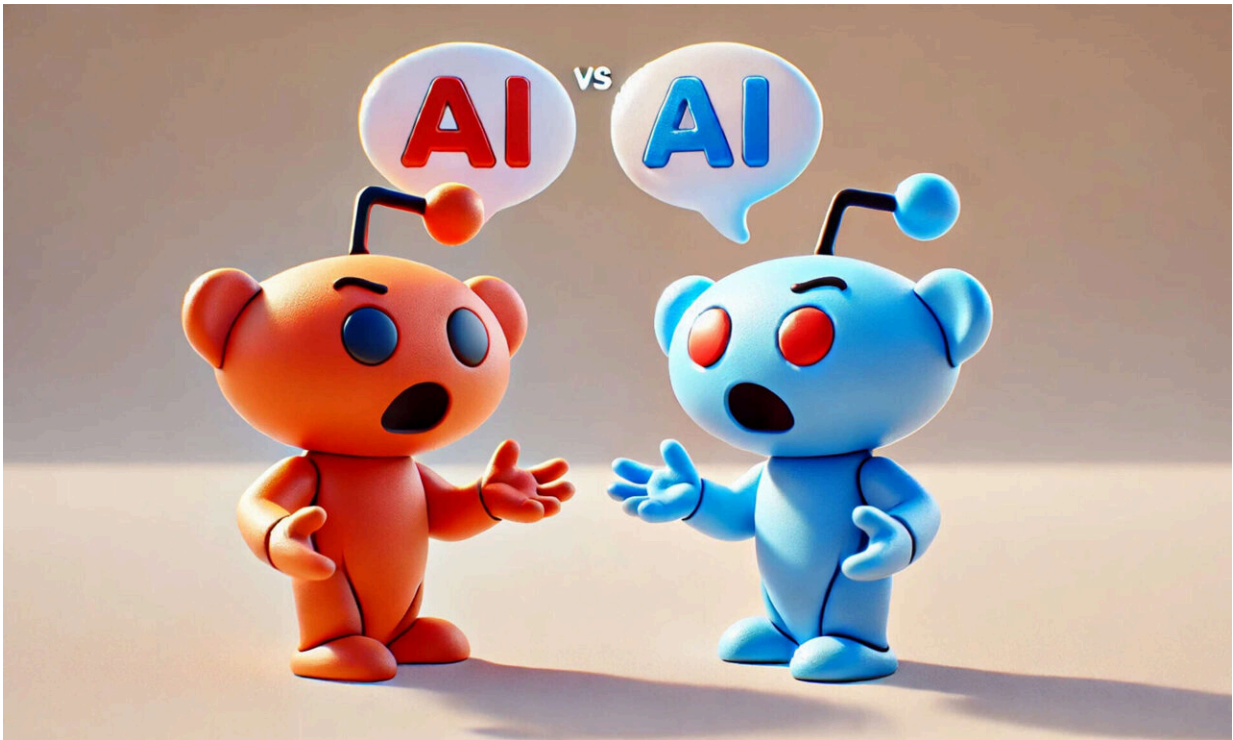


Who is more polarized about AI—the tech community or the general public?

July 30 2024, by Luke Auburn



DISCOURSE OR DISCORD? Reddit is an online social network where registered users submit content and commentary. Frequently discussed topics about AI on Reddit include its consciousness and intelligence, development and model training, business uses, the creativity it provokes, and its potential societal influence. Credit: University of Rochester illustration / Prompting and editing by Michael Osadciw using DALL-E

The tech community is more strongly divided in how they feel about artificial intelligence (AI) than the general public according to a study of Reddit discourse following the launch of ChatGPT.

Researchers from the University of Rochester led by Jiebo Luo, a professor of computer science and the Albert Arendt Hopeman Professor of Engineering, used ChatGPT and [natural language processing](#) techniques to analyze the themes and sentiments of 33,912 comments in 388 unique subreddits in the roughly six months following the generative AI tool's launch in November 2022. The [findings](#) appear in *Telematics and Informatics*.

Reddit is an [online social network](#) where registered users submit content and commentary, including to subject-specific forums called subreddits. The researchers studied comments about AI on tech-focused subreddits like "r/singularity" and "r/technology" as well as on non-tech subreddits like "r/futurology" and "r/wallstreetbets." Some of the most frequently discussed topics about AI include its consciousness and intelligence, development and model training, business uses, the creativity it provokes, and its potential societal influence.

But while comments in non-tech subreddits tended to talk about AI as a positive force that can be used for societal improvement, the tech community is more strongly divided.

"The tech community's opinions were either strongly positive or strongly negative, more so than the non-tech community," says Luo.

"I think the polarization is due to the commenters' personal knowledge of the issues. You see that play out among some of the tech celebrities as well, with people like Geoffrey Hinton, one of the pioneers of deep learning, being very pessimistic, and others like Sam Altman [the CEO of OpenAI] being far more optimistic."

While non-tech Reddit discussion tended to address [social issues](#) like concerns about job replacement or furloughs, the tech-centric subreddits had more focused discussions with stronger opinions one way or the other.

"On the positive side, members of the tech community say it can help improve productivity, and they are also happy about the open-source culture with the development of Llama [Large Language Model Meta AI] or other open-source language models," says Hanjia Lyu '20 (MS), a computer science Ph.D. student involved in the study.

"Some of the concerns the tech community shows are related to the [ethical implications](#) and potential impact on society stemming from AI advancement, as well as topics like regulation and hallucination."

The authors say these discrepancies show a need for more work to demystify AI for the public and address common misconceptions and fears. They call on policymakers, developers, educators, and researchers to develop clear, accessible explanations of AI technologies and their applications.

More information: Weihong Qi et al, Excitements and concerns in the post-ChatGPT era: Deciphering public perception of AI through social media analysis, *Telematics and Informatics* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.tele.2024.102158](#)

Provided by University of Rochester

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