



Citation: Battista, D. & Gallina, M. (2025). Counter-Resistant Digital Communities: The Impact of Truth Social in a Fragmented Society. *Società Mutamento Politica* 16(32): 37-47. doi: 10.36253/smp-16188

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Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

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Counter-Resistant Digital Communities: The Impact of Truth Social in a Fragmented Society

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Abstract. In today's digital landscape, social media platforms serve as central spaces for political communication and community building. However, the growing fragmentation of information has fostered ideological polarization and the emergence of closed environments, such as Truth Social, launched by Donald Trump following his exclusion from traditional channels. Focusing on the U.S. case, this study examines how Truth Social functions as a refuge for groups perceived as isolated from mainstream discourse, offering a context of cultural and political "resistance" that often conveys identitarian and exclusionary visions. The article explores communicative dynamics and the construction of political identity within this alternative digital space, where the algorithm rewards engagement regardless of the reliability of the content. The result is a progressive radicalization, fuelled by echo chambers and filter bubbles that strengthen internal cohesion and limit democratic dialogue. Through an illustrative comparative reading of significant posts published by Trump on Truth Social, X, Instagram, and TikTok during the 2024 presidential campaign, the study highlights differences in tone, political purpose, and rhetorical strategies. While Truth Social fosters a direct, intimate, and polarizing communication with Trump's electoral base, the other platforms reveal a more strategic and performative use of language. The text technically emphasizes how Truth Social is not merely a distribution tool but rather a true space of ideological belonging, contributing to the formation of closed communities and the radicalization of public opinion. The article thus offers a critical reflection on the role of alternative platforms in reshaping the public sphere and the democratic implications of growing digital segmentation.

Keywords: truth social, polarization, digital communities, political communication, ideological identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current socio-political landscape, the rise of digital technologies – particularly the internet and social media platforms – has triggered a substantial reconfiguration of communicative and participatory practices among

individuals. These mechanisms go beyond the mere mediation of social interactions; they assume a structuring role in the architecture of social relationships and in shaping democratic practices (Loader and Mercea 2011). The public sphere has been markedly amplified in the digital realm, giving rise to new models of aggregation, deliberation, and collective mobilization. According to Castells (2015), digital networks constitute the core infrastructure of new social movements, enabling more horizontal communication, less constrained by traditional media channels. From this perspective, social media not only broaden the visibility of political demands but also redefine the very modalities of participation by promoting forms of “connective” activism (Bennett and Segerberg 2012), characterized by individualized engagement coordinated through digital technologies. Several studies have highlighted how these tools have reshaped the social and political spheres, influenced not only interpersonal relationships but also formed of activism and civic engagement (Boulianne 2015; Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2012). It is therefore argued that the use of social media has a significant impact on social life and political participation, facilitating access to information, the construction of social networks, and collective mobilization. Indeed, social platforms are not limited to being entertainment spaces but become genuine “digital squares” where opinions are formed, values shared, and political causes promoted. Clearly, digital networks are also central to new forms of political communication, encouraging more horizontal and decentralized participation (Battista 2024a), while also fostering active citizenship that promotes a sense of belonging and collective responsibility (Dahlgren 2009). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the influence of the digital dimension on participation is not exclusively positive, as the algorithmization of information, echo chambers, and misinformation often hinder the openness of democratic debate (Sunstein 2007, Pariser 2011). Yet it is equally undeniable that the digital ecosystem today represents one of the main channels through which citizens get informed, organize, and participate actively in political life. It has thus become widely acknowledged that in the digital age, virtual arenas have become the new agora’s of political communication and community building. At the same time, the proliferation of such spaces has generated a fragmentation of public opinion and increasing polarization among political groups. One emblematic case is Truth Social, a digital realm created at the initiative of Donald Trump in reaction to the censorship he experienced on more traditional social media platforms. This paper aims to explore how Truth Social functions as a refuge and space of cultural and political resistance

for those social groups perceived as marginal or excluded from dominant discursive arenas, and how this fragmentation of digital communities contributes to intensifying the socio-political divisions of our time. The analysis of this platform allows for a deeper reflection on the complex dynamics of political communication and community formation in an increasingly atomized digital universe. Unlike social media giants such as Facebook, Instagram, X, and TikTok, Truth Social targets a politically homogeneous audience, often perceived as excluded from mainstream debate. In this light, the examination of the content published by Donald Trump proves essential, as his use of the platform offers meaningful insights into how communication strategies vary depending on the medium. It is, however, necessary to point out that this community does not oppose the neoliberal paradigm; rather, it represents the mirror image of those advocating for justice and social equity. It positions itself as a defender of the status quo, opposing demands for reform and social emancipation (Antonucci *et al.* 2024). Far from being a progressive force, it embodies the crystallization of rigid worldviews and exclusionary logics. It is no secret that the messages and networks surrounding the re-elected President of the United States promote political and ideological orientations that run counter to the inclusive, solidaristic, and justice-driven principles typically associated with cultural and political resistance. These communities advance exclusive visions and the protection of elite interests, supporting narratives favouring a return to authoritarian or ultraconservative power structures, thus fueling further polarization (Lieberman *et al.* 2019). To better understand the impact of this platform, we adopt an illustrative comparative reading of Trump’s most engaging posts, juxtaposing those published on Truth Social with others disseminated on mainstream platforms. This approach is not intended to be generalizable, but it allows us to examine the rhetorical strategies employed by the leader to mobilize his audience, and to trace platform-specific variations in discursive style and affective appeal. What emerges is a picture of Truth Social as a cradle for a closed and ideologically homogeneous political community, one that reinforces in-group identification and deepens polarization when compared to the more heterogeneous and performative environments of mainstream social media.

2. PARTISAN SELECTIVE EXPOSURE IN CHANGING INFORMATION ENVIRONMENTS

The concept of *partisan selective exposure* refers to individuals’ tendency to favour information sources that

align with their existing political attitudes and ideological predispositions (Stroud 2017). This phenomenon is rooted in the psychological mechanism of *confirmation bias*, the cognitive inclination to seek, interpret, and remember information in ways that confirm pre-existing beliefs while avoiding contradictory evidence (Nickerson 1998). In the context of political communication, this means that voters tend to gravitate towards media outlets, and channels that reinforce their partisan views, avoiding those that might challenge or undermine their convictions. However, the extent and consequences of partisan selective exposure are profoundly shaped by the nature of the broader information environment (Strömback *et al.* 2023). In a *low-choice information environment*, such as the broadcast media landscape of the mid-20th century, the limited availability of channels and content meant that individuals had relatively little control over what political information they encountered. While selective exposure was still possible – for instance, by choosing a preferred newspaper or news anchor – media scarcity also led to a degree of incidental exposure (Bennett and Iyengar 2008). Citizens might come across political news not because they actively sought it, but because there were few alternatives: political content was often embedded in general-interest programming, and media outlets tended to share a set of professional norms that guaranteed a basic level of exposure to shared political facts. For example, during the era of limited broadcast television in Italy, evening news programmes such as RAI's *Telegiornale* were part of a shared national media experience. Regardless of political orientation, most viewers were exposed to the same content, simply because there were few alternatives. Television itself functioned as a collective ritual: programmed like the *Telegiornale*, followed by light entertainment/advertisement shows such as *Carosello* (Giusto 2021), were watched simultaneously by a large share of the population, effectively synchronizing daily life and fostering a common public sphere. In such a context, even politically uninterested individuals would often encounter political news as a by-product of routine media consumption. By contrast, in today's *high-choice information environment*, shaped by the digital revolution, the proliferation of cable, online platforms, and social media has dramatically expanded both the quantity and diversity of available content (Prior 2007). This transformation has brought about two key forms of media fragmentation: horizontal fragmentation, or the growth in the number of outlets within the same genre or function (e.g., multiple partisan news channels); and vertical fragmentation, which refers to the growing variety of content types, from hard news to entertainment and lifestyle program-

ming (Prior 2005, Webster and Ksiazek 2012). This high-choice environment enables much more refined and consistent partisan selective exposure. Individuals can now curate their media diet in ways that almost entirely shield them from cross-cutting perspectives. More critically, however, the explosion of entertainment options means that many users opt out of political information altogether, favouring non-political content over news. This shift reduces the likelihood of incidental or inadvertent learning – the process by which citizens acquire political information passively while consuming general media (Prior 2005). One major consequence of the shift to a high-choice information environment is the potential intensification of the *political knowledge gap*. In the broadcast era, even politically uninterested or less sophisticated citizens were regularly exposed to major political events and institutional processes through routine media use. This incidental exposure functioned as a minimal informational safety net, ensuring that most individuals had at least a basic awareness of political developments (Bennett and Iyengar 2008). In contrast, the contemporary media environment enables individuals with low political interest to entirely opt out of political information flows. With countless entertainment and lifestyle alternatives available at all times, politically disengaged users are now able to construct information diets that are completely devoid of public affairs content (Prior 2005, Wei and Hindman 2011). This voluntary disconnection from political information can lead to a widening divide between politically attentive citizens – who may become increasingly informed and active – and those who remain systematically uninformed. Such dynamics challenge the normative ideal of an informed electorate and risk reinforcing inequalities in political competence and participation. A second, and perhaps equally troubling, development is the emergence of *echo chambers*. As individuals gain greater autonomy in curating their media environments, many tend to surround themselves with information sources that confirm and amplify their pre-existing beliefs. In these fragmented and self-selected media spaces, exposure to alternative perspectives becomes increasingly rare. Political discussions and content circulate within ideologically homogeneous networks, leading to a reduction in cross-cutting exposure, a reinforcement of in-group identities, and a growing intolerance toward dissenting views (Hobolt *et al.* 2024). Echo chambers are not merely spaces of like-minded discussion; they actively filter and frame reality in ways that deepen epistemic closure. These dynamics are often cited as drivers of affective polarization – the tendency of individuals to dislike, distrust, and even dehumanise members of opposing political groups

(Törnberg *et al.* 2021). However, the empirical evidence on this link remains mixed. While some studies have documented a correlation between selective exposure and increased partisan animosity (Stroud 2010; Lelkes *et al.* 2017), other research challenges this assumption. For instance, Barberá (2014), in a comparative study of Germany, Spain, and the United States, find that social media use may in fact *reduce* mass political polarisation by exposing users to a greater diversity of viewpoints than previously assumed (see also Nyhan *et al.* 2023). These contrasting findings suggest that the relationship between echo chambers and affective polarisation may be highly context-dependent, shaped by platform-specific algorithms, national media systems, and users' individual predispositions. Consequently, while the potential for echo chambers to exacerbate democratic fragmentation remains real, their actual impact may vary significantly across settings. Closely related to the notion of echo chambers is the concept of filter bubbles. Coined by Eli Pariser (2011), the term refers to algorithmically curated information environments that selectively present users with content that aligns with their previous behaviours, preferences, and ideological leanings. While echo chambers arise primarily from users' active choices to surround themselves with like-minded content, filter bubbles represent a more passive form of information isolation, driven by the invisible logic of algorithmic recommendation systems. These algorithmic systems – embedded in platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Google – are designed to maximise user engagement by predicting and prioritising content that aligns with a user's past behaviour. As a result, users are not only shielded from counter-attitudinal information but are also rarely aware of the curation process itself, which remains proprietary and opaque. The personalisation logics that govern digital information flows are neither neutral nor transparent; they shape not only what users see, but also what they do not see. The lack of transparency in algorithmic curation raises significant normative questions. In contrast to the editorial accountability of traditional media institutions, algorithmic systems offer little insight into how information is ranked, filtered, or excluded. Moreover, while algorithmic personalisation can reinforce ideological bias and polarisation, its effects are neither uniform nor universally negative. Some studies suggest that algorithms may actually increase exposure to diverse viewpoints, depending on user behaviour, platform design, and national context (Barberá 2014; Flaxman *et al.* 2016). However, the unpredictability of these effects only amplifies concerns about the democratic implications of algorithmically mediated information environments. From a normative perspective, the

fragmentation and personalisation of political information challenge several pillars of democratic theory. First, they undermine the notion of a shared public sphere in which citizens deliberate on common issues from a commonly accessible set of facts. Second, they foster asymmetries in political knowledge and engagement, as only some users are continuously exposed to civic content. Third, they may exacerbate affective polarisation, even if not uniformly, by reinforcing partisan identity and mutual distrust among citizens. Ultimately, the transition to a high-choice, algorithmically curated media environment raises pressing questions about the quality of democratic discourse, the representativeness of public opinion, and the resilience of democratic institutions. As citizens increasingly inhabit fragmented informational worlds, the challenge becomes not only how to inform, but how to reconnect publics across cognitive, ideological, and emotional divides. Against this backdrop, Truth Social can be seen as a paradigmatic case of how digital platforms both reflect and reshape the mechanisms of partisan selective exposure. By analysing the communicative strategies adopted by Trump across different platforms, we can better understand how platform affordances, audience expectations, and ideological cues interact to produce distinct rhetorical styles and community effects.

3. THE DIGITAL COMMUNITY AND TRUTH: ANTIDOTE VS. SYMPTOM

Whenever democracy shows signs of fatigue or manifests true pathologies – such as electoral disengagement, extreme polarization, or technocratic drift – a strong desire for community resurfaces, albeit often in conflicting and fragmented ways. This need is not merely propagandistic or reactionary but rather expresses a concrete urge to reclaim the political sphere by individuals who feel excluded and disoriented within what Rosanvallon (2014) defines as “the democracy of disenchantment”. In truth, as early as 1982, Nisbet had already drawn a clear line, identifying the dissolution of community ties as one of the defining features of modernity, asserting that the contemporary individual is forced to confront a pervasive institutional loneliness. In such a context, community is not only a refuge but also a form of resistance and a space for the reinvention of the political. Bauman (2003) also spoke of “community as a response to fear,” where the pursuit of community stems from a need for security in a liquid, fragmented world marked by economic and cultural uncertainties. In this sense, the crisis of democracy reactivates the desire for belonging, but also the ten-

sion between inclusion and the risk of exclusion – as Balibar (2017) aptly points out when he states that “community is also always a border: what holds together also separates.” In post-democratic times, community can thus become both antidote and symptom: it can give rise to new practices of solidarity, mutualism, and active citizenship, but it can also be captured by identitarian, exclusionary, or even authoritarian rhetoric. The persistent “longing for community,” then is ambivalent: it can open radical spaces of participatory democracy or harden into closed and nostalgic communitarianism’s. It depends on how it is interpreted and activated – whether as openness to the other or as a defensive retreat, as a political process or an imaginary refuge. Truth Social positions itself as an alternative to mainstream social media platforms, claiming to offer a space of truth and resistance against censorship, “wokeness,” and group-think. However, this is a deeply mystified vision. Rather than challenging the neoliberal model, Truth embodies a fully compatible derivation of it: a form of right-wing counter-hegemony. After all, neoliberalism does not eliminate politics – it reformulates it as a framework of identitarian passions (Brown 2015). And it is precisely in this theatre that Truth Social inserts itself: a bubble in which the individual, detached from any collective bond, asserts an absolute negative freedom – often equated with the right to say anything, including hate speech, conspiracy theories, and disinformation. In this sense, Truth Social does not represent a resistance to power, but a reversed performativity of it – a kind of false counter-public sphere, where subaltern subjects construct counter-narratives not for emancipation, but to reinforce a wounded and reactionary identity (Fraser 2001). On the one hand, various social justice movements – from Black Lives Matter to Me Too – have used digital infrastructures to create forms of collective and horizontal mobilization, opposing different forms of oppression (Crenshaw 1991, Tufekci 2017). On the other hand, platforms like Truth Social represent their mirror image. Rather than offering a space for dialogue, Truth Social emerges as a habitat designed to reinforce a conservative and often supremacist collective identity, simulating the discursive and symbolic codes of resistance (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). This dynamic fits into a broader manifestation of the co-optation of dissent language by reactionary movements, which exploit the rhetoric of censorship, free speech, and “reverse oppression” to consolidate a symbolic order that, in fact, reproduces existing social hierarchies (Farkas and Schou 2018). Truth Social – founded by Donald Trump following his exclusion from X (formerly Twitter) – positions itself as a “safe space” for the political imaginary of the Alt-Right, reversing the

logic of the platform as a public space and turning it into a self-referential bubble (Marwick and Lewis 2017). Unlike progressive social movements, which are grounded in an epistemology of solidarity (Hooks 2000), right-leaning digital communities seem to coalesce around exclusion and the idealized reconstruction of a lost past (Stanley 2018). For this reason, Truth Social can be interpreted as an explicitly identitarian structure, where the sense of belonging is based solely on a shared narrative of cultural siege and ethnic reclamation (Mudde 2019). Moreover, Donald Trump’s specific adoption and use of the platform reveals a clear break in the relationship between political communication and digital platforms. Beyond its role as a platform for partisan communication, Truth Social also operates as a space for affective interaction and the cultivation of a political fandom. Trump’s presence on the platform is not merely unidirectional; rather, it fosters a dynamic of identification and belonging among his followers. This dynamic resembles what Marwick and Boyd (2011) term “micro-celebrity politics,” where the political figure engages directly with their audience, collapsing boundaries between public and private, and creating an illusion of intimacy. Through recurrent tropes, emotionally charged language, and insider rhetoric (e.g., calling supporters “patriots” or referring to “the fake news media” as a common enemy), Trump galvanizes a collective identity rooted not just in ideology, but in shared affect and cultural codes. This fandom operates through affective loyalty rather than policy alignment, producing a tight-knit digital community that performs devotion and defense of the leader through likes, shares, memes, and hostile engagement with dissenters (Highfield 2016, Sandvoss 2005). Truth Social thus becomes both a platform and a performative stage where followers demonstrate allegiance and emotional investment in Trump, reinforcing a feedback loop of adoration, grievance, and mobilization. The cultivation of a fan-based political community did not begin with Truth Social, but has deeper roots in Trump’s earlier use of mainstream platforms. Already during the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump had used Twitter as a personal megaphone, bypassing traditional news channels and establishing a direct, polarizing relationship with his electoral base (Ott, 2017). Through informal, aggressive, and often provocative language, Trump skilfully leveraged the algorithmic logic of the internet to gain visibility and prominence in public discourse, contributing to the so-called “*platformization of populism*” (Gerbaudo 2018). Following the January 6, 2021, Capitol Hill insurrection and his subsequent bans from Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, Trump launched his own virtual platform – portrayed as a censorship-free

tool, but in truth designed to foster a homogenous and ideologically rigid information bubble. In this light, even in the most recent electoral campaign, this device proved to be not just a technical alternative, but an ideological and rhetorical project aimed at countering the alleged “cancel culture” imposed by Big Tech and at institutionalizing a post-truth communication ecosystem (Lewandowsky *et al.* 2017). This marks a dangerous drift toward the privatization of the public sphere, where the rules of democratic debate are rewritten according to identity-based loyalty. This leads not only to the polarization of opinions but also to the formation of closed communities that rarely engage with opposing viewpoints, further deepening political and social divisions (Jamieson and Cappella 2008, Nguyen 2020). Similarly, Truth Social positions itself as a platform welcoming individual with a clear political alignment, thus emphasizing its distance from mainstream political discourse. Beyond polarization, however, this dynamic represents a significant form of cultural and political resistance in the digital arena. Members of this structure identify as protagonists of a struggle against dominant thought, both in the media and within the political system. This stance typically reflects elements of populism, which often thrives on distrust of traditional institutions and the media, reinforcing the idea of a constant fight against the establishment (Mudde 2004). This perpetual opposition can be understood through Laclau and Mouffe’s (2014) concept of “antagonism,” where politics is intrinsically characterized by conflict between antagonistic groups. In the context of Truth Social, antagonism manifests in various forms, from viral campaigns challenging conventional media to the promotion of conspiracy narratives portraying the political system as corrupt and manipulated. Memes and viral graphics play a crucial role in reinforcing group cohesion and spreading political messages with a common front. Memes emerge from a blend of popular culture elements, creating content that can be shared and spread in the form of vernacular creativity (Burgess 2006). As Jenkins (2006) explains, participatory culture in the digital context allows users to be not only consumers of content but also active producers. However, despite the strong sense of belonging and resilience, these entities are vulnerable. Their fragility is partly linked to their excessive exposure to misinformation and fake news, which thrive in environments with weak or absent moderation (Scheufele and Krause 2019). Nevertheless, these communities develop mechanisms to maintain high online visibility and strengthen bonds among participants. This resilience extends to the fight against surveillance by big tech companies. Platforms like Truth Social have positioned themselves from the outset as

alternatives to perceived power structures, providing refuge for politically marginalized communities. Analyzing this platform allows us to explore the complex dynamics of political communication and community formation in a fragmented and digital context. Unlike mainstream platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok, Truth Social caters to a user base that identifies with specific political positions, often perceived as marginalized from dominant public discourse. In this context, analyzing the content published by Donald Trump is crucial, as he is a central figure in contemporary politics, and his use of Truth Social provides significant insights into how communication strategies can vary across platforms. It is important to clarify that this community is not in opposition to the neoliberal regime but rather represents the antithesis of those advocating for greater social equity. In fact, it opposes those who seek to challenge existing processes, positioning themselves as a defender of the status quo and resisting any attempts to move toward greater social equity. This community does not function as a catalyst for social progress or emancipation (Antonucci *et al.* 2024). Instead, it contributes to entrenching rigid ideological views and intensifying exclusionary logic. The messages and groups formed around Trump and his platform obviously promote policies and ideologies that oppose the principles of inclusion, solidarity, and social justice inherent in cultural and political resistance. This type of community fosters exclusionary visions and the defence of elite interests, embracing narratives that support a return to authoritarian or ultraconservative power structures, further reinforcing polarization (Lieberman *et al.* 2019). To fully understand the impact of this platform, we conduct a comparison of Trump’s posts with the highest interaction rates across several popular platforms, based on the assumption that Trump shared a total of 507 posts across the four platforms under examination during the period from September 25 to October 8. On X, he published 61 posts, while on Instagram he shared 62. In contrast, his presence on TikTok was extremely limited, with only 2 posts. His activity was particularly intense on Truth Social, where he posted as many as 382 times. This imbalance indicates a clear preference for Truth Social as his primary communication channel. However, this should not only be interpreted as a strategic alternative to mainstream platforms, but also as a means of building and strengthening an emotional bond with his electoral base. Through polarizing and highly emotional rhetoric, Trump fosters a sense of identity-based belonging that, in some respects, resembles the dynamics typical of fandom communities. In such communities, the relationship between leader and supporters is rooted in

emotional participation, deep loyalty, and a shared narrative that goes beyond strictly political engagement (Jenkins and Ito 2015). This phenomenon is part of a broader process of the *spectacularization* of politics, in which engagement is often driven more by emotions than by rational content (Wetherell 2012, Marcus 2000). Social media –particularly those designed for direct and unmediated use, such as this one—facilitate the creation of “affective publics” (Papacharissi 2015), capable of mobilizing around shared feelings rather than structured political visions. There is also a further aspect to consider: Trump handles the platform as a sort of personal press office, leveraging it to interact directly with the media ecosystem and amplify his messages (Chadwick 2017). This approach highlights the transformation of political communication in the digital age, where leaders can bypass traditional media to build a direct relationship with the public (Kubin and Von Sikorski 2021). Also, for this reason, rather than aiming for an exhaustive or statistically representative dataset, this paper adopts an illustrative comparative approach, focusing on the three most engaging posts by Donald Trump on four major platforms (Truth Social, X, Instagram, TikTok) during a randomly selected two-week period of the 2024 U.S. presidential campaign. This methodological choice reflects a qualitative and interpretive ambition: to examine not the frequency of content types, but the style, the purpose, and rhetorical logics that structure Trump’s platform-specific communication. By privileging the posts that received the highest levels of engagement, we aim to identify paradigmatic artifacts – those messages that most successfully activated audience response, emotional resonance, or ideological alignment. In other words, we do not seek generalization, but we want to explore how different platforms afford different performances and how Trump’s communicative persona is strategically calibrated to fit the technological and cultural logic of each medium. By analyzing his messages, we can identify similarities and differences of the specific communication strategies he uses to mobilize his audience across different platforms. This approach will allow us to highlight how Truth Social fosters the formation of a homogenous and closed political community, intensify-

ing polarization compared to the more diverse and varied landscape of mainstream platforms. From this interpretive lens, Truth faithfully mirrors this dystopia: a platform that promises truth but in fact delivers only echo chambers and closure, simulating dissent only to better integrate it into the online outrage economy. Overall, this overview demands a critical reflection on the nature and implications of this platform.

4. TRUMP’S ONLINE COMMUNICATION STYLES ACROSS DIFFERENT PLATFORMS

This section explores the variations in Donald Trump’s digital communication across four major social media platforms: Truth Social, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok. Rather than attempting a systematic content analysis, the goal is to offer an interpretive snapshot of platform-specific communicative logics. To do so, we examine the three most engaged posts (in terms of interactions and views) for each platform during a randomly selected two-week window of the 2024 U.S. presidential campaign (25 September – 8 October). Although interaction volumes vary due to platform-specific user bases (in particular, Truth is the platform with lowest number of followers in comparison to other social networks), the comparative logic follows a “most engaged content” rationale, under the assumption that these posts reveal core campaign themes and communicative strategies. Just to lay out some numbers that give us a clear picture of what we are talking about: Truth has around 8.6 million followers, X has 103.3 million, TikTok over 15 million, while Instagram more than double that with nearly 34 million, and Facebook slightly less with 36 million.

The focus of the analysis is not only on the content itself, but also especially on the tone, the underlying political purpose and the discursive style. Table 1 presents the results of our illustrative comparative reading.

As the table shows, each platform affords a distinctive rhetorical function and shapes Trump’s communication style in specific ways, even though the posts consistently engage with electoral and political themes

Table 1. Interpretative grid of Trump’s rhetoric across platforms.

Platform	Tone	Function	Discursive Style
<i>Truth Social</i>	Intimate, combative	Community-building, identity affirmation	Insider language, affective bonding
<i>X (Twitter)</i>	Institutional, declarative	Legitimacy signaling, elite alignment	Formal posts, policy stances
<i>Instagram</i>	Symbolic, emotional	Moral leadership, religious appeal	Iconography, short-form mythmaking
<i>TikTok</i>	Spectacular, playful	Viral charisma, pop-political branding	Memetic content, visual presence

across platforms. Truth Social emerges as the most affectively intense and ideologically enclosed space, where Trump adopts a tone of intimate combativeness, speaking directly to a loyal base in a shared language of grievance and affirmation. In contrast, X (formerly Twitter) serves more institutional purposes, functioning as a site for policy discussion and elite alignment, often through formal posts and endorsements. On Instagram, Trump leans on visual and symbolic registers – especially, in our small sample, religious iconography and emotionally resonant images – to present himself as a moral and charismatic leader. TikTok fosters a highly aestheticized and memetic form of communication, where Trump becomes less a rhetorician and more a viral figure of pop-political branding. This variation reflects a broader strategy of platform calibration, in which Trump tailors his discourse to fit the technological affordances and cultural expectations of each space. While the content often shares similar themes (patriotism, anti-elitism, populist appeals), the tone, function, and discursive mode differ substantially across platforms. The following sections offer a platform-by-platform discussion, illustrating these distinctions through a selection of emblematic posts and highlighting how Trump's rhetoric is modulated according to the communicative logic of each environment.

Truth Social

In comparison to other social networks, the communicative style on Truth Social stands out for its more explicit blend of incivility, intimacy, and mockery. Trump's posts on this platform feature direct insults ("Lyn' Kamala"), hyperbolic warnings ("They want to confiscate your guns"), excessive punctuation ("VOTE!!!"), and emotional appeals ("No Tax On Tips!"). These messages are not addressed to a general electorate, but to a clearly defined in-group, Trump's loyal base, within a "controlled" information environment. Unlike other platforms where Trump's tone often modulates toward promotional or visual performance, Truth Social fosters an intimate setting in which Trump speaks *with*, rather than merely *to*, his followers. The pictures showing him 'working' at McDonald's, as a response to Kamala Harris's claim about having worked there, exemplifies this: it does not work only as a symbolic act, but also a performance that reinforces shared frustrations and anti-elite sentiment. This helps shape a language that clearly defines the in-group and the out-group, serving as a resonance chamber for shared identity and "resistance" against the out-group. While Truth Social enables an emotionally intimate and ideologically

unfiltered mode of communication, Trump's activity on X, Instagram, and TikTok reveals a more strategic and performative engagement. These platforms still serve as crucial tools in amplifying campaign messages.

X

On X, Trump's posts maintain a more formal tone, often anchored in political messaging and elite endorsement. For example, the repost of Elon Musk's quote "Voting for Trump [is the] only way to 'save' democracy" (October 1) functions as a legitimising move, invoking tech-industry credibility and mainstream media coverage. Another post (October 2), where Trump asserts his opposition to a federal abortion ban, aligns with broader Republican efforts to moderate positions ahead of the general election. Here, the tone is declarative, institutional, and markedly less combative than on Truth: "EVERYONE KNOWS I WOULD NOT SUPPORT A FEDERAL ABORTION BAN [...] IT IS UP TO THE STATES TO DECIDE". Even the high-energy post announcing his return to Butler, the site of the assassination attempts against Trump in July 2024 ("I'M COMING BACK TO BUTLER!", October 4), blends emotional enthusiasm with patriotic imagery but avoids direct confrontation or insult.

Instagram

In contrast, Instagram emphasises an appeal to pop culture (Battista 2024b). The most engaged post features an image of Saint Michael the Archangel (29 September), captioned with a traditional Catholic prayer: "Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle [...] cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits." Here Trump fuses the political message with a religious iconography, proposing an implicit narrative using symbols and visual metaphors. Other posts, such as the rally in Butler or the stylised clip with Zelenskyy ("I WILL END THIS WAR"), also rely on the creation of his "persona" and reputation as charismatic leader.

Tik Tok

On TikTok, the messaging is even more spectacular and memetic. A popular video (7.4 million views) featuring Trump on stage, lifting and throwing branded campaign boxes into a cheering crowd, exemplifies the platform's native grammar: short-form, dramatic clips designed for rapid consumption and emotional impact.

On TikTok, Trump becomes a symbol, more brand than rhetor, and relies on implicit cues, music, movement, and slogans to construct an aura of control and charisma. Overall, the communicative style on these platforms tends toward performance and persuasion, rather than identity consolidation. Language is less intimate, more calibrated.

While Truth functions as a space of narrative co-creation with the base, X, Instagram and TikTok serve as broadcast arenas, where Trump creates and boosts his persona as saviour, warrior, and charismatic leader. The comparison of Trump's platform-specific rhetoric reveals a crucial distinction between *performative populism* and *affective identity-building*. Truth Social is not merely a content distribution tool but a discursive enclave, one that invites a deeper form of political intimacy. Such a communicative style does not only mobilise; it reaffirms membership, loyalty, and worldview. In this sense, Truth Social operates as a community forge, where the line between leader and follower blurs through a shared lexicon of resistance, resentment, mockery, and emotional charge.

5. CONCLUSION

The exploration conducted, situated within a broader reflection on digital communication dynamics, highlights how alternative platforms do not merely serve as spaces for expression, but act as true laboratories of political and ideological belonging. Truth Social emerges not as a pluralistic arena, but as an ideological enclave where communication reinforces identity bonds and deepens the distance from the other, evoking what Arendt (2019) described as the transformation of the public sphere into a space of closed, non-dialogical affiliations. The radicalization of content – fuelled by algorithmic logics based on engagement and by closed systems of information selection – demonstrates how the fragmentation of digital information is reshaping the public sphere, diminishing its inclusive and deliberative potential. In this scenario, the distinction between mainstream platforms and so-called “resistant” platforms is not merely technical or commercial, but profoundly political, aligning with Foucault's analysis of power as a diffuse and normalizing network that also restructures itself within digital contexts. Truth Social thus embodies a new form of affective and antagonistic political communication, where conflict between irreconcilable groups becomes the very structure of political discourse. Within this context, the rhetoric of permanent opposition replaces democratic debate, and the community consolidates itself more through the exclusion of the other than through rational argumentation – following a

logic akin to the “politics of wounded identity” invoked by Butler (1997). This study suggests that such dynamics are not marginal anomalies but structural symptoms of a broader transformation in the relationship between citizenship, media, and power. It is therefore urgent to reflect not only on the role of digital platforms as tools of mobilization, but also on their responsibilities in shaping public opinion and sustaining the democratic fabric. Only through a critical and multidimensional perspective – which also takes ethical implications into account – will it be possible to envision solutions capable of bridging the gap between digital participation and genuine democratic dialogue. This study has, however, several limitations. It is explicitly exploratory and descriptive in nature. It does not aim to offer systematic or generalisable analytical claims. The selection of data is deliberately narrow, based on a “most engaged content” logic within a short, arbitrarily chosen time window during the 2024 U.S. presidential campaign. As such, the findings should not be interpreted as representative of broader trends across platforms or over time. Rather than producing empirically robust conclusions, the goal of this work is to offer an interpretive lens through which to understand platform-specific communicative dynamics in Trump's campaign strategy. It seeks to raise conceptual and theoretical questions about tone, audience, and platform affordances, rather than to test hypotheses or quantify effects. This study therefore suggests that the communicative architecture of platforms like Truth Social is not a secondary feature of contemporary politics, but a structural condition through which antagonistic identities are shaped, legitimised, and mobilised. This dynamic poses urgent challenges for the future of democratic public life, as the very conditions for pluralism, deliberation, and civic responsibility in the digital public sphere risk being progressively undermined.

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