



How are far-right online communities using X/Twitter Spaces? Discourse, communication, sharing[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the first scholarly study of the use of *X/Twitter Spaces* by far-right online communities. *Spaces* — *X/Twitter*'s live audio-based platform — has become an increasingly prominent tool in the far-right's digital communication ecosystem in recent years. The popularity of *Spaces* with far-right users has increased in the wake of Elon Musk's acquisition of *Twitter* in 2022 which signalled a marked rightward shift in the platform's governance, particularly its techno-libertarian, 'free speech absolutist' approach to content moderation. Through a netnography and critical discourse analysis of ($n = 41$) *Spaces* sessions from January to July 2024, this paper critically examines how online far-right communities are using the voice-mediated affordance. In particular, this research explores the discursive practices and sharing strategies employed by individuals to propagate extreme and radical ideas, as well as to cultivate group membership, collective identity, and intersubjectivity. The findings demonstrate that *Spaces* are being used by a diverse range of far-right online communities and subcultures to promulgate conspiracy theories and radical and extreme ideological content. However, the findings also revealed a high degree of apolitical, non-ideological, and more everyday sharing practices. This paper broadens our empirical understanding of how *Spaces* are being instrumentalised by reactionary communities, and the role of voice-mediated affordances in the amplification, socialisation, recruitment, and radicalisation of far-right ideas globally.

1. Introduction

The resurgence of the global far right is perhaps the most significant political phenomenon of the twenty-first century. Far-right politics have increasingly moved from the margins to the mainstream, presenting significant challenges for liberal democracies around the world (Moffitt and Sengul, 2023). Scholarship has taken a particularly keen interest in the emergence and formation of far-right online communities as key sites of radicalisation, recruitment, socialization, and propaganda (Miller-Idriss, 2020). While the salience of this topic has increased substantially with the electoral successes of far-right parties globally, including the 2016 and 2024 elections of Donald Trump, the far-right's effective instrumentalization of the internet and networked media has been understood for decades (McSwiney, 2021). The participatory affordances of social media have been central to the formation of far-right online communities, allowing like-minded users to connect

globally under shared ideologies, grievances, frustrations and desires. This paper critically examines one of the most prominent and popular communication tools in the far-right's digital ecosystem to emerge in recent years, *X Spaces* (hereinafter referred to as *X/Twitter Spaces*).¹ Launched in 2020, *Spaces* is *X/Twitter*'s live audio-conversational feature that has proven to be popular with the heterogeneous groups and subcultures that comprise the contemporary far right. The use and popularity of *Spaces* with online far-right communities has augmented since the October 2022 acquisition of *Twitter* by Tesla CEO and head of the Trump administration's *Department of Government Efficiency* (DOGE), Elon Musk. Musk's acquisition of *Twitter* signalled a marked rightward shift in the platform, characterized by the re-platforming of previously banned far-right and neo-Nazi users, and a so-called 'free speech absolutist' approach to content moderation. *Spaces* has emerged as an influential communicative medium for the far right, allowing individuals and communities to connect and converse in real time. Yet

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¹ In 2023 Elon Musk announced that *Twitter* would be rebranded to X. However, the rebrand has been divisive, with most users still referring to the platform by its previous name, *Twitter*. In fact, an August 2024 *YouGov* poll revealed that only 4% of users refer to the platform as X. Given the slow uptake of the rebranded name, many scholars and journalists have taken to referring to platform as *X/Twitter* or *X (formerly Twitter)*.

despite its growing importance in the far-right digital milieu, at the time of writing this paper there has been no scholarly research on *X/Twitter Spaces* and its use by online far-right communities. This paper seeks to redress this lacuna by critically examining the discursive practices of far-right communities on *Spaces*. Employing an immersive netnographic and critical discourse-oriented approach, this paper explores how far-right communities are utilizing *Spaces*, and moreover, how these interactions are mediated by its audio-conversational affordances. The research is therefore guided by the following research questions: RQ1: *How is X/Twitter Spaces being used by far-right online communities?* RQ2: *What discursive practices do far-right users employ on X/Twitter Spaces to promote reactionary ideologies, construct political out-groups, negotiate intra-movement conflict, and cultivate social membership and in-group solidarity?* RQ3: *How are the discursive practices of Spaces users mediated by the platform's ephemeral live-audio affordances and lax approach to content moderation?*

The findings revealed a range of discursive practices employed in *Spaces* by diverse far-right groups, subcultures, and communities, from overt expressions of hate speech, antisemitism, conspiracy theories, and transphobia, to more nuanced and coded articulations racism. However, the findings also revealed a high degree of apolitical, non-ideological, and more everyday sharing practices and knowledge exchanges. As the first paper to explore this phenomenon, this exploratory research begins our empirical understanding of how *Spaces* — as an increasingly prominent tool in the far-right's digital politics — is being used by online communities. This paper concludes by arguing that through its lack of content moderation and mainstream accessibility, the rise of *Spaces* has profound implications for radicalisation, extremism, and democracy, and will continue to play a key role in the transnational circuitry of far-right ideologies.

1.1. *X/Twitter Spaces: Live audio convos you can join whenever, wherever*

Spaces is a live audio conversation feature launched on the micro-blogging platform *X/Twitter* in November 2020. The audio-based feature allows for real-time synchronous voice conversations on *X/Twitter*'s iOS, Android, and web-based platforms. *Spaces*, according to *X/Twitter*, is “a way to have live audio conversations on *X/Twitter*. Anyone can join, listen and speak”, and was seen as a competitor to popular social audio platforms such as *Clubhouse* and *Spotify Live*. The launch of *Spaces* in 2020 was viewed as an attempt to leverage the increasing popularity of live-streaming and short video platforms, and coincided with a heightened demand for online socialization during the 2020 and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Cauberghie et al., 2021). *Spaces* facilitates voice-mediated conversations, with the creator of the *Space* serving as the host. The hosts control who can speak by assigning co-hosts and speakers. Listeners can request permission to speak and can be assigned as a speaker by the host. *Spaces* are publicly accessible, allowing any *X/Twitter* user to join as a listener and with the option to listen anonymously. Private *X/Twitter* accounts can participate as listeners but are unable to create and host their own *Spaces*.

X/Twitter Spaces gained increased prominence in October 2022 with the acquisition of *Twitter* by billionaire *Tesla* CEO, Elon Musk. Musk has favoured the *Spaces* feature, promoting it as a core plank of *X/Twitter*'s plan to become a ‘digital town square’. Musk's acquisition of *Twitter* represented a marked rightward shift in the ideological positioning of the platform, and its approach to content moderation. Elon Musk has enforced a self-described ‘free speech absolutist’ approach to content moderation at *X/Twitter* and has reinstated numerous far-right accounts that were previously banned for hate speech and mis- and disinformation, including *InfoWars* host Alex Jones and avowed neo-Nazi, Nick Fuentes. Musk himself has openly endorsed several far-right conspiracy theories and has been a key figure in the right-wing culture war, frequently decrying the so-called “woke mind virus”. This right-ward shift has been accompanied by a watering down of the

platform's protections for minorities, including protections for transgender users in 2023. *Spaces* played a prominent role in the 2024 United States Presidential Election. After endorsing him in the wake of the assassination attempt at Butler, Pennsylvania, Elon Musk interviewed Donald Trump on *Spaces* in August 2024, which despite its initial technical difficulties, had 1.3 million listeners at its peak. In 2025, Elon Musk was appointed to lead Donald Trump's newly created *Department of Government Efficiency* (DOGE). Perhaps unsurprisingly given the platform's recent right-wing shift, media reports have noted that extremists have flocked to *Spaces* in recent years (Binder, 2021). To date however, this phenomenon has not been interrogated at the scholarly level.

1.2. ‘Hate Factories’: Weaponizing digital Spaces

The far right's prolific and effective use of new media — including digital and social media — has been well documented (Winter et al., 2020; Baele et al., 2023; Ganesh, 2025). Popular press such as *The New York Times* have referred to online spaces as ‘the hate factory’ of the modern far right (Knaus et al., 2019, n.p). Indeed, digital spaces have become invaluable to the amorphous online subcultures of the far right, allowing communities to more easily connect across political and ideological goals, subcultures, narratives, and strategies (Khalil, 2022). They are considered foundational to the growth of transnational far right movements, and have proven uniquely conducive to the spread of racist and conspiratorial rhetoric (Donovan et al., 2022). Far-right and extremist groups were early adopters of the internet, quickly understanding its potential to broaden recruitment opportunities and disseminate far-right ideologies (McSwiney, 2021). Cynthia Miller-Idriss notes that the “rapid adoption — and creation — of a broad new tech and media ecosystem for communication, dissemination, and mobilization” (2020, pp. 138–139) has been vital to the success of far-right movements globally. More recent scholarship has taken a keen interest in the ways that the far right uses digital technologies to advance its political project, including “its ability to exploit digital affordances, its hijacking of trends in digital culture, and its development of its own platforms” (Ganesh, 2025, p. 8). The development of the internet and connective technologies drastically increased what Gavan Titley refers to as the “transnational spreadability” (2019, p. 219) of far-right, fascistic, extremist, and racist ideas.

So transformative has the internet and digital spaces become to the success of the contemporary far right, that it is now impossible to distinguish between online and offline far-right extremist activities (Khalil, 2022). Rapid developments in connective technologies have fundamentally changed the online-offline interplay of far-right discourses, ideas, and practices (Baele et al., 2023). As noted by Winter et al., “today the internet is no longer just one part of the spectrum of extremist activism — it has become a primary operational environment, in which political ideologies are realized, attacks planned, and social movements made” (2021, p.1). It is therefore unsurprising that scholarly attention of the far-right has taken a keen interest in its digital manifestations and expressions, particularly the growth of online reactionary communities.

1.3. Theoretical framings: The discursive practices of ‘intimate ecologies of hate’

This paper is concerned with the discursive practices of far-right communities on *X/Twitter Spaces* and, importantly, how these are mediated through the platform's live audio-conversational affordances. Specifically, this paper is interested in the discursive strategies and sharing practices employed by individuals in far-right *Spaces* to achieve particular social political goals. Social media in the context of sharing has attracted substantial scholarly attention given its emergence “as a dominant outlet for sharing personal issues, emotions and experiences” (Ren and Li, 2024, p. 1). This paper adopts a broad understanding of

sharing as a communicating activity that encompasses “a wide set of language practices in social networking” (Androutsopoulos, 2014, p. 5), including the disclosing and publicising of individual experiences, emotions, stories, concerns, expertise, and resources voluntarily online. Importantly, scholars have emphasised the importance of not only examining the sharing practices of individuals and groups in social media environments, but also taking into account the affordances of contemporary technologies of sharing, “and their situated appropriation of specific (groups of participants)” (Androutsopoulos, 2014, p. 5). Thus, this paper is also concerned with whether (and how) the affordances of *X/Twitter Spaces* influences the discursive practices of individuals in far-right communities. In concert with previous literature on the various discursive practices and strategies of far-right communities, this paper leans on Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) to understand strategies as “intentional plans of practices (including discursive practices) adopted in order to achieve a particular social, political, psychological, or linguistic goal” (Wodak, 2021, p. 12). Depending on the aim, different strategies and linguistic, pragmatic, and rhetorical devices are used to realize the intended meaning (Wodak, 2021, p. 12). In the context of far-right online communities, discursive practices may be used to construct, negotiate, and facilitate out-group hostilities, “us” and “them” binaries, in-group intimacies, and collective identities (Jasser et al., 2023). Far-right communities have a distinctive repertoire of discursive sharing practices, oscillating between extreme rhetoric and carefully coded innuendos and doublespeak. Indeed, research has demonstrated that contemporary far-right discursive practices are not just pure distillations of extremism and hate, but are often nuanced, tempered, and imbued with indirect, ambivalent, and ambiguous language (Wodak, 2021). This, as argued by Wodak (2021), has allowed the far right to effectively straddle the boundaries of the extreme and mainstream, and between the ‘sayable’ and the ‘unsayable’. Strategies of calculated ambivalence (Engel and Wodak, 2013), doublespeak, and coded and indirect rhetoric have allowed far-right online communities to cleverly disseminate exclusionary and discriminatory propaganda on mainstream social platforms like Facebook and *X/Twitter* while evading terms of service and content moderation practices.

Extant scholarly research has taken an interest in the formation, use, and internal dynamics of far-right online communities as key spaces of radicalisation, recruitment, and ideological exchange (Bliuc et al., 2019; Helm et al., 2024; Törnberg and Törnberg, 2024). Social media has been formative to the development of reactionary and extreme online communities by offering technological affordances that facilitate processes of socialisation across temporal and geographical boundaries (Bliuc et al., 2019). Researching the online spaces of far-right groups helps us to better understand how they cultivate social membership, intimacy, collective identity, and intersubjectivity. Törnberg and Törnberg remind us that it is through meetings in online spaces that community, belonging, and identities are constructed and “symbolised through internal discourses and cultures where memes, jargon, images, and even specific words function as emblems and evidence of group membership” (2023, p.3). They provide spaces for individuals “to share their grievances, frustrations, and desires” (Helm et al., 2023, p. 27), and can reinforce “a sense of belonging, as shared ideas are affirmed by members of the in-group” (Jasser et al., 2023, p. 1730). Far-right online communities, which Törnberg and Törnberg (2024) refer to as ‘intimate communities of hate’, are said to broaden exposure to extreme content and far-right ideas, as well as bridging online connections with offline engagements and networks.

However, it would be misguided to exclusively think of far-right online communities as spaces of out-group antagonism and extreme and hateful ideological expression. Online communities also offer members “forms of intimacy, sense, and feeling that are maligned or considered unacceptable in mainstream society” (Ganesh, 2018, pp. 33–34). In this context, online spaces provide powerful social functions; virtual communities can provide a possible safe haven or refuge for those with extreme or socially marginalised views (Jasser et al., 2023),

they give vulnerable individuals support and validation (Helm et al., 2024), and provide a form of sanctuary where members can develop a sense of collective identity and construct counter-narratives to mainstream ideas (Törnberg and Törnberg, 2024). Thus, research into far-right online communities should expect to see, in addition to out-group hostilities, “more everyday community-building discussion between participants, such as dating, relationships, child-rearing, politics, and other non-ideological concerns” (Holt, 2022, p. 365). Central to these ‘everyday community-building’ discussions are practices of sharing that foster the creation of community through intimate confessions and expressions of raw emotions (Ross and Bhatia, 2025, p. 3). There is, however, a dearth of scholarship that examines these extra-political sharing practices of far-right communities, a gap that this paper seeks to address.

2. Research approach, methods, data

To capture the discursive practices of far-right online communities on *X/Twitter Spaces*, an inductive critical ethnographic approach was deemed most suitable. In particular, this research employed netnography, which has been described as “a method specifically designed to study cultures and communities online” (Bowler, 2010, p. 1270). Netnography has been extensively used to study diverse online communities (Fenton and Procter, 2019), including far right and extremist online communities (Collins, 2024). Netnographic research seeks to describe and decode the social aspects of online life, including “online communities, practices and cultures formed through computer-mediated communications” (Addeo et al., 2019, p. 10). Importantly for the present study, as a form of online ethnographic practice, netnography is specifically designed to draw meaning from technologically mediated interactions in online networks and communities (Kozinets, 2021).

Advantageously for this particular research, netnography is methodologically promiscuous, and is often successfully blended with other methods (Kozinets, 2010). For this study, netnography was combined with critical discourse analysis (CDA) which is particularly useful in examining covert, strategically ambiguous, and intertextual political rhetoric — a hallmark of contemporary far-right communication (Sengul, 2025). Critical discourse analysis is fundamentally concerned with issues of power and ideology, and the way that “social power-abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted by text and talk in the political context” (van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). The advantage of blending netnography with critical discourse analysis is that it allows for a critical observation of “cultural practices in social media that are related to discussions about challenging or maintaining the distribution of resources and/or power” (Villegas, 2021, p. 104).

The researcher was initially immersed in ($n = 35$) *X/Twitter Spaces* sessions from 25 January 2024 – 06 June 2024, resulting in a total of 1925 minutes of observation time. On 13 July 2024, the then former United States president and presumptive nominee of the Republican Party in the 2024 presidential election, Donald Trump, survived an assassination attempt while addressing a campaign rally near Butler, Pennsylvania. Unsurprisingly, the event generated global headlines and substantial social media interest and discussion. Although the data collection phase was planned to run from January–June, the researcher made the decision to re-engage in data collection given the scale of the event, as well as the researcher noticing that *Spaces* were being extensively used in the hours-and-days post the assassination attempt. An additional six ($n = 6$) *X/Twitter Spaces* were analysed in the three days following the assassination attempt (13–16 July), totalling an additional 270 minutes. Therefore, the sample analysed in this study comprised ($n = 41$) *Spaces* sessions, totalling 2195 minutes of observation time.

The research process was informed by the guidelines for netnographic fieldwork established by Kozinets (2010). Kozinets (2010) suggests that netnographers should look for online communities that are: 1) substantial, defined as having a critical mass of communicators and an energetic feel, 2) heterogeneous, in that they have a number of

different participants, and 3) they are data-rich, offering more detailed or descriptive rich data. The data collection phase proved to be challenging and labour intensive due to the ephemeral and ad hoc nature of *X/Twitter Spaces*. Previous research has examined the rise of time-limited and ephemeral social media platforms and affordances like *Snapchat* (Anderson, 2015), and the methodological challenges associated with researching ephemeral social media (Piwek and Joinson, 2016). As previously detailed, *X/Twitter Spaces* are live and, despite hosts having the option, are seldom recorded and made available to listeners. Furthermore, while hosts can schedule *Spaces* in advance, most *Spaces* sessions appear to be ad hoc and unplanned, frequently reacting to certain events or issues — such as the assassination attempt on Donald Trump — in real time. This presented difficulties in researching *Spaces* in a systematic and recursive way, unlike text-based far-right communities on *Gab* or *Reddit*, or video sharing platforms like *YouTube* where researchers can access the data in their own time. These methodological challenges may help to explain why far-right communities on *X/Twitter Spaces* have been hitherto elusive to scholars. To overcome these challenges, the researcher adopted an ad hoc approach to data collection, setting aside two-hour blocks at various times of the day (Monday-Saturday) to immerse themselves in *Spaces* sessions. Following Kozinets' (2010) suggestion that netnographers should look for online communities that are "substantial" and have "a critical mass of communicators and an energetic feel" (p. 89), certain criteria were applied to sessions to warrant their inclusion in the sample. Sessions needed to be overtly right-wing coded and have a minimum of 150 listeners/participants at a given time. Consistent with netnography's *researcher-as-instrument* philosophy (Kozinets, 2010), the researcher drew on their expertise in far-right cultures and ideologies to identify and select right-wing/extremism coded *Spaces*. This was typically evaluated using the title and/or topic(s) of the *Spaces* session, as well as the *X/Twitter* bio and characteristics of the host(s) (e.g., MAGA Warrior), and the participation of well-known far-right influencers and activists (e.g., Nick Fuentes). Using the short bios and profile characteristics to build a profile of far-right users on *X/Twitter* is a well-established protocol (e.g., Crosset et al., 2019). This approach is consistent with Crosset et al. (2019) who point out that digital traces (posts, profile descriptions, memes) can be used to demarcate the far right. The sample was limited to English speaking *Spaces*, and although non-intentional, were almost always dominated by hosts/speakers from the United States. This perhaps speaks to a greater uptake of *X/Twitter Spaces* with North American far-right communities, but further research is needed to substantiate this.

Fieldnotes in the form of memos were taken throughout the sessions to capture the researcher's observations of the online communities (Kozinets, 2010). Memos were made on the topics, themes, discourses, and issues discussed in the sessions, as well as the discursive and sharing practices employed by the participants. Memoing is a vital process in transparent and trustworthy ethnographic work and involves the recording of thoughts and notes throughout the course of a study (Bingham, 2023). Data was analysed inductively, drawing on Critical Discourse Studies' (CDS) extensive analytical toolkit of discursive strategies, and rhetorical and linguistic devices (Wodak, 2021). Inductive qualitative analysis is said to be a key characteristic and strength of qualitative research and involves reading through the data and identifying codes, categories, discourses, patterns and themes as they emerge (Bingham, 2023, p. 2). Importantly, inductive analytical strategies do not develop predetermined codes and categories, but rather identify them as the researcher engages with the data. The researcher felt an inductive analytical approach was particularly important in the study of *X/Twitter Spaces* as this was, hitherto, and unobserved site of communicative exchange. Bingham suggests that sound inductive analysis involves developing codes, categories, themes, and findings; identifying representative data to support findings; and explaining findings using theory and literature (2023, p. 2). Guided by critical discourse analysis, memos were analysed recursively from June-August 2024, with the researcher identifying discursive practices, sharing strategies, discourses

and themes. This data was then analysed through the prism of the paper's theoretical framework and connected to existing literature with the aim of "expanding the impact of the analysis and the findings" (Bingham, 2023, p. 2).

As with all research — and internet research in particular — netnography comes with a number of ethical implications and responsibilities relating to privacy, data collection and storage, and informed consent. While netnography has the potential to be conducted in a manner that is entirely unobtrusive, scholarly opinion diverges on the role of informed consent in ethnographic research, including online ethnographies (Addeo et al., 2019). Although some scholars argue that members of online communities should be informed of the researcher's presence, others suggest that this may compromise the findings. Addeo et al. (2019) distinguish between *covert* and *overt* netnographic research. *Covert access or lurking* is defined as the researcher invisibly observing "the community without informing people about the research and the researcher's presence within the group" (p. 21). Advocates of this approach suggest that covert access or lurking should be the norm for netnographic scholarship as it offers a unique opportunity for collecting "natural" data, as the members are not aware of their informant status and do not modify their behaviour due to the researcher's presence (Addeo et al., 2019, p.22). Moreover, that informing community members of the researcher's identity would compromise the main advantage of the approach, i.e. its unobtrusiveness (Addeo et al., 2019). With this in mind, the present study conducted netnographic observations in a covert manner by making use of the *X/Twitter Spaces* 'Listen Anonymously' feature. There is also an important point to make regarding anonymity and the safety and wellbeing of the researcher when engaging with far-right and extremist communities online. The Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR (2019) guidelines for ethical internet research note the risks posed to researchers whose work has the potential to "trigger strong ideological reaction", including harassment, doxing, death threats, and violence (p. 11).

Notwithstanding the advantages of covert observation, netnographers engaging in unobtrusive observation have clear ethical responsibilities to protect the privacy of their research subjects. AOIR guidelines pose a critical question for internet researchers to consider: 1) *Is the conversation, thread or forum perceived as public or private by the author(s)/subjects?* In the context of *X/Twitter Spaces*, participants are clearly aware that these spaces are publicly accessible and can be joined (anonymously) by anyone with an *X/Twitter* account. Participants are also made aware when the host is recording the *Spaces* session. Moreover, users wanting to engage privately are able to use the 'Listen Anonymously' function if they choose. Several steps were taken to protect the privacy of users throughout the research project. The first relates to the anonymisation of participants. All participants — apart from users that were reasonably deemed to be public figures, such as journalists, high profile media figures, influencers, and political actors and activists (e.g., Elon Musk, Nick Fuentes, Laura Loomer) — were assigned pseudonyms at the point of data collection, even if their *X/Twitter* username was already pseudonymised. This is consistent with Kozinets (2010) who stresses the importance of treating pseudonyms as real names during data collection. As users were assigned pseudonyms at the point of data collection, there were no potential privacy risks associated with data storage. Another strategy employed by researchers to protect the identities of research subjects is the obscuring of direct quotes to prevent reverse searches on text-based platforms (e.g., Collins, 2024). Due to the ephemeral and live- audio nature of *Spaces*, this was not a problem for this particular study, affording participants an added level of anonymity. However, for additional protection, the researcher chose not to include direct quotations when a *Space* was being recorded by the host.

3. Findings and analysis

Through a netnography and critical discourse analysis of (n = 41)

Spaces sessions from 25 January to 16 July 2024, a diverse range of discourses, strategies and sharing practices were revealed, providing key insights into how *X/Twitter Spaces* are being instrumentalised by far-right online communities. Consistent with previous research, the findings revealed a heterogeneous counterculture, replete with *good versus evil binaries*, hate speech, white supremacism, antisemitism, out-group hostility, conspiracy theories and reactionary ideologies (Zhang and Davis, 2022), mediated through the synchronous audio-conversational affordance. Disconcertingly, several *Spaces* contained extremist — including violent extremist and anti-democratic — rhetoric and calls to action. The observed *Spaces* exhibited a high degree of affective polarisation, characterised by strong support of Donald Trump and hostility for political out-groups, including left-leaning voters and self-identified Democrats.

However, the findings also revealed that *Spaces* were key sites of intimacy, humour, and socialisation for far-right communities. Participants were observed engaging in extra-political and non-ideological discussions and concerns (e.g., Holt et al., 2022). Drawing on Baele et al. (2023) conceptualisation of far-right online communities as either *organic* or *strategic*, the findings revealed evidence of both. Strategic communities tended to be hosted by individuals with large *X/Twitter* followings, including prominent right-wing influencers, activists, and political figures. Interestingly, strategic communities tended to function differently from organic communities. Strategic communities were far more monological and hierarchical than organic communities, which tended to be more conversational and egalitarian. Strategic *Spaces* would most often have a high-profile host/s and were akin to Q&A sessions, with listeners afforded the opportunity to ask questions of the host(s) and speakers at the end of the sessions.

The presence of conspiracy theories was a particularly noteworthy finding. Although the literature is replete with scholarship noting the link between the far right and conspiratorial attitudes, beliefs and rhetoric, the scale and saturation of conspiracy theories in the ($n = 41$) *Spaces* analysed was nonetheless surprising. Almost all *Spaces* contained some conspiratorial discussions, ranging from well-known conspiracies around elections, 'voter fraud', 'the deep state', COVID-19, 5G, vaccination, as well as racialised conspiracies such as the 'the Great Replacement', and antisemitic conspiracies such as QAnon. While media and scholarly interest in the QAnon phenomena seems to have declined in recent years — particularly from its peak in 2017/2018 — belief in, and discussions of, the conspiracy were manifest in the findings. References to 'waking up' — referring to The Great Awakening — 'the coming storm', and 'trusting the plan' were commonplace. For example, in an 18 April *Space* titled 'Elon says Eliminate Voting Machines', a participant said: "A lot of people don't understand the Q movement. It's beautiful. We need to do our part" (Anonymised speaker, 18/04/2024). Likewise, participants frequently invoked the central QAnon claim that nefarious forces led by the world's most powerful people, including the Democratic Party, Hollywood liberals, and big business, are secretly engaged in paedophilic cabal that sexually abuses, kills and eats children (Sommer, 2024). An example of this can be seen in a 1 April *Space* titled 'United we Stand. Storm Approaching' where several participants accused President Joe Biden of being a paedophile: "We allowed a paedophile and a child molester to become president" (Anonymised Speaker, 01/04/2024).

Antisemitic conspiracies were prominent in many *Spaces* and were often articulated alongside other conspiracy theories. For example, in discussions of voter fraud and the 'rigged' 2020 Presidential Election, a discussion in a 4 March *Space* centred around voting machines allegedly being controlled by Israeli intelligence: "We know that our voter registration systems are created and controlled by the Mossad" (Anonymised speaker, 04/03/2024). Antisemitic conspiracy theories and rhetoric dominated the *Spaces* of so-called groypers communities, loosely defined as a subculture of racist, white nationalist, alt-right, and neo-Nazi activists, internet trolls, and provocateurs (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, n.d.). It is important to note that many of these self-described groypers

were banned from *X/Twitter*, but were subsequently replatformed by Elon Musk in 2024, including leading groypers and avowed neo-Nazi, Nick Fuentes. In a 7 June *Space* hosted by Nick Fuentes and attended by 7623 listeners, overt anti-Jewish rhetoric was palpable: "Jews want to supplement Christ and Christendom...we can't talk about Jewish people... why is it bad that we say Jews are the ones that own the porn companies?" (Nick Fuentes, 07/06/2024).

In the above quote, we can see Fuentes employ the feigned ignorance rhetorical strategy of "just asking questions" (Lyons et al., 2019) to reproduce antisemitic conspiracy tropes, including the accusation that Jewish people are spreading 'degeneracy' through pornography. In this context, conspiratorial rhetoric proliferated in the wake of the 13 July assassination attempt of Donald Trump. In a 16 July *Space* that was attended by former New York Congressman George Santos, community members shared conspiracies that the assassination attempt was an 'inside job', coordinated by the 'deep state', FBI, and Biden administration: "I personally believe that the top echelon of the Secret Service were in a plot to assassinate Trump" (Anonymised speaker, 17/07/2024).

Conspiracy theories around the assassination attempt were also articulated alongside antisemitism. A 14 July *Space* that was hosted by a number of verified *X/Twitter* users was titled 'JEWS TRY TO ASSASSINATE TRUMP!', in which participants shared theories that the assassination attempt was part of a Jewish plot. Interestingly, while these aforementioned conspiracies are well known in academic and media circles, the findings also revealed conspiratorial discussions that would almost certainly be impenetrable to a lay person, or someone without deep literacy in far-right discourses. These conspiracies were often laden with racialised, misogynistic, and transphobic tropes. One such discussion centred around the unfounded theory that Brigitte Macron, the wife of French President Emmanuel Macron, is actually transgender and was born as a so-called 'biological man'. Another centred around the Somalia-born Democratic Congresswoman Ilhan Omar allegedly engaged in a sexual relationship with her brother.

Intertextuality and interdiscursivity were found to be vital to the fluency of these *Spaces* discussions. Intertextuality/interdiscursivity relates to the linkages between discourses and texts over time and space which are established through implicit and explicit references (Wodak, 2021). It was noted in the memos that participants in these discussions were able to discuss these various conspiracies and references, which would otherwise be unintelligible to outsiders, with ease. In this regard, it can be argued that intertextual and interdiscursive knowledge functions as a form of social capital in far-right online spaces. This connects to Törnberg and Törnberg's point that "internal discourses and cultures where memes, jargon, images, and even specific words function as emblems and evidence of group membership" (2023, p. 3).

Also noteworthy in the findings — and consistent with extant literature on far-right online communities — was the use of *Spaces* to discuss political strategies, including electioneering, communication, recruitment, mobilisation, turnout and 'getting out the vote', organising, and canvassing. Importantly, and disconcertingly for reasons developed further in the article, many of these *Spaces* were attended by various GOP politicians, operatives and party officials at the local, state and federal level, including candidates, precinct chairs, and members of state party executive committees.

As demonstrated above, overt articulations of racism were prevalent in many of the analysed *Spaces*. Several *Spaces* also contained highly misogynistic, Islamophobic, and anti-LGBTQIA+ discussions. Notably, racialised discussions tended to oscillate between overt hate speech, and carefully coded innuendos and stereotypes. Participants were noted to employ various discursive strategies, including *strategies of mitigation and intensification*, as well as strategies of *calculated ambivalence*, allusions, and metaphors to articulate racist utterances in an indirect way. Conversely, many participants openly engaged in overt expressions of racism, including antisemitism, without feeling the need to temper their rhetoric. *Strategies of intensification and mitigation* refer to the way that

language is strategically intensified or mitigated, depending on the goal of the speaker (Wodak, 2021). These strategies are often coupled with rhetorical devices such as metaphors and insinuations, allowing a speaker to make racialised and exclusionary claims in a way that provides them with plausible deniability if accusations of racism are made (Sengul, 2023). An example of this can be seen in a 20 June *Space* in which Laura Loomer engaged in anti-Black racism, albeit in a coded way. Loomer was discussing an event for Fani Willis, a Black woman and District Attorney of Fulton County, Georgia: “The event smelled like fried chicken and marijuana – it was gross. Stereotypes exist for a reason, that’s all I’ll say” (Laura Loomer, 20/06/2024).

Here Loomer was clearly reproducing harmful longstanding racialised stereotypes deployed against African Americans, but tempered this with mitigating strategies. Indeed, it was observed that participants tended to employ indirect and coded discursive strategies more frequently when engaging in racialised discussions. Participants were less inclined to temper their rhetoric when discussing women and LGBTQIA+ communities. Overtly homophobic and transphobic rhetoric were manifest in several analysed *Spaces*, with derogatory terms such as ‘faggot’, ‘tranny’, and ‘groomers’ used frequently. Also present in the data were both indirect and direct discussions of political violence. Here speakers employed coded discursive strategies and legitimising strategies to justify the need for violence against various out-groups. Legitimisation strategies are used to attain the support/approval for a particular idea, policy, or course of action (Reyes, 2011). When alluding to the need for violence, speakers often invoked conspiracies of election fraud, COVID-19 and vaccinations, and QAnon inspired accusations of paedophilia as warrants for action. Again, many of these discussions were couched in metaphors and indirect rhetoric. An example can be seen in a 1 July *Space*: “We can’t let July 4 be the last one, that’s all I’ll say” (Anonymised speaker, 01/07/2024). Here the speaker is talking in revolutionary terms, referring to *Independence Day* in the United States and the July 4, 1776 ratification of the Declaration of Independence. References to July 4 and 1776 are frequently invoked by far-right communities to signify the need for violence, resistance and revolution. Prominent far-right media figure Alex Jones infamously said in a 2013 *CNN* debate on gun control “1776 will commence again if you try to take our firearms”. Indeed, references to July 4, 1776 were also frequently invoked by participants of the January 6, 2021 *Storming of the United States Capitol Building*.

While the above findings were significant for their ideological, political, and partisan tenor, equally noteworthy to emerge from the data was the presence of apolitical and non-ideological discursive practices. Although unsurprising given what we know about the role of far-right online communities as spaces for intimacy, socialisation, and community-building (Holt et al., 2022), the role of *X/Twitter Spaces* in facilitating collective identity formation, belonging and in-group solidarity was striking. This was particularly the case in organic *Spaces* which tended to be far more dialogic and conducive to non-partisan discussions and knowledge-sharing on issues relating to parenting, finances, relationships, health and wellbeing, and popular culture to name a few. As an example, in a 12 February *Space*, an elderly participant spoke about her cancer journey and her recent side effects from chemotherapy. The lady was consoled by other members of the *Space*, providing expressions of solidarity and sympathy. In another *Space*, participants spoke about their respective pets and shared details about their names and breeds. In a 15 May *Space*, participants were noted exchanging financial strategies, particularly relating to *Bitcoin*.

Participants in other *Spaces* exchanged knowledge on growing organic foods and tips relating to cooking and farming. Indeed, memos documented a broad range of affective expressions throughout the analysed *Spaces*, including laughter, grief, despair, and excitement.

Finally, the presence of humour was particularly notable, challenging the popular misconception that far-right communities are exclusively sites of anger and fear. Humour was frequently used to ridicule the political enemies of the participants, including prominent

left-wing politicians such as Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

4. Discussion and implications

Through a six-month critical qualitative netnography of *X/Twitter Spaces*, this paper sought to address the following questions: *RQ1: How is X/Twitter Spaces being used by far-right online communities? RQ2: What discursive practices do far-right users employ on X/Twitter Spaces to promote reactionary ideologies, negotiate intra-movement conflict, and cultivate social membership and in-group solidarity? RQ3: How are the discursive practices of Spaces users mediated by the platform’s ephemeral live- audio affordances and lax approach to content moderation?* The findings revealed a range of discursive practices were employed by users in *Spaces* that both aligned with, and deviated from, our scholarly understanding of the habitus of online far-right communities (e.g., Blüch et al., 2019). A key takeaway from this study is that *Spaces* has emerged as a vital communicative tool in the far-right’s digital ecosystem at the elite and grassroots level. The heterogenous communities and subcultures that broadly sit under the umbrella of ‘far right’ – including but not limited to – radical right populists, neofascists, MAGA ultranationalists, QAnon, Christian nationalists, groypers, political misogynists, identitarians, and white supremacists appeared to enjoy the ability to host and participate in live audio discussions around current political events, with the tacit support of platform owner and Trump administration staffer Elon Musk. The *Spaces* that were included in this study proved popular with high profile far-right influencers such as Nick Fuentes and Laura Loomer who frequently used the affordance to litigate intra-movement disagreements on key issues such as support for Israel.

As the first study to account for the use of *Spaces* by far-right online communities, this paper was foremost interested in the discursive and sharing practices used to foster social membership, socialisation, intersubjectivity, and collective identity. Consistent with prior scholarship (Winter, 2019), *Spaces* were found to be highly affectively polarized, replete with out-group hostility, racialised hate speech, anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric, misogyny, and conspiracy theories. The findings reveal that racist speech frequently oscillated between overt articulations of racism, and more coded, indirect and ambivalent rhetoric (Mondon and Winter, 2020). These were often mediated through the use of discursive strategies and rhetorical devices such as calculated ambivalence (Engel and Wodak, 2013), doublespeak, intertextuality, as well as metaphors, innuendos, insinuations, and presuppositions (Sengul and McSwiney, 2024). However, while the use of more coded and indirect discursive practices was certainly evident in the data, the significant presence of overt racist, homophobic, transphobic, and misogynistic rhetoric was noteworthy and surprising given what we know about far-right communication on mainstream social media platforms. Indeed, many of the articulations of overt racism, including antisemitism, were more akin to the practices observed on Alt-Tech platforms like *Gab* (Jasser et al., 2021). This suggests that a) extreme discourses have permeated even further into mainstream online contexts, and b) users on *Spaces* are taking advantage of the aforementioned free speech maximalist doctrine of *X/Twitter* owner Elon Musk.

While the presence of conspiracy theories was expected, the scale, saturation, and normality of conspiratorial thinking was striking. It can be argued that the fluency with which community members were able to engage in niche conspiratorial discussions serves an important function of “determining insiders from outsiders” (Törnberg and Törnberg, 2024, p. 32). Adapting the work of Collins (2004), Törnberg & Törnberg note that *barriers to outsiders* are a key characteristic of online communities, taking the form of an internal culture and language. Demonstrating intertextual and interdiscursive fluency in the various conspiracy theories that occupy far-right spaces serve “as evidence of group membership” (Törnberg and Törnberg, 2024, p. 32). Thus, the “enforcement, embodiment, and maintenance of symbolic and affective boundaries” (Ganesh, 2025, p. 3) of far-right identity is achieved through “the circulation of shared beliefs, references and symbols that make sense to

insiders" (Crosset et al., 2019, p. 956). However — and somewhat surprisingly — the research also revealed a high degree of non-ideological intimacies, practices and interactions that belie how we typically think about online extremist and far-right communities. Observed in the *Spaces* were apolitical discussions and knowledge-sharing around personal finance, relationships, pets, health, illness, sport, hobbies, music, popular culture, grief, and family. The range of affective and symbolic practices observed in these *Spaces* corresponds with Holt et al., (2022) who suggest that online communities offer spaces for "more everyday community-building discussion between participants, such as dating, relationships, child-rearing, politics, and non-ideological concerns" (p. 365). And, importantly, that these diverse symbolic practices "are what make these assemblies of users into a collective" (Ganesh, 2025, p. 3). In this context, there is an important technocultural observation to be made. It is argued here that the real-time, synchronous, voice-mediated affordance of *Spaces* offered participants a heightened degree of affective participation and engagement, beyond conventional text-based platforms like *Gab* and *Reddit*. Indeed, it was observed that expressions of laughter, anger, grief, sadness, despair were articulated and experienced more vividly and evocatively in ways that do not necessarily translate on text-based platforms. Thus, it is theorized here that participants felt more encouraged and comfortable in sharing personal, spontaneous, intimate and everyday aspects of their lives — particularly in *Spaces* defined as organic — than other social platforms favoured by far-right communities.

Disconcertingly, direct and indirect expressions of violent extremism and anti-democratic rhetoric were present in the data. This is particularly concerning for two key reasons: First, *Spaces* is all but free of any meaningful content moderation. Indeed, *X/Twitter's* own terms of use make clear that the platform has no real interest in moderating the content of *Spaces*, stating in their community standards guidelines: "we will not generally take action on Live Spaces" (X Help Centre, n.d, n.p.). While it is true that content moderation has been significantly weakened under the 'free speech absolutism' of Elon Musk, it does still exist, albeit anemically, on *X/Twitter* proper. The lack of enforcement of community standards and terms of use of the platform should be troubling for policymakers, democratic actors, scholars, and citizens alike as extremist rhetoric is allowed to flourish unchecked. In this regard, although *X/Twitter* is a mainstream social media platform, it effectively operates akin to an Alt-Tech platform like *Gab* or *Truth Social*, which provide virtual safe-havens for far-right communities to openly espouse far-right and extremist rhetoric without the fear of censorship and deplatforming (e.g., Albrecht et al., 2019). However, in the context of the mainstreaming and normalisation of extreme rhetoric on platforms like *X/Twitter*, the boundaries between so-called mainstream and alternative social media platforms are becoming increasingly porous. Indeed, while Ganesh (2025) notes the historically precarious and contingent nature of the far-right's online presence, and this was certainly a key impetus of the Alt-Tech movement's goal of creating a parallel digital economy, the findings presented in this paper perhaps reflect a growing confidence of far-right communities about their long-term viability on mainstream social media platforms. This no doubt is bolstered by the support of Elon Musk, and most recently the drastic shift by *Meta* CEO Mark Zuckerberg on the organisation's approach to fact-checking and moderation and the return of civic content to *Facebook*, *Instagram* and *Threads* (Horvath, 2025).

Second, far-right online communities on *X/Spaces* are an incredibly difficult population to study. In the absence of specially crafted digital research methods, at present the only way to study the interactions of communities on *Spaces* is through time-and-labour intensive qualitative ethnographic research. This is made particularly more challenging due to the ad hoc and ephemeral nature of *Spaces*, where unlike *YouTube*, researchers do not have the ability to access recordings of the data in their own time. This presents a pressing concern as *Spaces* is emerging as one of the most important tools in the far-right digital ecosystem, yet has no meaningful content moderation and is incredibly labour intense for

(already stretched) journalists and scholars to track. This concern was augmented by the presence of various Republican Party officials in many of the observed *Spaces*, including ones that featured overt articulations of racism and anti-democratic rhetoric. In other contexts, the participation of political officials in extreme right-wing discussions would be reported on by news media. However, this largely went unnoticed for the aforementioned reasons.

5. Conclusion

As the first study to interrogate the use of *X/Twitter Spaces* by online far-right communities, this paper aimed to provide an initial snapshot into how the platform's voice-mediated affordance is being utilised and weaponized for reactionary ends. As an exploratory study, it is hoped that this work will engender more granular research into the uses and practices of *Spaces* by specific subcultures within the far right. *Spaces* has become an increasingly important tool in the far-right's digital media milieu and played a prominent role in the 2024 United States Presidential Election campaign. Understanding far-right online communities matters. As does the instrumentalization of newer technologies and affordances by far-right and extremist communities to further their supremacist political agenda. The role of online communities in the radicalisation and socialisation of individuals into extreme ideas and practices is a critical concern for scholars and policymakers alike. This paper has argued that *Spaces* is playing an important role in the facilitation of online far-right community building and communicative exchange. To this end, while extreme articulations of far-right ideologies remain a vital line of scholarly inquiry, the field must continue to take seriously the role of everyday, mundane, and apolitical sharing practices in assembling disparate users into far-right collectives. An important caveat to this study is that *Spaces* are not only used by the far right and may well have utility in other spheres, including progressive activism. Indeed, the prolific use of *Spaces* by cryptocurrency communities was noticed during the ethnographic phase of the research, but was not included in the study. However, at present *Spaces* does seem to be uniquely conducive to far-right movements for the reasons discussed in this paper.

The emergence of *Spaces* as popular communicative platform for far-right communities is concerning in the context of its lack of moderation, ephemerality, and the practical limitations for journalists and scholars in monitoring and documenting its use. Given its present popularity, rapid uptake by far-right users and association with Elon Musk, there is good reason to think that *Spaces* will continue to play an important role in the far-right's digital ecosystem. Notwithstanding the clear methodological challenges outlined here, further ethnographic work is needed to understand *Spaces* in the sharing, diffusion, amplification, socialisation, transnationalisation, recruitment, and radicalisation of far-right ideas globally.

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.

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