings, likely several human beings in fact. There's no guarantee that anyone will read your post, or that you will receive a response. If you get a reply it will likely be after several hours or days. Responses will be multiple and varied in terms of quality. It is a many-to-many ad-hoc conversational medium. ChatGPT described it as shouting in a public square, as opposed to its own method of whispering into a responsive oracle that always replies!

I asked ChatGPT for its opinion about the similarities and differences between a discussion forum and a chatbot. It gave the suitably academic reply: `There's a deep structural and experiential kinship between forum posting and conversing with LLMs. Both serve as platforms for projection, externalisation, and response but with different ontologies of agency and community. This invites further reflection on how we constitute the other in digital dialogue, and how platforms reshape habits of questioning, listening, and believing.` I think it has picked up on my academic profile.

Conceptual convergence

Some users are treating ChatGPT as the first access point to the Internet, ahead of Google it seems. (See banner image.) The current version of AI tools such as ChatGPT include web search, as well as summarising, analysing, calculating, explaining, solving problems, writing computer programs, etc.

As any recent user will have observed, Google deploys LLM technology and semantic indexing to generate responses to search queries. Google will also include Reddit posts in its search results if relevant. Reddit will also invoke rule-based bots to moderate interactions, though as far as I can tell it does not currently incorporate LLM tech to process user-generated content.

I wouldn't be surprised to see Reddit incorporate summarisations of Reddit posts and comments similar to Amazon's AI-generated summaries of customer reviews. Irrespective of current capabilities, there's a conceptual convergence among such platforms. In the mean time we can force such LLM capabilities by recruiting ChatGPT to process Reddit interactions.

As a conflation of capabilities I downloaded the response thread to *Several-Hyena2347's* query about over-dependence on ChatGPT (about 7,500 words) and uploaded it to ChatGPT with the prompt, "Please pick out the main themes in this Reddit thread. Ignore the comment that I posted to the thread."

Popular opinion

I've edited the ChatGPT response here. It collated the diversity of responses, noting that some commenters compared ChatGPT to Google, calculators, spell-checkers, and self-help books. The consensus was that while it's more advanced than these apps, it should still be treated as a tool not a substitute for human judgment or interaction.

Many commenters seemed concerned about users' increasing tendency to consult the app for personal decisions, conversations, and critical thinking. Some warned about possible dependency and even addiction. There was frequent mention of potential cognitive decline from offloading too much mental effort to AI. Users compare it to how GPS or calculators have diminished map-reading and arithmetic skills. Some are taking steps such as doing mental exercises or writing by hand to maintain cognitive acuity.

Several comments highlighted that ChatGPT is tending to affirm a user's ideas, reinforcing biases and self-perceptions. This "always agreeable" tone is seen as psychologically pleasing but potentially misleading and dangerous, especially in high-stakes decisions. (Note my earlier post on [AI sycophancy](#).)

Some argued that using ChatGPT to write out or verbalise thoughts can aid thinking, akin to journaling or thinking things through in a structured way. In this light, ChatGPT is a useful sounding board, especially if not accorded too much authority (as delivering "truth").

There was also discussion of thresholds, i.e. when use transitions from productive to unhealthy interactions. A few commenters saw no problem as long as users are aware and not experiencing negative consequences. Others liken this use of AI to emotional over-dependence or diminished agency.

Some comments hinted at broader ethical concerns, such as AI's role in reinforcing user beliefs, the commercialisation of advice, and AI's potential to replace human relationships in providing emotional support.

Many offered practical advice, such as being "mindful" and intentional in use, not letting AI replace human input, diversifying decision-making strategies, fact-checking, challenging AI outputs, and building in tech-free time.

Chat GPT delivered these summaries under headings. On request, it also provided a table of these themes including the frequency of occurrence, etc.

Here I have used ChatGPT and Reddit as a means of gauging public attitudes to a particular technology, bearing mind the limited sample represented by Reddit users and this thread. Such a process has merit in research, but also for general users of Reddit. I've demonstrated to myself that it is possible to deploy AI to organise and systematise discussion forum content, and to enter into a discussion about a discussion (as it were).

The summary provided seems to accord with common polite opinion. So I asked ChatGPT to identify outlier opinions, or incompatible and incomprehensible content. The response was just as illuminating. See Note below.

Note

Here is ChatGPT's response to my query about outliers. I have removed the names of respondents.

Yes, several outlier or unusual contributions appear in the Reddit thread. These are comments that stand apart in tone, relevance, or coherence, compared to the more consistent themes of caution, reflection, and practical advice around ChatGPT use.

Here are the notable outliers or incompatible/incoherent posts:

1. Vaguely Alarmist / Unverifiable Claim

Comment by xxxx:

"It's dangerous. Really dangerous. They mirror grief and trauma and create recursive loops. 12 people have been hospitalized or died."

Why it's an outlier:

This makes an extreme claim without context, evidence, or further explanation. No sources or references are provided. It departs from the otherwise cautious but reasoned tone of the discussion.

2. Idiosyncratic Slang or In-Jokes

Comment by xxxx:

"Just ask it here and there to stop glazing you. I found it to be a better advisor than all my friends combine times three."

Why it's an outlier:

The term "glazing you" is colloquial and ambiguous in this context. The tone is humorous and hyperbolic, with limited substantive contribution.

3. Philosophically Vague / Rhetorical

Comment by xxxx:

Honestly, normal people pre-AI just did this for themselves. When did people quit being human?

Why it's an outlier:

This is more of a rhetorical lament than a constructive response. It lacks specificity or analytical clarity, making it harder to integrate into thematic analysis.

4. Playful but Thin on Content

Comment by xxxx:

First thing I think of is the magic 8 ball! If it gets to the point where you can't make a decision without the magic 8 ball, it's time to stop and maybe get some help.

Why it's marginal:

The metaphor is amusing and loosely relevant, but the comment is more illustrative than analytical. It doesn't offer deeper insight or engage with others' ideas.

5. Contrarian but Brief

Comment by xxxx:

I don't see anything wrong with it. As long as you are aware. I talk to ChatGPT about everything. Every day.

Why it stands out:

In contrast to most posts expressing some ambivalence, this is completely uncritical and asserts habitual use as unproblematic without elaboration.

These outliers do not necessarily undermine the thread's quality. Reddit thrives on a mix of tones but they stand apart from the reflective, reasoned, and context-aware majority.

- Featured image is a local newspaper poster seen on a trip this week to Lausanne, Switzerland.

Category

1. Artificial Intelligence

Tags

1. discussion forum
2. research
3. survey

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