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Advice perceptions and upvote pragmatics: An experimental analysis of Reddit advice-giving dynamics



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ABSTRACT

This study examines how linguistic formulations influence our perceptions of advice within the computer-mediated context of Reddit, bridging the gap between linguistics and other disciplines. A between-subjects experiment was designed to both explore a selection of advice-giving moves on Reddit and to better understand Reddit's upvote system. Using frameworks from communication and social psychology to examine the underlying effect of linguistic variables, 180 participants were provided with an advice scenario and then invited to emulate the Reddit voting system, rate the advice on a variety of psychometric dimensions, and reflect qualitatively on the advice in the experiment and about advice-giving as a communicative act. This paper reports on how participants perceived the voting system and used it to evaluate advice, along with the quantitative aspects of the experiment.

Results show that the manipulation of advice-giving moves has a significant effect on perceptions of the advice-giver's warmth and competence, as well as the advice message's feasibility, limitations, and positive politeness perceptions; all ultimately influencing whether one will take up the advice. There is also evidence that Reddit's upvote system, as a binary affordance, has numerous, graded, pragmatic meanings that are not only obscured by the way the feature is operationalized, but also extend beyond the intention of the site's creators.

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1. Introduction

As of 2025, Reddit is the 6th most visited website worldwide ([Statista, 2025a](#)), with estimates of approximately 121 million daily active users ([Statista, 2025b](#)). The site can be conceptualized as a vast collection of discussion forums ([Unger, 2020](#)), or subreddits. Redditors (i.e. users of Reddit) mainly interact by posting and commenting, in addition to upvoting or downvoting a post or comment. Even though Reddit has undergone several redesigns since the site's inception in 2005, the upvote system has remained a constant and integral component. Yet, there is little empirical evidence about how and why people use this feature. Furthermore, exploring the dynamics of upvoting may help explain more contextualized forms of communication on Reddit, including that of advice-giving. For example, when a Redditor upvotes an advice-giving comment, it may provide evidence that the linguistic realization of that advice may be perceived positively. Thus, there is an opportunity to examine not only linguistic forms on Reddit (and the perceptions of those forms), but also its interaction with the platform's features.

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It has been argued that the characteristics and features of Reddit (e.g. high degree of anonymity, segmentation of the site into subreddits with specialized themes or topics, and the upvote system) have made the site particularly favorable for advice interactions (Carpenter et al., 2018). Studies about the relationship between advice and Reddit's features are still limited. One example is Vepsäläinen (2022), where it was noted that compared to other discussion forums, message connections on Reddit are more visible through the site's branch-like structures, allowing more complex, and sometimes off-topic, interactions within advice discussions.

Scholars have shown increasing interest in the relationships between technological affordances and interaction (e.g. Bou-Franch et al., 2012; Dynel and Chovanec, 2015) and a growing shift towards mixed-methods approaches (e.g. Locher, 2006; Yuan and Jin, 2024). Within linguistics, research about advice is taking an increasingly contextualized approach (e.g. Locher, 2013; Stommel, 2016; Waring, 2005). Despite all the good work that has been done on understanding online advice, these have been mostly descriptive accounts. In other words, the focus, especially within linguistics, is on the identification of linguistic strategies within different contexts where advice interactions occur (Yip, 2024). Therefore, more attention could be paid to the perlocutionary aspects of advice (e.g. perceptions and evaluations, both linguistically and paralinguistically), while also incorporating more interdisciplinary methods and theories.

In Lu's (2024) corpus-based analysis of advice comments, it was found that a variety of moves (a linguistic unit delineated by communicative function – see Swales, 1990, 2004) were used in the advice realizations on Reddit. This paper extends Lu's (2024) descriptive account of Reddit advice by using a selection of the results from that study to inform and design an experiment that tests the perlocutionary effects of advice forms. Two advice moves that had the strongest effect on increasing upvote scores were analyzed for their effect, while the upvote was analyzed for its pragmatic meaning. The combination of these two points of investigation in one experiment therefore allows us to not only understand perlocutionary effects of advice form beyond descriptions, but also substantiate if and how these same forms might be related to the meaning and usage of this digital affordance.

This experiment, which incorporates work from communication studies and social psychology, therefore attends to the call for studies of computer-mediated interactions that are informed by research not only within linguistics, but also other disciplines (Herring, 2019). Because the results contained both qualitative and quantitative measures that each yielded interesting findings on their own, the qualitative results are discussed in Lu (2025), while this paper focuses on the quantitative results and how participants conceptualize and utilize the affordances of Reddit as it pertains to advice interactions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Paralinguistic digital affordances (PDAs)

The term paralinguistic digital affordance (henceforth, PDA) has been used in communication studies, media studies, and psychology to describe “lightweight acts of communication” (Hayes et al., 2016). Examples of PDAs include Facebook ‘likes’ and ‘reactions’, X (formerly Twitter) ‘retweets/reposts’, and Reddit ‘upvotes’. Importantly, these affordances can influence one's psychological and emotional wellbeing (Hayes et al., 2018; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2022; Wohn et al., 2016). Even though PDAs have become an increasingly ubiquitous feature of online communication, scholarly research is still lacking and mostly limited to a few online platforms, namely X and Facebook. Research has been done on Twitter retweets (Boyd et al., 2010; Metaxas et al., 2015), Facebook ‘likes’ (Brandtzaeg and Haugstveit, 2014; Page et al., 2013; Placencia and Lower, 2013; Scissors et al., 2016; Sumner et al., 2018; West, 2015), and more recently, Facebook ‘reactions’ (Sumner et al., 2020).

A review of this body of work indicates that PDAs do not carry the same meaning across online platforms. Additionally, PDAs are not visually represented in the same way and are embedded within different aspects of a site or app's design. Thus, how users conceive and use PDAs might be very different across different platforms. Overall, the scarce work done on PDAs has revealed that not only do PDAs vary widely in use and function, but are very context-sensitive, highlighting a need for us to further understand their pragmatic nature.

2.1.1. Reddit upvotes as a PDA

At the time of writing, there has not been, as far as I am aware, any major scholarly attempts at discerning the pragmatic meanings behind Reddit upvotes, which can also be conceptualized as a PDA (Lu, 2024). How Redditors use this PDA, along with the meaning they intend to express through the PDA, requires explication. Although there has been much discussion amongst lay users, third-party websites, and even a set of official guidelines outlined by Reddit themselves, there is still little agreement on the pragmatic meaning behind the upvote.

According to Reddit, upvotes should be used to signal that something is a positive contribution (Reddit, 2025a). The official Reddiquette (i.e. Reddit's official rules of conduct) also states that a Redditor should signal endorsement by upvoting things that they believe contribute to the dialogue or discussion and avoid downvoting just because they personally do not like the post (Reddit, 2025b). Even though the Reddiquette exists, users are not required to follow these rules and can ultimately use the voting system in any way they want (Graham and Rodriguez, 2021). Indeed, Redditors have discussed how they often use the voting system as a way to signal like/dislike or agree/disagree, in direct contrast to the Reddiquette.

Thus, there are multiple potential communicative meanings behind this feature, which might be related to different contexts of use. The intended pragmatic force of the upvote within different environments warrants more study. This is especially important when considering that Reddit has a multitude of subreddits in which different discourses and types of

interactions can occur. Within all these subreddits, the upvote system is a salient affordance, but may carry different pragmatic meanings. For example, a highly upvoted comment could be an indicator of a valuable form of advice on an advice subreddit, but not other subreddits. Work therefore needs to be conducted to disentangle these pragmatic possibilities.

2.2. Online advice perceptions

Research on advice pragmatics has a long tradition, originating with (Searle's, 1969, p. 67) seminal classification of advice as a "directive speech act of telling someone what is best for them." Since then, scholars have identified a range of pragmatic strategies employed during advice-giving, including rapport-building (Morrow, 2012; Pilnick and Zayts, 2012), clarifying problems (Decapua and Dunham, 1993), as well as the establishment of expertise (Heritage and Sefi, 1992). There has also been some work in pragmatics that touch upon advice perceptions. For example, Riccioni et al. (2014) demonstrated that within close relationships, advice given after explicit advice solicitations were more positively reacted to, regardless of how direct it was, while Tanaka (2015) claims advice-seekers are more open to accepting advice after they feel like they have been listened to, and may react negatively to more direct advice forms. It is important to note, however, that most of these scholars have applied descriptive, discursive, or conversation analytical approaches to their data. Therefore, perceptions of advice are mainly noted when they are explicitly evidenced linguistically by an interlocutor.

More recently, advice within digital environments have received increased attention (e.g., Locher, 2006; Stommel, 2016). Methodologically, work on online advice interactions have mostly mirrored similar descriptive approaches to those studies of offline advice (e.g. Kouper, 2010; Lindholm, 2017; Locher, 2006; Morrow, 2006, 2012; Placencia, 2012; Stommel, 2016; Vepsäläinen, 2022). While this body of work has contributed greatly to our understanding of online advice, the prominence of the speaker-addressee dyad is evident. Due to the public contexts where these online interactions often occur, there is room for more avenues and foci of investigation.

Within these public online environments, it is possible that other participants may also read, evaluate, and even implement the advice to their own situations. At the same time, participants might choose to interact with only PDAs. So far, research on online advice has not taken into account the relationship between PDAs and advice, nor dimensions outside of the direct interlocutors. Accounting for these additional online audiences and possible participants, and how they might interact in a more indirect manner, is therefore important.

To effectively go beyond the speaker-addressee dyad, it is useful to look beyond linguistics. For example, Feng and MacGeorge (2010) and MacGeorge et al. (2004), in communication studies, have worked on developing frameworks to capture advice evaluations. Although their work does not touch upon the effect of language forms or use, they have shown that a variety of factors, such as who is giving advice, and the content of the advice itself, may predict how we evaluate the quality of advice. In social psychology, Cuddy et al. (2008, 2011) have proposed a set of universal factors humans draw on to evaluate and judge others. An interdisciplinary approach to understanding advice that accounts for online mediated features, linguistic forms, content-based (e.g. communication studies), and cognitive (e.g. social psychology) frameworks would therefore potentially enrich our understanding of advice.

3. Methods

3.1. The experiment

Moves are segments of text with varying linguistic expressions that serve specific communicative functions (Swales, 1981, 1990, 2004). This linguistic unit has been successfully used to describe the structure of online advice forms (e.g. Locher, 2006; Lu, 2024; Morrow, 2012; Placencia, 2012).

In Lu's (2024) corpus-based analysis of 6621 Reddit advice-giving comments, it was revealed, through regression modeling, that some advice-giving moves were correlated with higher upvote scores. However, the statistical methods employed in that study did not provide a fine-grained understanding about why those moves correlated with higher upvote scores, nor offer empirical evidence about what the upvote might mean within the context of advice-giving. Triangulation of those results can illuminate the manner and dimensions in which advice form and our perceptions are linked, through evaluative data and PDAs.

To address the shortcomings in Lu (2024), the present experiment aims to investigate if and in what way a selection of advice-giving moves from Lu's (2024) study affects perceptions of advice quality, and how participants understand the pragmatic meaning of upvotes within the advice-giving context. In doing so, it addresses calls for more experimental work in linguistics (Fuoli and Hart, 2018; Hart, 2020) and for closer integration of linguistic and platform analyses of online interactions (Feng et al., 2018). The research questions are outlined as follows.

RQ1. How do the type of moves used in giving advice affect perceptions of the advice?

RQ2. How do participants perceive the pragmatic meaning of upvotes within Reddit advice-giving?

Two independent variables were identified from Lu (2024) as having the strongest statistical association with increased upvote scores on Reddit: the *background* move, where advice-givers provide descriptive information about themselves, and the *encouragement* move, where advice-givers offer praise or supportive comments. Using a single, authentic advice-seeking

scenario about a family conflict, the study employed a between-subjects, four-condition design: the background condition (where the *background* move was inserted as the initial move in the advice reply), the encouragement condition (where the *encouragement* move was inserted as the initial move in the advice reply), the 'all moves' condition, where both moves were inserted in their most naturally occurring position as observed in Lu's (2024) corpus, and the 'no moves' baseline condition (where neither move was present in the advice). Participants viewed a Reddit-like interface containing the same advice-seeking post and one of the four manipulated advice-giving replies. On the same page, they were invited to offer meta-pragmatic judgments on both the advice text and the use of upvotes, both quantitatively via Likert scales, and qualitatively via short response items.

Figure 1 provides an example of the encouragement condition. In this condition, the *encouragement* move is placed in the first line of advicegiver101's reply: "I think you're a great parent for caring so much about your son's feelings and trying to make things right!".

Posted by [adviceseeker22](#)

Losing my son

My son is 18, the oldest of four. While he was growing up, we've always gave him plenty of room to find his own way. Currently, and understandably so, he leans more on his friends rather than me and my spouse.

Tonight, he got upset and left the house, writing a long text saying that we don't really know him. He's right. We've been so busy taking care of our younger children, our marriage, and work and I think we should have really tried to put more effort in building a deeper connection with him.

I feel lost and embarrassed about losing touch with my child, living under the same roof. How can I salvage my relationship with my son?

[advicegiver101](#)

I think you're a great parent for caring so much about your son's feelings and trying to make things right! I want to say that the feeling of disconnection from parents is a common and normal thing for every teen. But if you feel that you've not been spending enough time with your son, then you should definitely try to spend more time with him. We all know teens can be emotional and irrational and lash out at parents. It's still important to put in some effort to show that you care and are open to spending more time with him, while also giving him space.

Fig. 1. The encouragement condition.

In total, 180 participants were recruited and randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. A more detailed description of the measurement instruments for the qualitative aspects of this experiment and its results, the experimental procedures, pilot study, and the background of the participants, can be found in Lu (2025), while the experiment's other stimuli texts can be found in Appendix A.

3.2. Exploring upvote meanings


Fig. 2 reproduces the item inviting participants to evaluate the advice using the same upvote and downvote icons found on Reddit.

Which icon would you use to evaluate [advicegiver101](#)'s advice?

- 
- 
- I wouldn't respond at all

Fig. 2. Question item relating to how participants would interact with the advice given.

If the participant chose either the upvote or downvote icon, five options, plus an additional open response option, were provided. The five fixed options encompass a range of possible pragmatic and algorithmic meanings behind these icons as lay users, individual subreddits, and the Reddiquette maintains: “I (dis)agree with the advice”, “I (dis)like the advice”, “I think the advice is (not) valuable” (Silverman, 2012), “I (do not) want to see more advice like this” (Reddit, 2025b), and “I want this advice to be more/less visible within the forum” (i.e. the algorithmic function). These two follow-up questions are reproduced in Figs. 3 and 4.

Which best describes why you would use the  icon?

I agree with the advice

I like the advice


I think the advice is valuable

I want to see more advice like this

I want this advice to be more visible within the forum

Other (please specify)

Fig. 3. Follow-up question if the participant chose the upvote icon.

Which best describes why you would use the  icon?

I disagree with the advice

I dislike the advice

I think the advice is not valuable

I do not want to see more advice like this

I want this advice to be less visible within the forum

Other (please specify)

Fig. 4. Follow up question if the participant chose the downvote icon.

If a participant chose not to use any icons, an open response item would prompt them to explain why they would not upvote or downvote the advice, see Fig. 5.

In up to three sentences, please state why you wouldn't use these icons to evaluate [advicegiver101's](#) advice.

Fig. 5. Follow-up question if the participant chose not to use either icon.

3.3. Measuring perceptions of advice

Feng and MacGeorge (2010) and MacGeorge et al. (2004) suggest that perceptions of the advice message, along with perceptions of the advice-giver, both influence advice uptake. Therefore, measuring advice quality effectively requires capturing judgments of the advice-giver as a person, along with judgments of the advice message itself. When it comes to online communication, what might further complicate the advice quality construct is how we might conflate our judgments

of the message and the individual, as our insights of the person might predominantly be formed by the text itself. Nevertheless, I attempt to measure advice quality by incorporating scales that explore both psychological and content-related factors, while still being aware of the difficulty of completely separating these two elements in a textual medium like online advice-giving.

3.3.1. Warmth and competence

In social psychology, many scholars have claimed that warmth and competence are the two dimensions to which we align our judgments of others (see [Abele and Wojciszke, 2007](#); [Cuddy et al., 2011](#); [Cuddy et al., 2008](#); [Fiske et al., 2006](#); [Fiske, 2018](#); [Wojciszke, 1994](#)). Warmth relates to judgments of trustworthiness. For example, whether we believe someone is honest or has sincere motives. Competence relates to judgments of perceived capability, skill, and effectiveness. [Porath et al. \(2015\)](#) noted in their study that we also use judgements of warmth and competence when we decide whom to seek advice from, highlighting the ubiquitous nature of these types of evaluations.

3.3.2. Advice message factors

Turning to communication studies, [Feng and MacGeorge \(2010\)](#) and [MacGeorge et al. \(2004\)](#) have proposed a model of factors that they believe affect perceptions of an advice message, distinct from the advice source (i.e. the person delivering the advice). This model includes content variables such as perceived efficacy (the ability of the advice to solve the advice-seeker's problem), perceived feasibility (how practical the advice is), perceived absence of limitations (the perception of possible drawbacks if the advice were to be implemented), and [Brown and Levinson's \(1987\)](#) conception of positive and negative politeness.

3.4. The items

In order to measure perceptions of advice quality, 12 seven-point Likert scale questions drawn from these lines of work in social psychology and communication studies were adapted to capture the multi-faceted nature of advice quality perceptions as a construct as best as possible. These scales all ranged from 1, strongly disagree, to 7, strongly agree.

The first six question items were related to perceptions of the advice giver's warmth and competence. Six traits designed to measure warmth and competence, as used and validated in other studies, were incorporated. These items were adapted (as shown in [Table 1](#)) to the context of this experiment, with three questions measuring warmth and three questions measuring competence.

Table 1

Survey items measuring warmth and competence.

<i>Please rate the extent in which you believe advicegiver101 has the following qualities.</i>		
Construct Measured	Item (Rated from 1, Strongly Disagree - 7, Strongly Agree)	Sources
Warmth	1: advicegiver101 seems trustworthy.	Aaker et al. (2010) ; Cuddy et al. (2008) ; Cuddy et al. (2011) ; Dubois et al. (2016) ; Fiske (2018) ; Holoien and Fiske (2013)
	2: advicegiver101 seems sincere.	Aaker et al. (2010) ; Blunden et al. (2019) ; Cuddy et al. (2008) ; Dubois et al. (2016) ; Fiske (2018)
	3: advicegiver101 seems caring.	Holoien and Fiske (2013) ; Judd et al. (2005) ; Scott et al. (2013)
Competence	4: advicegiver101 seems competent.	Aaker et al. (2010) ; Blunden et al. (2019) ; Cuddy et al. (2008) ; Fiske (2018) ; Gao and Mattila (2014) ; Holoien and Fiske (2013) ; Scott et al. (2013)
	5: advicegiver101 seems confident.	Aaker et al. (2010) ; Blunden et al. (2019) ; Cuddy et al. (2008) ; Cuddy et al. (2011) ; Dubois et al. (2016) ; Fiske (2018)
	6: advicegiver101 seems intelligent.	Aaker et al. (2010) ; Cuddy et al. (2008) ; Cuddy et al. (2011) ; Fiske (2018) ; Holoien and Fiske (2013) ; Scott et al. (2013)

The remaining six question items were drawn from [Feng and MacGeorge's \(2010\)](#) and [MacGeorge et al. \(2004\)](#). To measure advice message quality, positive politeness, negative politeness, efficacy, feasibility, and 'absence of limitations' were all measured with one item each. Finally, the possibility of advice uptake, which measures the willingness of the participant to implement the advice, was also measured with one item. [Table 2](#) shows how the six items were adapted for this experiment and what they intend to measure. All 12 survey items as seen in the survey are provided in [Appendix B](#).

With warmth and competence measuring perceptions of the advice giver's qualities and the advice message factor model measuring the advice message's qualities, these 12 items would provide a comprehensive measure of participant attitudes and feelings toward the advice as manipulated in each condition.

Table 2
Survey items measuring advice message perceptions.

Please rate the extent in which you agree with the following statements about the advice in *advicegiver101*'s post.

Construct Measured	Item (Rated from 1, Strongly Disagree - 7, Strongly Agree)	Sources
Efficacy	7: I believe the advice could help solve <i>adviceseeker22</i> 's problem.	Feng and MacGeorge (2010, p.559)
Feasibility	8: The advice was suited to the problem of <i>adviceseeker22</i> .	Feng and MacGeorge (2010, p. 560)
Limitations	9: I predict the advice would not have drawbacks.	Feng and Burlison (2008, p.10); Feng and MacGeorge (2010, p. 560); MacGeorge et al. (2004, p. 53)
Positive Politeness	10: The advice makes <i>adviceseeker22</i> feel liked.	Feng and MacGeorge (2010, p.559); MacGeorge et al. (2004, p. 53)
Negative Politeness	11: The advice does not impose too much on <i>adviceseeker22</i> .	Feng and Burlison (2008, p.10); MacGeorge et al. (2004, p.53)
Implementation Intention	12: I would follow the advice if I were in a similar situation.	MacGeorge et al. (2004, p.55)

The conceptual map of the survey design is shown in Fig. 6. Symbol notations are inspired by structural equation modelling (Byrne, 2006, p.9, provides a description of notational conventions), where circles represent latent factors, rectangles represent observed variables, and the direction of single-headed arrows represents the direction of one factor being influenced by another. For instance, survey items 1, 2, and 3 are the observed variables that measure perceived warmth, a latent factor. Perceived warmth is in turn influenced by move presence, an observed variable.

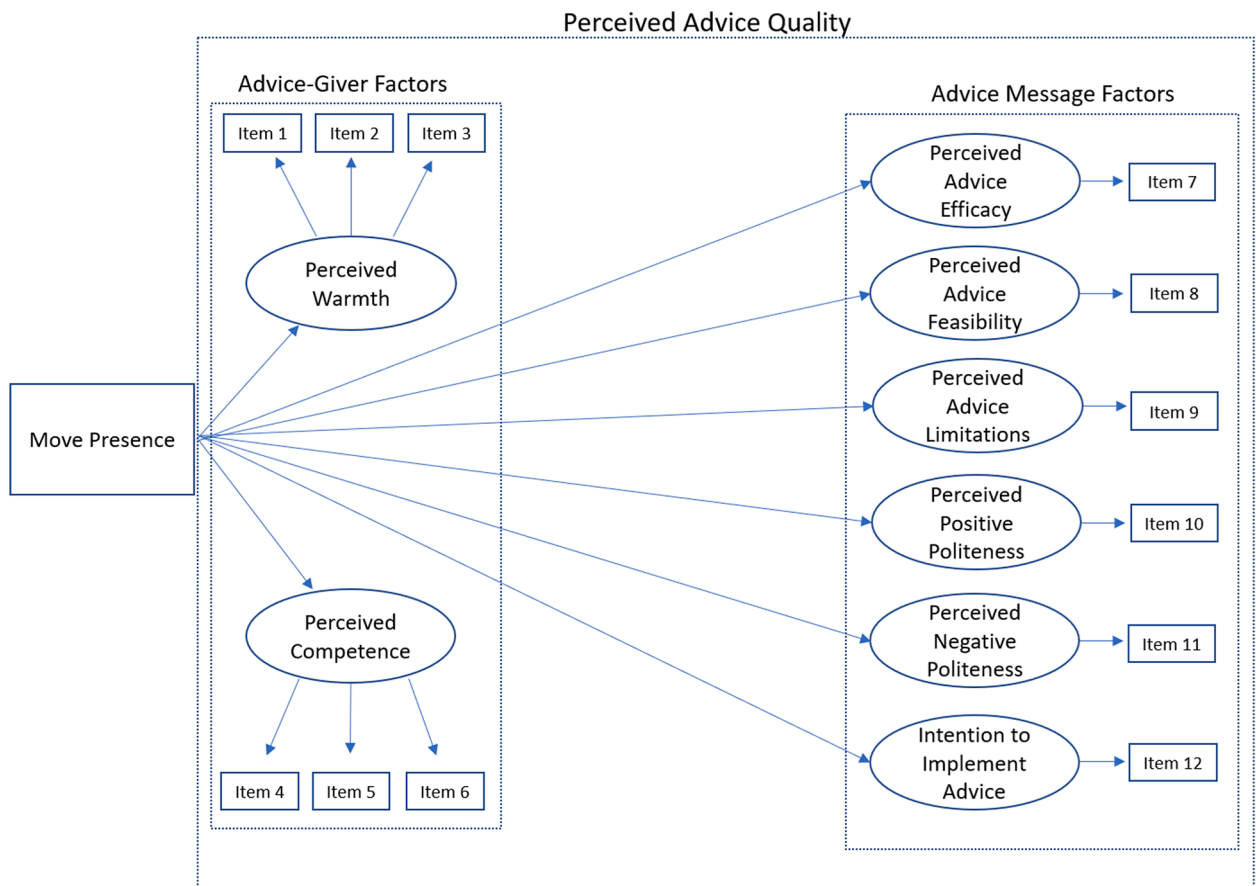


Fig. 6. Conceptual map of survey's Likert scale design.

4. Results – likert scales

Homogeneity of variance was established, and individual one-way ANOVAs were used to investigate whether there were significant differences in the Likert scale responses between the different experimental conditions. Where there were significant results, Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests were used to identify between which conditions the significant differences lie. Analyses were all performed using R. The next section will discuss the ANOVA and Tukey's HSD test results for each construct.

4.1. Warmth

The construct of perceived warmth was measured by aggregating the average scores of the three question items measuring warmth (“*advicegiver101 seems trustworthy*”, “*advicegiver101 seems sincere*”, “*advicegiver101 seems caring*”). Perceptions of the level of warmth in descending order by condition were as follows: 1. Encouragement, 2. ‘All moves’, 3. Background, and 4. ‘No moves’. This can be seen in Fig. 7.

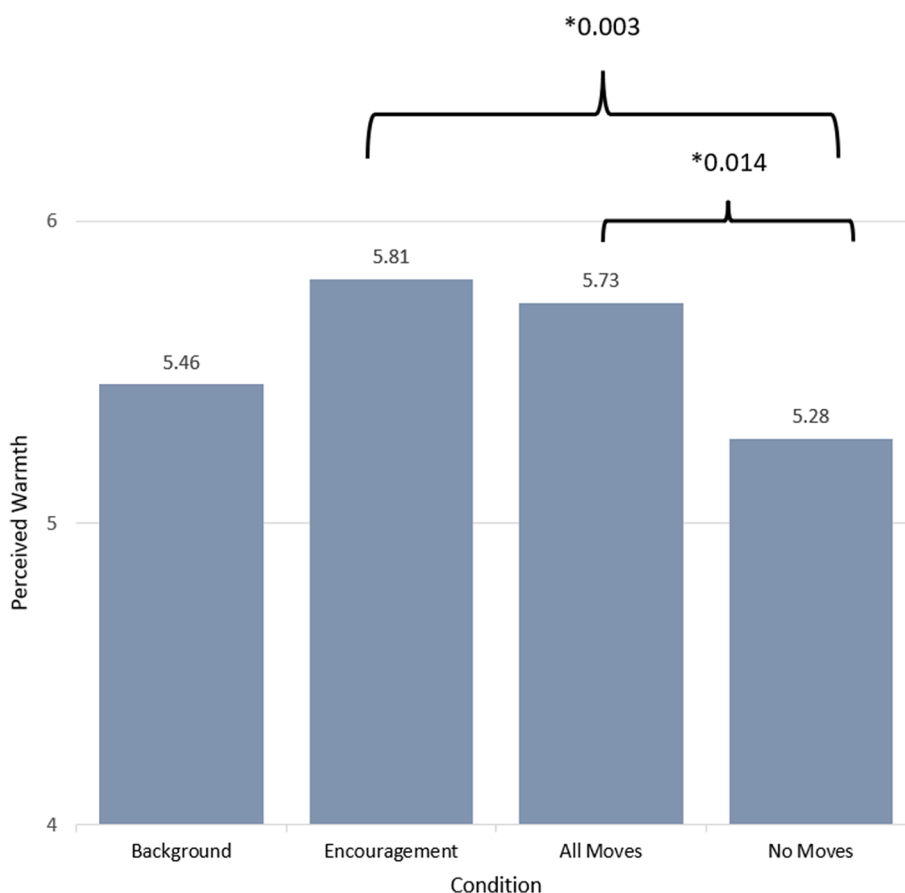


Fig. 7. Perceived warmth.

The ANOVA revealed that there were significant differences between conditions, $F(3,176) = 5.43$, $p < 0.05$. Tukey's post-hoc test indicated that *advicegiver101*'s perceived warmth was rated significantly higher in the encouragement condition compared to the ‘no moves’ condition, $p < 0.01$. Additionally, *advicegiver101*'s warmth in the ‘all moves’ condition was also rated significantly higher when compared to the ‘no moves’ condition, $p < 0.05$.

4.2. Competence

A composite score for the competence dimension was created by aggregating the average scores of the three question items measuring competence (“*advicegiver101 seems competent*”, “*advicegiver101 seems confident*”, “*advicegiver101 seems*”).

intelligent”). Perceptions of advicegiver101’s competence rated from highest to lowest were as follows: 1. Background, 2. ‘All moves’, 3. Encouragement, 4. ‘No moves’. This can be observed in Fig. 8.

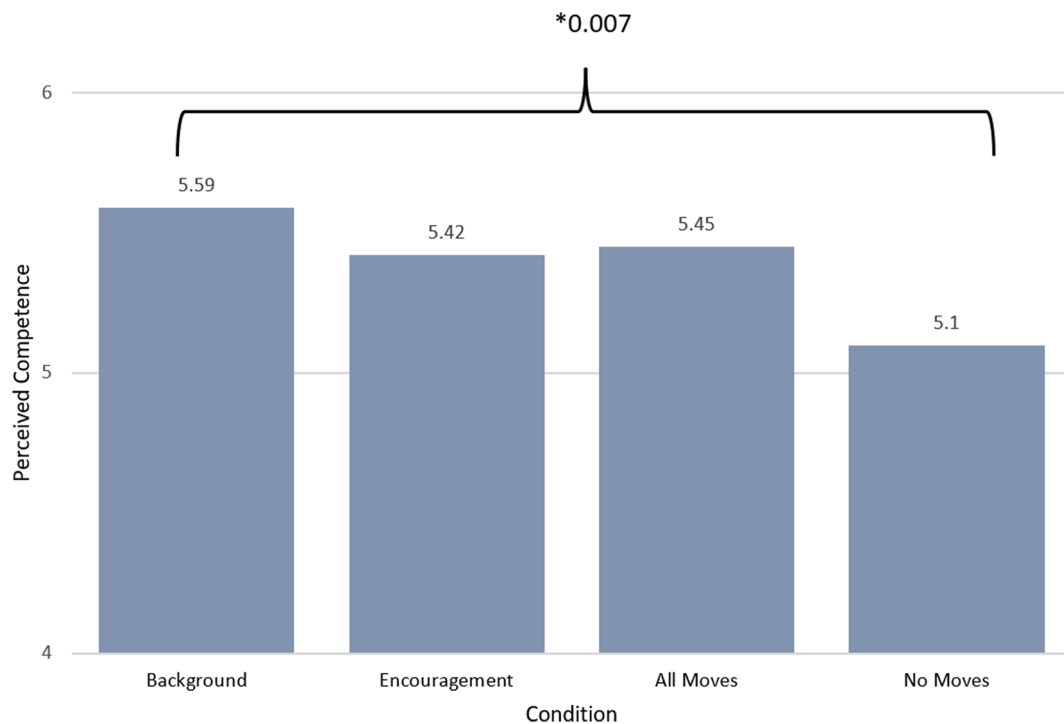


Fig. 8. Perceived competence.

The one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences between conditions, $F(3,176) = 3.837$, $p < 0.05$. Tukey’s post-hoc test revealed that there were significant differences in perceived competence between the background and ‘no moves’ condition, $p < 0.01$. In particular, advicegiver101’s competence was rated significantly higher by the participants presented with the background condition compared to those presented with the ‘no moves’ condition.

4.3. Efficacy

Efficacy, measured with the question item “*I believe the advice could help solve adviceseeker22’s problem*”, was rated 4.59 for the background condition, 5.09 for the encouragement condition, 5.02 for the ‘all moves’ condition, and 5 for the ‘no moves’ condition. The results of the one-way ANOVA indicated that these variations in scores were not significant, $F(3,176) = 1.811$, $p = 0.147$.

4.4. Feasibility

Perceived feasibility was measured with the question item “*The advice was suited to the problem of adviceseeker22*”. Perceptions of feasibility from highest to lowest were: 1. ‘All moves’, 2. Encouragement, 3. Background, and 4. ‘No moves’. This is shown in Fig. 9.

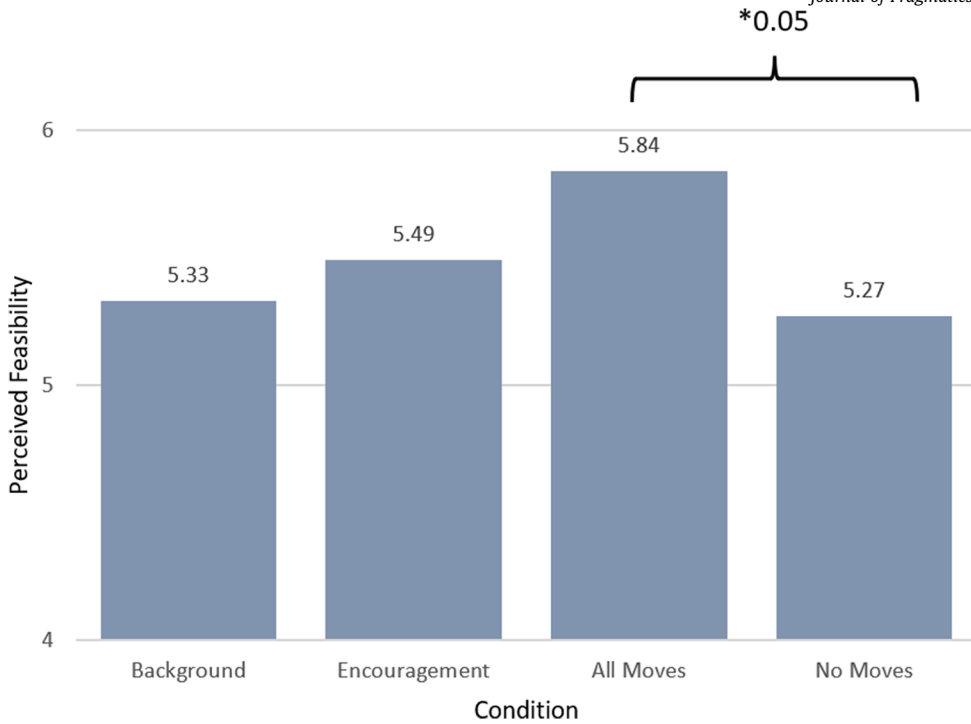


Fig. 9. Perceived feasibility.

The one-way ANOVA showed that the differences between conditions were significant, $F(3,176) = 2.693$, $p < 0.05$, while Tukey's post-hoc test indicated that the advice's perceived feasibility in the 'all moves' condition was rated significantly higher than the 'no moves' condition, $p < 0.05$.

4.5. Advice limitations

The perceived limitations of the advice were measured with the question item "I predict the advice would not have drawbacks". Perceptions of limitations from highest to lowest were: 1. 'All moves', 2. Encouragement, 3. Background, 4. 'No moves'. The results are shown in Fig. 10.

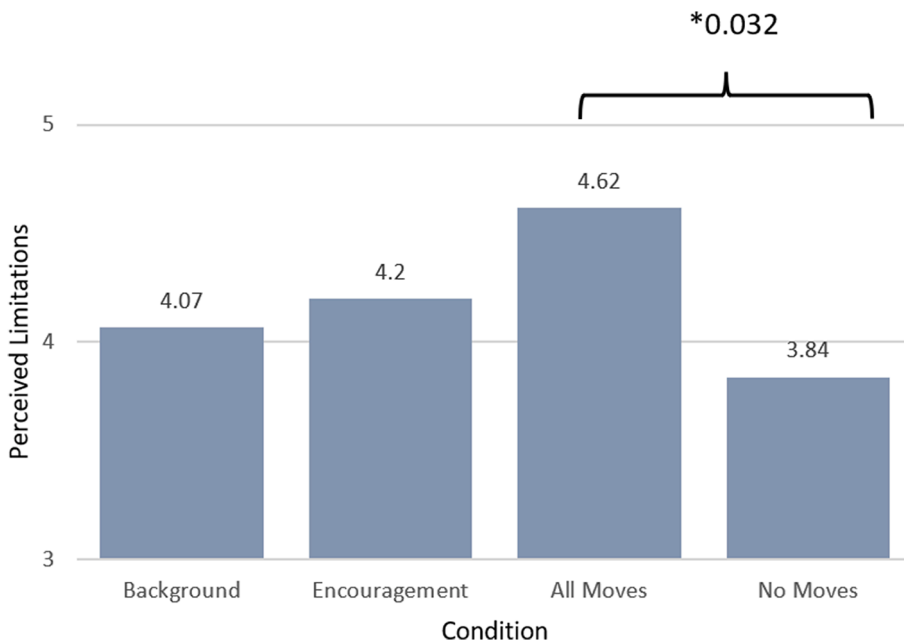


Fig. 10. Perceived limitations.

The one-way ANOVA indicated that there were significant differences between conditions, $F(3,176) = 2.698$, $p < 0.05$. Tukey's post-hoc test showed that perceived limitations of the advice were rated significantly higher in the 'all moves' condition compared to the 'no moves' condition, $p < 0.05$.

4.6. Positive and negative politeness

Politeness was tested through two question items. The first item, "*The advice makes adviceseeker22 feel liked*", measured positive politeness (c.f. Brown and Levinson, 1987). Perceptions of positive politeness from highest to lowest were: 1. Encouragement, 2. 'All moves', 3. Background, 4. 'No moves'. This can be observed in Fig. 11.

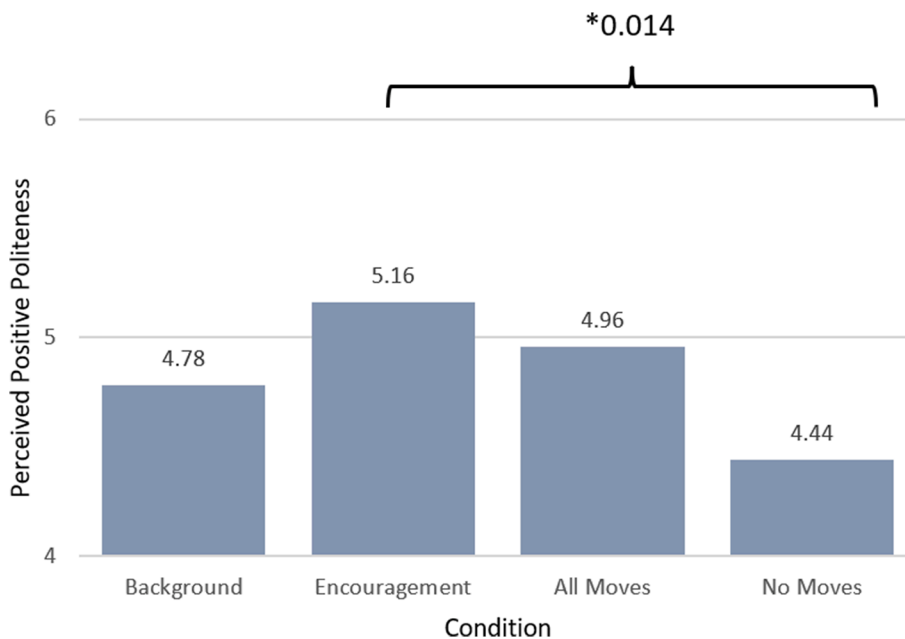


Fig. 11. Perceived positive politeness.

The one-way ANOVA showed that there were significant differences between conditions, $F(3,176) = 3.358$, $p < 0.05$. Tukey's post-hoc test showed that the advice's perceived positive politeness was significantly higher in the encouragement condition compared to the 'no moves' condition, $p < 0.01$.

The second politeness question item, "*The advice does not impose too much on adviceseeker22*", measures negative politeness (c.f. Brown and Levinson, 1987). The scores for negative politeness were: 5.2 for the background condition, 5.2 for the encouragement condition, 5.33 for the 'all moves' condition, and 5.16 for the 'no moves' condition. ANOVA results indicated that the variations in these scores were not significant, $F(3,176) = 0.975$, $p = 0.406$.

4.7. Advice implementation intention

Finally, advice implementation intention was measured with the question item "*I would follow the advice if I were in a similar situation.*" Advice implementation intention scores from highest to lowest were: 1. 'All moves', 2. Encouragement, 3. Background, 4. 'No moves'. This is shown in Fig. 12.

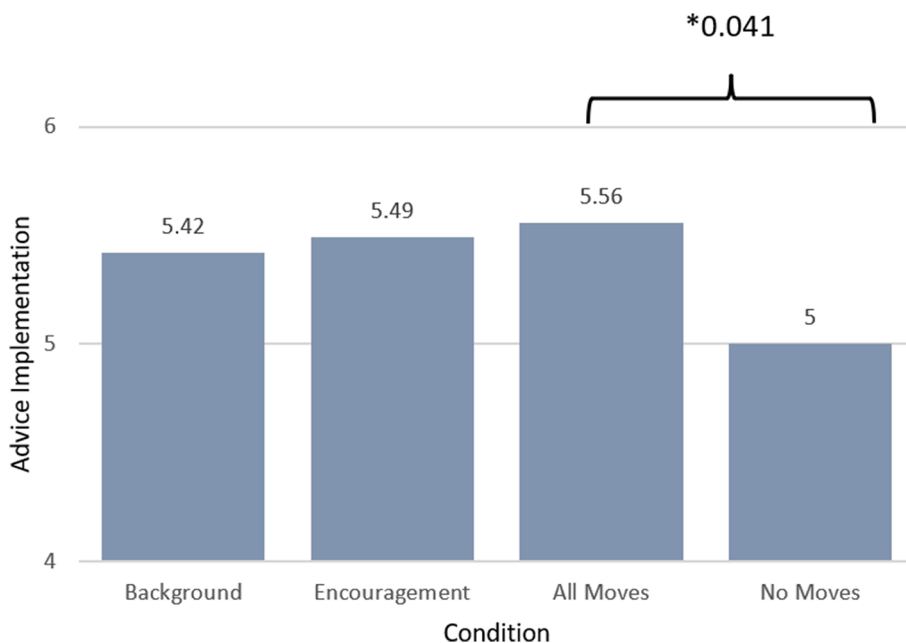


Fig. 12. Advice implementation intention.

The one-way ANOVA showed that there were significant differences between conditions, $F(3,176) = 2.899, p < 0.05$. Tukey's post-hoc test showed that participants exposed to the 'all moves' condition rated this item significantly higher than those presented with the 'no moves' condition, $p < 0.05$.

Table 3
Summary of experiment results.

Measured Variable	Scores in Each Condition			
	Background	Encouragement	All Moves	No Moves
Warmth	5.46	5.81	5.73	5.28
Competence	5.59	5.42	5.45	5.1
Efficacy	4.56	5.09	5.02	5
Feasibility	5.33	5.49	5.84	5.27
Lack of Limitations	4.07	4.2	4.62	3.84
Positive Politeness	4.78	5.16	4.96	4.44
Negative Politeness	5.2	5.2	5.33	5.16
Advice Implementation Intention	5.42	5.49	5.56	5

5. Discussion – likert scales

A summary of all the Likert scale analyses can be seen in [Table 3](#). Same colors on the same row indicate significant pairwise differences; for example, two green cells on the same row indicate that the differences between those pairs are statistically significant. A plain white cell indicates no color or significance. Note that the warmth construct exhibited significance between two pairs (encouragement – ‘no moves’, and ‘all moves’ – ‘no moves’), which are highlighted in both green and yellow.

These scales were adopted and designed to capture how and along what dimensions do participants evaluate advice. Before the experiment began, participants were prompted with the topic of the interaction; i.e. they knew that they were going to read an advice exchange, while the stimuli texts were also identical save for the manipulations of the two moves. Significant variations in participant perceptions within this experiment, as measured in their responses to these survey items, can therefore be primarily associated with the *background* and *encouragement* move's impact. It is from this viewpoint that I base my understanding of these results.

I originally predicted that the presence of the *encouragement* and the *background* move during advice-giving would lead to participants viewing the advice more positively, due to [Lu's \(2024\)](#) results indicating that these two moves were statistically associated with more upvotes on Reddit. These results seem to confirm this prediction, as the evidence indicates that these two moves did significantly enhance participants' perceptions of advice compared to when the moves were not present, across a variety of psychometric dimensions.

In general, the *encouragement* move was associated with a significantly higher perception of the advice giver's warmth. Warmth was rated significantly higher in the encouragement condition when compared to the ‘no moves’ condition, as well as significantly higher in the ‘all moves’ condition when compared to the ‘no moves’ condition. Furthermore, a significant difference was not observed when the *encouragement* move was wholly absent from the advice text. This indicates that the *encouragement* move predominantly taps into warmth judgments by linguistically indexing qualities of the advice-giver's identity that are related to warmth. The communicative function of the *encouragement* move is to provide compliments and encouragement, while warmth is often defined by morality and sociability ([Fiske, 2018](#)); the *encouragement* move being very related to the latter.

The *background* move was also shown to positively affect participant perceptions of the advice giver's competence when compared to when the move was wholly absent. As the *background* move's communicative function is to provide descriptive information about the advice-giver (e.g. age, gender, occupation, and expertise), and since competence is often conceptualized as perceptions of ability and effectiveness ([Cuddy et al., 2011](#); [Fiske, 2018](#)), my results seem to indicate a connection between the *background* move and the psychological dimension of competence. In this experiment, the *background* move invokes credibility through indexing a discourse identity akin to what some scholars have called a “lay expert” ([Mackiewicz, 2010](#); [Richardson, 2003](#); [Sokół, 2022](#)).

My analysis also revealed that there is a possibility that the effect of these two moves might be additive, in line with some of the qualitative evaluations of the advice expressed by these same participants in [Lu \(2025\)](#). In [Table 3](#) we can note that the *background* and *encouragement* move seem to display an additive effect on perceptions of the advice's feasibility and lack of limitations. The scores when the two moves are both present in the advice are significantly higher than both the baseline and when only one individual move was present, indicating that one move may not be enough to make a significant impact on our evaluations of these constructs. It is possible that our perceptions of these constructs involve both warmth and competence evaluations. For example, evaluating feasibility may require tapping into both warmth (linked to the *encouragement* move) and competence (linked to the *background* move). Perhaps because of this, only when the advice-giver includes both moves in their advice do participants view the advice as significantly more feasible than the baseline advice. [Aaker et al.'s \(2010\)](#) work on how we evaluate business entities corroborates the idea that warmth and competence evaluations can display an additive relation, while my results indicate that this may also apply for evaluations of humans as well.

In contrast to the additive effect, there were also occasions where one move seemed to be more effective in enhancing perceptions of a particular construct when the other tested move was absent. This was the case for the *background* move and competence evaluations, and the *encouragement* move and positive politeness evaluations. In these two cases, it is possible that the inclusion of both tested moves together might dilute the effect of the move that more directly taps into the construct being measured. It is also worth noting that some constructs were not associated with these two moves at all. Perceptions of efficacy and of negative politeness were not significantly affected by the presence or absence of these moves.

Next, I discuss advice implementation intention. This particular construct measures the advice outcome ([Feng and MacGeorge, 2010](#); [MacGeorge et al., 2004, 2016](#)). In other words, the higher the score on this item, the more likely the participant would implement the advice themselves. It seems that there is again a possible additive effect between the *background* and *encouragement* move here. Only when both these moves are present in the advice is the construct rated significantly higher than the baseline ‘no moves’ condition. This suggests that effectively demonstrating warmth and competence are both viewed as important in the success of advice, providing empirical evidence that supports studies that claim demonstrating authority (a competence trait) and empathy (a warmth trait) is important in online advice settings (e.g. [Kouper, 2010](#); [von Rohr et al., 2019](#)).

These Likert scale results indicate that when we evaluate advice, moves are an important linguistic unit that helps tease out how advice is evaluated. In particular, the *encouragement* and *background* moves seem to be linked to perceptions of warmth and competence, respectively. Furthermore, because warmth and competence evaluations are argued to underlie

all evaluations, the inclusion of these moves also seems to enhance participant perceptions of more content-related and pragmatic features of the advice, such as perceived feasibility, lack of limitations, and positive politeness.

Finally, it is also essential to connect these findings to Lu (2025), where the qualitative dimensions of this experiment are discussed. In that paper, the open-ended responses were analyzed using Spencer-Oatey and Kádár's (2021) politeness evaluation model. Depending on which of the four conditions they were assigned, there were observed differences in how and what aspects of the advice or advice-giver the participants commented on.

Also using the 'no moves' condition as the baseline, Lu (2025) revealed how participants assigned to the background condition commented more often about competence face sensitivities (recognition of our intellect, abilities, expertise, leadership, and problem-solving capabilities - see Ting-Toomey, 2005), which is directly related to competence evaluations. Moreover, participants assigned to the encouragement condition commented more about inclusion face sensitivities (one's desire to be likeable, pleasant, friendly, and cooperative - see Ting-Toomey, 2005), which is tied to warmth evaluations. Participants assigned to the 'all moves' condition commented more frequently about both competence face and inclusion face sensitivities.

Lu's (2025) qualitative insights therefore mirror and enrich the quantitative findings discussed within this paper, as not only do we see increased qualitative evaluations related to competence when the *background* move is present, but also statistically higher ratings along this same dimension. Likewise, the higher scores on the advice-giver's warmth when the *encouragement* move is present is also reproduced in the frequency in which the participant's commented on the warmth of the advice and advice-giver.

6. Upvotes

In total, 147 (82%) of the participants upvoted the advice, 11 (6%) participants downvoted the advice, and 22 (12%) participants chose not to take part in the upvote system. Participants' choice of icon and their rationale about their icon choice are summarized in Table 4. There was not enough data to justify further analysis of downvotes, so the focus of the discussion will instead be on the upvote. A closer look at these results (which are unedited, save for anonymization) indicates that participants' interaction with the upvote system were motivated by a range of pragmatically-oriented rationales.

Table 4
Participant choice of icon and their rationales.

Which icon would you use to evaluate advicegiver101's advice?	Which best describes why you would use this icon?	Percentage of Total	Response Count
Upvote	I agree with the advice	31%	56
	I like the advice	22%	39
	I think the advice is valuable	26%	47
	I want to see more advice like this	1%	1
	I want this advice to be more visible within the forum	1%	1
	Other	2%	3
	Total (Upvote)	82%	147
Downvote	I disagree with the advice	0	0
	I dislike the advice	1%	2
	I think the advice is not valuable	4%	8
	I do not want to see more advice like this	0	0
	I want this advice to be less visible within the forum	0	0
	Other	1%	1
	Total (Downvote)	6%	11
I wouldn't respond at all		12%	22

6.1. Pragmatic meaning of upvotes

There were various reasons why participants decided to upvote the advice. The options given to participants correspond to this paper's review of how Redditors conceptualized the meaning of the upvote in lay discussions and the Reddiquette. These results suggest that, although not evenly distributed, participants did seem to overwhelmingly draw from these potential meanings as motivations for upvoting, as only a very small number of participants ($n = 3$) chose the 'other' option.

Thus, the five fixed options on the survey regarding upvote rationales seem to be able to encapsulate the majority of the pragmatic meanings behind the upvote.

Interestingly, there is no clear dominating rationale, with 56 participants upvoting because they agree with the advice, 39 participants upvoting because they like the advice, and 47 participants upvoting because they believed the advice to be valuable. Page et al. (2013) and West (2015) discuss the Facebook 'like' as a feature where the meaning is both nuanced and negotiable, arguing that there is ambiguity in its pragmatic meaning. My findings suggest that this largely holds true for Reddit upvotes as well. Upvoting generally holds positive connotations, but what the upvote intends to precisely communicate cannot be discerned solely by the act of using it. In other words, the upvote carries a multitude of different pragmatic meanings, yet are all subsumed under the same icon.

Although upvotes are integral to the sorting and visibility algorithms of Reddit, the binary nature of this mechanism is limiting (Graham and Rodriguez, 2021). My results indicate that the upvote system does not capture different degrees of attitudes toward the advice. For example, one participant might believe the advice is merely adequate, while another might strongly like the advice, but both participants might ultimately still choose to upvote the advice. Thus, even if a participant upvotes because they want to display positive alignment with the advice, it is difficult to tell along what dimensions and to what extent they are aligning. In the reproduced comments that follow, even though these three participants all upvoted the advice, they all had different reasons.

I think it is comforting but not that helpful

I agree with the advice (to an extent) and I think it is supportive and valuable (again, to an extent). It's a good starting point for the advice seeker and will hopefully give them confidence to take further steps.

I agree with part of the advice. I don't know about giving the kid all this space.

Here, we see that these participants hold reservations about the advice or only agree with certain parts of the advice, demonstrating how these graded attitudes cannot be accurately represented in the upvote itself.

Another point to note is that this experiment only asks participants to use the upvote system within the specific context of advice-giving. When participants that chose not to respond with an upvote or downvote were prompted to elaborate on why they did not want to participate in upvoting, they often explained their reluctance to use the upvote system based on contextual factors, as the excerpt that follows highlights.

Because I do not fully know the situation i do not want to judge the advice given. I am not really interested in judging the advice given and feel that all advice is good, and it is up to the person with the issue to decide if they think it can help them or not. Even if they feel it cannot help them, it does not mean it is bad advice

This response implies that upvotes are sensitive to context, with one's willingness to use them, and how they might use this PDA, affected by situational factors. By pointing out a deficit of knowledge, this participant reasons that it is up to the advice recipient to evaluate the advice, not a third party. Here, politeness, social, and moral considerations are all invoked; i.e. whether it is even appropriate to use upvotes to evaluate advice. This sentiment was also echoed by some other participants (e.g. "It feels a little harsh to rate someone's heartfelt response with an icon. It seemed that the advice giver had good intentions"). This indicates that there is a perceived level of impersonality involved with using a rating system, which may not be suitable for advice-giving, as this particular context requires more interpersonal sensitivity. As Culpeper (2011, p. 23) discusses (emphasis mine), "[Situating] behaviors always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are **presumed** to cause offence." Additionally, Spencer-Oatey (2005, p. 100) also argues that "the belief that people should show appropriate amounts of respectfulness" is an important component of managing our interpersonal relationships. In other words, the reluctance of some to participate in rating the advice is due to its perceived inappropriateness, further demonstrating how pragmatic concerns related to computer-mediated interactions vary depending on the audience type and are also reflected in the operationalization and use of upvotes, and potentially other PDAs as well.

Furthermore, some participants opted out of participating in the upvote system because they believed that the binary nature of this system was not able to display their perceptions accurately. For example, some participants did not choose to rate the advice with an icon because they did not have a strong opinion about the advice, as the excerpts that follow highlight.

Advicegiver101 didn't give strikingly helpful or hurtful advice, so I wouldn't feel moved to up or downvote it.

I dislike evaluating people's advice in such scenarios. Unless I thought it was spectacularly bad advice or incredibly good I would not give a response. This is fairly bland and generic advice.

Finally, the following three responses clearly show that these participants hold negative attitudes toward the advice, yet they chose not to participate in the upvote system rather than using the downvote.

The advice giver doesn't really offer any new and meaningful advice. It's obvious to "try spend more time with him", it isn't helpful. Also, it is already known that teenagers are moody.

It's not very helpful. It's not saying anything the parent didn't already know.

It does not actually help at all. It is contradictory. It is unspecific.

Avoiding downvotes even when holding negative views might be explained by the Reddiquette, where it is urged to be used cautiously:

Think before you downvote and take a moment to ensure you're downvoting someone because they are not contributing to the community dialogue or discussion. If you simply take a moment to stop, think and examine your reasons for downvoting, rather than doing so out of an emotional reaction, you will ensure that your downvotes are given for good reasons (Reddit, 2025b)

These results are metapragmatic in the sense that participants are reflecting on their own pragmatic behaviors around the appropriateness and use of the upvote. These metapragmatic responses suggest that the meaning of the upvote is further complicated by sensitivity to context, the degree or intensity of the participant's perceptions, and an unwillingness to use the downvote. Drawing on Locher and Watts' (2008) relational work framework, where judgments of linguistic behaviors are discursively evidenced through individual evaluations of others, these evaluations provide us with a greater understanding of whether the use, and how the use, of the upvote is (in)appropriate. These findings also show the utility of relational work in understanding not just evaluations of other people's language skills, but also paralinguistic phenomena. This has implications for how we might study online pragmatics, due to the increasing complexity and ubiquity of other multimodal communicative resources on many online platforms, outside of text and talk.

7. Conclusion

This experiment set out to answer two research questions:

RQ1. How do the types of moves used in giving advice affect perceptions of the advice?

RQ2. How do participants perceive the pragmatic meaning of upvotes within Reddit advice-giving?

Tanaka (2015) laments that when analyzing conversational data, it is difficult to verify reactions from advisees beyond examining conversational cues. In this present study, I have highlighted how experiments can help us not only explore perceptions of advice from a wider range of audience types (RQ1) but also paralinguistically (RQ2), both of which are especially important when examining advice interactions within platformed online environments. The first research question was explored through testing the relationship between the *background* and the *encouragement* move and our perceptions of advice, both qualitatively (outlined in Lu, 2025) and quantitatively. Quantitatively, perceptions of advice were measured through the social psychological factors of warmth and competence (Cuddy et al., 2008, 2011) and the content-related advice message factor model (Feng and MacGeorge, 2010; MacGeorge et al., 2004). The statistical results suggest that these two moves do influence our perceptions of advice across a variety of these dimensions.

The *encouragement* and *background* move seem to effectively tap into warmth and competence evaluations, respectively. This was evidenced in the significantly enhanced perceptions of warmth and competence when the corresponding move was present in the advice. Furthermore, these two moves also influence our perceptions of advice message quality (namely, efficacy, feasibility, absence of limitations, and positive politeness). Ultimately, the presence of the *background* and *encouragement* move together do significantly affect an individual's willingness to implement advice. The limited work that has been done on the relationship between advice formulations and one's intention to implement the advice has suggested that demonstrations of empathy increase implementation intention (e.g. Carlson, 2016), while the results here seem to suggest that empathy is not the only consideration. Taken together with Lu (2025), we can observe the influence and effect of these moves on our evaluations of advice through quantitative scale-based differences, and qualitative meta-pragmatic evaluations, highlighting the connection between how advice formulations might influence our perceptions of the advice.

The second research question was explored through capturing evidence of the various reasons for why participants upvoted the advice in this experiment's scenario, with agreeing, liking, and believing the advice is valuable as the top rationales, which suggests that upvotes do have more than one potential meaning. Evidence has also been provided that the Reddit upvote system is not able to precisely describe opinions, as although users have a variety of reasons for why they upvote, this variety is not able to be captured on the site. These metapragmatic evaluations provide discursive evidence of the (in)appropriateness, pragmatic intentions, and limitations of such an affordance when used within the context of advice interactions.

Firstly, the upvote cannot capture degrees of nuance. For instance, even if a user upvotes to indicate that they agree with the advice, how much they agree with the advice, or whether they only agree with certain aspects of the advice, is something that cannot be ascertained by looking at the number of upvotes an advice comment has garnered. Moreover, some participants were reluctant to use the PDA because they had lukewarm attitudes toward the advice, indicating that intensity, and even polarization of attitudes, are motivating factors for using this affordance. Moreover, other participants in this group were reluctant to downvote even if they viewed the advice negatively. They claimed that even though the advice was not good, the advice-giver had good intentions, so it was impolite to downvote their advice.

This seems to confirm the notion that an upvote represents a multitude of different pragmatic meanings yet is also limited in expression. These meanings vary from user to user, is context-sensitive, and potentially also related to relational factors. These particular observations can be considered together with what researchers have said about the algorithmic

aspects of the upvote system. User awareness of how upvotes algorithmically operate and the visibility of the aggregate upvote score on the platform may act as a value marker and therefore create a desire to appeal to as many people as possible, while also providing preferential visibility on the site (Davis and Graham 2021; Shepherd, 2020). At the same time, although knowledge of these algorithms exists, they are not deterministic; as Graham and Rodriguez (2021) claim, Redditors often negotiate their own rules and ethics around voting. The findings here thus highlight the tensions between human pragmatic interpretation and algorithmic design features.

This study has contributed to our knowledge of online advice by providing empirical evidence as to how moves might affect our perceptions of advice, as well as a better understanding of upvote pragmatics within the context of advice interactions, adding to a growing number of linguistic-based inquiries on Reddit. Within Reddit, we now know that upvotes broadly signal favorable pragmatic attitudes towards the advice, and that certain linguistic forms are associated with more upvotes. Why these linguistic forms are associated with more upvotes can be further linked to the effect of these forms on our perceptions of the advice-giver and the advice quality.

This experiment and its findings demonstrate that work from other disciplines can be used to inform linguistic investigations of advice, enabling us to obtain a deeper understanding of this ubiquitous form of interaction. The use of seemingly disparate theories and frameworks from social psychology, communication studies, and linguistics has provided a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to studying advice from multiple perspectives; namely metapragmatic evaluations (c.f. Locher and Watts, 2008) of the appropriateness of using PDAs to interact with online advice, as well as the underlying effects of the linguistic forms of advice on how we perceive the advice-giver (Cuddy et al., 2008) and the advice message (Feng and MacGeorge, 2010).

7.1. Limitations and future work

This experiment concentrated on a single advice topic. Research on how advice-giving moves might be perceived for other advice topics could be explored. Further research on how other linguistic units might impact perceptions of advice, and also upvote scores, can also be considered. Explorations of moves that are significantly related to downvotes might be another area of potential inquiry. This project has also shown that there is a possibility that some moves have additive effects with each other. How these moves might work in conjunction to influence our perceptions is also something that warrants further investigation.

Work on uncovering other moves that might also be linked to warmth and competence, or other psychological dimensions, would be another avenue for potential future interdisciplinary research. Moreover, future research can also explore, in more detail, the relative importance of warmth and competence across advice topics. Similarly, work can also be done to examine whether warmth and competence (or other psychological dimensions) are equally important for advice-givers, advice-seekers, and other interactional roles.

The context-specific meanings of the upvote outside of advice scenarios may also be further studied. An especially interesting finding is that some individuals were reluctant to participate in the upvote system due to a lack of conviction, or their reluctance to downvote. These revelations raise additional questions about the efficacy of these types of rating systems, which scholars in algorithmic studies might be particularly interested in taking further. Rieder (2017, p. 113) claims that “it is becoming increasingly clear that algorithms ... are playing a crucial role in deciding how information circulates, how people find and relate to each other, and how conduct is indeed conducted”. It is therefore important to study whether algorithms serve to alienate or mask certain types of interactions by making them less prominent, and therefore implicitly less valued, on sites that incorporate rating systems. Answers to these questions have implications for not only linguistic diversity, but also the diversity and dissemination of ideologies and values on the internet.

Participants in the experiment were required to be first-language English speakers. Research on advice-giving has mostly focused on English first-language speakers and their cultures, treating advice-giving as an imposition that is often mitigated linguistically to maintain stable relationships (Locher and Hoffmann, 2006). In non-Western cultures, advice-giving may be seen as less of an imposition, and even rapport-enhancing (e.g. in Al-Sabbagh, 2025; Hinkel, 1997; Morrow, 2012). Moreover, the interpretation of digital icons, like upvotes, also seems to be culturally dependent (Gibson et al., 2018; Markman and Oshima, 2007; Sampietro, 2019). Therefore, the findings here may not be fully generalizable to other computer-mediated platforms and between/within other cultural groups. Future research could examine how culture might influence both perceptions of advice and metapragmatic interpretations of upvotes or similar PDAs.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Rickey Lu: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A

Posted by [adviceseeker22](#)

Losing my son

My son is 18, the oldest of four. While he was growing up, we've always gave him plenty of room to find his own way. Currently, and understandably so, he leans more on his friends rather than me and my spouse.

Tonight, he got upset and left the house, writing a long text saying that we don't really know him. He's right. We've been so busy taking care of our younger children, our marriage, and work and I think we should have really tried to put more effort in building a deeper connection with him.

I feel lost and embarrassed about losing touch with my child, living under the same roof. How can I salvage my relationship with my son?

[advicegiver101](#)

I want to say that the feeling of disconnection from parents is a common and normal thing for every teen. But if you feel that you've not been spending enough time with your son, then you should definitely try to spend more time with him. We all know teens can be emotional and irrational and lash out at parents. It's still important to put in some effort to show that you care and are open to spending more time with him, while also giving him space.

Fig. A.1. 'No moves' condition stimuli.

Posted by [adviceseeker22](#)

Losing my son

My son is 18, the oldest of four. While he was growing up, we've always gave him plenty of room to find his own way. Currently, and understandably so, he leans more on his friends rather than me and my spouse.

Tonight, he got upset and left the house, writing a long text saying that we don't really know him. He's right. We've been so busy taking care of our younger children, our marriage, and work and I think we should have really tried to put more effort in building a deeper connection with him.

I feel lost and embarrassed about losing touch with my child, living under the same roof. How can I salvage my relationship with my son?

[advicegiver101](#)

As a parent of an 18 year old teenager myself, I want to say that the feeling of disconnection from parents is a common and normal thing for every teen. But if you feel that you've not been spending enough time with your son, then you should definitely try to spend more time with him. We all know teens can be emotional and irrational and lash out at parents. It's still important to put in some effort to show that you care and are open to spending more time with him, while also giving him space.

Fig. A.2. Background condition stimuli.

Posted by [adviceseeker22](#)

Losing my son

My son is 18, the oldest of four. While he was growing up, we've always gave him plenty of room to find his own way. Currently, and understandably so, he leans more on his friends rather than me and my spouse.

Tonight, he got upset and left the house, writing a long text saying that we don't really know him. He's right. We've been so busy taking care of our younger children, our marriage, and work and I think we should have really tried to put more effort in building a deeper connection with him.

I feel lost and embarrassed about losing touch with my child, living under the same roof. How can I salvage my relationship with my son?

[advicegiver101](#)

As a parent of an 18 year old teenager myself, I want to say that the feeling of disconnection from parents is a common and normal thing for every teen. But if you feel that you've not been spending enough time with your son, then you should definitely try to spend more time with him. We all know teens can be emotional and irrational and lash out at parents. It's still important to put in some effort to show that you care and are open to spending more time with him, while also giving him space. I think you're a great parent for caring so much about your son's feelings and trying to make things right!

Fig. A.3. 'All moves' condition stimuli.

Appendix B

Please rate the extent in which you believe **advicegiver101** has the following qualities. The scales range from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
advicegiver101 seems trustworthy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
advicegiver101 seems sincere.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
advicegiver101 seems caring.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
advicegiver101 seems competent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
advicegiver101 seems confident.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
advicegiver101 seems intelligent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate the extent in which you agree with the following statements about the **advice** in **advicegiver101's post**. The scales range from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I believe the advice could help solve adviceseeker22's problem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The advice was suited to the problem of adviceseeker22.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I predict the advice would not have drawbacks.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The advice makes adviceseeker22 feel liked.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The advice does not impose too much on adviceseeker22.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would follow the advice if I were in a similar situation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Fig. B Likert scale items from experiment

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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