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Ideological segregation caused by opinion-based moderation in a social news website
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As the audience for the Internet rapidly expanded in the end of the 20th century, it was hypothesized that the fact that it enabled communication and mingling between very variable individuals could lead to increased diversity and tolerance between people. That the opportunity to communicate with people with whom one would never even exchange a glance in a real-world context could make for a virtual a world without borders, where one would no longer be limited to resources or companions in one's immediate geographical neighborhood.

In their article, Alstynne and Brynjolfsson (1996) overviewed what happened when telecommunications policies allowed extended access to all levels of society – their question was, whether the emergence of a global information infrastructure really implied the emergence of a global village, where individuals would create a community free of geographic constraints. This, they found, was only one outcome from a range of possibilities, many of which were much more likely than the harmonious global village scenario. They suggested that more likely than leading to a harmonious scenario, improving communications access through emerging information technology can – and will – also fragment society, »balkanize« interactions and eventually as a possible outcome, lead to new (or reinforce old) patterns of stratification and possibly even hinder democracy. Alstynne and Brynjolfsson (1996) opted to use the term »balkanization«, coined in the 1920's to mark the tendency of the geographically separated groups in the Balkan area to form ideologically homogenous communities that may react with hostility towards other groups holding antithetical ideas. Alstynne and Brynjolfsson (1996) explained that in the eighties and nineties, the ex-Yugoslavian countries that were geographically separated from each other by mountain lines were a good analogy to the online phenomenon, where individuals of the same geographical location or with similar interests, values or opinions would prefer to avoid communities that provided diversity and that were occupied with individuals with interests that differed from theirs, inflating inter-group differences to a point where hostility might occur towards out-group members. They had previously analyzed Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian online communities, and noticed that even online, the geographically separated nations did not really communicate with each other. In my opinion, however, the situation in Yugoslavia in the 1990s was much more complex than a lack of interaction between geographically isolated nations, and simplifying the political atmosphere of that time as geographical separation is somewhat naïve. I considered it best to replace Alstynne and Brynjolfsson's (1996) term with a more informative and less politically saturated term, and discuss cyberbalkanization as online

ideological segregation. Here it should be noted that the segregation can be outcome of also non-ideological factors, such as shared opinions, values, culture or geographic location.

In another article, Alstyne and Brynjolfsson (1996b) pointed out that the process might have implications on more serious factors than leisure-time conversation between members of different social websites, such as hindering interdisciplinary science in an environment where communication between scientists communicate mostly through information technology and where peer-reviewed literature is also mostly acquired online in an electronic format. Scientists who use information technology appear quantitatively more productive: they publish and write more papers, earn greater recognition among peers, and know more colleagues than those who don't use IT (Alstyne & Brynjolfsson, 1996b). IT allows a group of scientists easier coordination of large-scale projects and access to large data bases in remote locations. Alstyne and Brynjolfsson (1996b) pointed out that where this is perhaps good for enhancing the position and accessibility of science online, scientists tend to spend more time interacting with colleagues from their own field, and less time interacting with graduate students or scientists of other disciplines.

Alstyne and Brynjolfsson (1996) mostly assessed segregation of subgroup by geographic variables, but also alerted to the potential segregation by preferences, including social, intellectual and economic affiliations as well as that by geographic regions of Internet-users. Their basic argument is very simple: If information technology allows people to seek like-minded individuals and information that fulfills their preferences, then more information technology should accelerate the process. Local heterogeneity may give in to virtual homogeneity, as communities of like-minded people with similar interests, status, values and agendas gather across geographic boundaries and work to exclude themselves from the influence of those who do not conform to their ideals. This might potentially lead to stratification of the society of information technology users, and overall offers a way out to those who prefer to avoid contact with different individuals. This might be specifically harmful in a democratic culture where the majority's opinion is what matters, since there would be little exchange between the majority and groups that might otherwise function as influential minorities. Everybody would simply be busy mingling in their own community. The authors also note that segregation does not necessarily follow increased access to information technology. Whether or not it happens depends largely on mechanisms and functions of the community and its domain, and the process can be combated by consciously opting to use functions that work against it by encouraging diverse communications.

When considering the possibilities of how an online community can either accelerate or hinder the possibility of segregation, web page design, community rules and user interest as well as unwritten norms drafted by frequent visitors of the web page come to mind. There are numerous very large social news and entertainment web sites and communities with very different infrastructure, structure, features and user experience, and so likely very different levels of segregation depending on whether the structure of the webpage as a system accelerates or hinders creation and isolation of separated subgroups based on e.g. opinions, interests, geographic location, values or ideologies. The example I will mostly focus on is a social news web site called Reddit (www.reddit.com). The idea of Reddit is that it is a large website where users post content (typically stories, news, also interesting images or videos), browse and comment on contents posted by other users. The site is split into numerous »sub-reddits«, or news streams separated by relevant topics, such as *r/politics*, *r/worldnews* or *r/videos*. The site's users can subscribe to the sub-reddits that are of interest to them and thus regulate their news feed so that it is relevant to their interests.

The very basic quality control system on Reddit for guaranteeing interesting, fresh and high quality content is voting. Users »upvote« content that brings something new to the news stream of the relevant sub-reddit, or contributes to the conversation, and »downvote« content or comments that are uninteresting, irrelevant to the sub-reddit, or violate the sub-reddit's rules. Posts with more upvotes gain visibility by rising towards the front page, and posts with downvotes lose visibility by getting sent back on pages, where fewer readers will meet them and vote on them. Comments with more upvotes gain visibility by showing higher in the comment stream, comments with several downvotes get hidden from view. The users gain so-called link and comment »karma« by gaining as many points on their user profile as their post or comment has upvotes. The point system provides incentive to many Reddit-users to post content and comments.

The Reddit community's commenting, posting and voting guidelines are combined into an informal rulebook or etiquette, called the Reddiquette. The very first points on the Reddiquette are, interestingly, the following two rules:

- **Keep your submission titles factual and opinion-free.** If it is an outrageous topic, share your crazy outrage in the comment section.
- **Moderate based on quality, not opinion.** Well-written and interesting content can be worthwhile, even if you disagree with it.

These two rules are very salient, and give very clear indication that the informal community rules discourage opinion-based voting. The problem with opinion-based voting is that since posts with downvotes lose visibility and posts with upvotes gain visibility, the majority gets to decide what content is viewed and what is not. Against the Reddiquette, the majority frequently opts for opinion-based voting, rather than voting on new and intriguing content, accelerating the phenomenon of online ideological segregation simply by hiding conflicting ideas. One needs to remember that the web page is split to multiple sub-reddits oriented around an individual topic, and so on the individual sub-reddit, the majority's preferences and values are what decides visible content, creating sub-groups that at first sight appear ideologically homogenous, but where those with ideas conflicting with the values of the majority are actually silenced by downvoting their comments or content out of visibility.

Another Reddit mechanism that accelerates ideological segregation is the fact that the user is responsible for his or her own news feed. If a person complains about a sub-reddit starting to express little variability in their news feed, or overall discrepancy with e.g. the opinions or values of the majority on that sub-reddit, the user is typically reminded by other members of that sub-reddit that if he or she does not like the content, he or she can unsubscribe from that group and thus not view its content in his or her news feed, and then his or her comment is downvoted so that it loses visibility. This is not passive segregation by spending time with like-minded individuals, but very active segregation in that those who constitute an ideological majority in a given group encourage free-thinkers to leave and take their downvotes with them, leaving the subgroup in a state where the majority's views flourish in the absence of a challenger. A user with the nickname Mjolle commented on the web page with something that sums up the viewpoint from one who enjoyed the topic of the sub-reddit, but chose to leave due to the majority's preferences:

»Somewhat regretfully I unsubscribed from r/atheism. I found with time that it went from a community that valued intelligence and common sense, to a hiveminded circle jerk with the top goal of poking fun at christians. I truly and whole heartedly feel that this should NOT be the goal of such a community, atheism is not the counterpart of christianity, and such childish behaviour made me too ashamed of being a subscriber.«

»Circlejerk« is essentially a slang-word used by many redditors when discussing the phenomenon of ideological segregation in the community, meaning a » group discussion or activity between like-minded individuals that validates mutual biases or goals in a non-

confrontational environment« (Urban dictionary, 2011), or as Alstynne and Brynjolfsson (1996, 1996b, 2005) would call it – cyberbalkanization.

It should be noted that there are a few sub-reddits with much more heavy-handed moderation when it comes to avoiding opinion-based voting. A good example is r/askscience, which is a sub-reddit where the page users can ask an interesting question, which will then be answered by members of the community that have qualifications in a field of science that is relevant to the question at hand, who have been verified as professionals by moderators of the sub-reddit. Insightful and informative answers citing peer-reviewed journals and other credible sources are upvoted, everything else typically loses footing. Irrelevant comments are frequently deleted and conversation is kept on point. The quality moderation on these sub-reddits is unfortunately due to their external moderators that have been given power to directly remove comments that appear out of context or irrelevant, and without the deciding influence of the moderators, these communities would likely also be subject to segregation. It should also be noted that it is still the majority who gather most upvotes on topics that interest them, and thus regulate the community's discussion around their own interests.

I was interested in whether voting as one of Reddit's key features could really be a significant contributor to the ideological segregation. I decided to approach the problem by asking redditors about their habits of opinion-based voting, and then saw how their replies would connect with their answers to direct questions about avoiding communities where the majority expressed values or opinions that conflicted with theirs. I also asked them about their familiarity with the Reddiquette with the assumption that those who had read the community rules would have less tendencies towards opinion-based voting. One of my interests was also, whether individuals with active participation (posting comments and posts) would have different tendencies towards opinion-based voting than those, who never posted any content but only voted on others' contributions – the so-called »lurkers«, representing the silent majority of website visitors, who do not take part in the conversation or post content, but only observe (Nonnecke and Preece, 2003). On Reddit, lurkers may take part in voting, if they have registered, and so take part in regulating the content without contributing to it.

Method

Participants

Wikipedia (2012) cites that according to Google Doubleclick Ad Planner's estimate, the median U.S. Reddit user is male (72%), and 25–34 years of age. In my sample there are 75 women and 58 men, the 56% female majority being in direct contrast to most of the Reddit population being male. The age span of the respondents was 14 to 56 ($M = 21,65$, $SD = 5,43$, $Me=21$), and so the respondents were also younger than the average Reddit-population. 68% of the respondents were so-called lurkers, who only voted and observed and did not post new comments or posts, in contrast to the estimation that nearly 90% of online community users are lurkers (Nonnecke & Preece, 2003). Here it should be taken into account that the survey assessed voting habits, which can only be performed by registered Reddit members. On the community news feed itself, everybody can view comments and posts without having a registered account, but voting is only possible with registration. Due to this, the non-voting lurker population was directly excluded from the sample, which is in a way also meaningful, as lurkers who do not vote do not directly contribute to ideological segregation in the online community. It appears that by age, gender and activity, the sample is not very descriptive of the Reddit population as a whole, but one should also consider that the sample of comparison is probably also not perfectly descriptive of the underlying population.

The intention was to keep the instrument very short to avoid respondent compliance issues. Even though the instrument had altogether only fourteen items (including the demographic questions) and took on average one minute and 31 seconds to fill, the survey web page reported that nearly half of the potential respondents quit their participation after opening the first page, which may mean that the sample that did go through with the instrument is also by voting habits not a representative sample of the Reddit population. All the respondents were recruited from the same sub-reddit, *r/SampleSize*, which is a page used for collecting participants for projects of all kinds, varying from elementary school projects to university or marketing studies, where the target population is similar to that of Reddit-users, or where the researcher then trims down the final sample so that it contains cases that correspond with the target population. Occasionally, as in my case, *r/SampleSize* also includes surveys where the target population are only members of the Reddit-community. On one hand it might have been more interesting to only recruit the community users from sub-reddits where clearly ideological content is often found in both posted or linked content and comments, such as

r/atheism or r/christianity, but on the other hand I believe using r/SampleSize gives me a more representative sample of the Reddit-users as a diverse community. Assessing only sub-communities where it would have been meaningful to assume that selective opinion-based voting and ideological segregation would be a more common practice might lead to a finding that they are, indeed, an integral part of these communities, however that finding could not be generalized across a wider scope of the Reddit community, but only across the sub-reddits that were contained in the sample.

Instruments

I drafted a very short, simple online survey that first inquired respondents about their age and gender, to map whether the sample I got was at all descriptive of the Reddit-population as a whole, whether the individual respondents were so called »lurkers«, which is an expression used for online community dwellers who only observe and vote, without posting comments or posts or any more direct interaction with the other community members. Finally, I asked them the approximate proportion of posts and comments they usually voted on, to have some insight into how active the participants were as voters, or how many posts or comments typically are voted on.

This is a short account of the survey I used:

1. Gender
2. Please state the year you were born.

Note: Gender and age were assessed for a very rough assessment of whether or not the sample is representative of the Reddit-population as a whole.

3. Have you read the Reddiquette?
4. Out of a hundred posts, how many do you usually either upvote or downvote? ____
5. Out of a hundred comments, how many do you usually either upvote or downvote? ____
6. Which option would better describe your activities while browsing Reddit?

Note: This is a question used to assess whether or not the respondent on the questionnaire is a »lurker«. Lurkers constitute the largest population of the community visitors – they do not comment or make posts, but rather just browse comments and votes of others and vote on them.

Page 2: Next you will be presented with seven statements. Please, read the statement and then on the scale below estimate, to what extent you think the statement describes your behavior.

Note: Items 1,2, 4,5 and 7 assess tendencies towards opinion-based voting, whereas items 6 and 8 inquire about the respondent's tendencies towards online segregation. All of the items were scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 – Strongly disagree through 3 – Neutral, to 5 – Strongly agree.

1. I have never downvoted a good comment, even if I didn't agree with what it stated.
2. I tend to downvote comments that express opinions or values that differ from mine.
3. I upvote novelty accounts

Note: novelty accounts are accounts that only post comments or links that function as consistent puns, jokes or jests of the same type, and generally add nothing to the discussion. They do not contribute to ideological voting, as they posts of novelty accounts rarely have any ideological content, but since they rarely contribute anything to the discussion – and should thus be downvoted if one were to follow the community rules – upvoting novelty accounts may be a good indicator of opinion-driven voting habits. This item was not included in the total ideological voting score, but was included as its possible interesting correlate.

4. I tend to upvote all kinds of comments that add to the discussion, whether or not they conflict my own views and preferences.
5. I always upvote comments that I strongly agree with.
6. I prefer to browse sub-reddits where I can view posts and comments made by like-minded people.
7. I upvote only posts and comments made by people who share my opinions or preferences.
8. I avoid sub-reddits where I think I might meet people with values or opinions that would conflict with mine.

Next I assessed psychometric characteristics of the short questionnaire. Reliability coefficient for the two-item scale on ideological segregation was calculated per Cudeck and Hulin's

(2001) instructions of using Spearman Brown's formula and treating each item as a half in the split-half method. The discovered reliability coefficient was 0,55, which is relatively low, likely an outcome of the scale only containing two items. The first negative item had a negative correlation with the first positive item and reduced scale reliability, and so I excluded it from the results and the total score for the scale. Cronbach's alpha for the four items of opinion-based voting was 0,6 – also relatively low but bordering acceptable, and also likely an outcome of the shortness of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha for the entire seven-item scale lied at 0,67, which is again low but on the borders of acceptable, likely due to the shortness of the question as well as due to the fact that Cronbach's alpha is sensitive to dimensionality (Cudeck & Hulin, 2001).

Bartlett's test of sphericity revealed that the sample's correlation matrix was suitable for factor-analytic procedures, $\chi^2(15) = 85,56$, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0,65.

Since with maximum likelihood, the second item assessing ideological segregation created a Heywood case, the factor analysis was run with unweighted least squares. I used oblique rotation (direct Oblimin), because I assumed the two factors would correlate. The first factor explained 35,4% of variance and the second one 17,2%. On the pattern matrix, the first factor consisted nearly exclusively from linear combinations of the two items assessing ideological segregation, whereas the second factor consisted from a linear combination of the other items. Since the analysis was completed with unweighted least squares, I could not consult the χ^2 goodness of fit test, but the root mean squared residual was 0,047, which indicates that the two-factor model is a pretty good fit. Correlation between the factors was 0,48.

Procedure

I made a post on the sub-reddit r/SampleSize with a direct link to the online survey, explaining in my post that I was collecting data about reddit users' voting habits for a project at a social psychology course, and promising some descriptive statistics about the results for anyone that would be interested. After having the survey open and the post up for some over twenty-four hours, I closed the survey. For the results, I consulted Pearson's product moment and point-biserial correlation coefficients, and used t - and χ^2 - tests for inferential statistics.

Results

Table 1

Correlation matrix between the two sub-scales on the short questionnaire and other information gathered from the participants

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 opinion-based voting	1,00								
2 ideological segregation	0,33**	1,00							
3 age	-0,13	-0,02	1,00						
4 gender	0,02	0,10	0,05	1,00					
5 having read the reddiquette	0,19*	-0,05	-0,06	-0,20*	1,00				
6 proportion of posts voted on	-0,14	-0,01	-0,15	-0,06	-0,09	1,00			
7 proportion of comments voted on	-0,06	0,05	-0,20*	0,04	-0,09	0,66**	1,00		
8 active participation	-0,04	0,02	-0,10	-0,07	-0,13	0,12	0,18*	1,00	
9 upvoting novelty accounts	0,10	-0,01	-0,26**	-0,08	0,17	0,29**	0,25**	-0,01	1,00

Note. * = $p < 0,05$; ** = $p < 0,01$

Upvoting novelty accounts, was found not to correlate with opinion-based voting, it did, however, correlate negatively with age ($r=-0,26$, $p<0,01$), which means that younger community members are more likely to vote novelty accounts. Perhaps for younger individuals, the repetitive signature puns, jests or jokes typically made by novelty accounts seem more appealing. Upvoting novelty accounts did correlate positively with proportion of comments ($r = 0,25$, $p<0,01$) and posts ($r = 0,29$, $p < 0,01$) the participants voted on, indicating that those who vote posts more frequently also tend to upvote posts made by novelty accounts. Percentage of posts and comments the individual voted on had a high and significant correlation ($r=0,66$, $p<0,001$), indicating that individuals' voting habits on posts and comments are highly connected, and that it might have been useful to assess the participants' voting habits with just one item, however what is interesting is that the proportion of comments voted on correlated negatively with the participant's lurker status ($r= -0,18$, $p<0,05$), whereas the correlation between lurker status and percentage of posts voted on was non-significant ($r=0,17$, $p=0,17$), indicating that lurkers are less likely to vote on comments but no less likely to vote on posts than members of the online community that actively post comments and new content. It could, however, simply be that lurkers are more interested in

the posts made on the page than the web-page as an online community, and are overall less inclined towards even reading comments, since in order to read them and vote for them, one is often required to scroll down the page or to explicitly open the post page to view comments if the title of the page is a direct link to e.g. a news article.

Although gender data was only acquired as a rough assessment of how well the sample described the overall population on Reddit, I also found a difference between genders in whether or not the participants had read the community rulebook, Reddiquette, with a larger proportion of men reporting that they had read the rulebook $\chi^2(1, N = 133) = 5,46, p < 0,05$ with its instructions to avoid opinion-based voting. An independent *t*-test also revealed that the difference in opinion-based voting between those who have and those who haven't read the community etiquette is statistically significant $t(122)=2,16, p<0,05$ and of moderate effect size (Cohen's $d=0,39, r=0,19$). There was no difference in opinion-based voting in lurkers and active contributors $t(122)=0,46, p=0,65$, or between men and women $t(122)=-0,20, p=0,84$.

In order to compare the tendencies towards opinion-based voting between individuals with high or low tendencies towards online ideological segregation, I split the population into two groups on both sides of the 50th percentile on the score on the two items assessing ideological segregation, and ran an independent *t*-test between the upper and lower halves. I discovered a significant difference between a tendency towards opinion-based voting between individuals with a higher or lower tendency towards online ideological segregation. $t(122)=3,30, p<0,001$. The effect size was medium to large (Cohen's $d=0,60, r=0,29$) and indicates a connection between controlling content on the webpage according to one's own values, opinions and ideologies, and actively avoiding communities where one might meet people with values, opinions, interests or ideologies that conflict with one's own.

Conclusion

The results indicate that opinion-based voting is indeed related to tendencies of some individuals to avoid online subgroups where they might meet with opinions, values or attitudes that conflict with those that they possess themselves. From this sample, however, it is impossible to infer as in what measures exactly that leads to segregation, only that this kind of behavior is present in some of the respondents. Those who are familiar with the community etiquette report less opinion-based voting, and so emphasizing the Reddiquette's role in

maintaining diversity and interesting exchange in the community may be useful as a measure to counteract ideological segregation.

It should be noted that the case of voting increasing segregation might not be generalizable across the entire Reddit-population, as the questionnaire turned out to have questionable reliability, and the sample was likely not very representative of the community. This could be considered as something of a pilot test in assessing how a simple and an integral user-experience asset on a social webpage may lead to complex social processes. Similarly, the problems with opinion-based content control is not necessarily generalizable other voting-based social news sites, and that other news sites have their own benefits and problems. Overall, the web-design and user experience varies greatly across different popular social news sites, who in a way also serve different audiences with different needs, for different intentions. Similarly, the site's structure and user options directly influence who visits it, how they behave, what kinds of posts and comments they make, how they communicate with each other and so on. In regards to this, it would be interesting to directly (and quantitatively) compare the ideological segregation on Reddit to that on some other social website.

One interesting comparison would be between Reddit and a popular imageboard website called 4chan, which by structure is in some ways similar to Reddit, and in other ways its complete opposite. Where Reddit is a well-structured, very large website with dynamic subreddits being created and dying around topics of interest to its members, who have relative anonymity in that they first register and then communicate behind their screen-name without giving out any personal information, on 4chan nearly all users communicate from behind the unregistered nickname of »Anonymous«. Where on Reddit, community members prefer to use their single account (or disposable accounts called »throwaway accounts« in case they're posting something especially sensitive or embarrassing), and may inspect comments and posts made by other members' accounts as well as the amount of »karma« they have managed to acquire during their time on Reddit or even the exact date when the account was created, on 4chan there are hardly any accounts to inspect – since nearly all posts are made by »anonymous«, it is impossible to tell whether the person first posting an image and a message is the same person calling profanities at that person in the next message. Anonymity is, indeed, the key concept to the site's structure, perhaps as integral as voting and karma are to Reddit, leading to interesting communications between users. Whereas Reddit is dominated by carefully drafted messages, relatively little profanity and fairly good grammar (if one user makes a grammar mistake, another one is surely to point it out) and essentially, people are

trying to make meaningful contributions to the news flow and discussion, 4chan is dominated by internet slang, profanities, inside jokes, abbreviations, random images and other communications that appear entirely incoherent to an outside viewer, to whom entire channels might as well pass as a steady stream of nonsense. There is no voting on 4chan, so there is no specific system of quality-control other than the number of comments made under an individual post indicating its popularity. Another difference with Reddit and 4chan is that where Reddit archives old posts and their votes, keeping it possible to view the post and the comments under it but disabling them from being voted on, as well as using different kinds of tools to avoid reposting old content such as bots that perform link-counts for an individual news article, the newsfeed on 4chan is an endless loop in that the page has a limited capacity, it stores a given amount of data at one time, and as it gets full, older submissions get deleted regardless of their popularity or quality. The structuredness of Reddit splits it into relatively well-organized subgroups, where individuals can pick their part among different communities oriented around different interests, geographic locations, political orientations, lifestyles, ideologies and so on, whereas the nature of 4chan is chaotic, to say the least. It has several subgroups oriented around different themes of interest oriented around the main topics of Japanese culture, hobbies, creativity, pornography and »miscellaneous«, however what is really »own« to 4chan is a channel called /b/, or »random«, which is – in essence – exactly that: random images with random posts, anonymous strangers posting random ideas all under the same user name. It is difficult to describe /b/, which is why I would recommend anyone interested to have a look at the address <http://boards.4chan.org/b/>. But whereas chaos is the essence of 4chan as a web page, they are capable of organized action, as they displayed two weeks ago on May 11th by hacking the American Independence Tea Party Website, defacing the political party and holding the webpage in their possession for the entire day before its owners finally managed to take it down, then taking turns in blaming the entire ordinance on Reddit and 9gag (another popular social website). In a way, 4chan would be a much more interesting phenomenon for social psychological research than reddit, but its lack of organization and impish nature makes systematic study rather difficult. Or as it is written on the front page of /b/ - »The stories and information posted here are artistic works of fiction and falsehood. Only a fool would take anything posted here as fact.«

Due to its anonymity, chaos and eventually decaying content, 4chan has its charm in that it does not pressure users to segregation. On Reddit, unpopular comments are downvoted and they disappear out of sight, on 4chan, comments decay only after the page is full and needs

emptying. On Reddit, a poorly made comment is associated to the person holding the account from which it was made, and a post or comment with downvotes will diminish the individual's amount of karma, which in the community is essentially a sign of status. This leads to a loop of conformity – a person who posts a comment that conflicts with the view of the majority will be downvoted, which leads to loss of karma, which harms the individual's status. Posting comments or content that are consistent with the majority's views will gain upvotes, increasing karma and boosting the individual's status. This is only a problem due to opinion-based voting, and would not contribute to segregation if community members really lived up to their etiquette – earn status by significant contributions, by posting interesting, intriguing and new content.

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