PERFORMING POLITICS FROM THE MARGINS: POLITICAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN RADICAL RIGHT ONLINE COMMUNITIES



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BACKGROUND

THE CONTEXT

- The far-right riots across the UK in the summer of 2024 and recent **Unite the Kingdom** march brought **underlying social tensions** to the surface.
- **Reform's growing popularity** has seen **a growth in far-right rhetoric** in public and political discourse, particularly around immigration.
- **Globally**, far-right parties are seeing **a surge in popularity**.
- Social media has led our lives to become **increasingly polarised** (Martin, 2025).









RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. WHAT POLITICAL IDENTITIES DO THE RADICAL RIGHT CONSTRUCT FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR FOLLOWERS ON TWITTER?

2. HOW ARE THESE IDENTITIES LINGUISTICALLY AND VISUALLY CONSTRUCTED?

3. HOW DO RADICAL RIGHT GROUPS REPRESENT THEMSELVES AS LEGITIMATE POLITICAL ACTORS WHILE REMAINING OUTSIDE THE POLITICAL MAINSTREAM?

IDENTITY & THE RADICAL RIGHT

- The **social positioning** of **self** and **other** (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005: 598).

- Extremist sympathisers typically **lack a strong sense of self and social belonging** (Bowman-Grieve, 2009; Koehler, 2014; Webber and Kruglanski, 2017).

- Extremist groups **capitalise on social frustrations** to argue there is "a **growing perceived disadvantage of their cultural identity** (whiteness, male, straight, etc.)" (Hope Not Hate, 2023: 11).



APPROACH

THE DATA



THE EDL

Far-right
8-month period
3,229 tweets
50,670 words
681 images

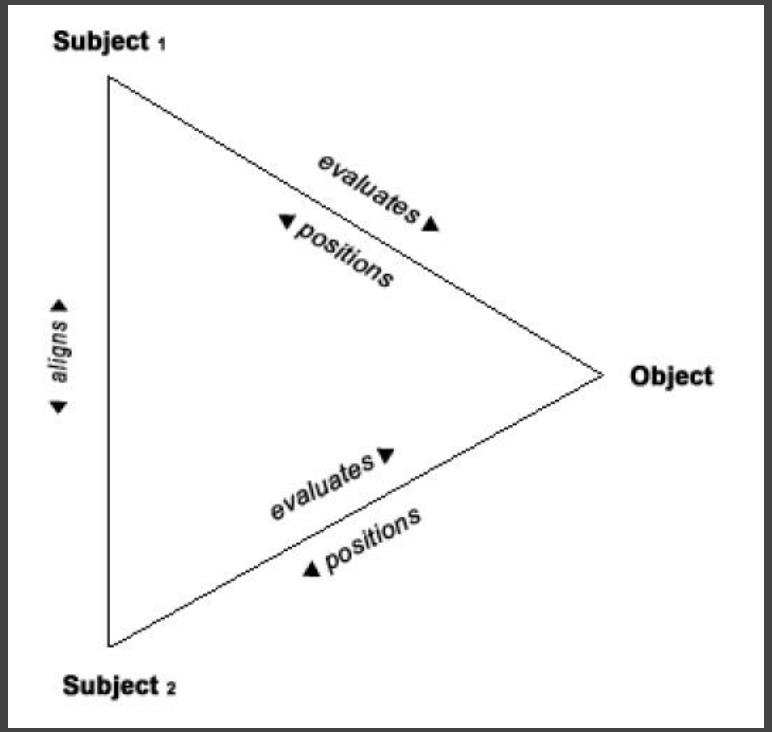
SIEGE CULTURE

Extreme right
8-month period
407 tweets
4,812 words
6 images

GENERATION IDENTITY

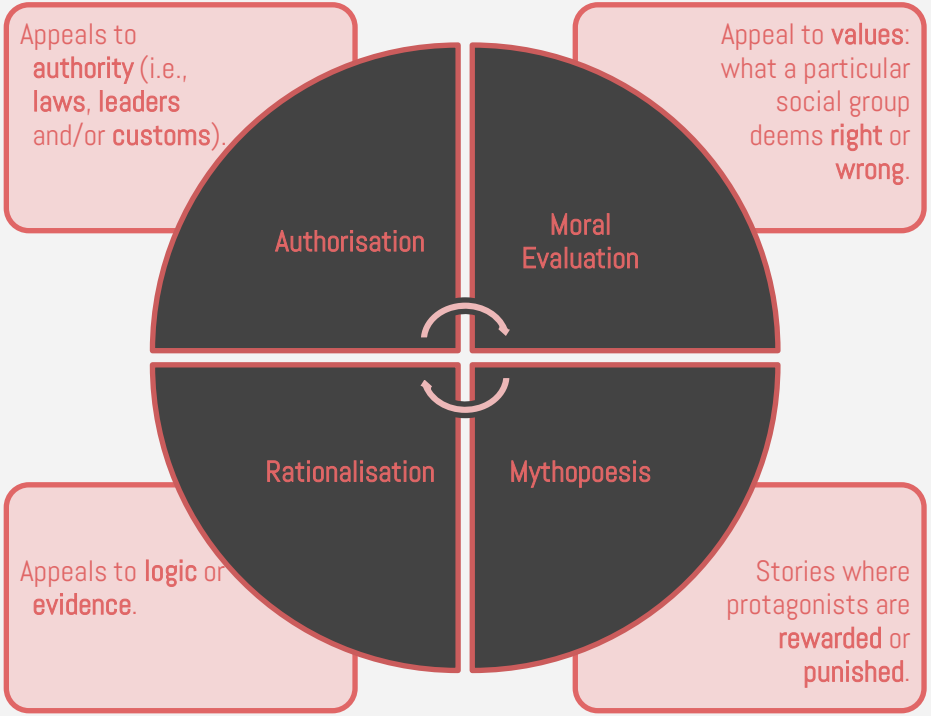
Unclassified
10-month period
1,332 tweets
25,716 words
87 images

STANCE ANALYSIS



Du Bois (2007: 163)

LEGITIMATION



van Leeuwen (2007)

DATA ANALYSIS: POLITICAL ROLES

POLITICAL ROLES



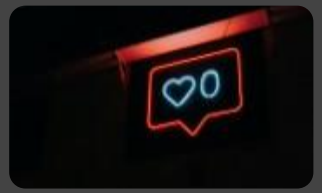
THE CANVASSER

An attempt by the RRG to **persuade those not affiliated with the organisation** to **support the group and/or their beliefs**.



THE CHAMPION

When the RRG **enthusiastically supports** and/or **defends** an **individual**, **political ideology** and/or **cause**.



THE INFLUENCER

An attempt by the RRG to **influence and/or shape another's opinions** through their **social media use**.



THE EXPERT

- An attempt by the RRG to **demonstrate their political expertise and knowledge**.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSIONS

- Radical right groups **perform politics from the margins**, adopting roles recognisable from mainstream politics.
- **Language and visuals combine** to **normalise extremist positions** as common sense.
- Radical right groups **use their outsider status as a strength**: **they gain authority** and **influence debate without seeking formal accountability**.
- Studying these processes is **vital** for understanding **how extremist ideas migrate into the mainstream**.



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