UPVOTING EXTREMISM: AN ASSESSMENT OF EXTREME RIGHT DISCOURSE ON REDDIT
BACKGROUND

EXTREME RIGHT ONLINE:
• Right-wing extremists (RWE) have exploited the Internet’s resources to connect, recruit, and spread their ideology in ‘virtual communities’

PREVIOUS RESEARCH:
• Shift from traditional hate sites (e.g., Stormfront) to mainstream social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube)
• Increasingly popular ‘social news aggregation’ sites, like Reddit, have been overlooked
• Created in 2005
• Users retrieve and vote on linked content from across the web
• Fosters tight-knit communities dedicated to specific topics
• Racism and hate speech is allowed
r/THE DONALD:

- Created June 2015 as an online community for Trump supporters
  - Discuss Trump’s presidency, including his political platform, press briefings, and larger political events

- r/The_Donald’s rules ban racist and anti-Semitic content, but allow critical discussions of Islam and anti-Muslim content

RESEARCH GAPS:

- Extremist content on Reddit is largely understudied
- Research largely focused on ‘memes’
THE STUDY

DATA:

• r/The_Donald: 10 ‘Trump Tweet’ posts, over ~3 years, 4,916 comments

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

• What is the nature of the online discussions surrounding ‘Trump Tweets’ on r/The_Donald?

• How does Reddit’s structure implicitly facilitate far-right extremism on r/The_Donald?

METHODS:

• Qualitative thematic analysis
OVERVIEW:

• Redditors discuss how their physical safety and ‘Western’ culture are being threatened

• Two sources of threat, each desiring to weaken America:
  1. The ‘External’: Islam
  2. The ‘Internal’: left-leaning news media and ‘politically correct’ culture
THE EXTERNAL THREAT:

• Islam is destructive:
  • Increasing terror threat
  • Eroding Western values

• Islam’s followers are dangerous
  • Practice a “violent” and “barbaric” religion
FINDINGS

[It’s] Part and parcel of...living with people who want to blow you into parts with a bomb in a parcel. (M56, +185)

Diversity is our greatest strength. (CRC_1488, +363)

If they [Muslims] kill us, we win. (robot, +296)
FINDINGS

THE INTERNAL THREAT:

1. American ‘Left’ seeks to undermine the nation’s defenses against Islam

2. ‘Mainstream’ news media
   • Failure to report the ‘true’ nature of Islam

3. ‘Politically correct’ (PC) culture
   • Inability to promote anti-Islam beliefs
FINDINGS

I just check Trump’s twitter. It’s real. MSM [Mainstream media] going to defend Muslims tossing people over the roof. (HK_Trump, +156)

[Mainstream media is] already reporting that the tweets are "far right anti Muslim videos" completely ignoring the content of the videos. (Techgirl, +176)
FINDINGS

RESPONDING TO “THE THREAT”:

• Trump’s Tweets bring key issues to light:

  • **External threat:**
    • “Simple” solutions

  • **Internal threat:**
    • Combat ‘PC’ culture by promoting alternative narratives, on and offline
FINDINGS

If London had our travel ban Manchester would have been stopped!!! (DustinTC, +368)

Keep them out. Fuck Islam. (roza123, +27)

Ban Islam. Problem solved [...] If we don't ban it soon we are dooming our future generations to perpetual terror the likes of which the world has never seen. (Impala, +15)
• Comments that claim Islam and ‘the Left’ as external and internal threats to America, respectively, are highly upvoted

• Reddit’s voting system enables RWEs to reinforce anti-Muslim sentiment within r/The_Donald:
  1. Members are rewarded for Islamophobic remarks (in the form of karma points)
  2. Practice of upvoting comments promotes anti-Muslim sentiment within the community

• Absence of dissenting views/counternarratives, due to r/The_Donald’s rules against anti-Trump content
FUTURE RESEARCH

• Consider other types of topics and posts on r/The_Donald
  • E.g., Anti-Black/Semitic/LGBTQ/immigrant discussions

• Consider extremist content on other RWE subreddits
  • E.g., r/KikeTown and r/metacanada

• Compare RWE discourse on Reddit with discourse on Voat and Gab
  • How does the discourse differ across platforms?

• Big Data/Quantitative analyses
  • Systematically track users’ discussions across time
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