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A wolf in sheep's clothing: a mixed-methods analysis of the far-right alt-tech social media movement

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A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of the Far-Right Alt-Tech Social Media Movement

Jonathan Collins

A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing
A Mixed-Methods Analysis of the Far-Right Alt-Tech Social Media Movement

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Abstract

The far-right encultures an expansive online network and content milieu that aims to cater for its participants' diverse needs. However, the counter-cultural activities and narratives connected to the movement triggered large tech corporations (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft) to act, deplatforming their content, systems, and userbase off their 'Big Tech' platforms. In reaction, an alternative ecosystem of websites (Alt-Tech) was developed to maintain sociality and to continue peddling an alternative ontology. And while millions of users flock to these spaces as bastions for far-right ideologies and communications, academic attention is sparce and fixated on one-dimensional extremist patterns of the phenomena. To bring research on Alt-Tech up to the level of other extreme platforms and communities, I aim to unpack the essential social drivers – community, collectives, narratives, and ontologies – which proliferate and maintain the success of one of these platforms, Gab Social. Through an experiential and holistic investigation into the behavioural dynamics of the platform's participants, the thesis unpacks the numerous processes mobilising, connecting, recruiting, and perpetuating these far-right environments. Told as a multi-encompassing storyline, through five published articles, capturing the different elements of the Gab Social's success, each chapter contributes an elaborate piece to the puzzle, from (1) the rise of far-right extremism to (2) the connection making means of Neo-Nazis, (3) the utilisation of insecurity to mobilise support, (4) the construction of identity and a unified community, and (5) the emotional connection to Gab Social as a new home. These findings culminate towards an overarching theoretical contribution, decentralised sociality. The research employs a qualitative mixed-methods approach – with netnography as the baseline – to examine these phenomena thoroughly, thematically, and interpretively.

Keywords: Far-Right, Social Media, Alt-Tech, Netnography, Online Extremism, Group Identity

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