A Guide to Conducting Online Focus Groups via Reddit

Brendan Richard, Stephen A. Sivo, Robert C. Ford, Jamie Murphy, David N. Boote, Eleanor Witta, and Marissa Orlowski

Abstract
Now more than ever there exists a need to conduct data collection online in a safe environment while ensuring that methodological rigor is not sacrificed. Widely available online platforms allow for text-based focus groups to be conducted quickly, easily, and efficiently, but protocols must be maintained to ensure they do not descend into casual observation of naturally occurring conversations. Various online platform options and their merits are discussed. Reddit is provided as a case study to illustrate the steps through which researchers can conduct an asynchronous online focus group. Key opportunities such as a similar quality of results, a lower cost, easier recruitment, and the ability to accommodate more sensitive topics are discussed, as well as challenges including a stigma against online focus groups, when they are most appropriate, and the potential for deviant behavior.

Keywords
focus groups, online focus groups, online platforms, Reddit

Introduction
Over the past decade online qualitative data collection has grown tremendously, offering researchers the ability to conduct research more quickly and easily. Annually firms spend over $1 billion on online qualitative data collection (ESOMAR, 2018). By conducting focus groups online participants can contribute whenever and wherever they prefer with the ability to remain anonymous minimizing the fear of judgment (Daniels et al., 2019; Wilkerson et al., 2014). Beyond participant preference, in an uncertain future where the threat of pandemics could limit face-to-face research for health and safety reasons, the ability to conduct data collection online becomes even more important (Parry, 2020). As individuals are locked down or choose to remain at home, videoconferencing (e.g., Zoom) and online text-based communication (e.g., Slack) have seen explosive growth (Kominers et al., 2020).

For researchers desiring to take advantage of the benefits of online focus groups it is important to understand how online platforms that support text-based communication can help facilitate data collection. Many of the same fundamental guidelines to conducting an in-person focus group also apply in an online environment. A forum (i.e., contribution place) must be created, participants must be invited and provided instructions, and the discussion must be overseen by a moderator and monitored. This paper provides an overview of the differences between focus group types and outlines potential online platform options before using Reddit as a case study to explore how researchers can effectively conduct an online focus group. Opportunities and challenges are discussed to assist researchers in ensuring a rigorous methodology with valid findings.

Focus Groups
Researchers value focus groups as a kind of group interview that encourages discussion among participants. By exchanging stories, sharing personal experiences and offering different points of view focus group participants add value to the discussion by exposing their likes and dislikes, wants and needs, and thoughts and suggestions. Contrasted with a one-on-one interview, the interactions between focus group participants tend to add emotion, breadth and depth to the discussion (Gammie et al., 2017; Kitzinger, 1994, 1995). Focus groups have

1 University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, USA
2 University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland

Corresponding Author:
Brendan Richard, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL 32816, USA.
Email: brendan.richard@gmail.com
been used extensively in hospitality and tourism research to study a diverse range of topics including women’s accommodation experiences, mobile augmented reality, and healthy eating while traveling (Chang, 2017; Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2018; tom Dieck & Jung, 2018). For all their advantages though focus groups can be expensive and difficult to coordinate, relying on participants who are willing to meet at the same time and place and forgo anonymity (Gammie et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2012).

**Online Focus Groups**

While in-person focus groups are used extensively in market research, the growth of the personal computer, the internet and social media is transforming the way in which firms conduct qualitative data collection (Daniels et al., 2019; ESOMAR, 2018; Patino et al., 2012). Conducting focus groups online is becoming increasingly popular (Shatz 2017; Schneider et al., 2002; Underhill & Olmsted, 2003). These new focus groups are an evolution, grounded in traditional focus groups and the principles that define them, but adapted based on technological advancement (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019).

Relative to in-person focus groups, online focus groups can be conducted independent of participant location. This is particularly useful for recruiting participants from various regions and for eliminating participants’ travel burdens (Boydell et al., 2014; O’Connor et al., 2008; Paraskevas et al., 2011; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). Online focus groups are also shaped by their respective online platforms, taking the form of asynchronous discussion boards (e.g., Facebook, Reddit) to synchronous live discussions (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet).

Online focus groups can also be anonymous, typically when conducted asynchronously via text-based communication, which can be advantageous in recruiting hard to access populations involving topics such as sexual preferences, health, and deviant behavior (Wilkerson et al., 2014; Wright, 2005). Anonymity has also been found to result in lower social anxiety and higher self-esteem in study participants (Joinson, 1999). The convenience of participating online anonymously though does come at the expense of a social environment with verbal and physical cues, and as a result the richness of the discussion can suffer (Tu, 2000). Anonymity, in addition to the lack of a face-to-face moderator, also has the potential to result in negative or harmful participant behavior (Williams et al., 2012).

**How Do They Compare?**

Research seeking to compare the results of asynchronous online versus in-person focus groups has primarily focused on the number of ideas generated as well as the cost of conducting the studies. One study found that online idea competitions (vs. in-person focus groups) resulted in more ideas generated at a lower cost per idea (€89.45 online vs. €105.76 for in-person; Schweitzer et al., 2012). Reasons for the lower cost include: no physical meeting place, no travel expenses, no video or audio recording equipment, and no transcriptions required (Landreth, 1998; Maddox, 1998, Reid & Reid, 2005; Walston & Lissitz, 2000). Another study found that while the in-person focus groups generated a higher total word count, both types of focus groups generated a similar number of idea themes (i.e., idea diversity; Woodyatt et al., 2016). As a result of these studies, researchers suggest that ideas generated from each focus group type could be combined and analyzed together as one source. This implies that under certain circumstances the outputs of both focus group types can be equivalent in idea generation productivity (Synnot et al., 2014; Woodyatt et al., 2016).

While online focus groups have a lower cost and generate an equivalent set of ideas, are the ideas themselves as valuable as those from in-person groups? By randomly assigning participants to in-person and online focus groups, one study showed that the two types of focus groups generated ideas that were comparable in novelty, usefulness and feasibility. Perhaps more importantly, both online and in-person groups were roughly equivalent in generating high quality ideas. As a result, the study concluded that online focus groups can generate ideas that are comparable in quality while being lower in cost relative to in-person focus groups (Richard et al., 2018).

Researchers considering online focus groups as a cost-effective substitute for traditional focus groups should become aware of the various online platforms that they can use for data collection. Reddit is used as an example of one potential online platform that can be used to conduct an online focus group. Reddit was chosen as the case study as the researchers had used it to successfully generate ideas of consistent quality to in-person focus groups (see Richard et al., 2018). Reddit has also been highlighted as a potential source for recruiting participants online (Shatz, 2017). The process for setting up and conducting an online focus group via Reddit is detailed, and the opportunities and challenges as a tool for online data collection are discussed.

**Online Platform Options**

There are a variety of options available to researchers seeking an online platform to host their focus group, including both video and text-based. Some of the more popular video conferencing options include Cisco WebEx, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet. All competing options allow for basic video conferencing functionality that would allow researchers the ability to conduct a live synchronous focus group. Participants can be invited to join via their browser or by installing an application, and all platforms (in their free versions) allow for up to 100 participants. Researchers deciding between the platforms should focus on the functionality differences both across and within (based on pricing tier) products. All the free product versions currently restrict the session duration to between 40 min to 1 hr which might not be acceptable to the researchers. Furthermore, while all products can record sessions, only Zoom and WebEx offer that functionality within their free pricing tiers (Archibald et al., 2019; Correia et al., 2020).
Turning to the focus of this study, while numerous private solutions exist for text-based focus groups developed by market research firms (e.g., itracks, flexMR, fieldwork) these can be expensive and as such publicly available solutions that are free (or nearly free) are considered and discussed below. For a website to be considered, it needs to have a robust discussion functionality that allows for organized comments. The primary purpose of websites that possess discussion functionality is typically news aggregation or question and answer, as popular topics provided to the community help drive meaningful and extensive discussions. Important functionality considerations such as the cost, anonymity of contributors, ability to create a community and make it private and the size of the existing community are compared in Table 1 (Alexa, 2018).

The website summaries provided in Table 1 highlight the substantial variance that exists between the most popular news aggregation and question and answer websites in terms of popularity and functionality. The two most well-known and used, Reddit and Quora, both possess an extensive user base, are free to use, and are within the top 100 highest traffic websites globally. Only Reddit though possesses the abilities to create an anonymous username and a private discussion community through which a focus group could be conducted. Facebook, one of the most popular websites globally, does have the ability to create private groups where focus groups can be conducted, although these private groups lack anonymity as the identities of the participants are known to each other (Medley-Rath, 2019). In one study using Facebook private groups, the researchers “friended” each participant to invite them to an asynchronous focus group in which the participants where able to see the identities of the other participants (Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2015). A similar focus group study, in this case asynchronous, was conducted on Facebook, where again participants where able to see each other’s name and profile picture (Thrul et al., 2017). Therefore, due to its popularity, ease of use, functionality, and anonymity, Reddit was selected as a case study in creating and conducting an online focus group.

### What Is Reddit?

Reddit is a social news aggregator where users can share and comment on news stories, web links, text posts and images. Founded in 2005, Reddit has developed a massive online presence. Reddit had grown to over 500 million monthly visitors (with over 300 million unique visitors) making it the fifth most visited website in the United States (sixteenth in the world). Visitors come from over 217 countries, spending on average 13 min per visit, leaving over 5 million comments and 25 million votes daily. The online platform it operates on is robust, allowing for hundreds of thousands of “subreddits,” forums dedicated to a specific topic, collectively accumulating millions of comments (Shatz, 2017).

As an online platform Reddit has the potential to be used for data collection. Reddit is available to the public, freely accessible to anyone with internet access. Reddit is also completely free to users generating revenue from advertisements placed on its websites. From a cost standpoint conducting an online focus group on Reddit or a similar online platform (e.g., Voat, Band, Hubzilla) carries with it no cost. As a result, Reddit can be advantageous from both a cost standpoint (Shatz, 2017) and its ability to deliver results similar in quality to in-person focus groups (Richard et al., 2018).

### Table 1. Online Platform Options.

| Website   | Primary Purpose                  | Free/Paid  | Users          | Global Web Traffic Rank | Page Views Annually | Anonymous Users | Community Creation | Private Communities |
|-----------|---------------------------------|------------|----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Facebook  | Social Networking               | Free       | 2.4 Billion    | 4th                     | Unknown             | No               | Yes                | Yes                  |
| Reddit    | News aggregation                | Free       | 330 Million    | 18th                    | 80+ Billion         | Yes              | Yes                | Yes                  |
| Quora     | Question & Answer               | Free       | 190 Million    | 93rd                    | 2+ Billion          | No               | No                 | No                   |
| Metafilter| News Aggregation; Question & Answer | $5 to join | <100 Thousand  | 2,787th                 | <10 Million         | Yes              | No                 | No                   |
| Voat      | News aggregation                | Free       | Unknown        | 6,993rd                 | Unknown             | Yes              | Yes                | No                   |
| Hubski    | News aggregation                | Free       | Unknown        | 249,298th               | Unknown             | Yes              | No                 | No                   |

**Using Reddit to Conduct an Online Focus Group**

Conducting an online focus group via an online platform, in this case Reddit, has the potential to generate high quality ideas at a fraction of the cost of traditional focus groups. Reddit users, safe in anonymity and empowered with the ability to contribute simultaneously, can take advantage of the platform’s ability to store and retain an almost unlimited number of organized contributions. For researchers considering conducting an online focus group via Reddit, a successful outcome can be achieved, although it will require preparation and adherence to proper procedures. Below are a series of steps designed to assist firms in conducting a focus group via an online platform. The steps were developed and refined from the authors own experience in successfully conducting online focus groups using Reddit (Richard et al., 2018).

**Online focus group steps to success:**

1. Create a unique online forum
2. Decide who you want to participate
3. Develop focus group guidelines
4. Submit a focus group post
5. Monitor responses
6. Transfer results for analysis
Create a Unique Online Forum

To successfully conduct an online focus group via an online platform the first step researchers must take is to create a unique online forum (i.e., subreddit in Reddit) to host the focus groups. To create a subreddit a Reddit user account must first be generated. With the Reddit user account active there are two requirements that Reddit enforces for requests to create new subreddits. First the user account must be at least thirty days old. Second the account must have a minimum level of activity within the Reddit website. The minimum activity requirement is considered met when the user participates in basic activities such as making posts and providing comments to existing posts. In the case of our study (Richard et al., 2018) this requirement was met via the posting of two news articles and by making a handful of discussion comments.

Once the basic requirements have been met a new Reddit user can proceed to creating a new subreddit. Researchers should carefully choose the name of the subreddit ensuring that it broadly represents the intended goals for the current and future focus groups as it cannot be renamed. To create the new subreddit a researcher should proceed to the subreddits page on the Reddit website (i.e., https://www.reddit.com/reddits/) and click on the “Create your own subreddit” link. The researcher will be asked to provide a name, description information, and type for the subreddit (see Figure 1 for example). Here type refers to the level of privacy. A public subreddit can be viewed and accessed by anyone whereas a private subreddit can only be viewed and accessed by approved users. The setting the researcher chooses should largely be determined by the desired sampling method and selection of potential participants.

Decide Who You Want to Participate

In our study we showed how randomly assigned participants to an online focus group conducted via Reddit can achieve a similar quality of results as an equivalent series of in-person focus groups (Richard et al., 2018). Like our study it is possible that researchers will seek to control access to who can and cannot participate in the online focus group. Researchers might have a research topic that applies specifically to a certain demographic or wish to obtain ideas only from those individuals who have had specific experiences. In either case if the researcher would like to control who can and cannot participate in the focus groups it is best to create a private subreddit. Whereas in a public subreddit any user can view and contribute to the discussion, in a private subreddit only those users who the researcher has pre-approved will be able to read and contribute.

For a private subreddit one method for recruitment would be to have potential participants complete an online survey (e.g., SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics) first answering questions that will help the researcher determine their appropriateness for the focus group (Gaiser, 2008). They would also be asked to create a Reddit user account and provide their username in the survey. The researchers should advise potential participants to create a username that is anonymous, doing their best to ensure that other potential participants will not be able to identify them based on their username. Alternatively, the researcher can create a unique account and anonymous username (e.g., participant001) for each participant, although depending on the desired number of focus group participants this might become laborious relative to allowing participants to select their own username.

After the completion of the pre-screening survey the researcher can determine if the potential participant is a good fit for the focus group study. If so, access to the private subreddit can be granted to the user by the researcher. A subreddit moderator can add approved submitters via the moderation tools listed on the right side of the subreddit (see Figure 2). By clicking on the “approved submitter” link the moderator can “add approved submitter” by entering their username. All users approved for the subreddit will appear in a list on the page with the option to message or remove that user from the subreddit.

Develop Focus Group Guidelines

In any focus group it is important that the moderator (i.e., the researcher overseeing the focus group) take an appropriate amount of time at the beginning of the study to properly
instruct the participants on basic guidelines, what to expect and how to conduct themselves (Kitzinger, 1995). This basic principle of focus groups is no different when they are conducted online. Rather than verbally though this important information can be communicated to online focus group participants on Reddit via the comment section at the top of the post reserved for the creator of the post.

In our study, we provided a focus group question to participants on Reddit focused on sustainability in the hospitality industry. We opened with a greeting thanking participants for taking part before proceeding to the actual idea generation question. Following the question, we clarified which responses would be deemed acceptable, noting that all ideas were welcome, and that there were no wrong answers. Next, we provided tips for approaching the exercise including reading other participants contributions first, submitting new ideas, commenting on existing ideas and trying to limit each comment to only one specific idea. Finally, basic procedural information was provided to the participants informing them when the focus group would be “open” for their discussion and for how long they were expected to participate (see Figure 2).

Submit a Focus Group Post

Creating a new focus group is a quick and painless activity. Subreddit moderators can create a new post from which to host the focus group by clicking on the “Submit a new text post” link on the main subreddit webpage. Reddit will ask the researcher for a “title” for the post, in addition to “text” where the researcher can place the focus group guidelines previously discussed. Reddit also allows for the addition of images or the creation of a table within the post. Once the information has been entered the researcher selects the “submit” button at the bottom of the page and the post is created and ready for

![Figure 2. Screenshot of created subreddit post.](image-url)
submission from participants. The post will have a dedicated web address that can be provided to participants. Please remember that the link will only work for those participants that have been pre-approved for subreddit access. Finally, to ensure that the focus group begins and ends at a time of the researchers choosing, please note the moderator option on the post page (just below the “text”) to “lock” or “unlock” the post. When a post is locked users can view the post but cannot submit comments to add to the discussion (see Figure 2 for example). By using this functionality researchers can manually set the beginning and end date and time for the online focus group.

Monitor Responses
Throughout the course of the focus group it is important for the researchers to regularly check-in on the state of the focus group and its participants. By assessing usernames that have contributed to the discussion researchers can determine which participants are engaged and reach out to those that have not with friendly reminders (Richard et al., 2018). Periodically reading through comments as they are submitted will help ensure that participants are staying mostly on topic and are not engaging in any destructive behavior that might cause harm to other participants. Actively reading the comments will allow researchers the ability to determine if any clarifying points or thoughtful probing questions need to be made either to individual participants contributions or to the group via the focus group guidelines within the “text” section at the top of the post (Wilkerson et al., 2014). For the length of the focus group, while ideally it would be flexible and last until the researchers feel data saturation has been reached (Hancock et al., 2016), practically it is preferable for researchers to set a specified end date in advance to obtain participant buy-in for the study. For guidance, previous studies lasted between four to seven days (Nicolas et al., 2010; Richard et al., 2018; Turney & Pocknee, 2005).

Transfer Results for Analysis
Once the focus group has been completed the researchers can stop user contributions to the discussion by selecting the “lock” option previously discussed. At this point while users will be able to view the post, they will not be able to make any further submissions. As all the contributions are text-based at this point it is relatively simple to transfer participant contributions to a local file for assessment and analysis. In our study the contributions were copy and pasted all at once into Microsoft Excel where traditional content analysis could take place. Alternatively, there do appear to be several publicly available solutions available that use an application programming interface (API) to automatically extract comments from a Reddit post. Due to the embedded nature of submissions within Reddit it is also possible, although somewhat time-consuming, to assess the levels at which a comment was made (i.e., whether it was a new “parent” contribution or a subsequent “child” comment). Finally, the text-based nature of the online platform allows the researchers the ability to tie the contribution to the username to the participant, something that is much more laborious in a conventional in-person focus group.

Discussion

Opportunities
Conducting a focus group on an online platform represents the opportunity to achieve a similar quantity and quality of ideas at a significantly lower cost. Previous studies have shown that conducting focus groups online can result in a similar number and diversity of ideas (Schweitzer et al., 2012; Woodyatt et al., 2016). Recent studies have also shown that online focus groups conducted via online platforms like Reddit can generate a similar level of quality of ideas (Richard et al., 2018). Finally, studies have shown that costs can be lower for online studies (Schweitzer et al., 2012). As a result, it is possible to see the benefits of conducting online focus groups versus pursuing data collection via traditional in-person focus groups.

Critical to the success of a research project is the ability of researchers to successfully attract participants to their focus group (Shatz, 2017). In a traditional focus group recruiting participants can be challenging. It is difficult obtaining participants who are willing travel to a specific location and attend at a specific time. For hard-to-reach and unique populations it can take much longer to find participants willing to meet face-to-face to discuss sensitive topics (Wright, 2005). As a result, it is likely that firms will find it easier to successfully recruit participants for online focus groups versus in-person. Participants have been found to prefer the convenience of flexible scheduling and participation location of online focus groups (Zwaanswijk & van Dulmen, 2014). Without the requirement of travelling nontangible incentives can play a greater role, especially if the goal of the study aligns with the participant’s interests (e.g., health, well-being, disorders; Krueger & Casey, 2009). Realizing the potential of Reddit with its pre-existing online communities, ability to recruit for free, and potential for large samples, previous studies have used it successfully as a source of participants (Shatz, 2015).

Given the potential ease of recruiting participants, moving beyond a traditional gated recruitment process and opening the focus group to the general public is also a potential opportunity. Traditionally in-person focus groups have been constrained due to the challenges of finding participants who can all meet at the same time at the same place. Additionally, since only one participant can speak at a time, the more participants the higher the likelihood potential contributions will be forgotten or left unexplored (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987). Instead of obtaining a relatively homogenous group via random assignment (Richard et al., 2018), participation could be made available to a geographically diverse crowd of contributors (Ford, Richard & Ciuchta, 2015). While the benefits would include increased diversity of participants and ideas, and likely a greater volume of unique ideas, the ability of the moderator to focus and
monitor the group would decrease. As a result, opening the online focus group up to the public would also allow its designation as a focus group under Krueger’s criteria (1994) to be questioned.

Finally, there are significant cost savings that can be achieved in the areas of transcription and preparation for data analysis (Reid & Reid, 2005; Schweitzer et al., 2012). In a traditional focus group the session must be recorded to retain the data collected. The recordings then must be transcribed typically at significant cost to the firm or researcher as accurate data transcription can be challenging, especially when there are more than two individuals speaking simultaneously. Even if the data can be transcribed efficiently and effectively at a reasonable cost, an additional step is required to match the transcribed text with the participant who was speaking. In an online focus group conducted via Reddit or a similar online platform neither of these steps are required as the data is already text-based, and each contribution has a participant’s username associated with it.

Challenges

Researchers using online focus groups might encounter pushback to recognizing a text-based focused online conversation as a focus group. Take away the targeted recruitment and prescreening process and moderator direction and legitimate methodological concerns could be raised regarding the validity of the findings. A focus group is traditionally perceived as an organized group discussion focused on a specific topic overseen by a researcher in a comfortable relaxed setting (Kitzinger, 1994). On the other hand, covertly observing a naturally occurring online group discussion is not considered to be a focus group (Bloor et al., 2001; Stewart & Williams, 2005). It is important to discern and maintain the difference between internet chat rooms and focus group discussions. Internet groups can be focus groups when the questions asked are truly focused, when participants can freely participate without the threat of retribution and when a moderator maintains control of the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2009). When these criteria are met, online focus groups have been found to meet the characteristics of focus groups (Turney & Pocknee, 2005).

While online focus groups have developed acceptance as equivalent proxies to in-person focus groups, there are still many different focus group uses, some better suited than others for the online environment. Focus groups can be used to stimulate new ideas, diagnose problems, generate impressions, or see how participants react to the phenomenon of interest (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Studies that focus on the generation of new ideas may be better suited to the online environment versus those that seek to benefit from rich discussions that go in-depth on a single topic. In-person focus groups encourage richer discussion with their more traditional form of communication in which participants can use all their senses, communicating with multiple cues such as eye contact, hand gestures and facial expressions (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Tu, 2000). From these real-time interactions, present in face-to-face and to some extent synchronous online focus groups, researchers can assess body language, vocal tones, and facial expressions, to develop a richer assessment of the data (Schneider et al., 2002) than is possible in asynchronous online focus groups (e.g., Reddit). On the other hand, online text-based communication does allow for the use of different fonts, spacing, punctuations and emoticons to express emotions which to some extent can substitute for non-verbal cues (Stewart & Williams, 2005). To this end online focus groups would also be more acceptable when researchers are recruiting participants from populations that are more technically savvy.

Finally, a concern with a much larger group with a less extensive or non-existent prescreening process is that the likelihood of participants’ providing false or inaccurate information will increase. One way in which online focus groups alleviate this concern is less emotional presence on the part of the moderator which can lead to less influence from visual cues, vocal tones and body language over the participants, though influence would remain via the questions asked. It is still important though for the moderator to remain attentive to the discussion taking place, helping to keep the group focused as needed to limit distractions (Gaiser, 2008; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). Furthermore, functionalities inherent to online platforms such as participant’s ability to vote on other’s contributions and a moderator’s ability to remove participants and their comments from the discussion can act as a natural deterrent to deviant behavior (Richard et al., 2018).

Conclusions

For those researchers willing to consider online focus groups the benefits could be substantial. By using an online process, researchers can avoid the costs and time required to find and set up a physical focus group space, incentivize participants to meet at the same time and place, and record and transcribe all the ideas generated. Instead, an online space can be created, and participants can be invited to participate virtually at a time of their own choosing. This becomes even more important when health and safety concerns such as pandemics result in research institutions suspending face-to-face research (Metzler, 2000). Critically with a lower barrier to participation and an online platform with near limitless capabilities the number of participants is only limited by the recruitment abilities and of the researcher (Ford et al., 2015). The focus group data, already in text form, can more easily be prepared for analysis, reducing the cost and improving the turnaround time of the findings. With the ability to obtain similar results as in-person focus groups faster and cheaper researchers that explore the use of online focus groups could achieve findings and develop publications more quickly.

Reflecting on our experience using Reddit as an online platform for focus groups (Mortari, 2015), there are several lessons we learned that we would like to acknowledge and share. While Reddit is one of the most popular websites in the U.S., it does represent something especially new and challenging for those who are not tech savvy. We hope that the website’s popularity, ease-of-use, and our step-by-step instructions are helpful to
both researchers and participants. Also, while our topic was broad and easily discussable for most participants, which can be beneficial, we acknowledge the immense value in using an anonymous platform like Reddit to allow participants the ability to discuss and share sensitive topics. Finally focus groups on Reddit, like other text-based asynchronous platforms, do lack the face-to-face presence and accompanying benefits we discussed in the challenges section, but more so than that can feel more clinical, lacking the camaraderie and joie de vivre that can make in-person focus groups enjoyable for researchers and participants.

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ORCID iDs
Brendan Richard https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7932-4635
David N. Boote https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7650-3646

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