Democratic Discourse in the Age of Platforms:
Lessons from Canadian Political Subreddits

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Scan to learn more about the research cluster

Research Agenda

Why are democracies—theoretically resilient systems of government—concerned about disordered information?

Argument: Disordered information exploits vulnerabilities in democracies' **inherent characteristics**—the free market, free marketplace of ideas, and cumbersome bureaucracy.

Output: Providing actionable **policy recommendations** for modern democracies to tackle the threat of disordered information.

Paper 1:

Democracies and **Free Market Principles**

- Investments in digital technologies vs. digital literacy

Paper 2:

Democracies and the **Free Marketplace of Ideas**

- Passive outsourcing of the public square and interpersonal trust

Paper 3:

Democracies and **Cumbersome Bureaucracy**

- The link between institutional trust and digital government

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Democracies and the Free Marketplace of Ideas

What we know:
      Political economy of disordered information
      Increasing polarization
      Declining rates of interpersonal trust
      Contraction of the physical public square
      Expansion of the virtual public square

What we don't know:
      How does the built environment of social media
      platforms impact discourse?
      How do these interactions shape our second-
      order beliefs?

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Screenshot from CBC News, published February 13, 2022

Case Selection

Canada:

    Previous research

    Political context—Trudeau and the U.S.

    Language and Familiarity

    Bill C-18 *Online News Act*

Reddit:

    Long-form responses

    Friction

    Renewed activity

Everybody doesn't love Justin: why Trudeau is on the receiving end of so much hate

Political scientists and pollsters say Trudeau is anathema to Trump and the far-right because to them, he represents everything they hate and a lot of what they fear.

Screenshot from the *Hill Times*, published March 7, 2022
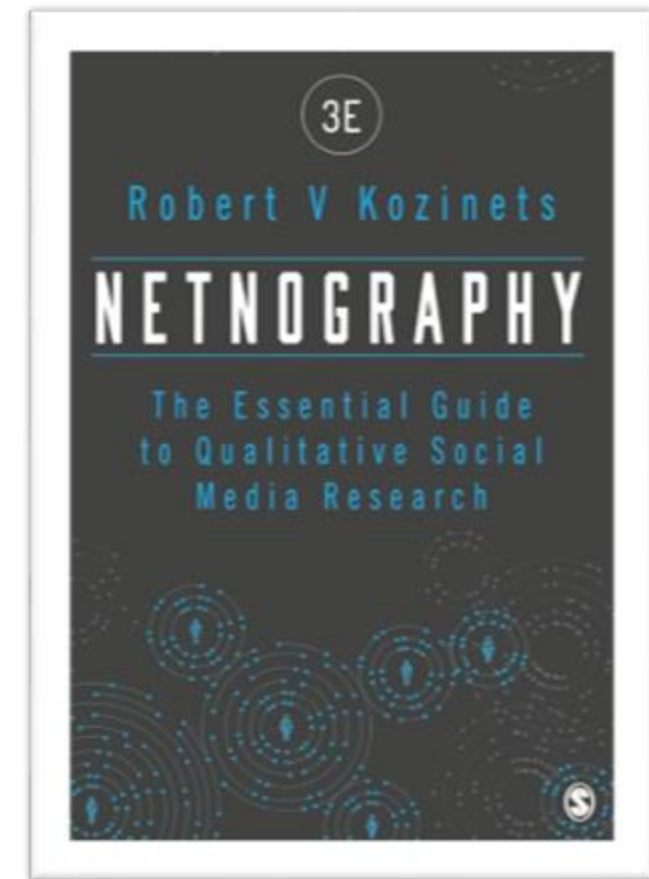
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Methodology

"**Netnography** is a form of qualitative research that seeks to understand the cultural experiences that encompass and are reflected within the traces, practices, networks, and systems of **social media**." (Kozinets, 2020)

Cultural focus
Social media data
Immersive engagement
Netnographic praxis

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Link to SAGE publications page

Netnography Movements

1 Initiation:

plan the study, hone the RQ

2 Investigation:

localize and interpret OTs to find the site

3 Immersion:

learn new language, rituals, IDs, stories

4 Interaction:

immersion or engagement?

5 Integration:

iteration, depth of cultural understanding

6 Incarnation:

communication of the RP

```
# -*- coding: utf-8 -*-
"""
Created on Tue May  6 10:01:55 2025

@author: valeriekindarji
"""

import praw
from datetime import date

# Reddit API credentials (keep these secret)
CLIENT_ID =
CLIENT_SECRET =
USER_AGENT = 'daily_top_scraper by /u/No_Grapefruit_Pls'

# Connect to Reddit
reddit = praw.Reddit(
    client_id=CLIENT_ID,
    client_secret=CLIENT_SECRET,
    user_agent=USER_AGENT
)

# List of subreddits
subreddits = ['canada', 'onguardforthee', 'canadapolitics', 'canadian', 'canada_sub']
results = {}

# Scrape top 3 daily posts from each subreddit
for sub in subreddits:
    top_posts = reddit.subreddit(sub).top(time_filter='day', limit=3)
    results[sub] = [(post.title, post.url, post.author, post.score, post.num_comments) for po

# Save results to a dated text file
today = date.today().isoformat()
filename = f'reddit_top_{today}.txt'

with open(filename, 'w', encoding='utf-8') as f:
    for sub, posts in results.items():
        f.write(f"### r/{sub} ###\n")
        for i, (title, url, author, num_comments, score) in enumerate(posts, start=1):
            f.write(f"{i}. {title}\n{url}\n{author}\n{score}\n{num_comments}\n\n")
```

Custom reddit scraper, using Python on *Spyder 6*

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Netnography on reddit

RQ: *How does the built environment of reddit impact Canadian political discourse?*

Searching, Scouting, and Reconnoitering

Top **3** posts, **last 24 hours**:
r/Canada
r/OnGuardForThee

Research Parameters
Systematic data collection
Data scraping challenges

Screenshot of r/Canada taken on 02-June-2025

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Immersion Journal

Immersion: 18h20mins

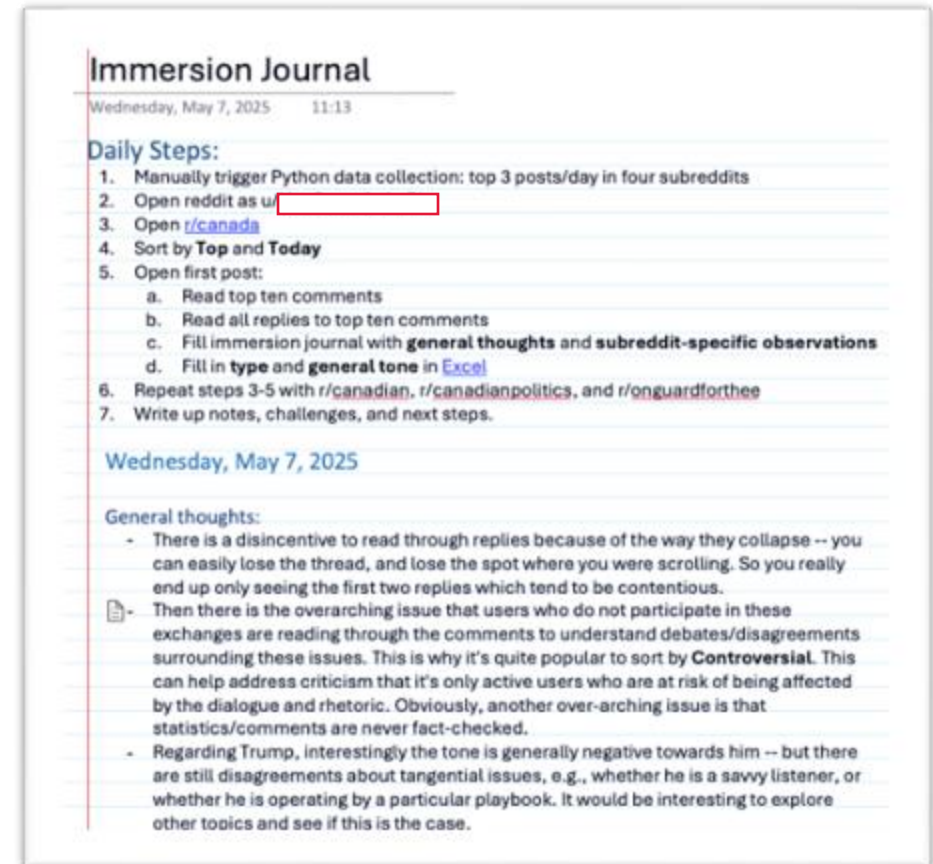**Data collection**:

      posted date, subreddit, title, type, user, upvote

      count, comment count, u:c ratio, URL

Observations:

      culture of respect and empathy

      benefit of nuance

      search for friction

      stunted conversations (unanswered challenges)

      award system and commenting tree

Screenshot of immersion journal from 07-May-2025

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Challenges & Next Steps

Challenges:

    the search for **friction**

    what is political?

    bots

    subreddit culture

    research density: > 3x data collection

    conversion into temporal comparative analysis

Bringing it back to **democracy**:

    Contraction of the public square

    Learning from street epistemology, collaborative decision-making

    Problematizing existing theories (Beyer, 2014; Forrestal, 2019)

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Thank you!

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