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The Record Herald

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PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Social media reshaping research on substance use



Reddit and TikTok – with help of AI – offer unprecedented insights

Layla Bouzoubaa Drexel University | THE CONVERSATION

When you think of tools for studying substance use and addiction, a social media site like Reddit, TikTok or YouTube probably isn't the first thing that comes to mind. Yet the stories shared on social media platforms are offering unprecedented insights into the world of substance use. • In the past, researchers studying peoples' experiences with addiction relied mostly on clinical observations and self-reported surveys. But only about 5% of people diagnosed with a substance use disorder seek formal treatment. They are only a small sliver of the population who have a substance use disorder – and until recently, there has been no straightforward way to capture the experiences of the other 95%.

Today, millions of people openly discuss their experiences with drugs online, creating a vast collection of raw narratives about drug use. As a doctoral student in information science with a background in public health, I use this material to better understand how people who use drugs describe their lives and make sense of their experiences, especially when it comes to stigma.

These online conversations are reshaping how researchers think about substance use, addiction and recovery. Advances in artificial intelligence are helping make sense of these conversations at a scale that wasn't possible before.

The hidden population

The vast majority of people diagnosed with a substance use disorder address the issue informal-

ly – seeking support from their community, friends or family, self-medicating or doing nothing at all. But some choose to post about their drug use in dedicated online communities, such as group forums, often with a level of candor that would be difficult to capture in clinical interviews.

Their social media posts offer a window into real-time, unscripted conversations about substance use. For example, Reddit, which is comprised of topical communities called subreddits, contains over 150 interconnected communities dedicated to various aspects of substance use.

In 2024, my colleagues and I analyzed how participants in drug-related forums on Reddit connect and interact. We found that they focused on the chemistry and pharmacology of substances,

See **SOCIAL MEDIA**, Page 3A

GETTY IMAGES

Local man charged with attempted homicide

Amber South

Chambersburg Public Opinion
USA TODAY NETWORK – PENNSYLVANIA

A 22-year-old Chambersburg man is charged with attempted homicide after a bullet intended for one person instead struck an occupied residence over the weekend, according to Chambersburg Police.

Nathaniel Stevens is charged with attempted homicide, two counts of aggravated assault and related gun charges.

Pennsylvania State Police and the Washington Township and Waynesboro police departments assisted in the investigation, according to the report.

He is in Franklin County Jail, denied bail, according to court records.

Borough police began investigating after responding to a shots-fired call just after midnight Feb. 7 on South Hackleberry Drive, located in the Franklin County Housing Authority in Chambersburg's west end.

Stevens attempted to shoot a certain person but missed and instead hit a house with two people inside, according to police.

"The public is not in danger. The suspect and victim were known to each other and the suspect solely targeted the victim," the police report states.

Police identified Stevens as a suspect after a short time and took him into custody at about 6:45 a.m.

Pennsylvania State Police and the Washington Township and Waynesboro police departments assisted in the investigation, according to the report.

In addition to attempted homicide

See **HOMICIDE**, Page 3A

Board of Commissioners approve resolution supporting ICE

Julie E. Greene

The Herald-Mail
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved a resolution Tuesday morning, Feb. 10 – supporting the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and local law enforcement – to a chorus of boos from the meeting room gallery.

The vote came with a group outside the Washington County Administration Building protesting against a proposed ICE immigrant detention center near

Williamsport.

The same morning Congresswoman April McClain Delaney's office announced McClain Delaney, D-6th, had introduced legislation prohibiting ICE from establishing or operating a planned immigration detention facility in Washington County.

The Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency purchased a warehouse at 16220 Wright Road near Williamsport on Jan. 16 for \$102.4 million, according to the deed.

See **ICE**, Page 3A



At least two people with signs in support of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency or the Trump Administration walked into a large crowd in downtown Hagerstown that was protesting ICE and a proposed detention facility near Williamsport.

JULIE GREENE/
THE HERALD-MAIL

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