

Prominently posted rules boost participation, cut harassment online

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Clear behavioral rules posted prominently on online discussions can markedly increase participation while cutting harassment, new research from Princeton University has found.

In a test developed with a 13.5 million subscriber science discussion group on the Reddit [online platform](#), the research found that rules posted at the top of the forum increased user participation by 70 percent compared to discussions with no rules posted.

Posting rules also prevented thousands of people a month from making harassing comments against the rules.

These rules change behavior by influencing [social norms](#)- people's beliefs about acceptable conduct in online discussions.

J. Nathan Matias, an associate research scholar in Princeton's Psychology Department and Center for Information Technology Policy, and the author of the study, said the work addresses common concerns that rules could stifle freedom of expression in online discussions. He said clearly demonstrating that a community will not tolerate harassment can increase participation and inclusion.

"When you make the rules more visible, more people participate for the first time," he said.

The research is scheduled for publication April 29 by the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

More information: Preventing harassment and increasing group participation through social norms in 2,190 online science discussions, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2019).

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Provided by Princeton University

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