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## Groupthink and Common Enemy Intimacy: A Thematic Analysis of Hyperpersonal Connection in Reddit's r/theDonald

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## Abstract

This paper offers a thematic analysis of the anonymous r/The\_Donald subreddit, a part of the popular anonymous message board, Reddit, to better understand connection in anonymous hyperpersonal spaces and the relationship between disinhibition and connection. This study considered the semantic, latent, and cultural themes of r/The\_Donald to analyze what was taking place in the conversations featured there. An analysis of subreddit activity over the course of one month indicated the presence of groupthink (Janis, 1972) but moreover, that these conversations lack a personal element and posters there appear to engage in “common enemy intimacy” (Brown, 2017). Not only do users often practice dehumanization in speaking about outgroups in derogatory and demeaning ways, but also fail to engage in connection of a personal nature with other posters. Instead, the content focuses around mutual dislike of specific groups and people which appears to be a barrier to authentic connection. This in-depth look at r/The\_Donald is an important part of a much larger conversation about disinhibition and anonymous online communication that offers greater understanding of online communication, or more specifically, online political communication.

Keywords: Donald Trump, Reddit, Disinhibition, Hyperpersonal

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## **Groupthink and Common Enemy Intimacy: A Thematic Analysis of Hyperpersonal Connection in Reddit's r/theDonald**

One of the most challenging aspects of studying anonymity in digital media is truly defining it. In *the Second Media Age*, Poster (1995) describes anonymous interactions as an “exchange (of) messages with the extraneous presence of the body or the voice, only signs passing from one to another” and theorized that anonymity leads to the “playful, imaginative, multiple self” as opposed to a “rational and stable individual” (71). The more important question, however, is its impact on those that utilize it.

Walther (1994, 1996) introduced the idea of the “hyperpersonal” as part of computer mediated communication. The hyperpersonal is defined as having four main parts. The first is an idealized understanding between sender and receiver without the ability to validate or invalidate perception. The second is that communication is selective, meaning that not only might users idealize the receivers of their messages, but they may also present an idealized and inaccurate view of themselves. Third, given the asynchrony of mediated communication and no need for spontaneity, it changes how users respond and how they are able to do so more carefully, although they may disclose more because of their perception of the personhood of the faceless other. Finally, users can receive the messages that they want making anonymous media almost an act of intrapersonal communication. While the user may interact with other humans, they do so for self-designed purposes and can choose to receive only validating messages.

Walther recognized that “there are times when less interpersonal or socioemotional communication is beneficial (1996, p. 6). In his research, he noted the conflicting ideas about how the lack of cues impacted communication. It was somehow both more connected and disconnected all at the same time. In response, he coined the term “hyperpersonal.” The

disconnect between users offers challenges to authentic connection, but over time, and as users adapt to the unique mediums, connection can be achieved. Moreover, the potential for no future interaction changes the way users communicate in both positive and negative ways. Specifically, with regard to anonymous communication, the impact of consequences plays a considerable role in the choice about whether it should be used and how it is used. Per Walther's findings, the ability to depersonalize those receiving messages from their senders impacts what users choose to send. It is apparent that some type of disconnect with the humanness of other users takes place in digitized formats but how this factor changes the interaction is an important conversation.

Reddit is currently one of the most popular formats for anonymous digital communication today and has seen a steady increase in usage since its inception in 2005, making it almost ancient in the digital media world. Part of its popularity is due to the fact that Reddit offers users autonomy over what is posted, the topics being discussed, and how it is moderated. The website is comprised of millions of subreddits, centered around a topic of the creator of each subreddit's choosing and used by others who have chosen to post or read there. While an individual subreddit does have moderators who can regulate content, motivation for moderators to take a hands-off approach is high given the many subreddit options available to users who will leave if they are unsatisfied. Moreover, Reddit management practices very little moderation outside of a blanket ban on illegal content. Even this ban on illegal content contains some gray area as users can reference and discuss illegal activity but not actually utilize Reddit to commit an illegal act. Otherwise, users are free to post anything they would like.

Political communication in today's culture has become an important topic as memes and divisive content overrun social media. Reddit is no exception. The subreddit r/The\_Donald is among the most notorious subreddits, appropriate given its namesake, Donald Trump's,

tumultuous presidency. The subreddit bills itself as “a never-ending rally dedicated to the 45th President of the United States, Donald J. Trump” and enjoys a user base of over half a million redditors. The subreddit has been criticized for harassment despite subreddit rules which warn against racism, anti-semitism, trolling, while also touting “Trump supporters only. No cucks or leftists.” The subreddit has been shut down and reopened several times even as recently as April 2020 when moderators were removed for ignoring community standards and allowing posts that included harassing language. This was not the first time the subreddit has fallen under scrutiny.

In 2017, Vanguard America rallied in Charlottesville, North Carolina, a gathering with heavy ties to the Ku Klux Klan. The event was believed to have originated on r/The\_Donald, which, while it is primarily for political discussion about President Donald Trump, also has ties to white supremacy groups within the user base. The Charlottesville rally was promoted on their subreddit in the weeks preceding it and would make national news when James Alex Fields, a frequent poster on the subreddit, was arrested for the murder of 32-year-old Heather Heyer, a protestor whom he ran over with his car while injuring many others. In the days that followed, subreddit administrators sought to distance themselves from Fields, but they could do little to hide the promotion of the nefarious event that included rally chants of “Fuck you faggots” (Feinberg, 2017). This prompted Reddit to ban some more inflammatory and toxic subreddits, a move that has happened only a few times in Reddit’s history; however, r/TheDonald was not one of the banned subreddits because as a subreddit, they had broken no official rules, at least not this time.

The subreddit is described as a place that “began as a straightforward, if slightly tongue-in-cheek forum dedicated to news about and advocacy for the presidential campaign of Donald Trump” (Lagorio, 2018). Yet, subreddit activities spiraled. Reddit CEO Steve Huffman attributes

this partially to the influx of readership during some major changes that took place to 4Chan, a more notorious competitor of Reddit with ties to the dark web (Isaac, 2016). He also mentioned that a sizable number of the posters of r/The\_Donald are not from IP addresses within the United States, a statement he illuminated but failed to explain its significance. This is important to understanding the aims of the posters there. It is possible that some of the posts in this analysis lack authenticity; however, the prevalence of comments and upvotes on them speaks to the culture of this subreddit and its designation and still makes them important to understanding disconnection.

Granovetter's (1973) work about strong ties and weak ties was one of the earliest works that considered the micro-level interactions in relationships and their impact. Previous communication scholars had studied interpersonal relationships, but very few specific studies examined the strength of those relationships. Granovetter addressed these ties as follows: "the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (1973, p. 1361). His theory also considers the importance of things like similarity and having mutual ties, which are among several key factors that often lead to strengthening the bond. This is a much more challenging concept to define and understand in a world increasingly connected through communication technologies and their applications.

For Reddit, this could mean many things. Are strong or weak ties defined by posting across similar subreddits? Are they related to shared ideas? It is challenging to determine, but it is what makes studies like this one essential. From Granovetter's 1973 vantage point, conversations took place via phone and face to face; however, our understanding of relationships has changed over time because of the influence of newer technologies and the way they have

been used. Mutual ties hold drastically different meaning in online spaces where those ties are often forged and maintained virtually. For example, a “mutual friend” on Facebook could mean a best friend, but it could just as easily be a high school classmate that a user has not spoken to in twenty years. The value and evaluation of these relationships have changed and holds a different meaning, sometimes to different people and across different generations.

Many scholars have discussed how Granovetter’s work translates to online spaces. One such study was done by Esteve Del Valle, Gruz, Haythornthwaite, et al. (2018). They looked for quantitative links in defining the “ties” between Reddit users. They sought to find things that led to more disclosure and connection in Reddit interactions. Ultimately, the study showed that there were very few repeat interactions and little evidence of strong ties in the traditional sense. This study suggests that “strong ties” may require an entirely different definition with regards to Reddit. All of Granovetter’s other original criteria seem to apply to these interactions, but the strengthening of ties among users does not.

Rademacher and Wang (2014) also offered an updated analysis of Granovetter’s original discussion of strong ties and weak ties concepts by offering their thoughts on how the social media world has changed the criteria. They specifically found that digital messages can also be a successful vehicle for tie maintenance, even noting that many relationships might not exist without them. They explain, “latent ties that remain meaningful but suffer from a lack of frequent interaction--can actually be strengthened as a result of social media-based interaction. That is, interaction via social media holds the potential to improve the strength of the tie by converting latent ties into weak ties and weak ties into strong(er) ties” (p. 1215).

Granovetter’s work is especially relevant to understanding the role of “connection” and engagement through Reddit and determining what factors are present when users opt to

strengthen ties rather than treating other users as an indistinct “other.” While it is impossible to know how a Reddit user perceives their relationship with another user, according to Granovetter, the level of interpersonal involvement, intensity, and reciprocation are all indicators of whether a tie is weak or strong. It is this definition we will use to further define “connection” throughout this study. Likewise, the absence of these characteristics, or distinctly negative involvement that moves further from these things, will be the signifiers of disconnection. Specific markers of these behaviors with relation to this study will be discussed in detail in chapter 3, a presentation of the research methods that were utilized for this study.

Other scholars have waded into the complex world of r/The\_Donald to consider the complex conversations that are taking place there, including the presence of masculinity as a theme (Massanarri, 2020). Others (Guest, 2018) have looked at the “echo chamber” qualities of the subreddit. Gaudette (2019) looked at the roles of extremism in the subreddit noting the outlasting of “the Left” and Muslims among members there and the validation that those frequenting the subreddit often receive from other members. Likewise, the results of this study also consider the focus on outgroups rather than the members themselves but further, considers the meaning behind this. Ward (2018) discussed the role of memes on r/The\_Donald as a popular means of communication there. This complex puzzle has been considered in many different ways and continues to be an important topic given its readership and reach.

r/TheDonald offers a unique vantage point of Walther’s hyperpersonal world. What does it look like? How is it being utilized? It is the hope of this researcher that this study will offer some insight into the use of r/The\_Donald and how connection and disconnection are taking place there.

### **Research Questions**



To understand this unique aspect of Reddit, this study analyzed the hyperpersonal interactions of r/The\_Donald. Research focused on answering the following questions:

**Q1:** What do the themes of r/The\_Donald reveal about hyperpersonal communication in anonymous online spaces?

**Q2:** What do the themes of r/The\_Donald reveal about connection in anonymous online spaces?

### **Method**

Here, the specific details of this thematic analysis of the subreddit r/The\_Donald will be explained. The data for this study was gathered using a thematic analysis as it was the best fit for this study of Reddit for two important reasons. Thematic analysis offers a more open-ended approach to qualitative research that does not constrain analysis to a particular theory. The second reason is that digital communication, specifically anonymous digital communication, is in its infancy and needs to be approached as such. Even in its relatively short lifetime, this area of communication study has already seen numerous changes due to the rapid pace of technological advancement; however, even mediums with longevity have seen drastic changes in format, users, and usage. Given a format with so much room for discovery, it is essential that studies like this one leave room for the medium itself to offer insights free of assumptions.

Braun and Clarke (2006) share this about thematic analysis: “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 10). This method involves engaging with the data and dividing it into categories and subcategories of themes that are prevalent in the data to seek patterns among the data. The specific guidelines that were utilized for doing so will be explained below.

Completing a thematic analysis in a space such as Reddit comes with some extra challenges because as Braun & Clarke (2006), suggest, there must be a distinction between the two levels of the themes: semantic and latent. It is this designation that makes it an excellent fit for an anonymous community where there are multiple layers of understanding. Semantic themes are the “explicit or surface meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written” (p. 84) while latent themes seek understanding based on context, as the researcher is tasked to “identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations – and ideologies - that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (p. 84). Any study of anonymous media requires some level of interpretation of the data. The distinction between semantic and latent content allows the researcher to differentiate between what is known and what is implied or open to a greater level of interpretation. Additionally, analysis also focused on the influence of the unique culture of Reddit to offer context.

Once weekly, over the course of four weeks, posts from r/The\_Donald were sorted into the top 5 most upvoted posts and coded for both semantic and latent themes and the cultural context that surrounded them. Additionally, the top 25 comments on each post were analyzed for content. This offered evidence of not only what content was most valued by that subreddit’s users based on the choice of users to upvote it, but also how users were engaging with it. Notably, the initial posts and the comments were coded separately.

Semantic themes focused specifically on topics of conversation and specific wording choices. Latent themes considered context and a knowledge of the online communities being studied to look for underlying meanings in the text to determine what was taking place. Cultural

themes considered the greater context of Reddit and its influence on the conversations taking place in r/The\_Donald.

The unit of analysis for this study was each individual post of content posted. Reddit users can offer an infinite number of responses beyond the original question and response. Each of these threads were coded as a single unit. While semantic coding did not account for intertextuality, latent coding did, based on a user's historical posts, prior interactions with users, and historical usage of the subreddit. Moreover, it also accounted for cultural norms; however, efforts were made to distinguish knowledge from evidence-based assumptions. These themes were then coded into subthemes to see what type of story they produced about the conversations taking place.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

An analysis of r/The\_Donald was carried out in accordance with the procedures described in the previous section. The results of the analysis of this subreddit will be presented here in detail, highlighting the semantic, latent, and cultural themes of the posts found there to answer the research questions regarding the nature of hyperpersonal connection in this unique space.

The majority of top content to r/TheDonald consisted of reposted memes, social media posts, or news stories. Many of the reposted social media posts are tweets written by President Donald Trump, often making fun of someone else. For instance, the week of January 8-15, one of the most popular posts was a Trump Tweet mocking Senator Elizabeth Warren who had shared that week that she intended to run in the Democratic primary in the 2020 election. Trump's tweet included a mock political sign stating "Warren, 1/2020<sup>th</sup>" mocking her political gaffe where she declared herself part Native American only to have a DNA test reveal that she had only a very small percentage of Native American heritage. Top comments were praise for

Trump with comments like “what a fucking legend” (gorime021) and “I can’t believe this is real! What a legend!” (RangerTreaty50). Others called Warren names like “chokeahontis” who also noted that “she is dirty” (Infamagaous).

This exchange also illustrates the prevalence of name-calling and dehumanization that appeared in every one of the top posts or subsequent comments in this study. Aside from the categorization of “Leftists” or “Dems” the subreddit also utilized names for most key players in the Democratic party like “schmuck Schumer” and “nasty Pelosi” (reesespuffs32). Some posts even went as far as to call for violence with designerdy posting in capital letters “LET THE COMMIES HIT THE FLOOR” several times responding to a post about Democrats who were frequently referred to as “Commies” on r/The\_Donald.

There was very little back-and-forth personal dialogue practiced on the subreddit and none identified in the data collected for this study. Themes found in dialogue on r/The\_Donald focused primarily on appreciation of President Donald Trump, dislike of Democrats, and broad discussion of policy. Most of this discussion presented as praise or outrage depending on the post. Also notable were the number of posts celebrating a defeat or misstep by a Democratic leader. These were some of the most upvoted posts on the website.

Also, apparent here was the presence of unifying language. While some subreddits utilize shared language and make an effort to define these types of shared ideas for new users, r/The\_Donald utilized it but expected users to know it, almost as a litmus test for the subreddit. For instance, in their “subscriber” and “currently online” count at the top of the main page, the moderators list subscribers as “Patriots” and subscribers currently online as “winners,” thus defining these roles by group participation. The previously discussed dehumanizing nicknames

were repeated throughout the subreddit with no explanations; some of the names would be obvious to outsiders, but many were not.

### **Groupthink, the Hyperpersonal, and r/The\_Donald**

The presence of groupthink was prevalent in this mediated world. Janis (1972) described groupthink as:

The more amiability and esprit de corps among members of a policy-making in group, the greater is the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink.... The social constraint consists of the members' strong wish to preserve the harmony of the group, which inclines them to avoid creating any discordant arguments or schisms. (p. 198)

When these conditions occur, excessive group cohesion can outweigh individual perception in groups where opposing opinions go unheard. This can also lead to the demonization of outgroups, very similar to the common enemy intimacy found in this study that will be discussed later in this paper. This can occur in spaces where there are few dissenting opinions or where dissenting opinions are silenced. The culture of Reddit lends itself to this type of communication by design, given individual subreddits about specific topics in which users participate. In fact, it is possible that groupthink is expected as users specifically choose groups focused on an individual topic and with a specific perspective.

The role of the moderators is an important one as they set the group dynamics where groupthink is often not only a result of group rules and norms but, in some cases, required by them. Groupthink typically requires a strong leader for this excessive cohesion to exist; however, because of the nature of Reddit, subreddit members themselves often enforce societal norms. Reddit offers an interesting example of a place where users chose a culture based on a

preexisting culture of groupthink that the majority of subreddits do very little to hide, or in the case of r/The\_Donald, openly acknowledge in their subreddit rules. Not only did groupthink appear to be present in this subreddit community, but users seemed to celebrate it.

Another aspect of the hyperpersonal is the disinhibition that is amplified in anonymous spaces. For instance, r/The\_Donald is known for extreme opinions. The majority of users most likely do not call people in their face-to-face interactions who identify as Liberal names like “Libtard.” Yet, this is commonplace among subreddit users. While this may be a response to the groupthink mob mentality, it is also possible that societal norms keep users from sharing these ideas in their face-to-face interactions but that these extreme opinions are a better reflection of real thoughts and desires than their face-to-face interactions. This is supported by Suler’s (2005) theory that anonymity and the hyperpersonal free users from societal constraints; one could argue that the true self is illuminated more in these spaces apart from societal norms, attributions, and roles. The data from this study offered no conclusive answers to this question but did offer evidence that anonymity and the choice to post in subreddits that match a user’s immediate need may leave room for that user to explore and engage in a spirit of self-exploration and discovery, for better or worse.

Suler (2005) suggested that hyperpersonal environments can be beneficial because they allow users to wrestle with their own opinions in a place with little or no consequences. The disinhibition allows them to discuss the taboo or even ideas that they have not fully processed because of the lack of consequences that may come from sharing these ideas even if they are not perceived by other users in a positive way. By choosing specific communities, users choose to interact with those specific ideas. Anonymous spaces like r/The\_Donald may allow users an outlet that is not afforded to them in their face-to-face interactions to share unwelcome or taboo

opinions. The problem is when this lack of taboo combines with groupthink over unhealthy ideas.

### **Common Enemy Intimacy and Disconnection in Anonymous Online Spaces**

While the groupthink culture of Reddit is not always problematic, it can be if the culture is one that breeds disconnection and dehumanization, which appears to be the case in r/The\_Donald. Instead of sharing life experience and connecting, the users denied the humanity of those with whom they disagreed to numb or explain away the discomfort of dissonance through the use of names and cruelty towards outgroups. Despite their agreement, as a result, they found themselves less connected to one another.

What is notable is that despite Janis' concerns about groupthink, it appears as though its presence on Reddit alone does not necessarily lead to a less connected environment but the outcome of connected versus disconnected communication seems to exist in about whom or what the subreddit is focused. The bridge between the hyperpersonal and groupthink comes with an understanding of how cognitive dissonance impacts communication (Festinger, 1957). Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance suggests that human beings are psychologically uncomfortable with information that feels contrary to what they already believe to be true. As a result, people attempt to alleviate the discomfort. They do so by diffusing, explaining, or numbing the new information. While they are capable of accepting the new information, this usually only occurs after they have taken steps to reduce the discomfort; adoption of new ideas is not always the outcome. One of the ways that one might alleviate the discomfort of nuanced or challenging ideas is to reframe their thinking about that particular thing to justify a particular idea or behavior. Another way that Festinger suggests people diffuse this discomfort is by numbing or refusing to address it.

Given this, it appears that dissonance holds an important role in the dehumanization illustrated here. It may offer a possible rationale for what brings users to Reddit and to like-minded communities where they will not encounter arguments that challenge their preexisting beliefs but instead validate them. Or it is possible that their viewpoints are shaped by the groupthink of their communities where the validation of other users helps to diffuse the contrary viewpoints a user might encounter. Not only is groupthink not discouraged, but it may also be easier for users who are challenged by ideas to simply find those in agreement than wrestle with the nuance of new and challenging ideas. It is possible that users of r/The\_Donald diffused their dissonance by removing the humanity from those who made them feel the sense of dissonance to explain away challenging ideas. In this case, the focus is “not like me” in the absence of invitational dialogue. Not only did the majority of users not seek to understand the outgroup, but they often dehumanized and degraded them.

Another notable finding was that the focus of r/The\_Donald appeared to be “them” or the outgroup rather than the members themselves. Throughout the course of this study, not a single one of the top 5 posts were personal stories nor were any of the responses. The top responses for the majority of the studied posts were insults of someone or something, including the ones that involved praising Trump or his ideas. Even these were often filled with derogatory comments aimed towards the “dems” or “libtards.” While it has been established that dehumanization and namecalling are core to the communication there, it’s notable that it appears that this also takes the place of personal disclosure. Relationships appear to be built on mutual dislike instead of personal connections and disclosure. Instead of sharing their own stories or personal anecdotes, themes centralized on issues, praising specific viewpoints, or demonizing specific outgroups whose goals ran contrary to the goals of or norms established in the subreddit. In the course of



this study, not a single post that included personal disclosure was included. While most posts included opinions about political ideas or criticism of people and uses of the phrase “we” and “us,” real personal connections were missing. The human element was almost entirely absent from the discussion, both in the interactions between users and in how they discussed topics and people. It should be noted that the majority of Reddit has the opposite problem with disclosure being central to interactions even if those reading it are anonymous. It makes these findings all the more surprising.

Granovetter’s (1973) definition of connection does not appear to exist here. It did not appear that posters ascribed human characteristics to other posters or participate in personal dialogue or storytelling with them because other posters appeared to function as an interchangeable other. Posters did not engage in back and forth dialogue on the subreddit and the majority of response posts were rally cries rather than discussion. The groupthink and agreement found there made this an easier task. Rather than recognize the complexity of hard topics, those who chose disconnection appeared to numb the uncomfortable idea of the humanity of others involved. While drawing towards likeminded people is probably a draw of subreddits like this one, the groupthink can become more troublesome when it takes the interactions are formed based on the premise of disliking the same people. Instead of simply numbing the dissonance by removing the human element from complex ideas, the unintended drawback was that users also seemed to removed the human element from their interactions altogether.

The focus on the dehumanization of the opposing groups or points of view is an important idea to be considered. Brown (2017) defined this as “common enemy intimacy” which she explains is “counterfeit connection.” This connection is best defined as “the bond that we share with others is simply that we hate the same people. The intimacy that we experience is

often intense, immediately gratifying, and an easy way to discharge outrage and pain.” She notes that in her research she has found that “the connection that we forge by judging and mocking others is not real connection” (p. 135-136). She goes on to explain how this type of community can thrive:

When all that binds us is what we believe rather than who we are, changing our mind or challenging the collective ideology is risky. When a group or community doesn’t tolerate dissent and disagreement, it forgoes any experience of inextricable connection. There is no true belonging, only an unspoken treaty to hate the same people. This fuels our spiritual crisis of disconnection. (p. 136)

Posters practiced very little humanization of other posters, political figures, or policy but seemed to unify in their animosity for anyone who stood in disagreement with Trump. However, that unification seems superficial given that posters struggle to form connection.

While semantic themes focused on political issues, there were no real surprises among the content found there. Users liked Donald Trump. The semantic themes and deeper analysis of them revealed that simply agreeing on something does not necessarily create a bridge to connection. Other subreddits often utilize connecting language with posts utilizing shared stories and personal disclosures as a result of the anonymous environment, r/The\_Donald takes a different direction.

Further research should be done to study the absence or presence of these themes in other political subreddit. The question that this presents is whether this is a result of the nature of contemporary politics or whether it is unique to the r/The\_Donald subreddit and is in line with the nationwide divide that has existed throughout his presidency. Even further studies should consider the progression of political dialogue and whether this is a new trend or one that has

presented itself during particularly tumultuous political periods. Is this a result of the technology? Or is this the result of the culture?

### **Limitations**

While this study added to a greater understanding of communication behavior with regards to r/The\_Donald and anonymous online disclosure, there were a number of limitations involved with the research. Intentionality and sincerity of posters is an ongoing concern of anonymity researchers, namely in a study such as this one where the CEO of Reddit has already hinted that many of the posts may be coming from outside of the United States. Additionally, the presence of advertisers or those with a specific agenda may cloud data. While this study tried to avoid this skewing of the data by focusing specifically on the most upvoted posts and also differentiating semantic and latent themes and also cultural norms of Reddit, there is no way to be certain that posts were not included that were inauthentic to the aims of this study. Moreover, the choice to focus on most upvoted posts in a specific time period may not represent the whole of the conversations taking place in that time period or in other time periods there. However, this study used a purposeful sample designed to represent the aims of this study. While research did try to account for content beyond this sample by adding an analysis of cultural themes for context, additional data outside of those recognized in this study may have offered new insights.

This study also focused primarily on r/The\_Donald. For an even more comprehensive look at this subreddit, it would ideally be compared to other subreddits or even other Donald Trump support pages to understand how this one is different.

### **Conclusions**

The core question regarding connection and the hyperpersonal is one that is illustrated in a unique way in the world of r/The\_Donald. A user base already known for supporting divisive

rhetoric makes a study of their own even more valuable and interesting. The groupthink element is unsurprising as it is a feature of Reddit and appears in many places; however, the unique community of r/The\_Donald offers a perspective on what happens when that groupthink is centered around not just shared ideas but also mutual dislike. This study suggests that discussions dehumanization is a key feature in this type of communication, not just of the chosen outgroups as one might suspect, but also of other users. It appears that mutual dislike creates a barrier to disclosure and connection creating a false sense of connection through common enemy intimacy. This theme of common enemy intimacy is one that requires further research.

Through the vehicle of Reddit and r/The\_Donald, this study considered some of the themes that appear in this notorious space primarily with regard to connection. The contributions shared here will assist our understanding of anonymous online communication and how the hyperpersonal impacts our interactions.

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