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“Pardon me if I don't weep for your victimhood”

Examining the Aftermath of Deplatformization Through Influential Far-right Activists'
Framing and Alliance-Building on Telegram

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Abstract

This thesis examines the social unfolding of the recent deplatformization of the far-right extremes on Telegram. Leaving prior approaches to moderation behind, this study asks questions around how moderation imprints itself on the complex terrain of meaning and practice, interacts with intensified reflexiveness of the social agents, and leaves affected collectivities changed in unanticipated ways.

The theoretical framework bridges platform and moderation studies (Gillespie, 2018; Van Dijck, 2018) to Couldry & Hepp's (2017) account of the interdependencies between media and social actors under deep mediatisation. The digital far-right networks are approached through the lens of cultural sociology of social movements, spotlighting influential far-right Telegram channels as core movement leaders and/or activists. The framing perspective based on Benford & Snow's work (2000) is adopted as a comprehensive framework to identify symbolic responses, trajectory shifts, mobilisation attempts, and alliance-building practices in the context of deplatformization.

The study conducts a qualitative multi-case frame analysis on four prominent far-right activists and their channels in the anglophone Telegram ecosystem: Nicholas J. Fuentes (US), Mark Collett (UK), Blair Cottrell (AU) and Hate Facts (CA). The empirical material represents four complete narratives on the issues of platforms, moderation, and deplatformization that unfolded in a critical period between actors' mass migration to Telegram in 2019 and the end of 2022, defined by the aftermath of Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter. The analysis follows a two-step approach that first examines the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing. Second, the analysis incorporates collective identity as a central analytical tenet to examine activists' boundary work and alliance-building surrounding deplatformization.

The analysis reveals 'Big Tech' as a potent empty signifier linking diverse grievances, deplatformization as a conflictual issue prompting fractured solutions, and novel micro-level individual actions redefined as a form of activism. Furthermore, the study provides evidence that through the reappropriation of the shared experience into a symbolic resource of victimhood, deplatformization further weaponizes conspiratorial far-right narratives, and strengthens their countercultural appeal. However, the findings also point to normatively positive implications, namely that (1) deplatformization serves as a contentious issue and (2) provokes competitive victimhood, inhibiting alliance-building between deplatformed far-right factions.

Keywords: moderation, deplatformization, far right, frame analysis, collective identity, alliance-building, competitive victimhood, Telegram.

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1. Introduction

Times are going to get a lot tougher, and when that happens it won't matter how hard some dork got 'owned' in a debate. All that will matter is how strong your community is, how well organized you are, how much force you can concentrate...

(Hate Facts, a Canadian far-right Telegram channel on deplatformization)

Mainstream social media platforms have provided a seemingly endless avenue for the far-right extremes to spread their intolerant ideas. Over the past two decades, participatory digital spaces have empowered the fringes of the political spectrum to engage disaffected youth under the ambiguous pretence of humour, paint an image more appealing than that of white robes, inject intolerant ideas into the cultural and political mainstream, and ultimately take their message to the streets (York, 2021). However, as the tide turned and platforms began to crack down on extremist activity, the shift provokes the question: what happens when the relationship between mainstream platforms and the far-right comes to an end?

Since 2016, mainstream social media platforms have made a series of moves toward detoxifying the platform ecosystem of extreme speech and digital hate by systematically pushing the virtual far-right activity to the fringes of the mainstream ecosystem (Van Dijck, 2021). As the pressure grew from the public, terrorism experts, politicians, and advertisers over the amplification of exclusionary rhetoric online, Big Tech and Twitter retooled their moderation approaches. Specifically, a series of events served as gradual inflexion points. In the wake of the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, platforms began removing self-identifying Nazi individuals (York, 2021). The decision came after the alt-rightists, till then thought to be confined to their humour-based online crusades, brought diverse factions of neo-fascism, nationalism, and militias to the streets of America. Yet, it was not until the wake of March 15, 2019, when the deadliest terrorist attack in New Zealand's history was livestreamed on Facebook (Hern, 2019), that deplatforming – the removal of one's account – became the platforms' tool of choice against the right-wing extremes. The sweeps did away with prominent far-right opinion leaders and organisations, the likes of Alex Jones and Milo Yiannopoulos, the Proud Boys in the United States, the fascist political party Britain First in the United Kingdom, as well as a myriad of other individuals. The measures escalated once more in the aftermath of the January 6, 2021 attacks on the US Capitol building in Washington, D.C. Beyond deplatforming individuals, most notably the then sitting US

President Donald Trump, companies disconnected the alt-tech apps used to coordinate the siege from app stores and cloud hosting services (Bromell, 2022).

In tandem, this series of shifts represents a significant change in the fight against digital hate actors and constitutes the core contextual backdrop for the present thesis. The widespread adoption of *deplatforming* as the permanent suspension of one's account from a social media platform (Rogers, 2020) and *deplatformization* as the disconnection of alt-tech from infrastructural services (Van Dijck et al., 2021) present an unprecedented set of interventions aimed at one community of practice *and* its infrastructure across the mainstream ecosystem.¹ Throughout the thesis, I adopt 'deplatformization' as an umbrella term to refer to this broader context.

As a clear-cut solution to a complex social problem, the altered moderation landscape ensued a cascade of trade-offs unfolding beyond the mainstream platforms. Questioning whether deplatformization detoxifies the social web more broadly, researchers have repeatedly pointed to how abusive user communities collectively migrate toward alternative spaces such as Telegram (Rogers, 2020). Mapping out the aftermath of interventions through metrics of participation such as levels of activity and toxicity (Ali et al., 2021), scholars have warned that while these spaces limit the reach of exclusionary voices, right-wing extremism continues to thrive in loosely moderated spaces, away from the public view.

Research Aims and Theoretical Framework

Despite excellent quantitative evaluations of Big Tech's systematic push against the right-wing extremes, scholars have yet to systematically address the central question of how such tectonic shifts in the digital media landscape interact with the complex web of agency, social practice, and symbolic meaning in affected counterhegemonic communities. Accounts signalling how actors interpret and confront sociotechnical power have been plenty, pointing to the revitalised perceptions of censorship and political bias (Canales, 2021; Simeone & Walker, 2022). Yet, these inquiries have largely remained anecdotal and/or biased heavily towards the viewpoints of US conservatives, despite the shifts taking place globally. The lack of systematic attention echoes a much broader and deep-rooted issue with contemporary research and theorising on moderation. Social media platform moderation is often understood as a set of governance

¹ This thesis approaches the networked virtual groupuscules of the far-right as a big tent movement with various belief systems and movement subgroups within constituting a broad community of practice. This approach is illuminated under the section 2.2 *The Social and Cultural Practices of Digital Hate Networks*.

mechanisms that ‘structure’ participation in an online community (Grimmelmann, 2015, p. 47). Such accounts limit our understanding of the interplay between moderation and collectivities. By ignoring the reflexivity of social agents (Giddens, 1984), undoubtedly reflected in the highly reactive and adaptive nature of the virtual far-right communities (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Nagle, 2017), they construct a positivistic understanding and deduce the operational dynamics of moderation to universal laws.

At its core, this thesis aims to illuminate the value of an alternative approach to examining the aftermath of large-scale moderation interventions more holistically. Bringing the fundamental notions of the late modern social theory back into the current theorising and research on moderation, I propose that any account of the actual aftermath of a moderation intervention needs to consider the complex interplay between structure and agency. As such, this thesis was guided by the questions of how affected actors reappropriate, negotiate, and challenge moderation to confront and counter manifestations of power in contemporary sociotechnical systems. Moreover, in doing so, how do they introduce new patterns of meaning and practice into their communities, altering the trajectory of the community.

The theoretical framework of the present study is anchored in Couldry & Hepp’s (2017) theory of mediated construction of reality. Their critical conversation between media and broader social theory is used as the backbone for approaching moderation at the intersection of social order, stabilities, and change, while also returning to Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory. Conversing with platform studies, this thesis approaches moderation as a structure that significantly shapes the social and political fabric in the deeply mediatised contemporary Western societies yet remains open for actors to renegotiate within their cultural, political, and social context. It becomes crucial, then, to focus on the social and cultural practices of the digital far right. This thesis draws on the cultural sociology of social movements to approach the far-right through the rarely adopted lens of social movement studies.² This means spotlighting the role of contemporary far-right opinion leaders as key movement activists to shed light on their rationale, operational dynamics, and reflexive responses in times of instability. Ultimately, the social movement framing perspective is adopted as a comprehensive theoretical and analytical framework to identify symbolic meanings, changes in the trajectory,

²The adoption of this approach does in no way attempt to draw normative equivalences to progressive movements. This perspective is adopted because it is central to the objectives set in this study, i.e., to understand the ways in which the far-right leaders frame issues for its followers, the factors that facilitate belonging and solidarity within groups, as well as the cultivation of symbolic resources and collective identity. This approach is highlighted in section 2.2.1 *Activism and Influence in ‘Leaderless’ Networks*.

and concrete mobilisation attempts (Benford & Snow, 2000). The framing theory is also bridged to critical contemporary accounts of affect (Papacharissi, 2015), resonance (Rosa, 2019) and distrust (Rosanvallon, 2008).

Research Questions and Objectives

Building on the theoretical and methodological framework of frame analysis, the study spotlights four high-profile far-right channels as core movement activists and opinion leaders of diverse factions across the anglophone Telegram networks. The empirical material builds four complete narratives on the issues of platforms, moderation, and deplatformization that unfolded in a critical period between the 2019 collective migration to Telegram and the end of 2022, when the aftermath of Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter provoked new uncertainty about the relationship between mainstream platforms and the far right.

Adopting a two-fold analytical approach, the research addresses the following questions and objectives:

(RQ1) How do the deplatformed influential far-right activists frame issues of moderation, platforms, and deplatformization for their followers?

(RQ2) What role do these activists' constructions of deplatformization play in their community- and alliance-building practices?

Specifically, the study seeks to narrow down the complex and multivalent symbolic process in which influential far-right channels on Telegram as leading movement activists construct meaning surrounding deplatformization. The goal here is not merely to identify the grievances and perpetrators they construct, the solutions they propose, and with which strategies and towards what goals they motivate their followers to act. To move beyond the one-dimensional accounts biased towards viewpoints of US-based conservatives (Jasser et al., 2021), the first objective is also to reveal to what extent the developing ideas and repertoires of action are shared or differ across contexts.

The second objective is to identify how the produced symbolic renderings of deplatformization, particularly the in- and out-group identity constructs, may be employed to facilitate a feeling of community and build new solidarity links with other deplatformed extremist actors and factions.

Throughout the following pages, this thesis guides the reader through the key conceptual architecture of the literature review. Under methodology, I discuss the choices that guided the design of the present study and the selection of empirical material. The analysis follows a two-fold approach that first illuminates the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing before adopting collective identity as a central analytical prism. Finally, the discussion of key findings contributes to the literature examining the aftermath of deplatformization and offers concluding thoughts on the value of the proposed approach to moderation studies.

2. Literature Review

This literature review discusses the central theoretical underpinnings which importantly shape the empirical research carried out in this thesis. I begin by contextualising deplatformization within the body of literature critically examining the mediatisation of Western societies, highlighting the research gap this thesis addresses. To understand how deplatformization interacts with meaning and social practices in the affected far-right collectivities, the second section approaches the digital far right through a social movement lens. It highlights their operational dynamics and the role of influential far-right creators as core movement activists shaping the orientation and action within these networks. To understand these key actors' responses to deplatformization, the third section revolves around framing as a form of reflexive control, as well as a community- and alliance-building tool. Lastly, adopting Telegram as a research site, I propose that post-deplatformization, prominent channels constitute core movement activists – making them the central focus of this thesis.

2.1 Deplatformization, Moderation, and Social Order

This thesis approaches moderation as a structure that importantly shapes the broader social order in contemporary societies. Due to what Couldry and Hepp (2017, p. 214) identify as the process of 'deep mediatization,' media – in both the material and symbolic sense – lay the foundations of social and political life. The novel social order is not merely 'a relatively stable pattern of interdependencies' between individuals, groups, and institutions (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 190). With the 'platformization' of Western societies, it hinges on larger stabilities afforded by the infrastructural and symbolic resources of platforms (Van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 24). Specifically, by nestling themselves at the gateways of online socialities, a handful of 'Big Tech' corporations known as GAFAM have amassed what Bromell (2022, p. 90) warns to be 'oligopolistic control' over important symbolic resources of visibility, legitimacy, and validation (York, 2021).³ In other words, being platformed acts as a multifold source of social stability for both the individual and collectivities.⁴

³ GAFAM stands for Big Tech corporations of Google-Alpha, Facebook-Meta, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft.

⁴ This thesis adopts Couldry & Hepp's (2017, p.168) notion of 'collectivities' to account for both networked and community-like groups of individuals. This is discussed under the section 2.2 *The Social and Cultural Practices of Digital Hate Networks*.

Under this novel social order, moderation becomes a fundamental structuring force (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Decisions made by human and algorithmic moderating agents not only regulate access to material and symbolic resources but profoundly shape social value regimes. As Gillespie (2018, p. 13) argues, moderation is not merely one aspect of the platform, but the definitional ‘commodity’ through which platforms ‘torque public life.’ Despite lacking democratic legitimacy to act as courts (Bromell, 2022), being vexed with contradictions, algorithmic bias and human error, moderation outlines the contours of acceptable political discourse and participation (Gillespie, 2018). Not solely on the platform – GAFAM forms the core of the ecosystem upon which other platforms depend on, resulting in the globalisation of their governance approach (Gillespie, 2018). Although smaller, this is why Twitter is often grouped with Big Tech due to its perceived influence on public discourse (Van Dijck et al., 2018).

The way moderation reconciles and creates value regimes is not through guidelines, but rather their enforcement. Prior to deplatformization, hate speech guidelines were merely a ‘discursive performance’ (Gillespie, 2018, p. 47) when ultimately overridden by what York (2021, p. 194) identifies as a ‘scattershot approach’ to digital hate. The inconsistent application was in part a consequence of the amorphous nature of hate speech and its unique detection challenges (Bromell, 2022). However, as corporations whose primary goal is to satisfy all the stakeholders, York (2021) argues that allowing anti-Muslim speech and various conspiracies to flourish as ‘opinion’ also constituted a strategic compromise to amass profit. To echo York, ‘if—as it has certainly seemed for some time—public opinion favors white supremacist ideas, then ensuring that they remain online is profitable’ (2021, p. 202). The lax approach rendered the participation of problematic users legitimate, validating their hateful rhetoric and intolerant ideas.

As an unprecedented extreme form of moderation, deplatformization importantly reorganised these value regimes through a series of shifts. In terms of enforcement, the shift from ‘softer’ measures of temporary bans to ‘hard’ enforcement of permanent deletion comes with a sense of certitude on their illegitimacy to participate (Gillespie, 2018; Singhal et al., 2022). Further, deplatforming renders *all* speech, not just the problematic parts, illegitimate. The speech is no longer constrained *ex post* as punishment for a concrete transgression, but *ex ante* as protection from any possible future wrongdoing, reflecting the idea of guilt by association (Gillespie, 2018; Grimmelman, 2015). The moral implications of this were brought into sharp focus when

directed at the sitting president of world's second-largest democracy, provoking a cascade of concern across the political spectrum (Bromell, 2022).⁵ And finally, expanding the target of interventions to the infrastructure level of alt-tech strips away not only the individual's basic legitimacy to participate in public discourse (i.e., the perception of Facebook and Twitter as public spheres), but to participate online more broadly.

Overall, as a systematic intervention aimed at one community of practice and their infrastructure across the mainstream platform ecosystem, the deplatformization of the far-right extremes was unprecedented in its extent. Not only in the infrastructural sense, but by profoundly disrupting the continuity and stability of symbolic resources and value systems upon which the far-right individuals and collectivities had oriented themselves.

2.1.1 Mapping Out the Aftermath

Scholarship attempting to trace the aftermath of these shifts has evaluated deplatformization in normative terms, warning about the implications of GAFAM's power for free speech (Bromell, 2022), public values, and responsible ecosystem governance (Van Dijck et al., 2021). At the same time, new media scholars have illustrated its substantial impact on the removed individuals and communities. These studies point to three broader patterns: (1) mass migration to alternative platforms, (2) hindering of operational abilities such as audience reach, recruitment, monetization, and (3) a decrease in toxicity within the mainstream ecosystem and an increase in toxicity on alternative platforms.

First, the deplatformed collectively migrated to alternative platforms, namely Telegram, where they re-established networks in similar constellations (Fielitz & Schwarz, 2021; Rogers, 2020; Urman & Katz, 2020). The moves were largely coordinated by influential far-right users (Rogers, 2020). Particularly in the United States, the right wing has also made a series of moves toward building an alternative platform ecosystem for free speech proponents ('alt-tech'): DLive, BitChute, Gab, Gettr, Parler, and Trump's latest platform Truth Social. Dehghan and Nagappa (2022) believe that the parallel ecosystem is becoming stable and self-sustaining, warning about a potential technological polarisation of the social web, where the two poles of the debate might not even exist on the same platform.

⁵ For instance, the Russian opposition activist Alexei Navalny called the measures 'an unacceptable act of censorship' and the German chancellor Angela Merkel warned them to be 'problematic' (Bromell, 2022, pp. 90-91).

Second, deplatformization severely hinders the ability of communities to control information flows. Migration to new spaces inhibits operational goals of affected groups by decreasing their audience numbers and hence political visibility (Rogers, 2020). In the platform society, a sizable portion of all traffic converges on mainstream platforms and losing access limits the reach of disinformation and extreme speech (Fielitz & Schwarz, 2021; Rauchfleisch & Kaiser, 2021). It also hinders their recruitment activities and severely lowers the revenue streams of fringe celebrities (Rogers, 2020).

Lastly, within-platform studies of intervention effects illustrate a significant decrease in the overall level of activity and extreme speech on the platform that removed communities (Jhaver et al., 2021). Yet, such studies shed little light on whether this still holds when considering the broader web ecosystem. Looking at pairs of platforms, researchers found that toxicity and radicalization in turn increase on alternative platforms (Ali et al., 2021; Dehghan & Nagappa, 2022) and communities' own websites (Horta Ribeiro et al., 2021).

These studies provide initial evidence that the broader societal effects of moderation come with a trade-off; the movement of abusive users toward alternative platforms will decrease their reach, but also lead to more toxicity. However, such analyses on the impact on speech and activity tend to exclusively adopt quantitative linguistic analyses, limited by the selection of terms in pre-existing lexicons (Chandrasekharan et al., 2022) and algorithmically derived 'toxicity scores' (Ali et al., 2021; Horta Ribeiro et al., 2021). In other words, they can only measure the level of extreme speech but cannot account for how the collective, 'lived' experience of deplatformization may shape the orientation, action, and other key aspects of participation within extremist communities. Since collective experiences are shaped by individuals, more use-centric approaches are needed in ways that computational metrics may not fully capture.

2.1.2 Opening the Black Box: Moderation as a Lived Experience

Whatever lines platforms draw, it is along those lines that [...] disputes can, and probably will, arise. (Gillespie, 2018, p. 73)

The previous section shed light on platform moderation as a global governance mechanism that fundamentally shapes the foundations of social and political life. While subject to much discussion about its values and power, only a limited number of studies have adopted user-

centred perspectives to consider how transformations in moderation unfold on the ground – how they are experienced, negotiated, and challenged by affected users and collectivities.

The user-centric studies highlight two key dimensions of moderation as a lived experience: the emotional factors and alternative theories. When banned or temporarily removed, frustration has been found to define the experience of nearly all removed users, regardless of the reason for their ban or their political orientation (West, 2018). This highlights that the disrupted continuity of material and symbolic resources threatens the ‘ontological security’ of affected actors (Giddens, 1984, p. 66). Particularly for collectivities and content creators on the social margins, moderation strips away their visibility, which functions as a social, political, and often also economic currency (Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Gillespie, 2018; Rogers, 2020). In addition, the lack of transparency in automatically generated explanations and the limited access to human-based customer service further reinforces frustration (West, 2018).

In the absence of transparency, affected users tend to develop alternative ‘folk theories’ about why their account was suspended (Savolainen, 2022; West, 2018). This underscores that the late modern social agent is ‘reflexive,’ afforded unprecedented freedom to construct their own sense of self and the world (Giddens, 1984), a dynamic further ‘intensified’ under the conditions of deep mediatization (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p. 218). The constructed narratives draw heavily on personal experience and pre-existing beliefs but also overlap with broader ‘algorithmic’ (Bucher, 2017) and ‘platform imaginaries’ through which individuals understand platform aspects and user practices (Poell et al., 2021). These narratives place blame on factors that users see fit rather than the ‘broad and complex range of sociotechnical factors’ that define moderation apparatuses (West, 2018, p. 4380). Notably, as early as 2006, prominent conservative users began interpreting moderation interventions as a confirmation of bias and censorship (York, 2021).⁶

These theories and emotional dimensions have real-world consequences – they influence users’ actions (Bucher, 2017; Papacharissi, 2015; Poell et al., 2021) and facilitate openings for political action, both on- and offline. To exemplify, Gillespie (2018, p. 143) outlines the case of breastfeeding mothers who, around 2010, faced systematic removals of content and accounts

⁶ In 2006, the American political commentator Michelle Malkin was among the first notable conservatives to publicly interpret her YouTube ban as a confirmation of anti-conservative bias, according to York (2021, p.193). Malkin was banned from YouTube under its hate speech policies for uploading a video montage showing victims of Muslim terrorist attacks.

by Facebook for posting images with visible female nipples. The shared experience and frustration, coupled with the interpretation of moderation within their existing beliefs of marginalisation, facilitated a novel community of solidarity that turned to activism to challenge the platform's policy.

These studies underscore that the aftermath of moderation interventions is unpredictable. In line with the complex terrain of meaning within their communities, affected users and collectivities reflexively challenge techno-social abjection through reinterpretation, mobilisation, and new solidarity links, (re)shaping their communities.

2.1.3 Research Gap

As highlighted in the introduction, the interplay between moderation and affected collectivities is a severely under-researched area of inquiry. Because platform moderation is often understood to 'structure' participation (Grimmelmann, 2015, p. 47), little attention is paid to the other side of the equation. Yet, if the structure is 'both medium and outcome of the practices,' as Giddens (1984, p. 25) suggested, moderation may profoundly shape the participation of human agents, but it is only through that that it possesses any power. In other words, any holistic examination of the aftermath of a moderation intervention needs to account for how shifts in web architecture and governance interact with a complex fabric of existing social practices and meaning, and how affected actors confront extreme manifestations of platform power.

The few studies that have laid the groundwork in this area have merely accounted for individual and small-scale removals, offering little insight into how *extreme* shifts in stabilities such as deplatformization may be experienced and challenged. They also focus heavily on interpretations rather than more strategic renderings of events. The examination of the biggest systematic intervention in the contemporary history of platform governance aimed at one community of practice hence offers rich opportunity to address the identified gap. As an 'extreme case' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 78), deplatformization activates 'more actors and more basic mechanisms' than any minor intervention and could lead to identifying important new patterns in how moderation plays out on the ground. Illuminating these concerns is crucial for several reasons. While as private companies, platforms hold accountability toward the shareholders, rather than the public (Van Dijck, 2018), deplatformization remains the primary approach for dealing with the most encroaching public concerns such as online hate. It becomes

urgent to develop a more holistic understanding of its aftermath and potential societal trade-offs. Further, while this is not the central aim of this thesis, an increasing concern about the power of Big Tech is now shared across the political spectrum in the EU and US (Conrad, 2022), expanding well beyond Silicon Valley to Tik Tok, and more recently, ChatGPT (Chafkin & Zuidijk, 2023). As the discussion unfolds, right-wing frames are increasingly imposed onto legitimate concerns about platform governance. As numerous contemporary crises have shown, these frames can define the trajectory of the broader societal response to the issues, making it important to study their development.

2.2 The Social and Cultural Practices of Digital Hate Networks

The previous section proposed that a holistic examination of deplatformization needs to consider its interaction with the complex patterns of social, cultural, and political practice and symbolic meaning in affected collectivities. To do so, this section approaches contemporary digital far-right networks through the lens of social movement studies. It highlights their converged nature, the use of culture as a resource, repertoire of action, and the dynamics of influence.

While the far right and their discourse are among the most discussed topics within social sciences, there is no consensus on the correct term for the communities and ideas at the heart of this thesis. Throughout the thesis, I adopt the ‘far right’ as an umbrella definition for a diverse plethora of beliefs on the extreme (rejecting democracy) and radical right (rejecting liberal democracy) (Mudde, 2019). In a similar vein, the notion of ‘collectivities’ accounts for both networked and community-like groups of individuals with shared orientation and action (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p.168). The adoption of these broad concepts is meant to highlight what some understand as ‘the unfolding of a new phase [of convergence] in nativist politics’ (Pirro, 2023, p. 109).

Under what Ganesh (2018, p. 31) discusses as ‘digital hate culture,’ swarm-like networks of users form ‘contingent alliances’ to contests liberal political culture. There are two underlying processes giving rise to these converged mediated networks of far-right communication. Throughout the last decade, ‘online culture wars’ have continuously churned cultural and political events into new identities and behaviours as ‘a response to a response to a response, each one responding angrily to the existence of the other’ (Nagle, 2017, p. 7). This created a shared culture of grievances ‘against liberalism, political correctness, and the like,’ morphing

together diverse groupuscules of the far right (Davey & Ebner, 2017; Ganesh, 2018, p. 31). At the same time, virtual spaces have facilitated a significant cross-pollination of beliefs between these strains (Davey & Ebner, 2017), and recently other conspiracy movements such as QAnon and anti-vaccine (Snow & Bernatzky, 2022; Snow et al., 2022). As a result, numerous groups exhibit ‘ideological pragmatism,’ blurring the lines between traditionally separate factions (Davey & Ebner, 2017, p. 29). Whereas Ganesh (2018) associates this phenomenon with anglophone North American and European corners of social media, Udupa et al.’s (2021) work provides evidence of similar processes at play globally.

2.2.1 Activism and Influence in ‘Leaderless’ Networks

In approaching these networks of networks, this thesis foregrounds social movement studies, particularly the cultural perspective developed upon Melucci’s (1995; 1996) work. Despite the plethora of attempts to understand contemporary online manifestations of the far right, little attention is paid to sociological lenses, particularly the perspective of movement studies (Blee & Latif, 2021; Toscano, 2019). Given the morphed nature of digital hate networks, any episode of grassroots engagement is likely to display both movement- and subculture-like coordination (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019). However, the activity at the heart of this thesis does not merely provide others with a subcultural social space but seeks to reshape political cultures in a purposive and coordinated way— much like progressive movements (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019; Udupa et al., 2021). Adopting this perspective is also instrumental to the objectives set in this study. Understanding the far right as a big tent movement with various subgroups within (Mudde, 2019) highlights the processes through which these actors create ‘conflictual orientations’ to opponents, connect ‘through dense, informal networks,’ and facilitate collective identities (della Porta & Diani, 2020, p. 21). Nonetheless, Blee & Latif (2021) call for researchers adopting this lens to rethink the possible spectrum of activism to better reflect participation and belonging within digital far-right networks.

The core repertoire of action within the digital hate culture revolves around the production and proliferation of material with which others construct their understanding of society. The actors broadly exhibit two rationales: to inject memes, propaganda, and educational material into the mainstream culture (Hawley, 2017; Maly, 2020; Mudde, 2019) and to foster social cohesion in their own spaces (Jasser, 2021; Lewis, 2018). These actions are central to the goal of their ‘symbolic crusade’ (Williams, 2022) to restore cultural prestige through the ‘mediated construction of reality’ (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). As the concept of metapolitics has been taken

up by the contemporary iterations of these counterhegemonic movements in the US and Europe, their philosophical roots build on the Gramscian idea that culture needs to be changed first to realise political change in the long term (Miller-Idriss, 2020).⁷ In order to build a post-liberal (or even a post-democratic) society, influential figures produce ideas that challenge progressive cultural landscapes and offer alternative worldviews. Concretely, researchers have highlighted the importance of the shared discursive frames centred around dystopian theories about the decline of the white race: ‘Red Pill,’ ‘white genocide’ and the ‘great replacement,’ ‘white guilt,’ and ‘anti-white racism’ (Ganesh, 2018; Miller-Idriss, 2020; Nagle, 2017; Zhang & Davis, 2022).^{8 9} Together, these frames form the narrative of awakening to the ‘truth’ of the white Western man under a cascade of social and cultural threats – primarily from migrant populations and progressive waves. The activity within these collectivities also relies heavily on other cultural resources, such as producing artefacts (memes) or mimicking counter-cultural discursive styles to attract sympathisers (Lewis, 2018).

The dynamics of how far-right discourse is formed and reproduced on social media sometimes suggests that a ‘leaderless’ (Nagle, 2017, p.10), horizontally connected bevy of sympathisers equally disseminate ideas (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). While Miller-Idriss (2020, p. 139) maintains that ‘much of the ecology of hate online is self-organised,’ the importance of influential leaders in shaping the rhetoric, identities, and orientations of encircling collectivities cannot be overlooked. As opposed to left-wing activism, which has found more success through horizontal ‘hashtag activism,’ right-wing activism has mastered a top-down pathway of reaching its target audience (Freelon et al., 2020, p. 5). For instance, Lewis (2018, p. 1) calls attention to the emerging ‘alternative influence network,’ an assemblage of high-profile content producers who supply alternative news and commentary to promote a range of right-wing political positions. Just as the reach of mainstream influencers translates into economic value,

⁷ The ‘new right’ and the pan-European Identitarian movements often explicitly refer to the 20th-century ‘school of thought’ led by Alain de Benoist, known as *La Nouvelle Droite* (‘new right’). In the late 1960s, this group of French far-right thinkers popularised the idea that political change could come about only because of cultural change. (Miller-Idriss, 2020)

⁸ The idea of the ‘red pill’ originated in the ‘manosphere,’ where it refers to the idea of being awakened to feminism as a ‘brainwashing’ ideology. In the broader context of digital hate culture, it signals progressive ideas such as feminism, Marxism, socialism, or liberalism are designed to destroy the white race and the Western culture. (Ganesh, 2018, p. 34)

⁹ The idea of Great Replacement (used globally) is central to the contemporary Identitarian movement and can be traced back to Renaud Camus. In his 2012 book *Le Grand Remplacement*, the French author argued that native European population (Camus was referring to white people) is being ‘replaced’ by non-Europeans, both demographically and culturally. His ideas are closely related to the white supremacist concept of ‘white genocide’ (used mostly in the US). (Miller-Idriss, 2020)

being acknowledged by supporters contributes to the spread of new ideas and orientations, making them core movement leaders. These actors are not necessarily known outside their networks. Among those found to hold influence are both completely anonymous actors (Urman & Katz, 2022), traditional far-right organisations, as well as emerging ‘micro celebrities’ (Maly, 2020) and ‘influencers’ (Lewis, 2018). Many are explicitly linked to what Miller-Idriss (2020, p. 128) warns is an ‘ever-expanding intellectual ecosystem’ of right-wing publishing, research, and media institutes. Whether anonymous or employed, these studies show that the strategies of influential users are key to understanding the orientation and mobilisation of the broader umbrella movement.

2.2.2 Beyond the Civic: Of Imitated Public Spheres and Counter-Publics

Ultimately, this thesis deals with a spectrum of contemporary political participation that no longer meets the minimal shared commitments to the norms and visions of (liberal) democracy, what Dahlgren (2013) discusses as ‘civic’ engagement. The engagement at the heart of this thesis better resembles what Rossini (2022) understands as ‘political intolerance.’ In contrast to ‘incivility’, which refers to the tone of the conversation and often contributes to the vibrancy of debate, intolerance marks its substance that actively undermines democratic values (Rossini, 2022). Clearly, these collectivities fulfil neither the functions nor the potential of the late modern democratic engagement, aiding instead in ‘social regression’ (Sik, 2015, p. 151). As such, models capturing the relationship between digital media and democratic engagement do not readily apply. At the same time, in sharp contrast to the vast literature examining meaningful forms of engagement, the dynamics of illiberal movements remain under-researched (Toscano, 2019).

As such, the analysis will draw on normative theories that can still lend rich conceptual architecture for understanding these forms of engagement – through the lens of ‘imitation’ (Sik, 2015; Jasser, 2021). Much like Freelon (2010) observed for online political communication more broadly, conceptualisations stemming from theories on deliberative democracy cannot encompass all possible objectives at play here. Instead, both the deliberative (public sphere(s)) and communitarian (counter-publics) ideals are reflected in digital hate networks. The objective of disseminating ideas and fostering a cross-cutting debate in order to persuade the ‘normies’ with the strength of their arguments, resembles deliberative ideals (Dahlgren,

2013).¹⁰ It can be understood as an ‘imitated public sphere’ (Sik, 2015). However, intolerant engagement has primarily been found to thrive in closed-off discursive spaces (Rossini, 2022), much like that of Telegram. This was reflected in several studies that find the overall goal of far-right influencers to be the cultivation of an alternative social space and identity to establish a like-minded community (Lewis, 2018; Maly, 2020). The emphasis on the cultivation of social cohesion is better reflected in the communitarian understanding of political expression that draws on Fraser’s (1990) counter-publics (Freelon, 2010), or in this case – ‘imitated counter-public[s]’ (Jasser, 2021). Both forms are merely imitated. Extremists wish to engage in the debate while actively undermining its foundations and claim countercultural victimisation while seeking to reinforce social domination. Still, the models can help understand the objectives of fringe participants.

2.3 Frames, Mobilisation and Collective Identity

The previous sections established that as deplatformization profoundly destabilises the context upon which far-right actors anchor their sense of security (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), the responses depend on their social practice and meaning, which revolve around the production of ideas by core movement activists. This section adopts the framing perspective to underscore how in times of instability, influential activists shape the orientation, trajectory, and action within their collectivities, as well as facilitate community- and alliance-building.

2.3.1 Framing as Reflexive Control

In times of instability, as activists are forced to go on the defensive, they use language as reflexive control to construct politically useful realities (Benford & Snow, 2000; Edelman, 1988). In this meaning-making process, ‘interpretative frames’ are produced by core activists to once again endow ‘social order with predictability, reliability, and legibility’ (Miztal, 2001, p. 314). As an interpretative schema, frames guide individuals’ perceptions (Benford & Snow, 2000). Drawing on a Goffmanian perspective, this thesis adopts the framing perspective developed in the field of social movement studies by Benford and Snow (2000, p. 613), emphasising *the process* of framing as ‘mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas.’ Rooted in the theoretical foundations of symbolic interactionism and social constructionism, adopting this perspective emphasises the performative nature of discourse as a form of action in achieving

¹⁰ In the context of the digital hate culture, ‘normie’ usually refers to a white person who is not a part of the far-right movement and has yet to be ‘awakened’ to the ‘conspiratorial ‘truth’ (Hawley, 2017, p. 74).

political goals (Edelman, 1988; Fairclough, 2003). While a rich strain of framing research has developed to capture news frames (Entman, 1993), the interest of the present study lies in framing in relation to various movement outcomes.

At its core, activists construct interpretative frames through three core framing tasks that Benford and Snow (2000) discuss as diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational elements. First, in what is seen as the moral boundary or diagnostic framing, activists establish problematic conditions and attribute blame, constructing related imaginaries of perpetrators and victims. Often, injustice frames are invoked to amplify the victimisation of the in-group (Miller-Idriss, 2020). Second, prognostic frames lay out a solution, suggesting how the sympathisers should respond to the problem. Lastly, motivational frames call for concrete action, support or solidarity, invoking discourse of urgency (Benford and Snow, 2000). Bennett & Segerberg (2013, p. 745) have recently shifted attention from ‘collective action frames’ to ‘connective and ‘personal action’ frames to better capture their spread on social media. Yet, in the context of this thesis, the motivational element is neither the focus nor is it necessarily present, as action is often not the sole goal of framing.

The frames are produced reflexively in pursuit of diverse movement goals, reflecting the needs provoked during deplatformization. The events forcefully diminished the visibility the far right previously enjoyed online, abruptly ending what Melucci (1995, p. 61) discussed as the *visible* phase of the movement. Literature suggests this forces the movement into a subsequent *latent* phase, when actions within the movement such as the production of new orientations and alliance-building dominate because the movement needs new ideas and solidarity links to sustain activity (della Porta & Diani, 2020). To Melucci (1995), the issue with the ‘myopia of the visible,’ i.e., scholars privileging the analysis of visible (protest) action is that it is precisely the orientations formed during submerged periods that eventually fuel a new phase, making it crucial to study these shifts as they happen. Adopting frame analysis hence serves as a powerful analytical prism to capture the process of meaning-making and alliance-building ‘behind the explosion’ of conflict between tech giants and the far right (della Porta & Diani, 2020, p. 74).

2.3.2 Framing as A Community and Alliance-Building Practice

As a deliberate product of the process of framing, (re)directing the movement is often the central rationale of framing. But framing also discursively produces collective identities by delineating in- and out-group boundaries, which can be leveraged in pursuit of further movement goals (Benford & Snow, 2000; della Porta & Diani, 2020). Specifically, in the context of deplatformization, identity may have two functions – for the in-group to be activated and motivated, and for the in-group to be expanded (alliance-building).

As a notoriously slippery concept, collective identity is fraught with problems of definition and ambiguity in its application, sparking many tensions across social scientific fields (Fominaya, 2010). Much has been written on whether identity functions as a resource or a product of mobilisation; a debate that renders it a static property of collective or individual actors (Fominaya, 2010). Rather, following Melucci (1995) and scholars building upon his thought, I approach collective identity as a dynamic process through which movement activists ascribe meaning to their experience to constitute a feeling of belonging for themselves and their followers (della Porta & Diani, 2020). Foregrounding identity as a reflexive project (Giddens, 1984) demands attention be paid to the multiplicity of collective identities at play. There is an interaction between identity at the group level and movement level, with some arguing there is no such thing as collective movement identity, but rather a plethora of collective identities at the level of collectivities (Fominaya, 2010). Moreover, networks of digital hate are largely still national and racial identity-based movements, provoking possible tensions between what Gamson (1991) discusses as long-standing and reflexively constructed identities.

A central element of interactionist and constructionist thought is the notion that identity is continuously constructed in relation to others, through inclusion or exclusion. Nearly all contemporary far-right discourse hinges on the construction of collective identity based on *us* versus *them* (Mudde, 2019). In this dichotomy, an exclusionary defined in-group – usually a victimised ‘native’ group – faces internal and external threats. These refer not to the physical aspects of safety, but the social and cultural dimensions in relation to race, nation, even the preferred sociocultural order (Mudde, 2019). As Alexander (2004) argues in his theory of the construction of cultural trauma, the threat status is not attributed to events due to objective harm. Both threats and the related constructions of victims are always a matter of symbolic construction – even when claims of victimhood are ‘morally justifiable’ (Alexander, 2004, p. 9). The threats are constructed through different antagonisms; Othering is commonly invoked

for external threats in the form of social groups such as Jews, Black people, and more recently Muslims (Mudde, 2019). Conversely, anti-elitism (populism) is used as a resonant dialectic to delineate internal threats that stem from the in-group population, targeting (perceived) media, political, and economic elites along the anti-establishment, authoritarian, and welfare-chauvinist lines (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Mudde, 2019). While dealing with similar discursive constructions, and despite the heightened scholarly interest in the concept of populism, it should be noted that this thesis does not meaningfully engage with it.¹¹

The social movement literature acknowledges how such in-group and out-group dynamics have two strategic functions – for the in-group to be motivated, and for the in-group to be expanded in order to facilitate alliance-building (della Porta & Diani, 2020). First, as the process of framing links individuals and groups by the shared frame and the shared enemy, it facilitates a stronger sense of belonging, serving as a powerful community-building tactic (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 632). This is why, at times of conflict underpinned by ideological grievances, communities within the digital hate culture have been found to strengthen their in-group identity (Bliuc et al., 2019; Gaudette et al., 2021). In a similar vein, at the intersection of digital humour and hate speech, ‘memetic antagonism’ has been discussed as a powerful tool to facilitate feelings of community around vague constructions of a common enemy (Tuters & Hagen, 2021, p. 78). Victimhood identity specifically has been found to serve as a strong community glue, manufacturing a sense of collective rebellion and underdog identity (Jasser, 2021; Lewis, 2018; Oaten, 2014). Particularly under what Campbell & Manning (2018) argue is the rise of the moral ‘victimhood culture’ in the West, victimhood has become a powerful orientation category to raise someone's social status.

Second, framing along the adversarial *us* versus *them* line also renegotiates the boundaries of collective identity. When conflicts provoke the emergence of new enemy constructs, group boundaries become more heavily defined through opposition to these new out-groups (Bliuc et

¹¹ This thesis does not meaningfully engage with the concept of populism for two reasons. First, the discussion on whether adversarial discourse of people vs elite should be analysed as populism is highly convoluted by diverging views on whether populism constitutes the mode (Laclau, 2005) or the substance of discourse (Mudde, 2019). Any meaningful engagement with this debate is well beyond the scope of this thesis. But foremost, neither of the uses is instrumental to the objectives set in this thesis. If understood as a *blank slate* for grievances (Laclau, 2005), populism can help explain the saliency of its generic antithesis across late modern movements, both illiberal and progressive (della Porta & Diani, 2020). Conversely, if argued to be a *thin ideology*, it is primarily used to determine whether the ideas in question are populist or not (Mudde, 2019). Meanwhile, the central objective of this thesis is to highlight the possible role of this discursive construction in shifting trajectories of movements and communities.

al., 2019; Mudde, 2019). Because far-right ideologies hinge on a strict us-versus-them opposition, when groups expand the notion of the threatening ‘Others,’ they also expand the opposing in-group collective identity (Mudde, 2019, p. 46). In other words, boundary work is often a strategic attempt to facilitate solidarity and alliances between diverse groups (della Porta & Diani, 2020, p. 109; Fominaya, 2010). In practice, this is achieved through ‘identity bridging’ and ‘locking’ diverse identities into a highly elastic opposition to the enemy construct at the centre of the conflict. Similar strategies have long been acknowledged by scholars looking at how far-right actors form successful transnational alliances based on the opposition to broad global policies, social groups, or exogenous structural shocks (Caiani & Kröll, 2015; Durham & Power, 2010; Froio & Ganesh, 2019). In short, collective identity is the fabric that both binds existing and facilitates novel ‘networks of trust’ among factions (della Porta & Diani, 2020, p. 104).

2.3.3 Resonance, Distrust, and Affect in the Age of ‘Epistemic Instability’

The framing theory is merely one of the three central traditions in social movement studies, alongside resource mobilization and political opportunity. It is hence important to note that adopting a focus on framing does not preclude other perspectives nor the more recent digital media shifts to emotional mobilisation (Castells, 2012) and ‘affective publics’ (Papacharissi, 2015). A commonly invoked critique of framing is that neglecting these dimensions leads to ‘ad hoc explanations’ by reducing the notions of power to communication (della Porta & Diani, 2020, p. 99). Rather than ignoring it, I treat them as playground – alongside affect, values, beliefs, and existing ideologies – upon which actors negotiate meaning.¹² In other words, these dimensions act as both resources and limitations in the process of framing (della Porta & Diani, 2020). After all, even under the opportunity theory ‘opportunities or threats are not objective categories,’ but demand meaning to be attributed to them (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 45).

Accounting for these dimensions is crucial to uncode how activists ensure the success of the frame. Framing needs to establish a resonant relationship with the audience, particularly as destabilising events such as deplatformization can rip into previous resonant ties (Rosa, 2019). Early framing scholars asserted that the resonance of a frame depends on its salience and credibility, highlighting frame bridging (linking two frames), extension (of an existing frame

¹² Due to the recent focus on populism as thin ideology rather than framing, it should be noted that while both shape power relations, this thesis treats ideology as a more durable set of beliefs, following Snow & Benford (2005). Conversely, frames function as extensions of ideologies.

to new areas) and transformation (changing old understanding of a frame) as possible methods (Johnston & Noakes, 2005). They argued that for frames to be credible, they should be consistent, accompanied by evidence, and delivered by a credible source (Benford & Snow, 2000; Johnston & Noakes, 2005). Yet, the success of the contemporary anti-vaccine and systemic conspiratorial movements of QAnon (Snow & Bernatzky, 2023; Snow et al., 2022) at the minimum counters such assertions. Rather, in what is often discussed as the age of ‘epistemic instability,’ deep-rooted frictions over knowledge and truth(s) (Harambam, 2020) have opened up new pathways for resonance and epistemic validation.

In his contemporary resonance theory, Rosa (2019, p. 28) argues that resonant relationships are a ‘dynamic interaction’ between the individual and their cultural, social, and political contexts. For the contemporary far-right, what defines many of their relationships to the broader social fabric, is distrust. Not in the passive sense, referring to the lack of trust, but rather closer to a Rosanvallonian conceptualisation of distrust. In his controversial account of the history of democracy, Rosanvallon (2008, p. 53) proposes manifestations of distrust constitute active forms of ‘social attentiveness’ and are inherent elements of democratic engagement.

Capitalising on the broader societal distrust is often the underlying mechanism through which contemporary far-right activists establish resonance. For example, Lewis (2018) discusses relatability and authenticity as key strategies employed by contemporary far-right influencers to establish an alternative sense of trust and credibility. Yet, the way to achieve this is by adopting a countercultural sense of rebellion, defined by distrust towards the mainstream. Similarly, establishing trust in their own alternative institutions of media and knowledge production capitalises on the broader delegitimization of media and science (Dahlgren & Hill, 2023). In a similar vein, Harambam (2020, p. 125) discusses the strategy of ‘epistemic pluralism’ where conspiratorial content producers triangulate diverse sources such as personal experience and futuristic imageries. He argues that such mosaic-like strategies are resonant within contemporary Western societies because they echo the broader distrust in strict reliance on one system of knowledge (Harambam, 2020). These strategies underscore how framing capitalises on, as well as calls into being ‘affective publics’ (Papacharissi, 2015). Contemporary far-right frames work by distracting from the complexity of issues, and instead appealing to softer structures of distrust as sentiment around which ‘networked public formations that are mobilized and connected’ (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 125). And by reproducing the affect that resonates with their sympathizers, framing can sustain the feeling of community

and motivate the encircling collectivity to act, driving the movement forward (Papacharissi, 2022).

2.4 Telegram as a Research Site

The previous sections established that influential activists and the frames they produce would play a key role in how deplatformization plays out on the ground, shaping new orientations, identities, and solidarity links within their respective collectivities. As one of the most prominent far-right social spaces online since the 2019 waves of deplatforming, this study is situated on Telegram. Before delving into the study design, this section briefly overviews how the platform's architecture (Bossetta, 2018) and unique political stances shape the dynamics of extremist activity. It proposes that the notion of core activists is best reflected in prominent far-right channels.

Founded in 2013 by the Russian billionaire brothers Pavel and Nikolai Durov, Telegram Messenger is a globally accessible instant messaging provider. In June 2022, it surpassed seven hundred million monthly active users, placing the platform among the 10th most-used social networking sites globally (Statista, 2023). Telegram is defined by a hybrid digital architecture that leads with private chats and follows with the social (Rogers, 2020). On the social side, it allows for the creation of channels (one-sided communication) and groups (participatory), both can be either public (searchable) or private (accessible only via link). While groups are comparable to those on other platforms, channels are made to broadcast the content to an unlimited number of subscribers in a top-down fashion – only the administrators can send messages and often choose to disable the comment option.

The key factors that prompted migration to Telegram are the same reasons the platform is widely used among activists in authoritarian regimes and until recently extremist groups such as ISIS (Urman & Katz, 2021; Rogers, 2020). Telegram's loose moderation policies, reputation for strict operational security, and commitment to user privacy and free speech make the platform attractive for collectivities in need of publicity and mobilisation opportunities while preserving anonymity (Marechal, 2018).¹³ Aside from a few instances of Telegram purging terrorist content, the CEO Pavel Durov explicitly refuses to collaborate with local authorities

¹³ This reputation is largely unfounded, as there is a significant gap between what users believe and the reality of the security on the app (Maréchal, 2018). Unlike messenger apps such as Signal and WhatsApp, Telegram's chats are in fact not end-to-end encrypted by default. A 'secret chat' feature must be switched on for every contact individually, while group features offer no end-to-end encryption at all.

in the prosecution of speech, including hate speech (Marechal, 2018; Rogers, 2020). In contrast to alt-tech platforms which are often forced to tighten their moderation approaches, Telegram's unique financial model makes it independent from any advertiser pressure, as well as Silicon Valley's financial and infrastructural mechanisms.¹⁴ This affords Durov the sole power to shape the platform in accordance with his pro-free speech, anti-state, anti-Big Tech, and anti-censorship beliefs (Marechal, 2018).¹⁵

Influential channels that produce and broadcast content represent central nodes in the extremist ecosystem (Rogers, 2020; Urman & Katz, 2022), much like influential users elsewhere in the digital hate culture (Freelon et al., 2020; Lewis, 2018). Prominent far-right channels, whether anonymous or known far-right activists and opinion leaders, are the origin nodes in the top-down pathway of reaching a target audience and can hence be understood as core movement activists. While extremist activity on Telegram also encompasses participatory group discussions, it is the influential channels that shape the orientation and action within these networks and are key to understanding community responses post-deplatformization. These channels often serve as repositories of knowledge and ideas that are then distributed to private chats, groups, and smaller channels (Guhl & Davey, 2020; Ragozin & Skibitskaya, 2021; Urman & Katz, 2022; Walther & McCoy, 2021). While numerous channels are image-based, the interest of the present study lies in 'news channels' (Mazzoni, 2019) that provide commentary and statements on current events such as deplatformization.

Beyond shaping the orientation within these networks, influential channels are also the key to understanding alliance-building on Telegram. As Telegram began to gain a prominent base amid the 2019 waves of deplatforming (Fielitz & Schwarz, 2021; Owen, 2019; Rogers, 2020; Urman & Katz, 2022; Vandellune et al., 2022), it welcomed a much more diverse and international user base than other alt-tech platforms, making it a prominent site to research potential alliance-building. In a contrasting vein, Parler (79% US users) and Gab (71% US users) mainly attracted a US-based audience, according to the web analytics company SimilarWeb (2023). In addition, Telegram's digital architecture influences the organisational dynamics of problematic communities in a way that promotes the establishment of new

¹⁴ As a billionaire, Pavel Durov funds Telegram through his personal wealth and some debt financing. The company is thought to run a not-for-profit business model, although there are no financial statements available publicly (Marechal, 2018). In June 2022, Telegram switched to a freemium model when it introduced paid subscriptions for some unessential features.

¹⁵ Pavel Durov holds strong anti-state stances, stemming from his personal experience with the authoritarian regime of the Russian state (Marechal, 2018).

solidarity links, reflecting Bossetta's (2018) argument that the architecture of any platform shapes the nature of user participation. Because Telegram lacks a discovery mechanism and algorithmic filtering, 'manual' dissemination (forwarding) of content to other channels is the primary way for users to discover new channels and hence to increase the reach of a channel. Due to the one-sided communicative nature of channels, channels cannot simply distribute their own content elsewhere, rather, other channel owners need to actively repost the content into their own spaces. In other words, these architectural constraints provoke the need to establish collaborative communication practices to strategically leverage each other's networks and expand reach. This is reflected in the fact that far-right channels and larger clusters are heavily connected, as Urman & Katz's (2022) network analysis confirms. It also means that influential channels serve as gateways into other communities and play a central role in bridging diverse actors across digital, ideological, and even geographical borders.

To summarise, Telegram's architecture and ownership offers a conducive social space for extremist activity in the aftermath of mainstream deplatformization. Post-deplatformization, prominent Telegram channels constitute core movement activists who, due to the specific functionality of the platform, require coordinated acts of user participation at the micro-level to spread extremism at a macro-level. As digital opinion leaders, these activist channels produce ideas in ways that shape the collective orientation and action of users within these networks, as well as establish new solidarity links across collectivities. Thus, the content disseminated by these channels offers a glimpse into a well-spring of extremist ideologies and, in particular, how they are shaped by broader tectonic shifts in the digital media landscape. Complementing a focus on content, academic attention to the framing strategies of these activists acknowledges that extremist worldviews are, like other ideologies, negotiated through the symbolic interaction of individual agencies, collective identities, and structural forces. In the following section, I detail my approach to studying this confluence of factors in one specific and understudied space for digital hate: far-right channels on Telegram.

3. Methodology and Methods

This section discusses the choice of methodology and methods guiding the collection and analysis of the empirical data. The design of the present study was guided by two research objectives. First, to narrow down the complex symbolic process in which influential far-right actors construct meaning surrounding deplatformization. And second, to understand the underlying ways in which these symbolic sentiments – rather than one monolithic sentiment – shape their community- and alliance-building practices.

3.1 Bridging Theoretical Perspectives to Epistemology

With the theoretical point of departure in the framing perspective, this thesis undertakes a view of society as a negotiated order. It is broadly rooted in epistemological assumptions of social constructionism and symbolic interactionism, or rather, situated at their convergence. In the process of framing, the constructionists' macro-level focus on making sense of the larger nature and structure of the social fabric is intertwined with the micro-level focus on collective identity at the core of interactionism. In other words, it is through the framing of broader socio-political injustices that far-right activists attempt to reorient the encircling collectivities.

As such, the present study is not concerned with the ontological reality of these actors' claims. These questions have already been well established in contemporary debates on misinformation, conspiracies, and 'post-truth' society (Dahlgren & Hill, 2023, p.28; Harambam, 2020) and can arguably not be answered in unequivocal terms, much less in the scope of this thesis. But foremost, since I want to understand the reflexive responses in depth, 'the question of truth becomes irrelevant—even absurd,' as holding on to such rigid dichotomy would obstruct 'the sociological assessment of the cultural meaning' (Harambam, 2020, p. 227).

Instead, I largely adopt a position of 'methodological agnosticism' throughout the analysis (Harambam, 2020, p. 227). This central feature of the cultural sociological approach allows me to focus on the process of symbolic and social construction, asking instead 'under what conditions the claims are made, and with what results' (Alexander, 2004, p. 9), while also acknowledging that this is only one among the multitude of possible 'epistemic contexts' (Dahlgren & Hill, 2023, p. 28). This position is, however, not maintained throughout the final discussion of results. In sharp contrast to the beneficial researcher-activist relationship that

characterises the study of progressive movements, studying extremist ideas echoes them to the broader public (Blee & Latif, 2021; Harambam, 2020). Therefore, the produced knowledge needs to be critically situated, as further discussed in the ethical considerations at the end of this chapter.

3.2 Methodology: Approaching the Data Pragmatically and Holistically

Despite – and largely because of – the theoretical popularity of the framing perspective, frame analysis offers no set methodology. Rather, as a broad analytical perspective, it can be translated into widely diverse methodological approaches (Johnston & Noakes, 2005; Benford & Snow, 2000). In line with this tradition, the present thesis employs a pragmatic approach to method choices and follows Bazeley’s (2013, p. 10) advice to ‘be informed by methodology, but not a slave to it.’

The design draws upon existing approaches developed by framing scholars but is ultimately guided by the research objectives and the nature of the platform under scrutiny. This is why a ‘pre-pilot’ exploration was performed over the span of four weeks in January and February, prior to designing the study (Bazeley, 2013, p. 36). By visiting several prominent Telegram channels across the anglophone far-right spectrum, I familiarised myself with the nature and the scope of the data, as well as the dynamics of platform use.

3.2.1 Frame Analysis

This thesis adopts text analysis as ‘the best way to empirically ground [social movement] frame analysis,’ when direct access to influential activists is severely limited due to the contentious and often anonymous nature of the movement (Johnston & Noakes, 2005, p. 255). In detail, it combines the systematic qualitative text analysis as laid out by Kuckartz (2014) with a three-part analytical framework developed within the framing perspective (Benford & Snow, 2000; Johnston & Noakes, 2005). Concretely, the coding structure included three structuring elements, each referring to one of the core framing tasks identified by Benford and Snow (2000): diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing. The codes were then inductively developed within these elements, while also allowing for codes to emerge outside. Attention was paid to structural and linguistic analysis, such as verb modality, the challenging of narratives, affect and emotion, and particularly validity claims as key building blocks in the

conceptual architecture of frame analysis. Furthermore, because the framing perspective considers language an active tool in constructing reality, the analysis also drew upon the discourse approach to text (Fairclough, 2003), but without adopting it formally. Due to the nature of the ideas at the heart of the analysis, social functions and ideological implications of the text were key to understanding how it is used to challenge or reinforce entrenched power structures.

It should be noted that the method was applied in a directed, but not a rigid deductive fashion, as such a strict coding structure would lack reflexivity and might lead to oversights within the data. In other words, the inclusion of these additional elements did not seek to replicate ‘the atomizing manner’ of quantitative analysis that deductively renders data into precise categories (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 66). Rather, it was necessary to treat the emerging categories and themes as the basis for the reconstruction of the framing process: hermeneutically and embedded in the context of framing (Johnston & Noakes, 2005). This is because the focal point of the analysis was not merely the emerging themes, but rather the themes in relation to each of the framing tasks, as well as the mechanisms and relationships between them. Hence, solely focusing on identifying broader ‘themes’ rather than divergences and overlaps in the actual framing process, falsely renders frames as static entities (Johnston & Noakes, 2005; Benford & Snow, 2000). Further, the inductive approach still allowed me to capture wider belief structures in influential actors’ meaning-making process, and remain sensitive to the complexity, dynamism, and heterogeneity of the data. This was crucial to avoid what movement framing studies have often been critiqued for – descriptive accounts and reductionist tendencies (Benford, 1997).

3.2.2 A Multiple-Case Framework

In framing research, a crucial design feature to capture the dynamic process of meaning-making through static ‘empirical snapshots,’ is adopting a comparative perspective (Johnston & Noakes, 2005, p. 255). Johnston & Noakes (2005) emphasise two imperative axes of diversity: among different actors (cases), and/or across different points in time. This thesis primarily builds upon the former, while also adopting the latter to a lesser extent.

The present study builds upon four distinct cases to balance the central trade-off between the depth of information-rich cases and the breadth of differences across cases (Patton, 2015). The sample size was based on Stake’s (2006) recommendations that the benefits of a multi-case

study are limited when less than four or more than ten cases are selected. Due to the intensity of textual analysis under the framing perspective, the number and length of analytical units within each case, and the richness of context surrounding the cases, a larger sample size would render the analysis unmanageable rather than add to its analytic outcomes.

A multi-case analysis can deepen our understanding of activity connected to deplatformization through patterns and variations across cases (Patton, 2015). While analysing movements on the basis of a single case study may produce illuminating findings (Flyvbjerg, 2001), it has long been recognized that movement activity rarely constitutes discrete episodes, rather, it clusters in time and space (della Porta & Diani, 2020). A similar set of contextual circumstances established by deplatformization could be associated with a vast repertoire of reactions, and isolating a single case would impoverish the explanatory potential (Johnston & Noakes, 2005). Hence, it was crucial to transcend the localness of a particular case, specifically the one-dimensional approach privileging the viewpoint of US-based conservatives (e.g., Canales, 2021; Chafkin & Zuidijk, 2023; Jasser et al., 2021; Simeone & Walker, 2022).

In addition, this study analyses a comprehensive set of longitudinal data, allowing for – but not reducing the analysis to – the detection of possible temporal patterns in how narratives, orientations, and identities emerge, change, and possibly dissolve with concrete events of deplatformization.¹⁶

3.2.3 Case Selection

The logic of purposeful sampling lies in ‘selecting information-rich cases [...] that by their nature and substance will illuminate’ the guiding research questions (Patton, 2015, p. 401). Stake (2006) recommends the cases to be chosen based on their relevance to the phenomenon, the rich opportunity to learn, and diversity across contexts. In other words, cases need to be ‘sufficiently similar’ that they can be compared with respect to deplatformization but also illustrate ‘sufficient diversity’ for analysis to have any meaning (Bazeley, 2013, p. 332).

Because they coordinate and define the trajectories of their collectivities, texts produced by leading activists constitute an approach of the highest validity in social movement frame analysis (Johnston, 2002; Johnston & Noakes, 2005). Hence, in line with the novel notions of

¹⁶ While a narrow time series analysis would allow for a fine-grained examination of pre- and post-event, it would limit the analysis to one event, rendered significant solely by the interpretation of the researcher, rather than the studied actors themselves.

activism within the digital hate networks, the channels had to represent influential opinion leaders, content producers, and/or organisers, whether anonymous or known outside these networks. In line with the objectives of the present study, the following criteria were formulated:

Telegram channels had to be (1) public, (2) far-right, and (3) prominent in that they have more than 6000 subscribers. They also had to be (4) created amid the initial 2019 waves of migration to Telegram and (5) provide original text-based interpretations of current events. Due to inquiries privileging US-centric angles, geographical diversity was introduced by opting for one US-based channel, and three non-US anglophone ones (Australia, United Kingdom, and Canada). (See Appendix I for a detailed justification of each selection criteria).

Telegram does not offer a comprehensive search mechanism, leaving researchers with two options: third-party search engines and snowball sampling.¹⁷ To select the four cases, I employed a combination of both. The case selection began by compiling a comprehensive list of possible channels using *tgstat.com*, the largest catalogue of Telegram channels.¹⁸ This resulted in an initial dataset of 195 channels that were then briefly visited and filtered out based on the above criteria. Then, the most prominent one for each context was selected based on the number of followers. Because the list did not feature many relevant channels outside North America and Europe, the fourth (Australian) case was instead identified during the pre-pilot exploration, as it was featured in multiple channels visited (See Appendix I for more details about the case selection).

¹⁷ Telegram search function does not allow searching for channels based on their content. A channel can only be found knowing its full username or the invite link.

¹⁸ The *TGstat* catalogue is not officially affiliated with Telegram and does not include all public channels, but nonetheless provides the most comprehensive third-party overview of channels classified by countries, languages, and categories.

Channel (handle)	Creation Date	Subscribers (date)	Location
Nicholas J. Fuentes (@nickjfuentes)	June 19 2019	53.024 (March 26)	United States
HATE FACTS (@HateFacts)	September 26 2019	10.199 (March 7)	Canada
Mark Collett (@markacollett)	May 25 2019	16.253 (March 7)	United Kingdom
Blair Cottrell (@realblaircottrell)	September 3 2019	16.523 (March 25)	Australia

Table 1. Selected Cases

Beyond meeting the inclusion criteria, all four actors self-identify as members of factions under the big tent ‘dissident’ right movement, a label used in an attempt to make white supremacist ideas appear less extreme in mainstream politics (Hawley, 2017). Here, I briefly describe the selected cases (comprehensive contextual information can be found in the Appendix II).

Nicholas Fuentes is a young (24 at the time of writing) right-wing activist and the host of the online programme ‘America First,’ whose goal is to offer a nationalist alternative to the mainstream US Republican party (Anti-Defamation League, 2021; Hawley, 2021). He is considered the leader and coordinator of a group of informally organised activists known as the ‘Groyper Army,’ a remnant and an update of the fading alt-right (Hawley, 2021). He also organises offline events and conferences (Anti-Defamation League, 2021).

Hate Facts is a Canadian channel led by an anonymous individual identifying as ‘Rick the Guy.’ They publish a podcast which is affiliated with ‘Murder The Media’ video collective (Hsu & Weiner, 2022), founded by prominent members of the Proud Boys, a neo-fascist organisation that engages in political violence in North America and is known for its active digital community (Lybrand, 2022).

Mark Collett is a British far-right political commentator and activist, often described as a neo-Nazi, white nationalist, anti-semitic, and a fascist (Anti-Defamation League, 2018; Nagesh, 2023; Townsend, 2021; Tsagkroni, 2021). Collett currently runs a prominent white nationalist

group ‘Patriotic Alternative’ that he founded in 2019. The group’s influence stems from their success in attracting online creators ‘to become active in a more traditional organisation’ (Murdoch, 2020, p. 2).

Blair Cottrell is an Australian far-right extremist, loosely defined as a neo-Nazi and white nationalist (Campion, 2019). He is the founding member of two prominent Australian extremist groups: the nationalist group United Patriots Front (UPF) and a men-only white nationalist group Lads Society (Campion, 2019). Both are known for a strong digital presence and the organisation of offline activities (Molloy, 2019).

3.2.4 Piloting

Since the analytical toolbox followed throughout the analysis was based on the convergence of diverse strategies previously untested on the chosen units of analysis, I followed Patton’s (2015, p. 372) proposed ‘rule of the loop’ to test strategies. During the pilot study, several data collection, sampling, and analysis techniques were trialled to ensure they are fit for the material in question. The pilot was conducted on one of the selected cases (Hate Facts); hence the material was also included in the final sample. As Bazeley (2013) argues, the tradition of eliminating pilot material is not necessary in qualitative work, particularly because the data was continuously coded in a recursive fashion.

First, several manual and machine-based data collection strategies were tested. These highlighted the intricate nature of identifying posts relevant to platforms, moderation, and deplatformization, leading me to clarify the inclusion and exclusion criteria for relevant posts. In the sampling pilot, I took a point of departure in the individual platform and/or corporation names. To account for possible discussion that does not invoke company names, additional keywords dominating the academic and popular discussion of deplatformization events were added. Because most identified posts did not entail any relevant discussion of the platforms or deplatformization, the resulting dataset was then continuously filtered to exclude irrelevant posts and form comprehensive exclusion criteria. Lastly, a coding pilot was conducted for data analysis in Google Docs, testing several coding frameworks (See Appendix III for details on piloting).

3.3 Data Collection, Sampling and Scope

Ultimately, the empirical material at the heart of this study consists of 876 Telegram posts by four core far-right leaders. The material should be understood as four complete narratives on the issues of platforms, moderation, and deplatformization that unfolded in a critical time period between the 2019 collective migration to Telegram and the end of 2022, defined by the aftermath of Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter.

Based on the piloting round insights, data collection was performed manually and combined with the process of sampling. Using the native Telegram interface, the search was performed for the specified keyword set ('Twitter', 'Facebook', 'Meta,' 'Instagram', 'YouTube', 'Amazon', 'Google', 'Apple', 'Microsoft,' 'Telegram,' 'tech,' 'deplatform,' 'ban,' 'censor,' 'social media'). To account for possible temporal patterns in framing, all relevant channel posts between channel creation (May-September 2019, depending on the case) and December 2022 were collected. For each unit of analysis, information on the text, date, origin (for forwarded messages) and context (accompanying visuals) were collected to ensure that the material is coded in its context.

Then, I conducted a round of close reading on the search results. Posts were either collected or excluded based on the following exclusion criteria: (1) content that does not refer to platforms (e.g., links to content hosted on the platform, other irrelevant discussions, misspellings), and (2) content that mentions the platform but does not entail any ideas, imaginaries, or sentiments regarding the platform or deplatforming (i.e., casual mentions). (See Appendix IV for examples).

This resulted in 876 posts across the four datasets, one for each channel, as outlined in Table 2. Telegram allows up to 4,096 characters per post, which was reflected in the length of the collected posts being longer than the typical social media format (e.g., tweets). Many of them more closely resembled longer position statements and/or blog posts, including 19 posts of article length (500 words or more).

Channel (country)	Total (pre-deletion)	Available	Deletion rate	Collected (analysed)
Nicholas J. Fuentes (US)	9656	9294	3.75%	427
Hate Facts (CA)	5623	5033	10.49%	132
Mark Collett (UK)	7173	6928	3.42%	179
Blair Cottrell (AU)	3933	2741	30.31%	138

Table 2. The scope of total, available, deleted, and analysed empirical material between 2019 and 2022.

Additionally, Buehling (2023) recently drew attention to tactical purges of post histories on Telegram, a prominent practice among right-wing conspiratorial channels. This is why the Table 2 also reports the overall percentage of deleted messages within the chosen channels, inferred from the machine-readable JSON export which was parsed using R statistical computing language (Appendix V).¹⁹ The omission could indicate that the most extreme posts were deleted, but the reasons could also be more miscellaneous (e.g., typos, accidental duplications, personal reasons, etc). Ultimately, the reduced dataset consistency is of issue primarily in computational analysis, but nonetheless important to outline the scope of the data.

3.4 Data Analysis

After preparing the collected data for the analysis, I turned to NVivo, a qualitative analysis software which offers tools to assist with large-scale analysis of qualitative data (Appendix VI).

In qualitative inquiry, coding is not a discrete phase but rather an integral activity throughout the entire research process. Hence, data analysis already emerged at the stage of data collection and preparation for analysis (Kuckartz, 2014). The process of manual data collection allowed

¹⁹ JSON (JavaScript Object Notation) is a standard text-based format for representing structured data, based on JavaScript object syntax, and commonly used for data obtained from web applications.

me to immerse myself in the data to ‘build a contextualised and holistic understanding’ (Bazeley, 2013, p. 101) as well as gain familiarity with the scope and content before coding it. In a circular manner, the analytical process continued with open coding compressing passages to codes, both within the three-part (diagnostic, prognostic, motivational) framework and outside of it. During this stage, I relied on summarisation, comparison, conceptualisation, and categorising to develop some provisional codes on a mostly descriptive level (Kuckartz, 2014). I also noted what grounded theorists refer to as ‘in-vivo codes’ (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 62), which was important to reveal common signifiers, terminology and metaphors used by these influential actors. It should be noted that not all categories were developed with themes or discourse in mind, for example under motivational framing more attention was paid to compiling a list of actions the actors called for. Elsewhere, beyond the themes and terminology, attention was also paid to framing validation techniques, the challenging of narratives (counter-framing), affect and emotions, as well as linguistic elements such as verb voice and modality.

Due to the intensity of textual analysis under the framing perspective, several coding rounds were performed. Subsequently, throughout this iterative process, patterns between codes were identified, serving as the basis for analytical categories. Due to the objectives of the present study, the categories under diagnostic and prognostic framing largely reflected the perspective of the activists, rather than of the researcher (Bazeley, 2013). In addition, extensive analytical memos in which I noted down my developing understanding, reflections, patterns, and connections to use as the building blocks for the subsequent analysis, were produced across all stages of data collection and analysis.

NVivo allows for the category system to be built throughout the coding process, hence many descriptive codes were grouped and transformed into thematic categories, and eventually integrated into emerging analytical ones. Once I reached what Bazeley (2013, p. 50) refers to as ‘data’ and ‘theoretical saturation,’ mind maps were produced in Miro, a virtual whiteboard platform, to visualise the relationship between categories and connect them to broader analytical themes and framing tasks (Appendix VII). Once fixed, the category scheme was also updated in NVivo. Because the goal was not merely to account for the shared interpretations among a homogeneous group, the patterns, categories, and analytical themes were then compared in a cross-unit analysis to identify potential overlaps and divergences. To do so, visual hierarchy charts were produced for each of the four cases to rely on visualisation in the course of comparison (Appendix VIII). In close regard to the analytical memos, and the context

of each case, I noted the key divergences in what each of the cases framed as an issue, how they defined the victims, and who they saw as primary perpetrators, as well as which directions they saw best fit for the future of their community and the broader movement.

3.5 Ethics and The Role of the Researcher

As highlighted at the beginning of this section, the adoption of an agnostic stance on the truth of the narratives in question was adopted as a productive sociological strategy (Alexander, 2004). As emphasised by key late modernity thinkers, the role of researchers is to interpret the competing belief systems we are facing today rather than recover the essence of ‘Truth’ (Inglis, 2012; Harambam, 2020). Yet, what works methodologically cannot necessarily be maintained in the socio-political reality against which the produced knowledge is situated (Toscano, 2019).

The most common critique faced by researchers studying the far right is that ‘consciously or unconsciously, they become a legitimizing “mouthpiece”’ (Pilkington, 2021, p. 25). Fringe actors often acknowledge the presence of researchers (Askanius, 2021) and interpret ‘neutral’ stances as support for their cause (Harambam, 2020, p. 235). Thus, when spotlighting actors whose ideas are seen as distasteful at best, but often actively subvert the health of Western democracies, researchers tend to adopt a normative stance against it, as do I. Further, the knowledge produced in the scope of the analysis is critically situated against the broader socio-political ethic in the discussion section.

In parallel, Askanius (2021) argues that their awareness of the presence of external observers provokes the question of the validity of the knowledge produced on these actors in their public online spaces. Centring public Telegram channels was necessary to ensure all the data and empirical materials are publicly available, in line with the ethical practices of the field. Regardless of the perception of these activities transgressing in ‘shadows,’ the names of these users were not changed, as these actors actively spotlight themselves and constitute public personas rather than regular users (Urman & Katz, 2022). In addition, the only other cited individuals in the analysis are public personas that the four activists mention, and no personally identifiable information on discussed individual users is reported. While ultimately, this approach means we can only access what they want us to know (Askanius, 2021), such perceptions, combined with Telegram’s loose approach to moderation and refusal to collaborate with authorities, are of benefit here, as they lead to a less curated version of their beliefs (Rogers, 2020).

4. Analysis

The findings produced in the analysis are discussed in a two-fold approach: 1) a framing overview and 2) community- and alliance-building practices surrounding deplatformization.

First, I provide an overview of the three framing tasks: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. While frame analysis often seeks to present frames in a schematic manner by identifying diagnosis-prognosis pairs, this thesis builds on Benford and Snow's (2000) conceptualisation of framing, which focuses on the *process* of framing as a strategic construction of reality rather than on the frames themselves. I begin each of the following sections by identifying the shared interpretative frame. Then, shifting the focus from the commonalities onto divergences, I delve into the process of 'frame articulation' to highlight individual differences in which the elements of experienced and fabricated reality are assembled (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 623). The second part of the analysis seeks to understand the underlying role that the symbolic renderings constructed around deplatformization play in collective identity constructs that activists provide for themselves and their followers, but also other deplatformed right-wing factions.

As a final introductory note to the data; this thesis does not encompass audience research, but it is important to note the demonstrated grip these leaders have over the direction of their factions and the broader umbrella movement (Freelon, 2020; Lewis, 2018). Consciously or subconsciously, as opinion leaders, the ideas they articulate have an impact.

4.1 Framing Overview: The Symbolic Re-elaboration of Deplatformization

To understand how events of deplatformization may provoke changes in the targeted communities, it is imperative to begin by understanding the symbolic reinterpretations of events. After all, collective suffering, victimhood, and grievances are mediated through the social and symbolic constructions, rather than factual reflections of transpired events (Alexander, 2004). As the method demands, the ideas presented in this analysis largely reflect the perspective of the activists, rather than of the researcher (Bazeley, 2013). They should not, however, be understood as *mere* perceptions of these actors, but rather as *symbolic* renderings strategically offered to their sympathisers. The full overview of themes and categories used as the basis of framing reconstruction can be found in the Appendix VII.

4.1.1 Diagnostic Framing: Deplatformization as Techno-Social Dehumanisation

Following the structure of the frame analysis, I found that the main diagnostic frame (i.e., the problem) is shared across the four anglophone activists of four diverse factions. It goes beyond the questions of bias and freedom of speech that have dominated the debate thus far. The familiar far-right theme of cultural, social, and political tyranny and oppression of the in-group (Miller-Idriss, 2020) is extended to techno-social oppression and underscored with the theme of social acceleration. The frame that emerges is that of accelerated techno-social oppression.

The identified theme of the *techno-social oppression* of the in-group presents an essential context for the rest of this analysis. It fundamentally veins through most analysed statements and commentary on platforms, moderation, and deplatformization, but is concretely reflected in three main issue clusters that the leaders chose to accentuate: *control of information, speech, and thought; systematic bias; and dehumanisation*.

Control is perceived to be both a negative (restricting opposing views) and a positive measure (promoting preferred views), rather than seen merely as limiting freedom of expression. Under this rendering of social reality, contemporary information, speech, as well as thoughts and beliefs are discussed as actively policed and controlled, with various platform moderation decisions interpreted as censorship of dissenting voices and suppression of debate. However, platforms are also seen as active producers and promoters of propaganda. The notions of anti-conservative and anti-white *bias* further fuel this narrative by establishing that expression is controlled in an explicitly biased way that holds the in-group to stricter standards of conduct, while actively protecting other social groups, including paedophiles, LGBTQ, and minorities. Collett echoes this:

Social media companies don't have any standards, they just have one rule – if you are against the anti-white establishment, you are banned, if you are with anti-white establishment you can say whatever you want.

The third lens through which they discuss issues is *dehumanisation*. The activists construct the imaginary of deplatformization as a strategic destructive process in which the in-group is being denied full humanness. Specifically, they discuss strategies of *targeted discreditation and persecution, physical violence, and replacement*. In this dimension, the discussed impact exceeds issues of freedom of expression, much like West (2018) found in her study of users from diverse political poles. Instead, the channels emphasise the aggression, cruelty, and

personal relationship losses that accompany this process. To exemplify, the 2019 change in Facebook's moderation policy that circled out numerous far-right users as 'dangerous individuals' is continuously reinterpreted as the tech giant actively promoting violence against them:

In a shocking update to its Community Standards, Facebook has said that calls for "high-severity violence" and "threats that could lead to death" are acceptable if they're aimed at people who it deems to be "dangerous individuals."
(Hate Facts, forwarded from Laura Loomer)

The emerging frame of techno-social oppression, and particularly its dehumanisation dimension, is further accentuated by the theme of *social accelerationism*. The activists manufacture a strong fear of exacerbation by constructing the present as a time of fast-paced change, pushing the community into a crisis. By establishing the narrative that the situation – while already severe and unacceptable – will only get worse, they contextualise the events of deplatformization as merely the start of something much more sinister looming on the horizon. To exemplify, Fuentes refers to his own deplatforming as 'the litmus test,' a challenge that will reveal whether this is a viable strategy to curb the influence of the 'dissident' right. Similarly, Cottrell believes himself to be a 'test case,' and predicts more 'non-democratic' measures will be adopted to prevent the far right from coming to power in near future. The accelerationist discourse is vividly illustrated in this excerpt from one of his long-winded writings, in which he bridges moderation apparatuses to concentration camps:

Don't worry about what's fair and don't suppose that your abstract "rights" will help you from here onwards. You should be worrying about how you're going to survive the next few years. [...] People who hate you and want to kill you are writing your nation's laws, controlling the information you can access, "educating" your children, giving the police and military officers their orders. [...] it'll be made virtually impossible for anybody on "the right" to communicate. Apple will ban Parler & Telegram, ISP's will block Gab and bitchute, the remaining residue of independent Youtubers will be deleted [...] Expect concentration camps of some kind, but if you're arrested you'll be lucky to make it to one, they're more likely to take you out into the woods somewhere and shoot you. [...] Social media will swiftly censor any information anybody is trying to publish regarding murders and disappearances of dissidents [...] thinking that this won't happen or can't happen is literally just wishful thinking at this point.

Such accelerationist ideas are utilised to contextualise deplatformization as a part of resonant dystopian conspiracies that have come to define the contemporary far right. Nearly universally, the ideas of 'great replacement' and 'white genocide' are extended to deplatformization, which as Miller-Idriss (2020, p. 9) argues, are powerful devices to establish urgency and motivate

whites to act. In this way, the heavy emphasis on the acceleration of dehumanisation points to the influential far-right actors' attempts to transform their individual suffering into a broadly resonant cultural trauma. According to Alexander (2004, p. 10), such a transformation is crucial for traumas to emerge at the level of collectivity. The accounts of deplatformization must transcend the context of platforms in which they are situated and be redefined as a free-floating signifier of trauma for the broader social group, namely white people. If conspiracies surrounding the fate of the white race typically invoke an imaginary in which native (white) people are demographically and culturally replaced by demographic groups (i.e., immigrants, Muslims, Jews) (Miller-Idriss, 2020), whiteness now needs to be defended against techno-social power:

When we talk of the anti-white agenda, one of the most over used arguments we face is that: 'it's just business, it is about profit and there is no malice in such policies'. Elon Musk attempting to buy Twitter disproves this critique [...] those in control of Twitter would rather do anything other than accept said offer. This is because those in control of Twitter are not as concerned with profit as they are about pushing the anti-white agenda. (Hate Facts)

This underscores that the acceleration of techno-social oppression is a novel frame, meaning that it provides a new orientation for the community. While it is ultimately produced by 'frame extension' (Johnston & Noakes, 2005, p. 12) to draw upon cultural frameworks widely accepted among the sympathisers, the novelty of a frame is not in the originality of all elements, but rather 'the manner in which they are spliced together' (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 623). Here, the threats of immigrants and Muslims are replaced – and in the case of Jews extended – by the threat of an interconnected and opaque techno-social system.

The heavy emphasis on acceleration also suggests that rather than merely deplatformization itself, the temporal structure of abjection– its suddenness and speed– unsettle the social stability that stems from being platformed. To Couldry & Hepp (2017), deep mediatization also entails the changing temporal structure of society. They draw on Rosa's (2013) theory of social acceleration, to which the notion of acceleration is an indispensable tool for socio-political analysis of late modernity because of its destabilising implications for the social order. In the case of the deplatformization of the far right, the technological acceleration provoked by platformization of our societies leads to the acceleration of social abjection. Due to GAFAM's and Twitter's position as the ultimate gatekeepers of online socialities, the process of removal of unwanted social actors from the mainstream unfolded at an unprecedented speed and extent, 'the bursting of a cultural bubble,' to adopt Gillespie's (2018, p. 204) analogy.

4.1.1.1 Discourses of Techno-Social Victimhood and Perpetrators

Beyond establishing a grievance, diagnostic framing also needs to produce related constructions of victims and perpetrators. These underscore the overall point of oppression of the in-group not at the hands of foreigners, but rather *an opaque and interconnected techno-social system* that arises as the common theme in adversarial passages.

Activists delineate three entities within this system: *elites, platforms (as actors and social spaces), and controlled opposition*. The in-group identity the activists provide their followers is constructed in opposition to these entities. If the discourse of enemies is one of persecution, the discourse of the self is one of victimisation. It rests on the imitated victimhood identity as it incorporates a threat-victimhood duality, wherein the in-group is both a threat and the victim of the system. These emerging in-group collective identities, alongside the adversarial entity of ‘controlled opposition’ which refers to other right-wing factions, are delineated in the second part of the analysis, where I focus on their implications for alliance-building.

Instead, this subsection delves into the process of blame attribution. While the discursive frame identified in the previous subsection is largely shared among the four activists, the distribution of blame importantly diverges.

The main antagonism at play here builds upon the foundations of *anti-elitism*. All four channels invoke similar adversarial entities, namely perceived Jewish elites, traditional media, state and international governance elites, political left-wing, and economic elites. Just like the anti-elitist dialectic of people vs elites on which it rests, the frame of techno-social oppression serves as a blank page upon which diverse in- and out-group identity pairs can be inscribed. The identity constructs that activists provide their followers largely reflect their ‘brand’ and the context in which they operate.

For instance, Cottrell, who often writes lengthy testimonies of his legal trouble provoked by a Facebook video of him beheading a doll in a protest against a mosque, directs nearly all blame toward Australian state elites, namely the government and the legal system, rather than Muslims.²⁰ Overall, he often frames the conflict in class terms, reserving the in-group victimology for the white, working class:

²⁰ Cottrell was charged under the Australian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act for inciting hatred of Muslims after he published a video to Facebook in which he beheaded a doll in a protest against a mosque.

Facebook and Twitter Marxists are the privileged, petty-bourgeoisie of the modern era and they're projecting it all onto the white working-class.

Conversely, Collett, whose key beliefs feature antisemitism, charges accusations at Jews. In connection to platforms, he anchors the conspiracy of Jewish domination in platform ownership, and the influence of Jewish hate speech organisations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) over moderation decisions:

That is obviously just an excuse for Twitter to bow to high pressure activist groups (Jewish), which happens to be exactly how Twitter censorship accelerated in 2017.

Similar patterns appear in regard to the in-group identities. In line with the white nationalist beliefs of their respective communities, Hate Facts and Collett both emphasise nationalism and whiteness as the ultimate victims. Meanwhile, Fuentes – who steers away from white nationalism in order to appeal to a larger number of Americans (Hawley, 2021) – reserves the victim identity for nationalism and Christianity.

These constructs underscore that invoked enemies do not reflect factual events but are a strategic combination of activists' pre-existing lived experiences, personal beliefs, political affiliations, and movement goals. However, it should be noted that this is not a consistent process; blame shifts continuously and opportunistically, often from one sentence to another, revealing the often contradictory nature of the symbolic process of framing.

4.1.1.2 Post-Deplatformization Platform Imaginaries – Of Big Tech, Faceless Marxist Terrorists, and All Those with Pronouns in Their Bio

In addition to elites, in the context of deplatformization, *platforms* unsurprisingly take the central stage as the movement's antagonists. This section examines two contradicting post-deplatformization platform imaginaries that emerge from the four far-right leaders, as well as considers how 'Big Tech' emerges as an empty, or rather, an over-potent signifier. This is crucial, because the ways in which social actors understand moderation, as well as algorithms, and user practices influence individual and collective behaviour and have a real-world impact in driving a response (Bucher, 2017; Poell et al., 2021).

In the first understanding, platforms are ascribed agency, and play an active part in the regime of oppression. For example, to Collett, it is Google that 'hates white people and wants to see them erased,' that 'dictates what you can and can't see and hear.' Under the second imaginary, platforms are not seen as active perpetrators, but rather perverse social worlds, controlled and

influenced by other actors. Specifically, they might be externally controlled by other elites (as outlined above), or internally by staff and users. The conversation most often revolves around Twitter, and other participatory platforms such as YouTube or Facebook. The users that voluntarily participate in what the activists construct as ‘the perversion’ of the shared social space, are discredited as pathetic, manipulative, and intelligence-lacking proxies for elite interests. For instance, the far-right activists often invoke an image of ‘shame mobs’ as intermediaries for the interests of ‘subversive elites’ such as LGBTQ. Similarly, it is ‘the pathetic bloggers and mentally ill sodomites,’ the ‘faceless Marxist terrorists,’ ‘all those [...] with pronouns in their bio,’ as well as the ‘weirdos, degenerates and anti-whites’ that receive blame for the events of deplatformization.

In a connected way, the responsibility for the downfall of far-right extremism across the mainstream ecosystem is directed at platform moderation staff. Rather than carriers of values imposed by platform leadership, they are believed to be acting in their own or elite interests. To discredit them, activists reinforce established lines of inferiority according to gender, race, and political orientation, and invoke dehumanising discourse through metaphors of infestation (Miller-Idriss, 2020). Collett, sharing a video of a female Twitter moderator, comments that ‘this is the kind of weirdo who was in charge of moderating the political landscape on Twitter – the world’s largest micro-blogging site. No wonder Twitter became a hell-scape of madness and degeneracy!’ On another occasion, he writes that ‘The whole company is infested with liberals [...] I think rooting out all those bad eggs and changing things on the platform from the top down would take a long time.’

Contrary to the debate insofar that emphasises the backlash against Big Tech as active corporate actors, the anti-Big Tech sentiment identified in the material is primarily based on the second imaginary. But ultimately, all actors alternate between the two, often in contradicting and ambiguous ways. Framing scholars emphasise that such frame ambiguity is an asset and does not emerge by chance (Johnston & Noakes, 2005). Denying platforms agency allows for ‘Big Tech’ to act as an empty ‘floating signifier,’ a symbolic node upon which diverse established contestations, strategic adversarial entities and collective identities are linguistically linked (Levi-Strauss, 1987, cited in Papacharissi, 2022, p. 71). The emptiness here does not indicate the lack of signified, but rather the equivocality and high variability of the term. The lack of transparency that defines GAFAM’s moderation systems merely provides ammunition for this process and allows the far-right to capitalise on the pervasive ‘myth of a

neutral platform’ (Gillespie, 2018. p. 24). While the activists slice through the myth that platforms are neutral conduits, it is more beneficial that they remain seen as merely conduits – under the influence of others. Because the aim is often to cast the net as wide as possible and attract diverse sympathisers, the linguistic evocation of political enemies is most powerful when they are not delineated specifically (Edelman, 1988).

In this way, ‘Big Tech’ can be associated with established notions of tyranny and cultural degradation, but also serve as a sign of the times defined by anti-white bias, dehumanisation of white people and conservative activists, and absolute narrative control. By constructing and repeating ‘Big Tech’ as a potent empty signifier, framing reduces the complexity of deplatformization, but also drums ‘up the rhythms of affective’ (Papacharissi, 2022, p. 71). Invoking a reference to the phantasm is bound to provoke a set of latent associations resonant with the respective audience – whether long-standing socioeconomical and ethnic grievances, or contemporary moral crusades against gender, LGBTQ, and the like.

4.1.2 Prognostic Framing: The Future of the Virtual Far-Right Community

As an answer to the constructed diagnosis of techno-social oppression, influential movement activists also outline the course of action they see most fit for the vibrancy of the broader movement in the aftermath of deplatformization. The analysis of their prognostic framing reveals how tectonic shifts in web governance alter the trajectories of these collectivities.

The prognoses proposed by the four influential actors echo a common overarching theme of *strengthening the movement*. Yet, much like with blame attribution, they importantly diverge in concrete proposed solutions. These divergences are crucial to analyse for two reasons. First, because they tend to serve as conflict points over which movements disperse (della Porta & Diani, 2020). And second, they offer a glimpse into the diversity of concerns provoked by deplatformization (Edelman, 1988).

On an abstract level, all four activists promote the idea of *solidarity despite differences*, which emerged as one of three fundamental categories under prognostic framing. They emphasise the commonality of collective suffering under ‘Big Tech’ should overshadow past disagreements in beliefs or methodology between various factions of the big-tent far right movement. The language of solidarity is a strategic device, particularly prominent in posts calling for concrete action, as demonstrated in this post forwarded by Hate Facts:

I know some of you hate me for reasons but remember THEY view all of us the exact same way. THEY don't make a distinction as to who we are and the little differences we may have [...] You know I'd do it for you...and I'll probably have to one day soon. I won't forget your solidarity when it INEVITABLY happens to you.

4.1.2.1 'They can't deplatform us from the streets' – Between Online and Offline

At the same time, the two other prognostic categories each reflect an opposing idea about where the community and the broader umbrella movement should concentrate their resources. The first one outlines an *offline* path, while the second one focuses on restoring the movement's *online* success. In outlining their own proposal, the activists often 'counterframe' and refute the logic of solutions laid out by other factions (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617), forgoing the previous notions of solidarity.

The favoured direction generally reflects the existing strategic goals of the faction. Fuentes and Collett – who both head groups whose operational rationale is closely dependent on mainstream platforms' infrastructure – focus heavily on the online. Meanwhile, Cottrell and Hate Facts emphasise that the movement needs to pay more attention to the offline world to survive. They propose limiting social media use, and instead nourishing the offline community, training their bodies, and starting families. The heavy mainstream social media users are labelled 'serotonin chasers,' that lack discipline and masculinity, while they themselves are the true 'nation-builders' (Cottrell) who 'put [their] race first above all other meaningless garbage' (Hate Facts). Framing ideals of masculinity and discipline as the ultimate obligation to whiteness serves to reinforce lines of superiority (Miller-Idriss, 2020) in relation to other factions, as echoed by Hate Facts in their counterframing of Fuentes and his followers:

Who do you want to be in this world, the guy that sends Nick Fuentes lemons on D-live, tweets that Charlie Kirk's a [REDACTED], then lays back in bed and goes "well my work to reclaim America from the corruption holding it is done, time to jerk off to porn of 18 yo runaways getting fucked by Jews while I eat a cheesburger" or the guy who's building his community, organizing with his people, and training his body to protect and provide for the family you want?²¹

4.1.2.2 'I would rather be active on Twitter and dead irl' – Chasing the Deliberative Past

Despite Cottrell and Hate Facts advocating strongly for an offline turn, all four actors also voice their solutions for the future of the digital far-right. They construct two possible paths for the

²¹ Founded in 2017, DLive is a US-based video live streaming service popular with right-wing content producers. Lemons are a virtual reward point system on the platform.

movement online: the return to the mainstream ecosystem or the embracement of alternative infrastructure. Unlike the online-offline dilemma, each activist's statements are defined by a fluctuating tension between the two, although the offline proponents are unsurprisingly less inclined toward the mainstream ecosystem, with Cottrell explicitly refusing further engagement with Twitter.

The first prognosis emphasises the need for a push-back, retaliation, and ultimately the return to mainstream social media platforms, indicating that they still constitute symbolically relevant spaces. For example, Fuentes continuously emphasises that he 'would rather be active on Twitter and dead irl than be banned from Twitter and alive' and shares dozens of attempts to return under alternative names. These narratives place value in social spaces that champion the deliberative ideals of cross-cutting debate (Dahlgren, 2013), reflecting one of the central goals of the contemporary far-right movement – awakening the 'normies.' Collett often echoes the restoration fantasy through a faux version of a past where extremists were 'happy to share a space with political opponents' and 'engage in a battle for the hearts and minds of the public.' The discourse of restoration underscores that in the wake of destabilising shifts of deplatformization, strategies may not be driven merely by simple emotional desires such as frustration (West, 2018), but also by what Miller-Idriss (2020, p.168) sees as more 'complex yearnings' for past order, belonging, and purpose – nuances otherwise central to the appeal of many contemporary conspiracies about the perceived downfall of white race.

At the same time, activists emphasise that change needs to take place for the return, both externally, and internally within the movement. 'To unchain the Aryan E-Boy Race,' as Fuentes hopes to do, they discuss financial and legal damage, as well as the legal regulation of Big Tech. Within the movement, they express frustration with individuals who by engaging in incivility undermine the 'optics' needed to participate on mainstream platforms, and blend the movement into the mainstream.²² This is echoed by Hate Facts:

Sometimes a guy will post in a group [...] and they'll have immediately opened with something like "hey you [REDACTED], why are you afraid to talk about jews" I'd ban your ass too [...] I'd ban you for the same reason I don't allow untrained dogs who scratch my couch and shit on the floor into my house, if you behave like an animal don't be surprised to be treated like one.

²² The optic debate is a common point of contention among diverse far-right groups, where some see the optics of violence and incivility as bad for the mainstream acceptance of the broader movement (Miller-Idriss, 2020).

4.1.2.3 ‘Telegram is superior because it’s less democratic’ – Embracing a Communitarian Future

Emerging on the other hand is a path that embraces more traditional communitarian ideals (Fraser, 1990; Freelon, 2010). Under this narrative, attempts to return to platforms or to further engage in the debate are discussed as a waste of movement’s resources. To exemplify, Hate Facts compares desperate attempts to return to ‘being upset that someone won’t let you watch them fuck your wife’ and calls on their followers to ‘get your balls back.’ Instead, actors emphasise the need for the collective abandonment of Big Tech, the establishment of a parallel self-sufficient platform ecosystem, and the embracement of Telegram and other alt-tech.

Connected to this prognosis is a platform imaginary of Telegram as a political shelter, thought to offer the most conducive atmosphere for the furtherance of movement’s objectives of the production and spread of ideas.

The only place you will find true men of passion, who are willing to ask the tough questions and seek the harsh truths; is right here. The greatest philosophers of our time are all on telegram... (Hate Facts)

Particularly Hate Facts and Fuentes discuss Telegram’s digital architecture as superior to that of Twitter or Facebook because it allows for the absence of fundamental disagreement. They embrace the one-sided top-down distribution of content as a welcome condition. For Fuentes, a ‘big part of telegram’s appeal’ is not having to ‘hear any feedback whatsoever from the peanut gallery.’ Similarly, Hate Facts reposts that Telegram is superior because ‘it’s less democratic. No I don’t feel like spelling it out. No I don’t want to do research for you. And no, I dgaf what you think.’ In doing so, these actors – implicitly and explicitly – echo (imitated) communitarian ideals, in which the absence of debate is a necessary condition for the construction of a thriving community (Fraser, 1990).

Looking for possible temporal patterns in these actors’ framing, individual events of deplatformization seem to impact the envisioned direction only temporarily. For example, in the statements produced in the immediate aftermath of the January 2021 events (Parler app ban and Trump’s deplatforming), all four advocate for the abandonment of Big Tech. However, for Collett and Fuentes, otherwise proponents of returning, this is merely temporary as they provide extensive information sharing over the developments in Musk’s acquisition of

Twitter.²³ On the contrary, the channels that have been advocating for an offline and alt-tech turn all along, Cottrell and Hate Facts do not produce significant position statements over the acquisition. This signifies that the favoured direction is ultimately a confluence of strategic factors such as the existing goals and beliefs, rather than a mere reflection of transpired events.

4.1.3 Motivational Framing: ‘Do Your Part to Destroy Big Tech’

Similarly to the analysis of prognostic frames, calls to action reflect the concrete needs provoked by deplatformization. Because the position statements analysed in this thesis are produced by activists rather than traditional organisations, a rather small subset of posts included ‘action frames,’ as often fostering of shared sentiment and strengthening in-group identity is the primary goal of framing (Freelon, 2010; Gamson, 1991).²⁴

As outlined under the analysis of diagnostic framing, the activists relied on hyperboles to establish deplatformization as a crisis. Framing problems as crises accentuates instability and reinforces a sense of urgency, justifying actions to sacrifice for the common welfare (Edelman, 1988), and motivating their followers to support and act upon the cause. In addition, most calls to action invoked the potent ‘Big Tech’ signifier to provoke a chain of associations linked to them throughout the process of diagnostic framing.

This is exemplified in Fuentes’ call to action in the context of the proposed Big Tech regulation bill in the state of Florida:

 WAKE UP PATRIOTS 

TIME TO CALL THE OFFICE OF GOVERNOR DESANTIS AGAIN. DO YOUR PART TO DESTROY BIG TECH

The actions proposed can be roughly divided into *online* and *offline action*. Calls to online action largely related to establishing and expanding the reach and strength of their network on alternative platforms. Because visibility is a scarce resource, activists called for others to show support through their use of alt-tech, following other accounts on Telegram and across alt-tech, and sharing content links across their network. The call for alt-tech use is reflected in the following post forwarded by Fuentes:

²³ The official acquisition of Twitter by Elon Musk took place between April 14th and October 27 2022.

²⁴ Action calls were only present in approximately 1/10 of the sample.

If you really want to put a dent in Big Tech censorship: stop using their platforms and making them money. Get on Gab.

Calls to offline action were extremely rare, unsurprising due to the nature of the problem at hand. The handful were exclusive to North American accounts, particularly Fuentes, and included supporting legislation by contacting representatives, financial support, and event attendance.

In tandem, the advocated actions reflect that rather than concrete (visible) mobilisation, the loss of visibility elicits support, solidarity, reach, and visibility as fundamental symbolic commodities post-deplatformization. And more importantly, new seemingly minor individual actions are redefined as activism in the fight against ‘Big Tech,’ lowering the threshold for participation in action. This matters because it expands the array of possible meaningful ‘contributions’ to the cause for the followers. And as della Porta & Diani (2020) discuss, participation in episodes of mobilisation can strengthen participants’ feelings of belonging, which then recursively serves as fuel in future mobilisation waves.

4.1.4 Epistemic Validation and Affective Devices

The analysis also considered resonance criteria, i.e., the devices actors use to embellish trust in the constructed narratives. Rather than focus on the traditional framing concepts of salience and credibility (Benford & Snow, 2000), the analysis aimed to broadly capture any methods of validation, including affective devices that tend to overshadow other validity methods in contemporary far-right communication (Papacharissi, 2022). Two primary methods of epistemic validation are identified: epistemological pluralism and distrust.

4.1.4.1 Epistemological Pluralism –Treading Between Fact and Fiction

The narratives are told through a triangulation of different sources of knowledge, a strategy discussed by conspiracy scholars as ‘epistemological pluralism’ (Harambam, 2020, p. 125). Namely, four distinct methods of epistemic validation are identified: factual events, insider knowledge, personal stories and beliefs, and future predictions. Threading between fact and fiction, glimpses from real-world events, moderation policy updates, insider information, leaks, and rumours, are intertwined with the personal and the symbolic: personal experience, platform and algorithmic imaginaries, as well as future predictions. According to Harambam (2020, p. 126), the pluralistic approach resonates culturally in the West because the dynamics of the post-

truth society produce a ‘culture wary of dominant epistemic institutions’ and strict reliance on one system of knowledge (Harambam, 2020, p. 126).

4.1.4.2 ‘Just propaganda designed to delude and distract’ – Seeding Distrust

Alongside epistemological pluralism, seeding distrust or epistemic doubt is employed as the key instrument for epistemic validation by the four far-right activists. As outlined in the literature review, I use the notion of distrust not to indicate passive absences of trust but rather the seeding of epistemic doubt in a Rosanvallonian sense, as an active form of engagement to resist institutional power by means of delegitimization. The observed manifestations of distrust that veil through the statements on deplatformization can be understood as both counterframing and an affective device.

First, in their statements, activists need not only develop diagnoses and prognoses, but actively undermine trust in the existing ones by refuting their logic, efficacy, and credibility (Benford & Snow, 2000). Not only to ‘counterframe’ solutions proposed by other factions, but more broadly, because at its core, any commentary on deplatformization can be seen as an act of ‘counterframing’ (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617). In a discursive response, the versions of interpretative reality painted by social media platforms, media, academia, and other epistemic institutions that portray these actors as ‘dangerous individuals,’ need to be challenged by seeding epistemic doubt in these institutions. This dynamic is reflected in Cottrell’s critique of a documentary aired on Australian TV about the harms of social media platforms, a passage in which he both seeds epistemic doubt, and provides an alternative interpretative frame:

[...] The whole doco seemed to serve no purpose other than to try to convince the viewer that the internet is dangerous [...] It also of course demands more social media regulation (read: more censorship), particularly to “fight hate”. [...] The primary purpose of social media regulation is to make sure as few people as possible can access and understand alternative information, so international corporate swindling, genocide and general tyranny can continue without anybody ever knowing or understanding it.[...] You’ll never get any valuable information from out of a Television, just propaganda designed to delude and distract.

As a device for epistemic validation, distrust in platforms as one of the major institutions structuring contemporary social life is culturally resonant with the broader epistemic context at play. The foundations of contemporary far-right beliefs build on the conspiratorial assumption that the stories told by our epistemic institutions are but a ‘symbolic facade to lure the public’ and obscure the fact that ‘malicious, covert actions are taking place’ (Harambam,

2020, p. 177). This shared context of distrust can help explain why, in terms of emotion, the analysis found that expressions of frustration, fear, and anger were much less pronounced than preceding findings of moderation studies indicate (West, 2018; Gillespie, 2017). In a similar vein, there was not much of what Rossini (2022) discusses as ‘uncivil discourse’ (apart from Hate Facts) in which the creators would invoke foul language. Due to a lack of discovery mechanism, Telegram constitutes a closed-off discursive space where the followers are largely sharing the same context of distrust. The strategic use of strong emotion and incivility is not needed to underscore the strength of one’s argument. In fact, one of the miscellaneous categories formed was ‘information sharing,’ where key updates on the deplatforming of new actors, changes in platform moderation and ownership, are discussed without much sentiment or emotion. Rather, given the overall absence of other strong emotions, distrust here serves as the key affective device. The activists capitalise on broader societal distrust in technology and platform corporations, but also their followers’ distrust in any form of institutional power, in order to fuel the intensity with which their statements are received (Papacharissi, 2015). In doing so, they also drive the spiral of signification further. Because frames seed epistemic doubt in a directed and repeated manner, they can further circulate affect (Papacharissi, 2022).

The interplay of distrust and trust gives rise to what Rosa (2019, p. 184) sees as ‘a dialectic of resonance and alienation.’ At its core, the primary function of frames is establishing social trust within the community. But because distrust is the key validation device, frames simultaneously seed trust in activists’ own narratives, and distrust in others. Distrust, then, becomes the central instrument in activists’ attempts to stabilise the social order in the wake of deplatformization.

4.2 Community- and Alliance-Building Practices Surrounding Deplatformization

The second part of the analysis seeks to identify the underlying ways in which the produced symbolic re-elaborations of deplatformization shape the community- and alliance-building practices of the far-right activists. To do so, I adopt the concept of collective identity as ‘an analytical tool’ (Melucci, 1995, p.46) rather than merely a category of analysis. As a myriad of collective rebellion and far-right literature illustrates, identity plays a central symbolic role in how activists facilitate and sustain the feelings of belonging, as well as enable new networks of trust to arise among diverse movement groups.

Building upon the findings from frame analysis, the following section closely examines the boundary work performed by Collett, Cottrell, Hate Facts, and Fuentes in their statements on platforms, moderation, and deplatformization. Specifically, I focus on identity constructs provided for the in-group, as well as other deplatformed far-right individuals and factions.

4.2.1 Collective Techno-Social Victimhood – A Novel Axis of Orientation

As highlighted previously, the creators construct a novel imitated victimhood through a threat-victimhood duality. In the analysed data, the identity that activists construct for themselves and their sympathisers hinged on a strict us versus them opposition. This ties the in-group identity to the adversarial entity of a techno-social system of oppression – the in-group is a victim *of the system*, as well as a threat *to the system*. This reflects previous evidence that in times of conflict – real or constructed – group boundaries become more heavily defined through differentiation from the adversarial out-group at the heart of the conflict (Bliuc et al., 2019; Mudde, 2019). And in opposition-based identities, the identification of the enemies in national or ethnic terms is the same process as the identification of the self in those terms (Edelman, 1988), meaning that the constructed in-group collective identity becomes one of techno-social victimhood. Although numerous other long-standing identities (race-, class-, or religion-based) are invoked, they are ultimately placed in strict opposition to the techno-social system of oppression. Hence, the ‘reflexively constructed’ collective identity overshadows any single long-standing identity, such as whiteness or nationalism (Gamson, 1991).

The provided vantage point is novel in the sense that it is constructed along the emerging techno-social axis identified under the diagnostic framing. Yet, it continues the long tradition

of imitated victimology. This discourse of victimisation, personified in one activist, but broadened to the collective level, has multiple functions. As a rhetorical technique, the notion of white victimhood is tied to the white replacement conspiracies, and acts as an emotional appeal to urge white supporters to act (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Oaten, 2014), as discussed previously. But more importantly, in the context of deplatformization, imitated victimhood reflects a strategic attempt to cultivate an alternative social identity using the image of a social underdog in order to turn the common feeling of techno-social abjection into a community glue, and provide countercultural appeal to their followers, much like previous work has indicated (Oaten, 2014; Lewis, 2018). While qualitative studies on fringe collectivities post-deplatformization are scarce, Jasser et al.'s (2021) inquiry into the community on Gab similarly points to the emergence of a novel techno-social victim identity as an important new axis of orientation for the virtual far-right community.

4.2.1.1 Ban as a Social Currency – Adopting the Moral Economy of the Victimhood Culture

The threat-victimhood duality of self-presentation that defines the collective techno-social victimhood is neither antithetical nor incompatible. This is illustrated in the fact that the novel techno-social victimisation emerging across the four cases is utilised as a social currency. Being banned, censored, or otherwise a victim of the system, is not only worn as a badge of honour much like Jasser et al. (2021) found on Gab, but is seen as evidence of the quality of one's ideas. In other words, a higher threat status is both the cause and the result of higher victimhood status. This sentiment is echoed in the following post by Hate Facts:

If you haven't been banned from any of that gay silicon valley tech shit you're doing conservatism wrong, and if you've been banned from all of it you're probably doing it better than anyone.

The fact that ideas, information, or individuals qualify for censorship and deplatforming, is used as a measure of three characteristics: the legitimacy and substance of ideas ('truth'), their impact (popularity), and their threat factor (potential for 'awakening'). This evaluation system is reflective of their contemporary Gramscian-inspired practices of cultural production and is reflected in how they promote both individuals and content. For example, when promoting videos on alt-tech platforms, a common capture is to announce that the video has already been deleted by YouTube or is feared to be removed in the future. These sentiments are concretely laid out by Cottrell when discussing 'censorship criteria:'

1. Does this idea/information/person seriously threaten the present-day establishment and its systemic propaganda narratives? [...]
2. Is this idea/information/person sound and truthful; are they based on legitimate evidence and/or engaged in conscientious dissemination for maximum influence/affect? [...]
3. Is the idea/information/person popular or likely to become popular? [...]

The mechanisms at play here broadly echo those of ‘victimhood culture’ identified by Campbell & Manning (2018, p. 22) in which victimhood provokes a higher social status, ‘regardless of whether one has done anything praiseworthy.’ As discussed above, claims to victimhood are not new, and collective victimhood has served as a powerful orientation category to extremist groups (Oaten, 2014). But ‘emphasis on victimisation is a matter of degree, and the highest degrees are found in victimhood culture,’ which is reflected in the adoption of this moral economy (Campbell & Manning, 2018, p.162).

To expand, the observed imitation of victimhood can be understood as opposition to the moral ideals of victimhood culture, according to Campbell & Manning (2018). Paradoxically, conservative figures tend to act as victimhood culture loudest critics. Particularly when critiquing deplatformization and deplatforming as a broader social justice practice—referring to banning speakers from college campuses and denying them a speaking platform (Bromell, 2022). Such academic censorship may not be new, but the contemporary rationale for it is rooted in ‘the ideals of victimhood culture,’ meaning that speech limits are justified through potential harm that were to occur had the speaker been given platform (Campbell & Manning, 2018, p. 223). Similar rationale is reflected in ‘the discursive performance’ of moderation guidelines that justify deplatforming through the protection of minorities (Gillespie, 2018, p. 47). Despite right-wing commentators speaking out against this rationale, Campbell & Manning (2018) argue that the long-standing conflict between the ideals of free speech and safe spaces has led the right wing to adopt similar victimology tactics. After all, the more widespread a ‘moral framework’ becomes, the more beneficial its adoption (Campbell & Manning, 2018, p. 165).

4.2.2 ‘More Thoroughly Cancelled Than Anyone’ – Competitive Victimhood and Its Implications for Alliance-Building

The adoption of similar victim-based identity across the analysed cases does not automatically create a homogeneous identity on a movement level. Nor does it imply the emergence of solidarity and alliance links between affected collectivities. Instead, a closer look at boundary definitions surrounding other right-wing and far-right factions is needed.

As highlighted under the prognostic framing, all four actors acknowledge a common source of victimisation, and promote the idea of solidarity despite differences. Yet, as the symbolic resource of techno-social victimhood becomes a valuable cultural and social commodity, all four activists engage in the competition over it. Their claims to collective victimhood become a zero-sum game, wherein only the in-group is the true victim (Oaten, 2014).

What arises from these competing claims made by similar groups affected by the same perpetrator is a dynamic of ‘competitive victimhood’ where all groups attempt to portray themselves as the ultimate victim (Campbell & Manning, 2018, p. 162).²⁵ This dynamic has previously been documented among right-wing groups and adversarial entities, e.g., Muslims (Oaten, 2014), or the political left-wing (Campbell & Manning, 2018). However, in the context of deplatformization, it is also other factions and even alt-tech platforms are often discussed as *controlled opposition* rather than potential allies, which emerged as the third adversarial entity in diagnostic framing, alongside elites and platforms. In the field of social psychology, it is suggested that if groups have pre-existing tendencies to compete over other valuable resources, e.g., visibility, reach, or audience numbers, ‘they are likely to compete over the symbolic resource of being recognized as a victim as well’ (Noor et al., 2012, p. 25).

The competition over the symbolic resource of techno-social abjection demands that the core movement activists affected by the same ‘Big Tech’ perpetrator ‘establish that they have suffered more’ and ‘differently’ than other right-wing factions (Noor et al., 2012, p. 2). In the context of deplatformization, they construct three exclusionary victimhood criteria to measure the victimhood status of others: the level of abjection, the time of the ban, as well as previous expressions of solidarity, as illustrated in Figure 1.

²⁵ When introducing the concept of competitive victimhood into sociology, the authors largely focus on adversarial relationships. However, the theory of competitive victimhood is borrowed from social psychology, specifically the field of violent conflict studies, where the term is often used to analyse competing victimhood claims made by similar groups affected by the same perpetrator (Noor et al., 2012; Young & Sullivan, 2016), which is how the concept is applied in the present study.

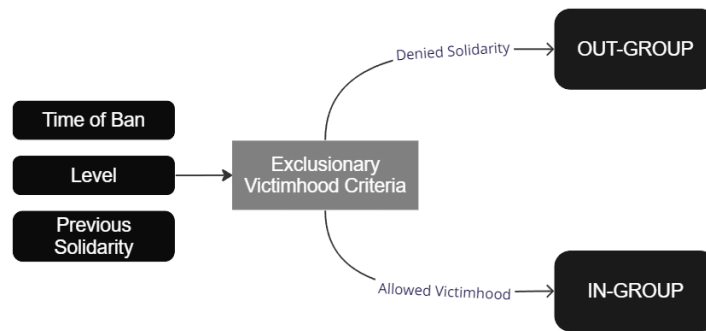


Figure 1. Exclusionary Victimhood Criteria

Whenever competing right-wing factions do not meet one or more of the criteria, that is used as evidence to deny their claims of victimhood by counterframing. When denied victimhood constructed for the in-group, they are defined as an out-group. They are rendered hoax opposition, collaborators being influenced or otherwise controlled to various degrees by the other two adversarial entities. In doing so, as established previously, counter-framing ultimately seeds further distrust and doubt in other factions by echoing to their followers that ‘if [one’s] beliefs aren’t considered a threat by the system, they aren’t worth having.’ (Hate Facts).

As reflected in the first two criteria, by reappropriating the structure introduced by platform moderation into a symbolic resource of victimhood, the activists incorporate fragments of original structure into their own social practice. The time of the administered ban is adopted as the first measure. All activists echo the idea that every ‘truly right-wing or nationalist figure’ was already banned years ago (Cottrell). They utilise the fact that deplatformization was gradually applied to less extreme factions of the right wing, concluding that an earlier ban indicates a higher threat value of one’s ideas. A similar logic underlies the level (number) of bans. Under the victimhood culture, those who combine many victim identities are ‘accorded greater moral status than those with only a few’ (Campbell & Manning, 2018, p. 168).

Fuentes takes this the furthest by branding himself as ‘the most censored man in America,’ which he has since imprinted onto his general personal brand:²⁶

²⁶ To exemplify, a 2022 ‘documentary’ on Fuentes was titled ‘The Most Canceled Man in America.’ In the video, Fuentes attempts to present himself as a target of brutal state censorship, and the hero of the far-right movement in the aftermath of January 2021 events.

I'm double censored, double blacklisted, more thoroughly cancelled than anyone because I am THE biggest threat to the system.

Additionally, previous solidarity also plays a role. Under competitive victimhood, any (faux) sentiments of solidarity are negated if the other right-wing faction is thought to have contributed to the suffering (Young & Sullivan, 2016), namely by not speaking out against perceived oppression. The North American channels, Fuentes and Hate Facts, mainly point to the lack of solidarity from the mainstream conservative parties. Commenting on the prospect of Biden's win in the 2020 US presidential election, Hate Facts forwards the following post:

I don't feel any sympathy for Trump [...] Where was Trump when Milo Yiannopoulos got de-platformed and hounded by the media? Where were any of the mainstream conservatives for that matter? [...] Get no support [from] the man you were out on the street to support in the first place.

Further, in discussing concrete alliances, the leaders often echo opposing views on whether the common Big Tech enemy is enough to renounce other disagreements. Speaking about Laura Loomer, a Jewish-American far-right activist, Hate Facts and Fuentes both disagree with her support for Israel, but construct opposing issue hierarchies:

...Pardon the hell out of me if I don't weep for your victimhood. [...] If you're against internet censorship, do you advocate for the rights of white nationalists [...] To openly preach their philosophies and criticize Israel, Zionism, and Jews in general; without being kicked off Facebook and Twitter? (Hate Facts)

We disagree on this, but we agree on issues like big tech censorship [...] We can work together on the areas where we agree and we can be open and discuss areas where we disagree. (Fuentes)

The findings contrast those of Jasser et al. (2021) on Gab, where the researchers concluded that the shared experience of deplatformization united individuals espousing diverse far-right beliefs. One reason for this could be that Gab's user base is much more homogeneous than that of Telegram, which was one of the key arguments for adopting Telegram as a research site in the present study. But they also contradict past instances where commonalities of shared grievances were successfully leveraged to facilitate joint oppositions, and hence alliance-building between factions (Durham & Power, 2010). Ultimately, these findings indicate that on an abstract level, all activists emphasise the need to overcome previous differences and instead build alliances to work together against Big Tech. Yet, competitive victimhood claims pose a potential barrier to intergroup relations between similar deplatformed factions of the broader 'dissident right' movement, leading to reduced solidarity and potential for alliances.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

From the outset, this thesis project set out to bring the fundamental notions of late modern social theory back into the current theorising and research on moderation. To underscore how moderation importantly interacts with the agency of affected actors through the complex fabric of social practice and symbolic meaning, this thesis centred the post-deplatformization far right as a space through which critical dimensions of contemporary mediatised society are reflected. It spotlighted four high-profile far-right activists and their statements on platforms, moderation and deplatformization between 2019 and 2022, due to their demonstrated role in shaping the orientation of diverse extremist collectivities on Telegram and beyond.

Drawing on the methodological frameworks of social movement frame analysis and discourse-inspired qualitative text analysis, the present study sought to understand the ways in which these opinion leaders attempt to (re)shape orientations, trajectories, and mobilisation of their collectivities in the context of deplatformization. To account for how actors may build new alliance links between affected collectivities, the study incorporated collective identity as a central analytical tenet to untangle the boundary work surrounding deplatformization.

Contributing to the growing literature on deplatformization, the study provides systematic qualitative evidence that deplatformization further weaponizes their narratives and strengthens their social underdog image. However, the findings also point to normatively positive implications, namely that (1) deplatformization serves as a conflictual issue and (2) provokes competitive victimhood between diverse affected groups, inhibiting solidarity and alliance-building.

In this final section, I return to the guiding questions and objectives, offering final insight into the aftermath of deplatformization. I then highlight the implications of these findings for the broader field of moderation research and sketch out possible future directions.

How do the deplatformed influential far-right activists frame issues of moderation, platforms, and deplatformization for their followers?

The findings underscore the emergence of a novel interpretative frame of techno-social oppression, an extension of the familiar white genocide frame, which is shared across the four cases. As far-right activists reappropriate the shared experience of deplatformization into a

powerful symbolic resource of oppression (victimhood), several novel orientations that could shape new phases of the movement arise (Melucci, 1996):

Diagnostic framing (problem identification and blame attribution) shows that despite the shared general frame, Big Tech animosity does not constitute a coherent shared grievance. Rather, 'Big Tech' is constructed as an overflowing empty signifier and an affective device linking a diverse cascade of contemporary and long-standing grievances. To establish new resonant links and drive the intensity with which their statements are received, activists draw on their personal experience and beliefs, cultural frameworks resonant with their followers, as well as capitalise on the abundance of emerging broader societal distrust in Big Tech, while also converging the affect built around other long-standing adversarial entities such as elites and social groups (namely Jews). 'Big Tech' becomes the bridge between established cultural frameworks, as well as a sign of the times defined by anti-white bias, dehumanisation of white people, and absolute narrative control. Regarding the issue clusters constructed around platforms, contra anecdotal accounts, the conversation is moving well beyond the questions of bias, censorship, and platform corporations. Rather, activists emphasise dehumanisation and social acceleration to seed a strong fear of exacerbation. This presents an attempt to redefine their personal experience with techno-social abjection as a free-floating signifier of trauma for the broader in-group with which their agenda aligns (Alexander, 2004), namely white people, and specifically, whites espousing conservative beliefs. Through the signifier and against the general backdrop of framing problems as crises, activists herald instability to justify concrete measures to adapt to the challenges posed by moderation; and motivate their followers to act upon them.

Prognostic framing (proposed solutions) indicates that deplatformization prompts fractured visions for the trajectory of the umbrella movement. Despite calls for solidarity and unity despite differences, deplatformization is found to be a highly divisive conflictual issue that provokes contention between the similarly affected far-right factions. Combined with the use of distrust as a key validation device to counterframe alternative solutions, this suggests potential for further dispersion of the broader movement (della Porta & Diani, 2020). Activists signal three possible trajectory changes: (1) an offline turn; (2) abstention from incivility to better resemble the deliberative ideals needed to return to Twitter as a key symbolic place for propaganda and mobilisation; and (3) abandoning Big Tech and embracing the alternative ecosystem that allows for the absence of fundamental disagreement.

Motivational framing (calls to action) reveals that post-deplatformization, new micro-level individual actions become defined as activism. Actions that contribute to the lost resources of visibility and reach, such as alt-tech platform use or following a channel, lower the threshold of meaningful participation. This matters because participating in action has been found to strengthen participants' feelings of belonging, which then recursively serves as further fuel in future mobilisation waves (della Porta & Diani, 2020).

What role do these activists' constructions of deplatformization play in their community- and alliance-building practices?

The study finds that deplatformization prompts activists to adopt victimhood as a symbolic resource to facilitate an in-group sense of community, which provokes competing victimhood claims between affected actors, diminishing the potential for inter-group alliances.

Regarding community-building, the key findings underline that adjoining 'white victimhood' (Oaten, 2014; Lewis, 2018) is a novel techno-social sentiment of persecution constructed as a community bond to manufacture a countercultural appeal for their followers, similar to Jasser's (2021) findings on the alt-tech platform Gab. This tends to have a strong resonance with disaffected youth, and the grave consequences of that are well documented (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Nagle, 2017). The findings also highlight that bans serve as a social currency, meaning that the experience of techno-social abjection is not appropriated merely into a community-building practice, but becomes interwoven in the concrete social practice and meaning in the collectivity. In other words, the symbolic renderings of deplatformization are not just an added layer to their social world but are constitutive of it (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

In regard to inter-group relations, deplatformization provokes competitive victimhood, which inhibits alliance-building between affected far-right factions. While activists attempt to use the commonalities of deplatformization as a shared grievance to bridge any other previous disagreements and call for unity and solidarity, in practice they engage in competition over the symbolic resource of victimhood. Moreover, the reappropriated resource of techno-social victimhood becomes an active tool in establishing new lines of superiority and inferiority between affected factions. The findings contrast those of Jasser et al. (2021) on Gab, where the shared experience with platform suspension and collective frustration with Big Tech united diverse far-right beliefs. They also contradict a myriad of literature on far right indicating that shared grievances facilitate joint oppositions, and hence alliance-building between factions

(Durham & Power, 2010). A possible reason for this is that mainstream platform animosity is not a shared grievance in the sense of constituting a coherent issue cluster, as highlighted above. Rather, it is a strategically leveraged phantasm furthering other grievances. Another potential explanation is that by reappropriating the structure (i.e., the meanings imposed by moderation) into a resource (Giddens, 1984), being a victim is no longer merely a commonality, but foremost a resource where its value depends on scarcity and exclusivity. Particularly as deplatformization denies attention to hate actors, it strips away other symbolic resources, making novel resources all the more important to hold their influence. Further, the use of the time of the ban as one of the exclusionary victimhood criteria shows that the gradual administration of deplatforming plays into competitive victimhood. This indicates that a gradual approach might be a better solution to curb digital hate than outright removals, in addition to impeding inter-group coordination as Urman & Katz (2022) suggested.

In the context of countering the spread of digital hate, this presents a normatively positive development that importantly adds to academic inquiry into the aftermath of deplatformization. One of the key concerns about the broader societal trade-offs of deplatformization has been an accelerated coalescence of right-wing extremism within loosely moderated oxygen-giving alternative spaces (Jasser et al., 2021). Yet, in tandem, the competitive victimhood claims, seeding distrust in other factions, the diminished inter-group solidarity, and the overall highly divisive nature of the issue, suggest potential for further dispersion of the broader umbrella ‘dissident’ right movement.

Reflections on the Contribution to Knowledge, Limitations, and Future Work

Beyond the limits of the case, the findings highlight that much like any structure under the conditions of deep mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), moderation operates in a nonlinear way — and should be researched accordingly. As unprecedented shifts in web governance imprint themselves on the complex ground of social practice and meaning, they leave the affected collectivities changed as a result, impacting their belief systems, identities, and trajectories. The novel orientations that actors develop in response to techno-social abjection are not merely adding to their set of beliefs. They become constitutive elements, actively reshaping their social practices and action, not just at the moment of the intervention, but as increasingly stable elements underlying their identity and the ways they perceive and interact with others.

Ultimately, the present study sketches out merely one path for exploring this direction under the broader field of moderation studies, one that is a product of many trade-offs. Namely, the statements analysed were public-facing messages produced for the sympathisers. Important orientations and solidarity links could be developing behind closed doors, in virtual and offline spaces that researchers have little access to. Further comparative research is needed into the implications of deplatformization for the trajectory of digital hate factions, including within more ‘leaderless’ collectivities. Another important limitation is the lack of audience perspective in the present study. While the role of influential users in the overall orientation and direction of the movement is imperative (Freelon, 2020; Lewis, 2018), adopting an audience perspective would importantly add to this area of inquiry by shedding light on their followers' reception of the statements.

Despite these limitations, this thesis contributes valuable knowledge to the growing body of literature on the viability of deplatformization, and more broadly, the socio-cultural implications of platform moderation beyond the mainstream ecosystem. The adoption of a qualitative approach, which has insofar been largely absent from inquiry, reveals important micro-level implications not yet captured by computational metrics. Previous work has established that the movement of problematic users toward alternative spaces decreases their reach (Rogers, 2020) but ultimately leads to more activity and toxicity (Ali et al., 2021). This thesis adds that in reinterpreting and challenging platform moderation, hate actors (1) strengthen the conspiratorial narratives of oppression and provide further countercultural appeal, and (2) display contention rather than solidarity toward other targeted extremist actors. Further studies should explore this novel, normatively positive implication of competitive victimhood, to understand how best to administer bans to inhibit potential alliance-building between problematic actors.

Afterall, if there is one thing that became apparent throughout this thesis, it is that when tectonic shifts underlying the digital media landscape shape arguably one of the most encroaching social phenomena pestering political communication and our society at large, the aftermath matters – for all of us.

6. Reference List

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7. Appendices

Appendix I. Case Sampling

Sampling Criteria	Justification
Channel	Texts produced by influential movement activists, i.e., influential far-right Telegram channel creators, constitutes an approach of the highest validity in social movement frame analysis due to their influence over the movement group (Johnston, 2002; Johnston & Noakes, 2005). As such, channels are chosen over open discussion groups.
Public	The nature of platform use, research ethics.
Far-right	Relevance to the phenomena.
Prominent (6000+ subscribers)	A channel with a minimum of 6000 subscribers can be understood as prominent as it has roughly 3 times more followers than the average far-right extremist channel (Guhl & Davey, 2020; Walther & McCoy, 2020).
Created in 2019 (or before)	It was after the 2019 waves of bans, that Telegram became a prominent social space for the far right. Focusing on the channels already created then allows for more information on how framing might change over time.
News-based channels	Because of the interest in framing, I was primarily interested in channels producing <i>original</i> 'position statements or commentary on current events, as opposed to image- or video-based channels, or channels that largely forward content from other creators.

Table 3. Case Sampling Criteria

Based on these criteria, a list was compiled using *tgstat.com*. It included channels under the categories of politics, news, and media, as well as blogs. A smaller number of channels that met the criteria was also identified during the pre-pilot exploration.

Name	Classification	Subscribers	1 post reach	Citation Index	Date of Collection
Donald J. Trump	Politics	771,419	269100	522.6	07/03/2023
Donald Trump Jr	Politics	599,524	123900	503.7	07/03/2023
Project Veritas	Politics	453,450	213400	778.6	07/03/2023
James O'Keefe	Politics	292,191	161100	450	07/03/2023
Trump Supporters Channel us	Politics	243,529	31700	158.6	07/03/2023
GEORGENEWS	Politics	237,593	55000	485.9	07/03/2023
Fearless Report	Politics	222,688	11400	158.6	07/03/2023
Tim K.	Politics	157,085	90900	301.6	07/03/2023

Figure 2. A screenshot of the collected channel list.

Appendix II. Case Descriptions

Mark Adrian Collett

Collett is a British far-right political commentator and activist, often described as a neo-Nazi, far-right, white nationalist, antisemitic, and fascist (ADL, 2018; Murdoch, 2020; Nagesh, 2023; Townsend, 2021; Tsagkroni, 2021).

He served as a director of publicity in the far-right British National Party. In 2019, Collett founded a white nationalist group 'Patriotic Alternative' (PA). The PA is run by Collett and his deputy, Laura Tyrie (aka Laura Towler) who is also the editor of *Defend Evropa*, a network of European identitarian far-right activists.

The group has been organising offline and online activities. They maintain a strong online presence with daily blogs, weekly vlogs, and social media campaigns like 'White Lives Matter.' They also organise traditional conferences, distribute leaflets, hold events and coordinate demonstrations across the country (Murdoch, 2020). The UK advocacy group *Hope not Hate* warns that they have become one of the most 'prominent, largely because they have 'managed to attract a number of far-right social media influencers from the post-organisational online far-right to become active in a more traditional organisation' (Murdoch, 2020, p. 2).

Blair Cottrell

Cottrell is an Australian far-right extremist, loosely defined as a neo-Nazi and white nationalist (Campion, 2019). He is the founding member of two prominent Australian extremist groups: the nationalist group United Patriots Front (UPF) and a men-only white nationalist group Lads Society (Campion, 2019). Both emphasise anti-Muslim and anti-immigration rhetoric and have a strong digital presence, as well as organise offline activities such as rallies (Molloy, 2019). Cottrell has been convicted of several hate speech charges for inciting hatred against communities, as well as stalking and arson, and has spent time in prison (Molloy, 2019).

Hate Facts

Hate Facts is an anonymous channel. It publishes a podcast under the same title, affiliated with 'Murder the Media' video collective (Hsu & Weiner, 2022). The 'Murder the Media' community was founded by Nicholas DeCarlo and Nicholas Ochs, two active members of the

Proud Boys who also participated and were charged with the January 6 US Capitol Attacks (Lybrand, 2022). Ochs also founded the group's Hawaii section. The Proud Boys are an exclusively male North American far-right neo-fascist organization that primarily promotes and engages in political violence in the United States and was classified as a terrorist organisation in Canada and New Zealand.

Ideological positions that the group officially adopts include antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-communism, anti-immigration, anti-feminism, anti-LGBTQ rights, and Trumpism, yet many factions adhere to white supremacy (Hsu & Weiner, 2022; Kitts, 2022; Lybrand, 2022). The group initially started as an exclusively alt-right community but has since called for and participated in notable episodes of offline violence, rallies and demonstrations (Kitts, 2022; Lybrand, 2022).

Nicholas J. Fuentes

Fuentes is a young (24 at the time of writing) right-wing activist, organiser, and the host of the online programme 'America First', whose goal is largely thought to create a white nationalist alternative to the mainstream US conservative party, which he often targets (Anti-Defamation League, 2021; Hawley, 2021).

He is viewed as the leader and coordinator of a group that he refers to as 'Groyper' or the 'Groyper Army' (although the movement is not formally organised). The movement is seen as a residue of the declining alt-right in the US, as well as its updated version (Hawley, 2021). Hawley (2021, p. 234) sees them positioned at the 'point on the ideological spectrum that can appeal to both White nationalists and more conventional Republicans.' Concretely, while Fuentes does not introduce new ideas, he calls for a less aggressive and more 'mainstream' approach to appeal to larger numbers of Americans. By rebranding 'white nationalism' into 'American nationalism,' he avoids attacking liberal democracy and identifying with racial nationalism (Hawley, 2021). Rather, Fuentes speaks in favour of Christianity, white America, and against immigration (Anti-Defamation League, 2021; Hawley, 2021).

In terms of activities, Fuentes organises conferences (e.g., America First Political Action Conference, 2020; Big Tech Press Conference), attends other events associated with the far right (including the 2021 Capitol Riots), as well as coordinates his followers to carry out online campaigns (Anti-Defamation League, 2021).

Appendix III: Piloting Rounds for Data Collection, Sampling, and Analysis

The piloting rounds were conducted on the channel Hate Facts. First, three data collection options were tested: manual collection, HTML, and JSON. Telegram’s option to scrape all message history from the selected channels and return a simple HTML file, as well as photos and videos, was the fastest way to extract the data. However, the data could not easily be parsed into a spreadsheet usable in the analysis. When exporting the same data in the machine-readable JSON format, several issues arose due to the varying nesting structure of the code, meaning that this format could not be easily parsed and used either. In addition, the parsed format would not allow for the material to be interpreted in its context, i.e., images, videos, and important preceding and subsequent posts, as Figure 7 shows. Lastly, because of the high number of irrelevant posts returned by the specified keyword search, manual collection was ultimately the fastest option.



Figure 3. An example of why the textual material needed to be coded in the context.

This is why a decision was made to collect all material manually, which leaves some room for human error. However, given the qualitative nature of the study, potentially missing a small number of relevant posts is negligible (Bazeley, 2013).

In the next step of piloting, I tested sampling strategies. Using the Telegram interface, the search was first performed for key platform and corporation names (‘Twitter,’ ‘Facebook,’ ‘Meta,’ ‘Instagram,’ ‘YouTube,’ ‘Amazon,’ ‘Google,’ ‘Apple,’ ‘Microsoft,’ ‘Telegram’). Once these posts were collected and reviewed, several others were added based on common expressions used in regard to deplatformization (‘tech,’ ‘deplatform,’ ‘ban,’ ‘censor,’ ‘social

media’). During the pilot, *all* posts under these keywords were collected, which revealed that a high number of them are irrelevant and included no commentary on deplatformization, platforms, and moderation. Hence, the collected posts were systematically excluded, forming comprehensive exclusion criteria (see Appendix IV).

Lastly, a coding round was conducted with colour codes in Google Docs. Initially, three extra structuring elements for three framing elements (diagnostic, prognostic, motivational) were included alongside the *Codes* column. Several other frameworks were also tested, for example one that also included a column for in-group and out-group (perpetrators) collective identities. However, such an approach was found to slow down the work, unnecessarily fracturing the codes. It ultimately proved to be too rigid. Working with spreadsheets similarly proved to be inflexible, slowing down the coding pace. Often, an open code was made within the Codes column, but ultimately had to be moved to the Diagnostic or Prognostic columns. Additionally, this did not allow for one passage to be assigned multiple codes. Based on this, a decision was made to conduct coding in NVivo which allows for more flexibility in working with large quantities of data.

ID	Date	Forward	Context	Text	Codes
1	02/11/2019		Screenshot of a news article: 'MIGA: Zionist Organization of America Calls for Nick Fuentes To Be Deplatformed'	An anti-American organization in America calls for the deplatforming of someone who wants to put America first .	National identity, patriotism, individual v organisation, external pressure
2	15/12/2019			<p>Too many people conflate flaws in their behavior and personality with political persecution 99% of the time I see people complain about being banned from something (meaning by other people, not by Facebook/instagram/Twitter etc) and it had nothing to do with politics, it was all them. Sometimes a guy will post in a group "I was in the so and so chat calmly discussing the influence Israel has on American foreign policy, when suddenly the cuck admin banned me" then I'll go to that chat and read the guys posts and they'll have immediately opened with something like "hey you faggots, why are you afraid to talk about jews" I'd ban your ass too if I ran a chat and you came in like that. I'd ban you for the same reason I don't allow untrained dogs who scratch my couch and shit on the floor into my house. if you behave like an animal don't be surprised to be treated like one.</p> <p>If you're acting like that it means you're doing nothing to further the advancement of white people, Europeans, or western civilization in general, it also means you probably don't leave the house much Who do you want to be in this world, the guy that sends Nick Fuentes lemons on D-live, tweets that Charlie Kirk's a fag, then lays back in bed and goes "well my work to reclaim America from the corruption holding it is done, time to jerk off to porn of 18 yo runaways getting fucked by Jews while I eat a cheesburger" or the guy who's building his community, organizing with his people, and training his body to protect and provide for the family you want? This is all about family, children, and rebuilding community, if those aren't your goals than you're a literal waste of time and energy, let's work toward those goals together and quit fuckin around on the internet boys. @HateFacts.</p>	'untrained dogs', lack of proper conduct, building community, masculinity, internal division, advancement of white people, offline turn

Figure 4. Coding Pilot

Appendix IV. Data Sampling, Collection and Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion Criteria	Example
(1a) If the platform name is only within a link, while the content does not refer to the relevant topics	Conor McGregor stands with the people of East Wall in their opposition to the government dumping asylum seekers in their community. 🍌 IE twitter.com archive.vn (https://archive.vn/8hY08)
(1b) If the post does not refer to platforms at all	The new law being tabled by the Conservative Government aimed at banning Conversion Therapy isn't designed to stop woke institutions from indoctrinating children with transgender ideology, it is designed to prevent parents from stopping this indoctrination.
(2) If the post refers to the platform, but the discussion does not entail any ideas or sentiment regarding the platforms	Don't go to experimental therapy in Russia on the recommendation of your daughter and her Russian husband (who at the time was claiming he was possessed by a demon named Igor on his Facebook page), then get put into a coma for 9 days while said daughter trips around Europe with a pick-up-artist (not her husband).

Table 4. Post Exclusion Criteria.

The posts were collected manually, and sampling was performed at the same time. In other words, only relevant posts were collected. I collected the post, date, information on the origin or forwarded messages, and any information on the context of the post, i.e., accompanying visual material. Posts from each of the four cases were collected into their own dataset, which was then formatted (adding post IDs, white space removal, duplicate check, etc.) for import into the NVivo software, as Figure 5 shows.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	ID	Date	Forward	Fwd_from	Context	Text
114	ID_113	09/01/2021				Just so everybody understands, we are going to make this banning extremely painful for DLive. I am consulting with my lawyers about which legal options to pursue. Stay tuned to this channel, I will be calling on your help very shortly!
115	ID_114	10/01/2021				Free speech alternative to twitter and it's hosted by AMAZON??? With no backup or plan B? Give me a break, how stupid can you be
116	ID_115	10/01/2021				Parler is completely imploding, it's clear that Gab and Telegram are the only viable alternative social media platforms. I'm neither surprised nor upset to see Parler go, I never liked the app and I never liked the people running it. Always seemed to me to be a big grift.
117	ID_116	11/01/2021				If Trump's twitter ban catalyzes a viable solution to big tech censorship of conservatives then this will be the best possible outcome of the 2020 election. When it's just Alex Jones, Milo, Anglin, etc getting deplatformed, nobody bats an eye. But POTUS getting deplatformed elevates this issue to a global spotlight and hopefully will attract the attention of billionaires, mega-donors, and others who can do something about it. It creates urgency and attention. If a solution comes out of this then we are in a great position.
118	ID_117	12/01/2021				Vince James (Red Elephants) was banned from DLive yesterday! Follow his telegram channel to see how you can continue to find his content and support him. https://t.me/RealVincentJames
						These are challenging times but nothing that has

Figure 5. Data Collection and Preparation.

Appendix V. Deleted Messages Check

To perform a check for deleted messages, all four channel histories were exported in the machine-readable JSON format and parsed to .xlsx files. The number of deleted messages was then inferred from the largest message ID and the number of actual unique message ID available.

```
setwd("C:/Users/avsec/Downloads/Telegram Desktop/Export_1")
library(openxlsx)
library(rjson)
library(dplyr)

##Read in Data
tele_dat <- fromJSON(file = "result.json")

##Extract Messages
tele_dat2 <- tele_dat$messages

library(tidyjson)

##Flatten JSON
tele_dat_flat <- spread_all(tele_dat2, recursive = T, sep = ".")

##Drop first document, as it's a channel and not messages
tele_dat_flat <- tele_dat_flat[-1,]

##Build df
tele_df <- tele_dat_flat %>%
  select(id, type, date, text, from, from_id, photo, media_type, duration_seconds, forwarded_from,
  edited)

##Drop JSON Column
tele_df$..JSON <- NULL

##Write to Excel
library(openxlsx)

write.xlsx(tele_df, "Telegram Data Excel.xlsx")
```

Figure 6. R Code used for parsing machine-readable JSON export into .xlsx file in R Studio

Appendix VI. Data Analysis

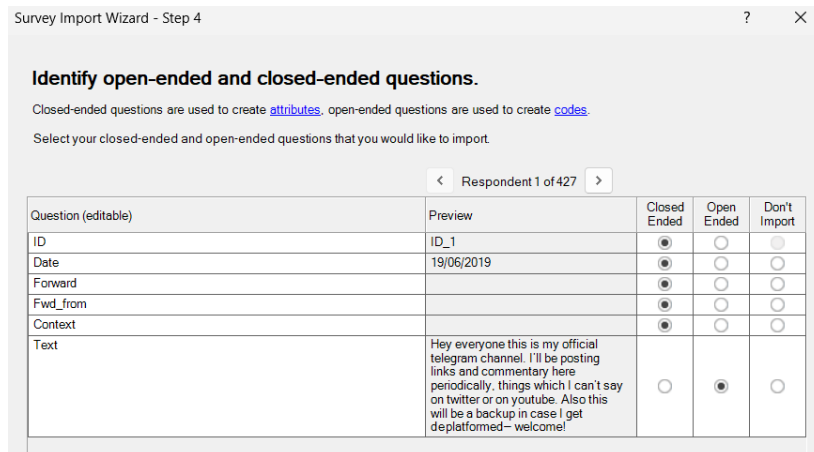


Figure 7. Data Import into NVivo

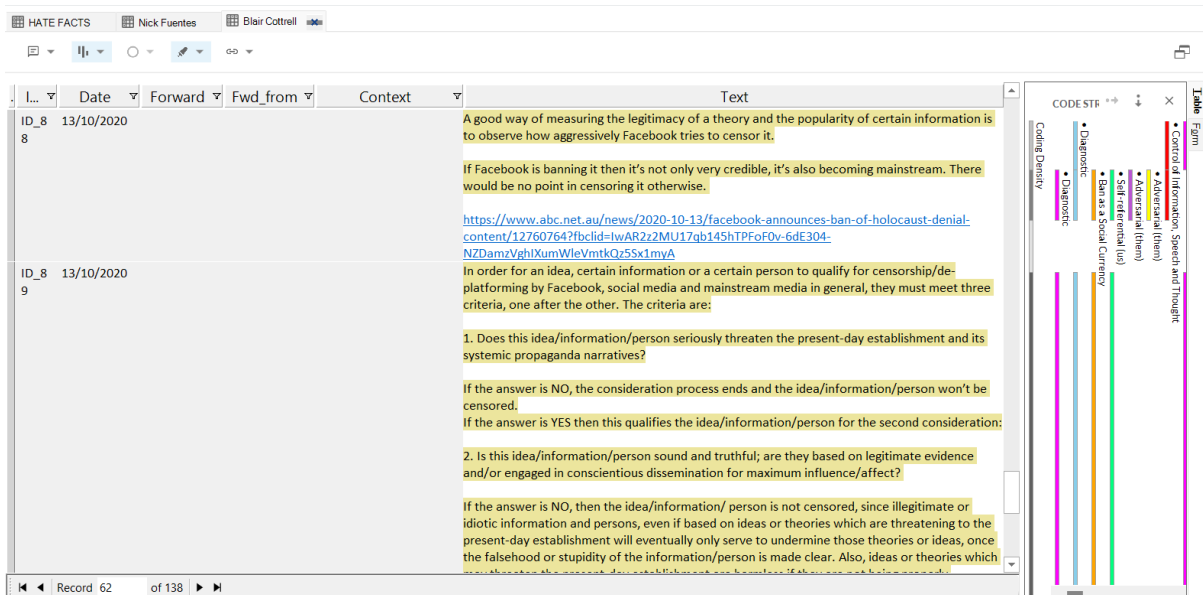


Figure 8. Working in NVivo

Name	Files	References
Diagnostic	4	659
Self-referential (us)	4	247
Adversarial (them)	4	344
Issue	4	68
Prognostic	4	144
Motivational	4	109
Other	4	69

Figure 9. The frame analysis framework which served as the basis for inductive open coding.

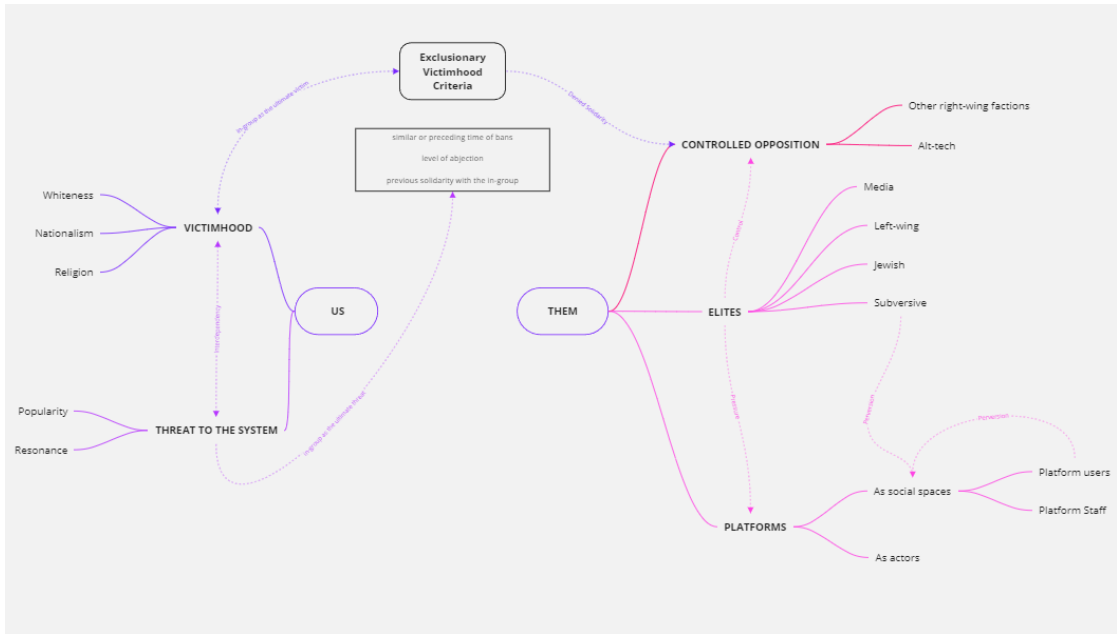


Figure 10. Mind map of collective identity constructs produced in the second analytical step.

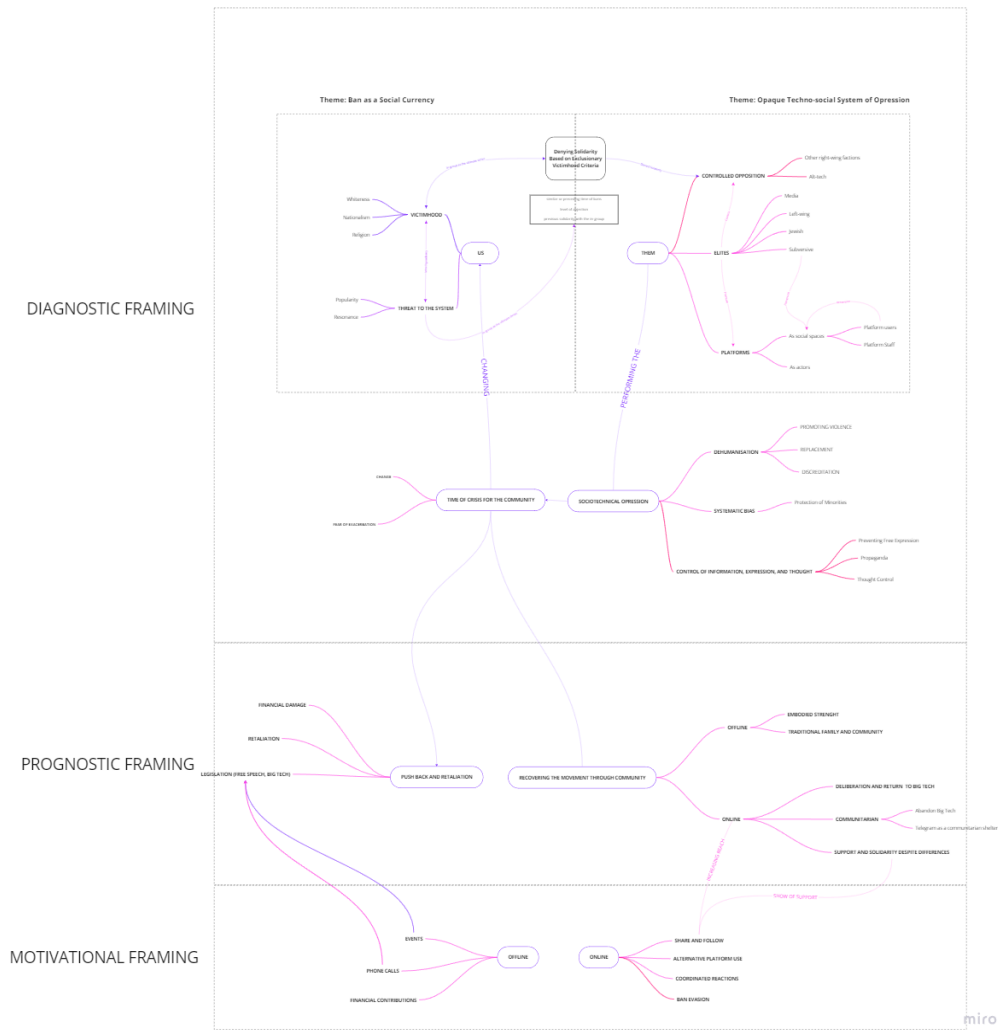


Figure 11. Mind map for shared framing reconstruction.

Appendix VII. Theme and Category Scheme

Theme	Main Category	Subcategory	Description	Excerpt
Diagnostic				
Acceleration	Change and time measures		Events of deplatformization as markers of change, precedents, or milestones.	Talk about slippery slopes, the precedent this sets truly marks a new era in the UK.
	Fear of Exacerbation		Emphasising that things are going to get worse, and that events of deplatformization are merely a start	PHASE TWO: Disable any forms of visible feedback for example; the YouTube dislike button - they can't stand it when people can express themselves freely [...] PHASE FOUR: Manufacture a fake series of polls to claim the public actually love all the diversity and white erasure to reinforce to those last few dissenting voices that they are a minority and out of step with society as a whole.
Techno-Social Tyranny and Oppression	Dehumanisation	Discreditation and Persecution	Moderation decisions are seen as a form of personal persecution for beliefs targeted individuals hold. Labelling individuals (e.g., 'dangerous', 'far-right') to discredit their ideas either through public discreditation of targeted individuals, or...	the only way to recover the ground they lost was to try to associate me with terrorism, delete, ban and censor me from everything, then drag me through the courts for hate-speech.
		Promoting Violence	Moderation decisions are believed to actively promote physical offline violence against the in-group.	“In a shocking update to its Community Standards, Facebook has said that calls for “high-severity violence” and “threats that could lead to death” are acceptable if they’re aimed at people who it deems to be “dangerous individuals.”
		Replacement	In their media products or official visual imagery, platforms are believed to be removing the in-group out of the representation, or performing historical revisionism of their role	Ever wondered by Google search results always feature so much diversity? Well, it's because that's what Google wants you to see. Google wants those in Western nations to accept their own replacement and subtly (or not so

			in history, and replacing the in-group with minority representation.	subtly) alters search results to manipulate public perception.
Systematic Bias	Protection of minorities		Moderation decisions are believed to actively cover up immoral and illegal behaviour by minorities.	You get banned on social media for commenting on the ethnicity of a non-white criminal.
	Anti-white and anti-conservative bias		Moderation decisions are believed to be adopted not because guiding norms, but unspoken and inherent bias against the in-group.	Social media companies don't have any standards, they just have one rule – if you are against the anti-white establishment, you are banned, if you are with anti-white establishment you can say whatever you want.
Control of Information, Speech and Thought	Propaganda		Platforms as the creators and enablers of political, social, and cultural propaganda	This is who Google decided to promote for today's doodle. When Google isn't promoting the evil of transgenderism it is promoting vile anti-White historic Black figures. Google must be stopped and those associated with these doodles need to be thrown in jail.
	Preventing Free Expression through Censorship and Suppression of Debate		Moderation decisions are interpreted as attempts to conceal and suppress certain points of view, and/or prevent discussion or minimise its potential.	Hundreds of Twitter accounts sharing video footage of mobs of antifa/BLM looting and beating people being suspended. Footage disappears from Twitter servers. Several accounts Trump shared footage from were suspended almost immediately.
	Thought control		Moderation guidelines seek to police thought and private beliefs, not just actions.	I don't need it anymore and its community standards are the most warped form of Orwellian thought control we have even seen.

Table 5. Diagnostic framing: issue

Theme	Main Category	Subcategory	Description	Excerpt
Adversarial (them)				
Opaque Techno-social system of oppression	Controlled Opposition	Alt-tech	Alt-tech platforms discussed as false alternatives to Big Tech, and/or lacking commitment to free speech.	There is zero point in bringing Parler back if it's just another Twitter that deplatforms the right.
		Other right-wing factions	Other right-wing factions that hold different views on deplatformization, or are subject to different treatment (i.e., are still allowed on the platforms), are discussed as a hoax opposition or collaborators that are being led, influenced, or otherwise controlled to various degrees by adversarial agents.	The fact that all of the prominent libertarians still have access to normie platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc. And haven't started setting up on telegram or Parler shows you one thing; the system does not see them as any sort of threat. The system sees libertarianism as a child that says "I hate you" to it's father, sure he is upset; but the child can never force his father to do anything. If your beliefs aren't considered a threat by the system, they aren't worth having.
	Platforms ('Big Tech')	As actors	Platforms are ascribed agency on their own, and discussed as player acting in their own commercial, social, or political interests.	Facebook is covering up all news of the attack on the teenage girl at a Melbourne train station by either censoring the footage of the attack or stating that it "factually did not happen".
		As perverted social worlds under internal and external control	Platforms are not given agency but are rather discussed as social spaces and/or worlds, internally controlled by staff and users, and externally by other elites.	Twitter has become nothing more than echo chamber for weirdos, degenerates and anti-whites.
	Elites	Perversion	Elites attempting to perpetuate perversion through spreading or promoting certain beliefs such as paedophilia, LGBTQ rights, feminism.	Literal pedophile communists making hundreds of thousands of dollars while we get demonized, slandered, and censored.

		Jewish	Jewish organisations and prominent individuals are believed to exert control over platforms.	Just a reminder that the decision to censor Trump on twitter and facebook on election day was made by the Anti-Defamation League
		Traditional Media	Traditional media organisations and professionals are believed to exert control over platforms.	The mainstream media's persistence in lying and making false associations between political dissidents and terrorism or "hate" seems to be at least one of the driving forces behind Facebook's new classification system on "dangerous individuals", which are people who are banned immediately along with any objective information on them, including even just images of them.
		State and international governance	State elites (parliamentary, juridical, etc.) and international organisations (e.g., European Union) are believed to exert control over platforms.	US federal officials reportedly colluded with social media companies to censor free speech.
		Left wing	Left-wing elites, both political parties and civil society and social movements are believed to hold control over platforms.	The Marxists who all remain on Facebook know about this but don't talk about it, because they quietly adore the fact that billionaire tech Lords grace them with totally free speech privileges, while classifying all of their most influential opponents as "dangerous" and banning them from sharing any content.
		Economic elites	Economic elites, either social classes or entities, are believed to exert control over platforms.	White journalists, Facebook and Twitter Marxists are the privileged, petty-bourgeoisie of the modern era
		Interconnected system	The system of oppression is interconnected, with multiple elites, platforms, and other actors acting together, or one exerting control over the others.	Jack and his Twitter staff, Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook, thousands of high-profile journalists, professors and government officials are all in direct association with, sympathetic to, representing and funding a terrorist organisation.

Table 6. Diagnostic Framing: Out-group

Theme	Main Category	Subcategory	Description	Excerpt
Self-referential (Us)				
Ban as a Social Currency	Victimhood	Individualism	The in-group is discussed in terms of victimhood by emphasising their individuality (versus the large system of oppression), as well as through discourse of harm. Victimhood is connected to various identities, such as racial (white), political beliefs (nationalism), religion (Christianity), and socioeconomic status (working class).	It's now me, a working man from the suburbs up against the highest levels of bourgeois state bureaucracy.
		Nationalism		nationalists who have been exposing the real agenda behind these restrictions were right all along.
		Whiteness		What words are white people allowed to say? Better ask Google!
		Religion		That's what I've done and now, after fully understanding the way the law is written and it's intended purpose, it's clear that it is a law specifically designed to be used against people like me and there really is no good defence against it when you're white or Christian.
		Working Class		The working masses aren't as stupid as you thought they were.
	Threat to the System	Awakening	The in-group is subject to moderation measures because they represent a threat to the system in power. The threat stems from their popularity among people, bravery, continuous resistance, and the potential of their ideas and activity to 'awaken' the masses to the wrongdoings and secret plots of the system.	In order for an idea, certain information or a certain person to qualify for censorship/de-platforming by Facebook, social media and mainstream media in general, they must meet three criteria, one after the other. The criteria are: 1. Does this idea/information/person seriously threaten the present-day establishment and its systemic propaganda narratives?
		Resistance		'crime' was merely pushing back against the liberal anti-white narrative
		Bravery		PewDiePie has not only shown real heart, but he has also exposed the truth
		Dissidence		anyone from the dissident right

		Popularity	<p>Is the idea/information/person popular or likely to become popular?</p> <p>If the answer is NO then the idea/information/person is generally not censored, since the lack of popularity may actually serve to discredit that idea/information/person in the eyes of the masses. However the idea/information/person will still be watched closely and carefully by the establishment and a reconsideration will be made if they begin to gain in popularity.</p>
Abjection as a Quality measure		Being subjected to censorship or bans is utilised to in self-branding or to promote content. The more censored or banned the individual or a piece of content, the higher quality of their ideas, their value to the movement, and their threat potential to opponents.	If you haven't been banned from any of that gay silicon valley tech shit you're doing conservatism wrong, and if you've been banned from all of it you're probably doing it better than anyone.
Denying Solidarity based on Exclusionary Victimhood Criteria	Level of abjection	Whether or not someone is granted solidarity for being a target of moderation system, depends on whether they meet victimhood criteria, which stem from time of their ban, level of censorship, and whether they showed previous solidarity to the in-group.	<p>However, I don't feel any sympathy for Trump.</p> <p>He did not stand up for his core supporters.</p> <p>Where was Trump when Milo Yiannopoulos got de-platformed and hounded by the media?</p> <p>Where were any of the mainstream conservatives for that matter?</p>
	Previous solidarity		
	Time of the ban		

Table 7. Diagnostic Framing: In-group

Theme	Main Category	Subcategory	Description	Excerpt
Prognostic				
Strengthening the movement	Online	Communitarian Future by Abandoning Big Tech	The movement needs to abandon the Big Tech, stop trying to return, and build a self-sufficient alternative ecosystem.	I think it's interesting how people will continue to use Twitter or Facebook right up until they're banned. They won't choose to stop using these platforms because everybody of any real value is getting banned, or because any time they spend on there is ultimately worthless because they're bound to get banned too sooner or later, they'll just continue to spend hours of their time scrolling the app and keep posting right up until they're banned.
			Telegram is superior to mainstream platforms due to its lack of democratic mechanisms	This is such a mood. I sent out two tweets on Easter Sunday after giving it up for Lent & can say: I didn't miss it. Telegram is superior. Wanna know why? It's less democratic. No I don't feel like spelling it out. No I don't want to do research for you. And no, I dgaf what you think, person w pronouns in your bio.
		A Pushback for a Deliberative Future by Returning to Big Tech	The movement needs to return to Big Tech to continue to awake others of the truth. This entails changes within the movement (less incivility) and pushing back and retaliating against the platforms (financial damage, legal regulation).	Any "model" legislation fighting Big Tech censorship needs "clear definitions, effective protections, and strong punitive enforcements." DeSantis-backed bill falls short. FIX!
				Last year I had 136 million impressions in 90 days on twitter... when we get back it's so over for them Sometimes a guy will post in a group "I was in the so and so chat calmly discussing the influence Israel has on American foreign policy, when suddenly the cuck admins banned me" then I'll go to that chat and read the guys posts and they'll have immediately opened with something like "hey you [REDACTED], why are you afraid to talk about jews" I'd ban your ass too if I ran a chat and you came in like that. I'd ban you for the same reason I don't allow untrained dogs who scratch my couch and shit on the floor into my house, if you behave like

				an animal don't be surprised to be treated like one.
	Offline Turn	Physical Strength	Emphasising that the movement needs to pay more attention to the offline world in order to survive, i.e., by starting or nurishing the offline community, as well as training their bodies, finding wives and having children.	Who do you want to be in this world, the guy that sends Nick Fuentes lemons on D-live, tweets that Charlie Kirk's a ■■■, then lays back in bed and goes "well my work to reclaim America from the corruption holding it is done, time to jerk off to porn of 18 yo runnaways getting fucked by Jews while I eat a cheesburger" or the guy who's building his community, organizing with his people, and training his body to protect and provide for the family you want?
		Family and Community		
	Support and Solidarity despite differences	/	The movement needs everyone to show support and solidarity despite any disagreements or differences, because the enemy sees them all the same.	I know some of you hate me for reasons but remember THEY view all of us the exact same way. THEY don't make a distinction as to who we are and the little differences we may have in ideology or methodology. THEY view us all as EXACTLY the same. You know I'd do it for you...and I'll probably have to one day soon. I won't forget your solidarity when it INEVITABLY happens to you.

Table 8. Prognostic Framing

Main Category	Subcategory	Example
Motivational		
Online	Share/Follow	Help us get reach for our politically incorrect games nonetheless - share and follow our channels on Gab and Gettr and most importantly: Share this Telegram Channel far and wide!
	Alternative platform use	please support your favourite creators on BitChute: https://www.bitchute.com/
Offline	Events	Today is the day!! Come on out to the Big Tech censorship rally in Palm Beach, FL where we will be rallying in support of strengthening the FL Big Tech Bill!
	Phone calls to representatives	Call the number and say you think Facebook is radicalizing your friends to push for Zionist interests in America and the West.
	Financial contributions	If you stand with me please help me send a message to the ENEMIES of freedom by contributing whatever you can today. I am still \$7.5k short of my goal and today is the day. [...] DONATE: https://secure.anedot.com/wendyrogersforazsenate/sr

Table 9. Motivational Framing (Action calls)

Main Category	Subcategory	Additional	Description	Excerpt
Other				
Information Sharing	/	/	Key updates (e.g., deplatforming of new actors, changes in platform moderation and ownership) discussed without detectable sentiment or emotion.	White Unity Project has been Google banned.
Methods of Validation	Distrust	/	Seeding epistemic doubt in ideas, individuals, groups, and institutions.	All “the far right” or “the alt right” actually was, was a loose network of folks who attacked what the media and government officials were obliged to defend, thereby exposing them
	Pluralism	Personal stories/beliefs	Drawing on personal experience and beliefs to support claims,	Subscribe to my brother Invictus. He and I once saved some college girls from a crazy homeless guy that was harassing them late at night.
		Insider knowledge	Using platform staff testimonies as a source of credibility.	Former Google tech engineer explores Jewish influence in the world today.
		Factual events	Incorporating parts of factual transpired events to establish credibility.	“In a shocking update to its Community Standards, Facebook has said that calls for “high-severity violence” and “threats that

				could lead to death” are acceptable if they’re aimed at people who it deems to be “dangerous individuals.”[...] Facebook designated me as a “dangerous individual”.
		Futuristic Imaginary	Invoking futuristic imaginaries as support for claims about the present-day situation.	You should be worrying about how you're going to survive the next few years. [...] People who hate you and want to kill you are writing your nation's laws, controlling the information you can access, "educating" your children, giving the police and military officers their orders. [...] it'll be made virtually impossible for anybody on "the right" to communicate.

Table 10. Other Categories

Fuentes/First coding round/Memoes

- Starts already talking about big tech in 2019
- Embracing communitarian telegram as well as deliberation on Twitter
- Major focus on Twitter
- Divisions because they have different visions for the future relationship between the broader community and mainstream platforms
- Success is measured against time, a measure of time, milestones
- Other elites controlling platforms → no agency
 - vs exercising control (Big Tech)
- Battle for the mainstream (Twitter) upon return
- Mainstream conservatives only claiming victimhood/bans to appear relevant
- Other alt-tech as controlled opposition
- Seen as a time of a test for the community
- Social currency to build trust
 - If you are allowed to claim victimhood, your opinion on big tech matters more
→ credibility
- Big Tech as a filter issue
 - Even above Israel disagreements

Figure 13. An excerpt from a coding memo produced for the case of Fuentes during the first coding round.