Dunnock Summary

Forum Design Features

Dunnock is a digital platform designed to support the mental health of children and young people between the ages of 10 and 25. Users aged 10 to 13 have more limited access to the site, while those between the ages of 18 and 25 can access a sister forum specifically designed for adults. Users can sign up for Dunnock for free if it is commissioned by the NHS in their area.

Users must create an account with a unique and anonymous username. As Dunnock is commissioned by different regional services, users may need to select their local area or enter their postcode to check eligibility (location data is not stored). During the sign-up process, users enter the month in which they were born and have the option to enter their gender and ethnicity. Users can consent for their data to be shared for research purposes. Terms of use stipulate that users must remain anonymous and not share any identifiable information while using the site. This is enforced by moderators during pre-screening of all posts. The terms of use are accessible from the bottom of every page.

When logging into the site, the user is prompted to record how they feel that day with an emoji and a short journal entry. Dunnock has a variety of options for the user to connect with professionals or peers, including a live chat feature, online discussion boards, the ability to post and comment on articles, and a digital journal. The live chat with a professional is available from 12pm to 10pm on weekdays and 6pm to 10pm on weekends, where users can chat with Dunnock staff. This counselling service is accredited by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Asynchronous messaging with a professional is also available, both for admin or therapeutic messages to be shared. Outside of the forums and chats, users can also view and comment on articles, which are written by the Dunnock users as well as the professional team.

The forum section of the website shows recent discussion posts and provides a text search option. Discussions are also organized into categories, such as abuse and bullying or eating difficulties and body image. Users can create a new discussion or reply to an existing discussion. Users can only reply to posts with comments and there are no upvotes or reactions available. However, discussion threads can be starred so users can follow them and see when others comment, with new posts will appearing under a "following" tab.

Moderation

Between 30 – 50 moderators work on Dunnock. Moderators are accredited counsellors or mental health practitioners who are paid to work shifts throughout the week. All posts on the

forum are pre-screened by moderators before they are published, to ensure they meet the community guidelines. Moderators sometimes delete or edit posts to ensure they meet the guidelines, and they will message users if they need to do this. Moderators will remove or edit post submissions which include details or methods of suicide or self-harm, along with posts relating to eating disorders which contain details such as weight or calories. All user-submitted content is moderated, including journals and goals. Some moderators also work on the live one-to-one chat with users, which is available from 12pm – 10pm. Dunnock uses AI-assisted moderation for journal posts, which helps to identify journal posts that require manual review to address safeguarding issues.

Moderators are given a bespoke training programme focused on how to use the site. Moderators are supervised by qualified clinical specialists and their work is regularly audited to ensure best practices are adhered to. Clinicians are available during shifts to ensure that someone with clinical training is always available to provide support if escalation of an issue is required. When risk is identified, moderators will work with users and may request personal information to help safeguard them. Moderators can message users directly through the platform to a user's personal inbox. If the user is uncomfortable providing this information, moderators will work with them to put a safety plan in place and signpost them towards other resources and services that the user can contact.

Language Data

Forum posts were collected from the Dunnock forums on 28/02/2023, including data back to 14/05/2019. The data was sent from the Dunnock team to the iPOF team, which included all users who had consented to their data being used for research purposes. Out of all forum posts, 53% of the data was associated with users who had consented for their posts to be used in research. Therefore, 47% of the data was removed before it was shared with the iPOF team. This dataset included a total of 42,648 users who made 213,125 posts across 72,720 threads, resulting in a total of 13,425,212 words overall.

Figure 1 shows the average number of posts per hour on the subreddit. This shows a clear preference for users to post messages in the evening, mostly in between 18:00 and 21:00, and has a peak average per hour post count of nearly 14,000 posts.
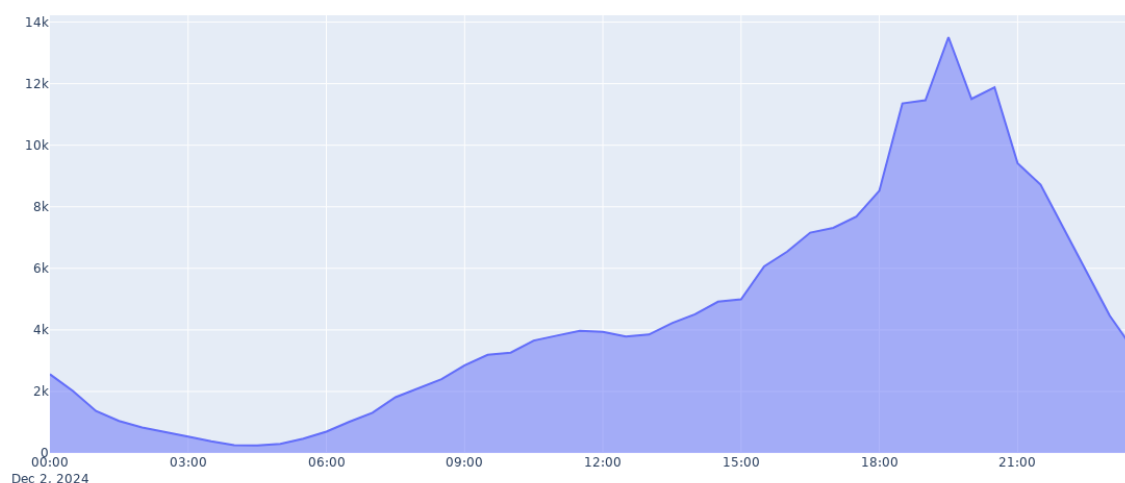

Figure 1 – daily mean number of posts per hour

The most popular topics discussed in threads are displayed in Figure 2.

One notable theme here is that of GCSE revision (Topic 7), and the exams in general; this would indicate that the users are in the 14-16 years old age bracket, as this is when most people in the UK would be facing these exams. This makes sense as they are often a cause of increased stress and anxiety.

Beyond this issue, we note several instances of peer-judgement topics, such as weight issues, or toxic friends (Topics 1 and 3), in addition to family relationships (Topics 2 and 4) around interpersonal issues such as arguments, or 'coming out' as bi, trans, or gay.
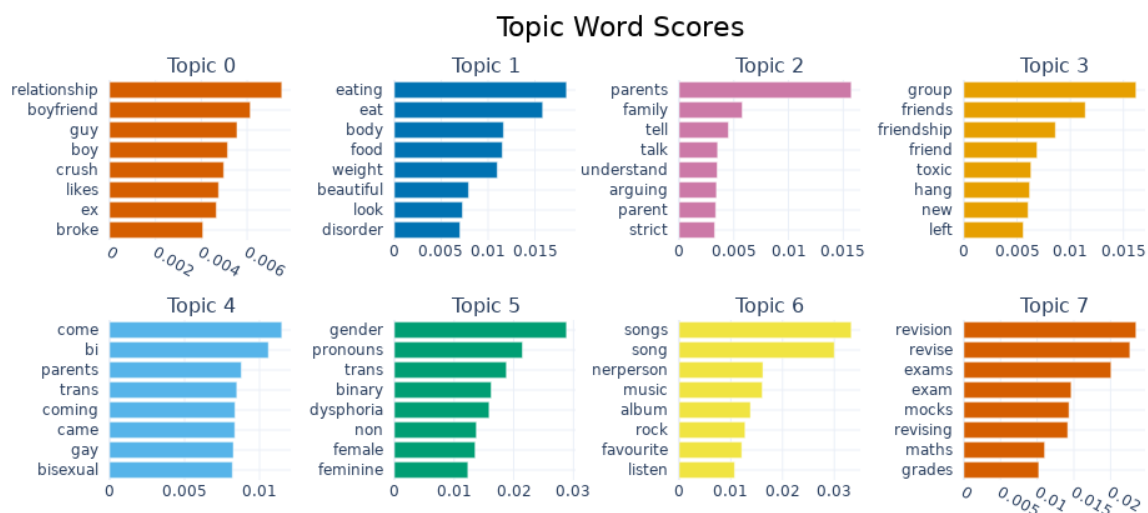

Figure 2 – Topic word scores generated by BertTopic

Users also discuss their issues around their own identity more generally, with concerns around gender identity (Topic 5) and individualism (Topic 6), notably around music choices and escapism.

Figure 3 shows the most relevant keywords when compared to the BNC (British National Corpus).

Based on the topics identified in the previous section it should be unsurprising that there is a high keyword frequency for 'scared' and 'scary' along with notable specifics such as 'pronouns' and 'bullying' around terms such as insecurity and sexuality.
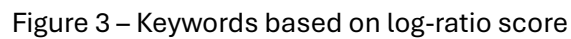
Figure 3 – Keywords based on log-ratio score