

Universal Basic Income and Reddit: Research Proposal

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Introduction

The idea of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) – an unconditional, periodic cash payment of an amount sufficient to meet necessities that is provided to every citizen – is a public policy initiative that has recently transformed from a utopian proposal to one that merits serious consideration. In particular, the threat of technological unemployment (machines displacing people from their jobs) and the COVID-19 pandemic have spurred discussion surrounding UBI. UBI has gathered many prominent supporters throughout history and in the present-day, including Mark Zuckerberg, Martin Luther King Jr., Milton Friedman, and Robert Reich (Stanford Basic Income Lab). Meanwhile, there is yet to be a successful, widescale, and nationwide implementation of the UBI in any country; the world at large is still in the experimentation phase, determining whether UBI would be successful at ensuring that no one is living below the poverty line.

Reddit is an online social platform and discussion forum with over 330 million users (Pardes, 2018). It is often used by researchers as an efficient method to survey and observe large populations. As a computer science student also interested in public policy, researching UBI from a computational lens is a topic of great interest to me.

Research Questions: How have sentiments and discussions surrounding UBI changed over time on Reddit? How can UBI discussions on Reddit be characterized?

Research Advisors

My research will be supervised by Dr. Ashton Anderson and Venia Veselovsky. I will be working with the Computational Social Sciences Lab (CSSLab) at the University of Toronto. Dr. Anderson's recent paper *Community embeddings reveal large-scale cultural organization of online platforms* will help guide my own research and data analysis process. I will also refer to Venia's and Dr. Anderson's paper *Imagine All the People: Characterizing Social Music Sharing on Reddit* as a starting point for my own research.

Proposed Outcomes

Through this research, I hope to better understand how Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom (as Reddit is most widely used by citizens of these countries) feel about UBI, the topics and concerns related to UBI that people discuss most, and the demographics of those who support or oppose UBI. At minimum, my research will allow a better understanding of where everyday citizens stand on the discussion surrounding UBI, and what people believe the primary benefits and downsides are.

Through the Laidlaw Scholars Program, I hope to experience planning and carrying out an independent research proposal, which will help hone my leadership and ownership skills.

Regarding my specific research topic, I hope to gain a better understanding of the research areas lying at the intersection of computer science and the social sciences. I believe the research will allow me to develop my computer programming, machine learning, statistical analysis, public policy analysis, and writing skills, which will be invaluable as I continue to pursue courses and research opportunities in both the near and far future.

References

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