

# CONTRACT CHEATING AND UNAUTHORISED HOMEWORK ASSISTANCE THROUGH REDDIT COMMUNITIES

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The use of the Reddit collection of online communities provide opportunities for people to enter into discussions and come to financial agreements, often with a degree of anonymity. Some of those discussions relate to contract cheating, where customers ask to have work completed for them or providers offer to complete work for customers (Clarke and Lancaster, 2006). Although Reddit is known to be a rule breaking community (Thompson, 2014) the use of Reddit for contract cheating has not been widely explored in the academic integrity literature.

Previous papers have reviewed how students are using file sharing sites such as Chegg for homework help (Rogerson and Basanta 2016, Lancaster and Cotarlan 2021). This involves the payment of a subscription fee. The Reddit approach to homework help differs as there is no charge made for support through several of the subreddit communities, although that is dependent on the goodwill and support of other members of that community.

This presentation and accompanying paper will review the operation of Reddit from both the perspectives of homework help provision and contract cheating solicitation.

Reddit provides an Application Programming Interface (API) to allow access to information about posts on the site. Quantitative data was collected programmatically from Reddit in September 2020 using the API. As Reddit users have pseudonyms, information identifying individuals is not usually available. The quantitative data will be explored in the presentation, along with examples of how Reddit appears to be being misused by students.

The homework help section of the presentation will focus on the r/HomeworkHelp subreddit, which has over 130,000 subscribers.

A data set of 141,136 Reddit posts was collected from r/HomeworkHelp and analysed. These posts

covered the period 1 January 2016 to 13 August 2020. The classification of request types provided by posters was examined. 28% (39,619 out of 141,136 posts) were created by high school students, the rest by college students. Requests for Maths support formed about 60% of the data set.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of posts over the period examined. This shows spikes in requests corresponding to typical examination periods in Western countries and a reduction in requests during vacation periods. There were no substantial differences seen between weekdays and weekends over the period.

r/HomeworkHelp is not the only subreddit allowing students to seek unauthorised answers. Another example is the r/CheatAtMathHomework, with around 53,000 subscribers. The use of the word “cheat” in the subreddit name suggests that students make little attempt to hide why they are accessing these communities.

The r/HomeworkHelp and r/CheatAtMathHomework subreddits are not strictly providing contract cheating services. Indeed r/HomeworkHelp has a policy against contract cheating. But students are still receiving private offers for contract cheating once they access those subreddits.

A smaller group of Reddit communities are of greater concern, as these exist solely for contract cheating purposes. Examples include r/domyhomework, with 5,527 subscribers, r/domyhomeworkforme with 8,173 subscribers and r/writemyessay, with 1,565 subscribers (all numbers correct as of 7 September 2020). These are emerging options that students can use for contract cheating which instructors need to be aware of.

The presentation will also consider the subreddits used for contract cheating, where discussions are often taken to Discord to allude tracing. The use

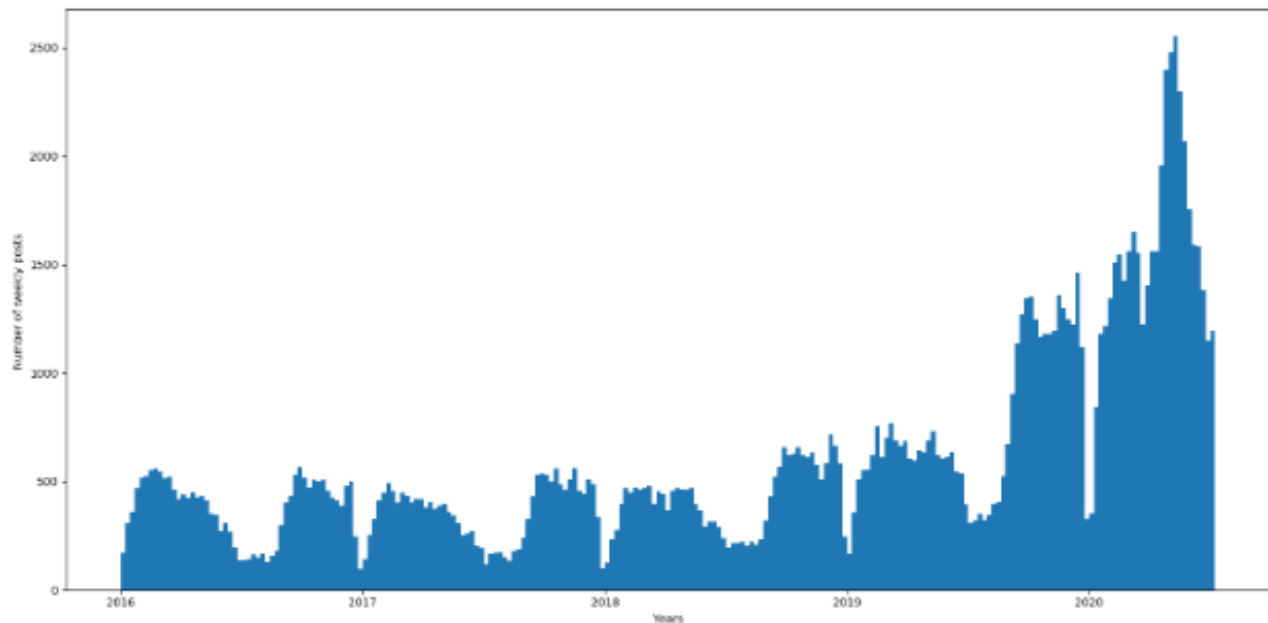


Fig. 1: Posts on r/homeworkhelp

of Reddit for contract cheating is not without its risks to both students and providers. The issue of Reddit contract cheating scams will also be explored

and is something that can be used to pose a warning to students about the dangers of outsourcing their assessments.

## REFERENCES

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