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# “X is the voice of the people”: How Elon Musk styles X as a newsroom

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Since purchasing Twitter in October 2022, Elon Musk has branded the platform as a decentralized newsroom operated by and for citizens. While this assertion can easily be dismissed as performative, contradictory, and self-serving, Musk and his platform are nonetheless increasingly central to conservative politics and culture in the United States. This paper considers the stylistic and rhetorical strategies that Musk uses to make his vision salient. It is based on social media content from October 2022 to January 2024. It asks, first, how Musk discursively and stylistically claims authenticity and authority to validate his vision of X, with attention to the “cultural and symbolic referents” that are used to make content “socially meaningful” (Peck 2019, 16). Second, drawing on Hall’s (1988) assertion that radical alternatives appear in relation to a “dominant bloc,” it explores the aspects of mainstream journalism, politics, and technology that Musk is re-articulating. This paper argues that it is the very inconsistencies within Musk’s vision that lend it salience amidst a crisis in professional journalism (Knight and Gallup 2022). By drawing upon the transgressive elements of populism, the efficiency of technocracy, the authority of traditional masculinity, and the cultural capital of working-class aesthetics, Musk lays claim to authenticity and authority.

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## Introduction

In September 2023, Elon Musk traveled to the small city of Eagle Pass, Texas, which sits alongside the border between the United States and Mexico. As a groundbreaking innovator and the richest man in the world, Musk is a frequent flier. However, his visit to Eagle Pass stands out from his usual itinerary. Far from traveling in an official capacity, he was acting as a self-described “citizen journalist”. Armed with a smartphone, an internet connection, and an account on X (formerly Twitter), Musk toured Eagle Pass and broadcasted what, to use his terminology, was *really happening* at the border.

For weeks, Musk had been condemning the mainstream media for failing to report on the migrant crisis, asserting that their coverage was indicative of broader patterns of liberal bias. His statements tapped into the deep story at the heart of the contemporary right: the feeling that conservative identities and interests have been ostracized and demonized by elites, and that mainstream media serves to cement liberal political agendas, rather than inform and empower a democratic populace (Nadler and Taussig 2023; Meeks 2022; Conroy 2021). Describing his actions as a corrective to these acute-on-chronic conditions, Musk livestreamed his journey to the border on X. Shortly after, he called for X users everywhere to do the same: “Citizen journalism is the path to [a] better future! I strongly encourage people around the world to post news about events as they’re happening, in both text & video” (Musk, Oct 4 2023).

Musk’s vision, in his own words, is to create a new means of news production and consumption that replaces the traditional newsroom with a “maximally effective group mind” or “cybernetic super-intelligence” that is composed of citizen journalists crowd-sourcing the news at an unprecedented scale (Tesla Owners SV 2023; Musk November 3 2022). Musk has asserted that X is “an inclusive arena for free speech” that delivers the truth with unparalleled speed, accuracy, and even a humorous flair (TED 2022; Musk Sept 29 2023; Musk Nov 26 2022). Underwriting this vision is Musk’s commitment to free speech absolutism, which contributed to sweeping policy changes when he took over Twitter, including decimating Twitter’s trust and safety teams and reinstating accounts banned for hate speech or incitements to violence. These policy changes significantly altered the platform’s information ecosystem, with hate speech, antisemitism, foreign propaganda, and disinformation proliferating under Musk’s tenure (Myers et al 2023). Far from cultivating a digital town square, Musk’s policies have served to further endanger marginalized communities online, accelerated the spread of disinformation and international propaganda, and ultimately, have weakened the democratic process (Navaroli 2023).

Given the empirical reality of Musk’s Twitter takeover, it is easy to dismiss his vision of a digital town square as the utilitarian posturing of a public figure who has had a long and troubled relationship with the press, the overextension of a billionaire’s ego, or the last-ditch effort of a businessman flailing to monetize his costly new asset. Scholarly and popular accounts of Musk’s Twitter takeover in the last year have largely offered these explanations, focusing on how his policies negatively impact journalism, the democratic process, information integrity, and online safety. These accounts are valid and vital.

While Musk is subject to heated criticism from academics, journalists, and the political left, his celebrity amongst conservatives has risen meteorically. Although X’s overall usership has fallen by 23% (Hern 2024), conservative accounts have seen a surge in followers and right-leaning politicians, activists, influencers, and independent journalists increasingly mobilize through, and congregate on, the platform (Faifé 2022; Counts 2024). Opinion polls reflect this change in political climate, with Republican users in 2024 being three times as likely to claim that

X is “mostly good” for democracy than they were in 2021 (McClain et al 2024). While we can and should point out Musk’s self-serving motives, we must also grapple with how his platform and persona have become increasingly privileged amongst conservatives. By attending solely to the utilitarian motives and negative consequences of Musk’s X takeover, we have failed to interrogate *how* and *why* Musk’s X-based model of journalism has—despite its contradictions—achieved this partisan cultural and political salience.

To gain insight into how Musk establishes and maintains his authority, it is instructive to analyze the methods he uses to craft a culturally and politically salient message about X. Thus far, scholars have largely failed to consider the ways Musk’s rhetoric may draw upon and articulate tensions in sociopolitical life and popular culture writ large. Operating on the assertion that “culture constrains how we tell the tale” (Schudson 1992, 53), Musk’s vision—even if contradictory or self-serving—must draw upon and articulate aspects of popular culture and channel sociopolitical tensions to give it resonance. At a time when professional journalism is in crisis (Lemann 2020), it is essential to investigate the discursive and stylistic strategies that Musk uses to give meaning to his alternative formulation of “news” in the digital age.

This paper attempts to address this gap by taking seriously Musk’s claims in order to investigate the stylistic decisions and rhetorical strategies he uses to brand X as a platform for journalism. Through a close qualitative analysis of Musk’s X posts, audiovisual content, and publicly available interviews, I evaluate how he constitutes and claims journalistic authenticity and populist authority. In attending to both the content and context of Musk’s X-based newsroom, I follow two lines of inquiry. First, how is authenticity and authority constructed in the branding and content of X-based citizen journalism? What “cultural and symbolic referents” are being used to make this content “socially meaningful”? (Peck 2019, 16) Second, what is the broader media, political, and technological landscape in which Musk has arisen as a proponent for his own brand of anti-institutional, popular journalism? As Stuart Hall reminds us, radical alternatives do not appear out of thin air, but in relation to a “dominant bloc”. What aspects of mainstream journalism, politics, and technology is Musk reacting *against*, and what vision of society is he re-articulating?

I argue that Musk’s vision of X as a newsroom leverages popular critiques of, and felt discontent with, professional journalism to assert its own authenticity and authority as information that is *by* and *for* an imagined citizen. Musk’s conceptualization of X as a newsroom is one that is caught in a web of contradictions: it is both reactionary in its rejection of the mainstream media and techno-utopian in its faith that unmoderated digital space will lead to collective enlightenment. It blends the transgressive aesthetics of populism, with working class cultural appeals to authority, with technocratic appeals to efficiency. Rather than contradicting one another, these disparate elements resonate together to lend authenticity and authority to Musk’s claims. At a time of hegemonic realignment, when public trust in professional journalism and epistemic institutions is floundering (Knight and Gallup 2022), Musk’s dual utopian-and-reactionary, lay-and-expert vision of journalism has deep affective appeal in its promise of an alternative, participatory reality accessible to all.

**Methodology.** I conducted a qualitative content analysis of Elon Musk’s posts on X, supplemented by an analysis of interviews where he discusses his purchase of the platform. In the spring of

2023, I manually reviewed Musk's X profile, which allowed me to view his posts, replies, and reposts in their original sociotechnical context. I used screenshots and screen recordings to archive media that explicitly discussed the platform or Musk's purchase of it, as well as posts where Musk projects a techno-populist self-image and engages in cultural or political commentary. Given that X maintains daily "technical limits" on user activity (per X's policies, 2,400 viewable posts per day as of August 2025), this method did not yield a comprehensive archive of all content over time, but nonetheless provided a rich, contextual corpus of textual and audiovisual content. Alongside Musk's posts, I also consulted a wide range of news outlets for interviews in which Musk discusses his purchase of, and vision for, Twitter.

To supplement and expand my data, in the spring of 2025 I downloaded an archive of Musk's tweets compiled by data journalist Dada Lyndell (2025) and published on Kaggle, a data science platform. Using natural language processing, I extracted all posts from 2022 to 2024 which contained the keywords "X" and "Twitter," resulting in a dataset of 913 posts. This article is based on a qualitative content analysis of the above materials, wherein I attended to the populist rhetorical strategies Musk uses to position X as a newsroom by and for citizens, as well as the stylistic and aesthetic elements that underpin his messaging. My findings are situated within secondary literature that depicts Musk's narrative arc over the past several years to position him within broader trends in politics, technology, and media.

To many, Musk's assertion that X operates as a newsroom may stretch the imagination. After all, newsrooms are professional, institutionalized spaces with set reporting and editorial practices. They look and operate very little like the digital, algorithmic, ephemeral, and crowdsourced feed of a social media platform. In this work, I pay scant attention to *whether* a social media platform can be categorized as a newsroom, instead evaluating *how* Musk articulates this vision and *why* it resonates with particular audiences. Rather than presupposing whether or not a platform can operate a newsroom, I attend to "the modalities of speech and action, and the styles of statements and performances, that are capable of enacting authority" (Eyal and Medvetz 2023; 5). In doing so, I focus not on the validity of his claim, but on the ways through which it is enacted.

**Hegemony and the contemporary media ecosystem.** Before evaluating how Musk discursively, rhetorically, and stylistically positions X as a newsroom, I will situate his project within the shifting landscape of contemporary media. In doing so, I consider not only how the contours of our current sociopolitical moment may enhance the resonance of Musk's claims, but how his claims reveal the contested nature of contemporary cultural and institutional authority. My analysis is guided by Stuart Hall's framework of hegemony, but it also, conversely, draws on contemporary debates about the applicability of hegemony theory. Rather than strive to settle these debates, I will consider what the instability and uncertainty of current power arrangements *does* in terms of enabling or constraining actors, like Musk, to offer radical alternatives to existing institutional and cultural arrangements.

Drawing on Raymond Williams, hegemony is "a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society..." (Williams 1977, 109–110). Hegemony is both cultural and political, yet it is always in flux. Drawing on Williams, Savas Coban argues that "hegemony does not exist passively as a form of sovereignty, but has to be constantly renewed, rebuilt, defended and changed... hegemony is trying to stabilize with various

movements on a loose ground like an acrobat on a rope" (Coban 2018, 96, 99). Hall (1988) captures the fluid and contested nature of hegemony through his theorization of the "popular" as a site of struggle. As Hall writes, radical movements do not "appear out of thin air" and must "be understood in direct relation to alternative political formations attempting to occupy and command the same space" (Hall 1988, 16). Speaking of an alternative political movement, Hall writes:

It works on the ground of already constituted social practices and lived ideologies. It wins space thereby constantly drawing on these elements which have secured over time a traditional resonance and left their traces in popular inventories. At the same time, it changes the field of struggle by changing the place, the position, the relative weight of the condensations within any one discourse and constructing them according to an alternative logic. (Hall 1988, 20)

Hall's framework allows us to understand Musk's transformation of X as more than just the impulsive venture of, to draw from biographer Walter Isaacson (2023), "a billionaire man-child". Rather, his articulation of an X-based newsroom is one that engages in a struggle for and against the dominant bloc. As Hall shows us, the "popular" is a constant site of struggle that is divided "roughly, between what, at any time, counts as an elite cultural activity or form, and what does not. These categories remain, though the inventories change" (Hall 2002, 189). In short, Hall's framework means that it is instructive to approach Musk's success as a media figure as a sort of barometer of popular cultural trends.

However, analyzing Musk's project as part of the struggle for the "popular" requires reflecting on the role of newsrooms in the current era. If Musk's vision for X as a newsroom contests the "dominant bloc," this implies that mainstream media institutions, such as legacy newsrooms and broadcast networks, occupy a hegemonic position. During the high modern period from the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, this was certainly the case. As Hallin (1992, 2000) writes, this period was marked by high public confidence in political authorities and institutions, allowing journalists to practice "objective" reporting and reduce controversy over their role as mediators of the public sphere. Through historically contingent arrangements, journalists mediated the flow of expert knowledge to the public, acting as gatekeepers who cultivated trust through "rituals of objectivity," and professional credentials such as codes of ethics and practices of transparency (Tuchman 1972; Lippman, 1922).

Today, these institutional arrangements, as well as the accompanying levels of public trust in journalism, have radically shifted. As of 2024, 69% of adults in the United States report having little to no trust in the media. While trust lags across political affiliations, it is skewed along partisan lines, with only 12% of Republicans reporting that they have a "great or fair" amount of trust (Brenan 2024). Trends in news consumption habits clearly demonstrate how attention—and revenue—is shifting away from legacy newsrooms and towards social media platforms, with 21% of all Americans, and 37% of Americans under 30, getting news from content producers on social media platforms (Stocking et al. 2024). In 2025, both the number of US social network users and social video advertising spending is estimated to surpass that of linear TV—marking a turning point in where attention, audiences, influence, and revenue are located (Enberg 2024).

The 2024 US presidential election cycle brought the shifting institutional arrangements of the public sphere into sharp relief. Both Kamala Harris and Donald Trump sat down for relatively

few interviews with legacy newsrooms, opting instead to visit a wide range of “news influencers”—or content producers without traditional journalism credentials (Lewis 2025). In a first, the Democratic National Committee invited over 200 content creators to its 2024 conference (Hendrickson 2024). In numerous ways, public perception of the election cycle was mediated not through traditional newsrooms, but through the platform economy, demonstrating the waning ability of mainstream media to operate as gatekeepers of public discourse. Within hours of Donald Trump’s victory, *The Federalist* declared that it was not his opponent, Kamala Harris, who was the real loser of the election, but rather the “corporate media industrial complex” (Stelter 2024). Scholars have shared these concerns for at least a decade now, with Couldry writing that “the whole terrain of media (and media institutions) has been reshaped by huge external forces,” with the platform economy being central to the disruption of the media landscape (Couldry 2015, 642).

These 21<sup>st</sup> century trends, made visible during the 2024 election cycle, raise serious questions about what constitutes the “dominant bloc” in our contemporary media landscape, and, more broadly, whether hegemony is a useful concept in our fragmented and networked public sphere. As Andrews (2022) writes, there has been not only “a shift in the terrain of the hegemonic struggle but a shift in the nature of this hegemony itself”. Andrews further asserts that:

...the very idea of cultural hegemony is challenged by the mercurial, distributed, algorithmically refracted social media environment. In effect, media hegemony is no longer constituted through the editorial decisions and institutional heft of the culture industries... There is no longer a true center other than the bloc that holds actual state power. (Andrews 2022)

As the above illuminates, we are faced by an atmosphere of intense uncertainty and contestation—struggling not just to determine what constitutes the dominant sociopolitical arrangement of our time, but also over the very definitions and contours of contemporary power relations as historically theorized. My goal here is not to settle debates on the nature of hegemony in our contemporary landscape, as this is far beyond the scope of this article. Instead, I am suggesting that the context of these debates is *precisely* the point. As the hegemony of mainstream media declines, displaced in part by new media systems and entangled with public distrust of institutional authority, space has opened for new arrangements of political, cultural, and institutional power to vie for dominance. In Antonio Gramsci’s formulation, we find ourselves in an interregnum—a moment of political in-betweenness where old hegemonies are in flux. As Gramsci writes, “the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (Gramsci 2022, 276).

Musk’s positioning of X as a newsroom is part and parcel of the cultural and institutional realignment of our current moment. It articulates cultural and political discontent with the historically hegemonic, yet waning, power of mainstream media, while offering a techno-utopian and populist rearticulation of the future of the public sphere. The atmosphere of the interregnum provides fertile ground for his formulation of a new model of the public sphere, which gains further salience through Musk’s assemblage of seemingly contradictory cultural and social referents, as is discussed below.

**Populism, political style, and citizen journalism.** To evaluate how Musk rhetorically and stylistically depicts X as a

newsroom, I draw upon Reece Peck’s (2019) approach to analyzing *Fox News*. While communications scholars and political scientists focus on the content of political and journalistic messages, Peck argues that the style of a given news outlet is as substantive and important to the formation of its political identity as its ideology alone” (Peck 2019, 18). He asserts that *Fox News*’ ideological force “derives not from its talking points but rather from the cultural-stylistic referents Fox produces and pundits use to make such talking points socially meaningful” (Peck 2019, 16). This style can be seen in the news casts of anchors like Bill O’Reilly, who performs an outraged, energetic, and confrontational masculinity that positions him as a populist crusader for the working class.

It is through its use of stylistic appeals to class that Fox is able to reframe the meaning of political and journalistic values, like objectivity and balance, to suit particular political stances. Fox capitalizes on longstanding antagonisms between the “serious” and “tabloid” journalism traditions, which stand in for deeper antagonisms between the working class and elite. By rhetorically and stylistically claiming to stand up for the “forgotten men,” Fox reconfigures the meaning of socioeconomic divisions so as to negate the market’s role in producing them. This advances “a cultural-normative understanding of class conflict” and allows Fox to “reframe their political bias as balance” (Peck 2019, 4). In drawing on this approach, I attend to the stylistic and cultural referents Musk invokes in his performances.

Musk and his conception of journalism can be understood through the lens of populism. Drawing upon a discursive-performative framework, populism is not so much an ideology as a *style*—a way of “doing politics characterized by a specific repertoire of performances” (Aiolfi 2022, 2). Benjamin Moffitt defines “style” as “the repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political” (Moffitt 2016, 29). The style of contemporary populism includes “an appeal to the people versus the elite, bad manners, and the performance of crisis, breakdown, or threat” (Moffitt 2016, 45). It is marked by a stark, morally laden binary of “the people” versus “the elite,” with the populist leader positioned as the representative of an imagined “people”.

Although Moffitt and Aiolfi both offer discursive-performative theories of populism, Aiolfi modifies Moffitt’s description of populists as “flaunting the low” and argues that the high/low binary of “manners” is less important than the “the strategic use of transgression”. Transgressive acts violate a “norm of political relevance,” regardless of where that norm falls on a high/low culture axis (Aiolfi 2022, 6). If a transgressive act is met with the audience’s approval, it “can prove effective in differentiating the political actor from their peers and [make them] appear closer to their audience” (Aiolfi 6-7). However, transgression can be a double-edged sword, as audience disapproval of a performer can “ruin their own credentials or make them appear threatening” (Aiolfi 6-7). Populist performances are thus never risk-free and are always contextually and temporally dependent.

Traditionally, populism has been conceived of as irreconcilable with technocracy. However, scholars have recently argued that the two can exist in a symbiotic relationship. “In populist hands, technocracy becomes an excellent tool to ‘find’ the simple solutions that people need” (Drapalova and Wegrich 2021, 645). The alliance between technocracy and populism, or “technocratic populism” offers a:

... bipolar division of society and conflict in a less nativist and more pragmatic fashion as hard-working people against incompetent and corrupt political elites.

Technocratic rhetoric reinforces the nature of the antagonism between the people and the elite but bases its front line on the incompetency and incapacity of traditional politics to solve pressing social issues (Drapalova and Wegrich 2021, 645).

In Musk's rhetoric, elements of technocracy and populism come together to compliment, rather than contradict, one another. The moral framework of populism as the-people-against-the-elite blends with the technocratic framework of the-incompetent-against-the-industrious. Rather than being entirely novel, this dual technocratic and populist framework weaves through the longstanding discourse of producerism, and in particular, the "entrepreneurial producers" framework adopted by Fox News in its coverage of the Great Recession (Peck 2014).

Scholars of contemporary populism and politics also assert that masculinity plays an active role in the cultivation of authority and authenticity. Karen Lee Ashcraft argues that masculinity is a key element underpinning the rise of right-wing populism today. In contrast to class-based conceptions of populism, she argues that "masculine prevalence is not incidental, superficial, tangential, or any other way we like to shelve it beside the real point of populism". (Lee Ashcraft 2022, 4) While I hesitate to assert that populism has a *single* "real point", Ashcraft astutely shows how a gendered conception of cultural and moral alienation, in short, of "aggrieved masculinity," is a driver of populist movements.

Beyond populism, masculinity is widely deployed as a source of authority. As Valerie Sperling argues, "the cultural framing of masculinity under patriarchy makes the assertion of masculinity a vehicle for power... Traditional masculinity, therefore, enables male political leaders... to assert their power over others" (Sperling 2014, 4). Masculinity, whether explicitly invoked or stylistically coded, becomes a powerful legitimating force for figures like Musk. In styling himself in a traditionally masculine fashion, performing gendered personality traits, and emphasizing his virility, Musk projects an image of manhood that closes the social chasm between CEO and working class.

A populist framework is also essential for understanding how "citizen journalism" functions in Musk's rhetoric. While Musk frequently asserts that X is a platform—or even a newsroom—for "citizen journalism," he rarely defines what "citizen journalism" means or explicates how X operates as a newsroom. In rare cases, he will share or comment on another user's analysis of X's role in the public sphere, but this is the exception, rather than the rule. The scant attention Musk pays to the practice of citizen journalism, despite his consistent invocations of it, warrants reflection.

As Melissa Wall (2015) notes, there is no universally agreed upon definition of citizen journalism. However, it has been broadly defined by Roberts (2019, 1) as the "involvement of non-professionals in the creation, analysis, and dissemination of news and information in the public interest". While the practice predates the internet, it was popularized by the widespread uptake of digital technologies for capturing and sharing content (Roberts 2022, 288). From the early 2000s into the 2010s, many scholars and practitioners heralded the democratizing potential of citizen journalism, which enabled the transformation of audiences into active participants in the public sphere (Rosen 2006, Allan 2013). The ability of citizen journalists to document otherwise-overlooked historical events, or bring public attention to issues such as police brutality, attested to the power of this technologically-enabled practice (Allan 2006; Antony & Thomas 2010). Meanwhile, the citizen journalist's "outsider" status and lack of connection to traditional newsrooms has at times allowed them to claim independence and authenticity, particularly as trust in professional media declines (Roberts 2022, 290).

As this cursory history suggests, citizen journalism has been a topic of scholarly, professional, and public attention since the

early days of the internet. This provides rich empirical and conceptual groundwork that Musk *could* draw upon to articulate the role of X users in the public sphere. Yet, despite Musk's frequent references to citizen journalism, the concept is broadly invoked, rarely explained, and never defined. It is in this absence that the populist function of citizen journalism as a concept becomes clear.

Invoking citizen journalism discursively positions Musk's platform as an embodiment of the average citizen—a nonhierarchical space bereft of the perceived biases and failings of elite-coded mainstream journalism. This rhetoric draws on "the sheen of idealized citizen participation" traditionally associated with citizen journalism (Roberts 2022, 296). When Musk himself "practiced" citizen journalism by journeying to Eagle Pass, he laid claim to being one of the people, narrowing the vast chasm in power between himself and the average X user by adopting the title of a nonprofessional, noncredentialed "citizen journalist." Taken together with his biting criticism of mainstream media, Musk effectively uses citizen journalism as a populist signifier, positioning himself and his platform as representatives of the average citizen in an era of declining trust and institutional instability.

**Elon Musk's evolving image.** He tosses satellites into orbit and harnesses the sun; he drives a car he created that uses no gas and barely needs a driver. With a flick of his finger, the stock market soars or swoons. An army of devotees hangs on his every utterance. He dreams of Mars as he bestrides Earth, square-jawed and indomitable.

– Times Person of the Year announcement (Ball et al 2021)

Understanding how X is envisioned as a newsroom requires first dissecting and historicizing Musk's public image and evolving political stances. Musk is one of the richest people in the world and the founder and CEO of several groundbreaking technology companies, including Tesla, SpaceX, and Neuralink. In 2021, TIME Magazine declared him Person of the Year for "creating solutions to an existential crisis [climate change], for embodying the possibilities and the perils of the age of tech titans, [and] for driving society's most daring and disruptive transformations". Although often controversial, Musk's accomplishments have earned him the respect, either begrudging or outright, of his fellows. As Bill Gates noted, "you can feel whatever you want about Elon's behavior, but there is no one in our time who has done more to push the bounds of science and innovation than he has" (Isaacson 2023, 439).

While Musk's accomplishments are sizeable, his ambitions loom larger. According to his biographer, Walter Isaacson, Musk has bypassed forming something so minuscule as a "worldview" and gone straight to articulating a "cosmic view" (Isaacson 2023, 6). A visionary who sees humanity as a multi-planetary, star-faring civilization, Musk relentlessly pushes the boundaries of what is possible, profitable, or pragmatic in the pursuit of his cosmic vision. According to entrepreneur Max Levchin: "one of Elon's greatest skills is the ability to pass off his vision as a mandate from heaven" (Isaacson 2023, 94). Musk's visions and ventures aspire to strip the "fiction" from science fiction, liberating humanity from the confines of a single planet and launching it into a technological utopia amidst the stars.

Musk pursues these visions with an iron will, a reckless embrace of risk, an aggressive rejection of compromise, and only a fleeting regard for interpersonal norms, such as compassion. As a former employee noted, Musk "cares a lot about humanity, but humanity in a very macro sense" (Isaacson 2023, 367). Technological progress writ large eclipses the well-being of those

individuals working to achieve it. Likewise, moderation falls to the wayside. Musk prides himself on working 80-120 hours a week and has little tolerance for employees who expect a more traditional work-life balance (Isaacson 2023). When Musk took over Twitter, he scoffed at its mindful work culture and visibly recoiled from its principle of “psychological safety,” insisting instead that discomfort, urgency, and mental fortitude are what matter (Isaacson 2023, 508). This is a worldview partially instilled in him by his violent childhood in South Africa, where his father’s autocratic approach to parenting set a model that Musk would—knowingly or not—integrate into his own career.

These personal qualities are mirrored in Musk’s vision of what is desirable from social media platforms – as well as how he behaves as a user. In a comment thread, Musk wrote that “It is infinitely preferable to be attacked by strangers on results over process, and Twitter, than [sic] indulge in the false happiness of hide-the-pain Instagram” (Musk, July 6 2023). In line with his vision of platforms as combative spaces, Musk has no qualms with engaging in bitter public disputes—whether that be with fellow tech CEOs or the sitting president of the United States. Taken together, Musk’s work-ethic, focus on results over process, technological achievements, and combative conduct allow him to capitalize on technocratic and hypermasculine bases of authority.

Musk’s image as a hardcore, uncompromising, technocratic visionary is complimented by a transgressive, provocative, and satirical online presence. Journalist Edward Felsenthal describes Musk’s persona as “a blunt instrument,” and suggests that Musk “revel[s] in division and aggressive mockery as he gives the world access to his id through social media”. Musk’s social media posts are consistently transgressive, whether that be tweeting about his bowel movements from atop a “porcelain throne,” or making grand business proclamations, such as declaring he would take Tesla private. The latter move resulted in a fraud case brought against Musk by the SEC, although he was ultimately exonerated (Clayton 2023).

Musk’s raunchy tweeting habit demonstrates how he shirks the professional norms that CEOs are expected to abide by. While his habits consistently land him in hot water, they also cultivate his populist appeal as an authentic, authoritative figure, which itself feeds, and is fed by, a persona of entrepreneurial bravery—of embracing risk in pursuit of innovation. Demonstrating an awareness of his image, Musk often shares commentary that affirms his entrepreneurial-populist appeal. In August of 2023, he re-posted the following praise from a user: “more CEOs and senior mgmt [management] folks should start posting on X, and do so themselves! Super lame to see accounts being run by their PR depts, chief of staff or similar. it helps their brand too - authenticity builds trust because it cannot be manufactured convincingly” (Viv, August 17 2023). At a time when most institutions carefully regulate their public image, Musk’s seemingly unfiltered posts set him apart.

Musk’s transgressive appeal is enhanced by his stylistic decisions, such as a tendency to sport cowboy hats, T-shirts, boots, and leather biker jackets. Supplanting his stylistic decisions are posts that include firearms, military, and old-West frontier references, such as a photo he posted of revolvers on his nightstand with the caption “I’m Musket, Elon Musket,” or a video of him firing his 50-caliber rifle (Musk Nov 28 2022, Musk Sept 30 2023). These images contain numerous cultural and political referents. While gun ownership is not exclusive to a particular social, political, or gender identity, it nonetheless carries masculine, rural, and conservative political associations. Taken together, these images allow Musk to lay claim to traditional masculinity and associate him with rural cultures, offsetting his affiliation with Silicon Valley and its liberal, elite image. In cultivating these cultural associations, Musk works to

mask the empirical reality that he is one of the elites. Far from being Musk’s own creation, this formula has been deployed by economic and political elites throughout history. Teddy Roosevelt, for example, aesthetically and discursively enacted a “cowboy-soldier hero model,” tapping into cultural themes about authentic masculinity that resonated with “ordinary,” or working-class, white men (Watts 2003).

Although Musk has long been friends with outspoken libertarians such as Peter Thiel, his own politics have historically been mercurial and opaque. Writing of Musk’s life in 2016, Walter Isaacson says “like many techies, he was liberal on social issues but with a dollop of libertarian resistance to regulations and political correctness” (Isaacson 2023, 262). Musk has donated to candidates across the political spectrum, ranging from Republican George Bush to Democratic Dianne Feinstein (Peters 2022). He often described himself as being “middle of the road,” part of the “80%” of the population—a categorization with a populist affinity.

However, Musk became much more vocal about politics in 2020. His statements, actions, and associations shifted to the right. As his biographer writes, “he went from being a fanboy and fundraiser for Barack Obama to railing against progressive democrats” (Isaacson 2023, 418). Some of this was certainly associated with Covid-19 restrictions, which chafed his libertarian ethos and his tendency to shirk rules and regulations. In March 2020, Musk tweeted that “the coronavirus panic is dumb”—a statement that, while it signals a right-of-center political orientation, also captures the widespread exhaustion and disillusionment with the pandemic, termed “pandemic fatigue” (Jorgensen et al 2022). While this March 2020 tweet hints at Musk’s rightward shift, it wasn’t until May 2020 that he begins to explicitly embrace alt-right and conspiratorial concepts with tweets such as “take the red pill” (Isaacson 2023).

In 2021, Musk’s political shift crystallized when he introduced the idea of a “woke mind virus”. He used this phrase to “battl[e] what he considered to be the excesses of political correctness and the woke culture of progressive social-justice activists” (Isaacson 2023, 418). Musk had become convinced that social justice initiatives had gone too far, and that the left was “ruining humor” in its effort to promote inclusivity and contain hate speech. The growing chasm between Musk and the left was on full display when his appearance on the Dave Chappelle show elicited a cacophony of boos that left Musk nearly speechless (Valinsky 2022). Musk’s political shift was made explicit when he tweeted: “in the past I voted Democrat, because they were (mostly) the kindness party. But they have become the party of division & hate, so I can no longer support them and will vote Republican” (Isaacson 2023, 419). As a free speech absolutist, internet troll, and believer that discomfort and confrontation incubate progress, Musk came to agree with the right-wing that the left had gone “too far”.

Amidst this political shift, Musk decided to buy Twitter. At first glance, it seems strange for a man who shoots rockets into space and dreams of colonizing mars to deem something so mundane as social media a worthy endeavor. However, Musk’s concern over the state of politics and society under a perceived “woke” agenda clarifies the move. This conviction, coupled with Musk’s delight in using Twitter as his own virtual playground, gives him a personal, cultural, and political rationale for the purchase. Twitter has long been one of the largest social media platforms in the world and a forum for global political leaders, journalists, and citizens to engage in what Musk asserts is a “virtual town square.” Concerned that the technology company was infected by the “woke mind virus,” and that it may infringe upon his favorite playground, Musk bought Twitter in October 2022. In the ensuing year, he launched X as a “newsroom.”

**Styling X as a newsroom.** In this section, I will analyze how Musk has articulated his vision of X as a newsroom since his takeover in October 2022. Following Hall, I will interrogate the aspects of popular culture and politics he is pushing against in his rhetoric, as well as the alternative configurations he is envisioning. I will analyze a selection of Musk's posts on X, the memes he has shared, and an interview with BBC's James Clayton in April 2023. Musk's choices of how to advertise and position X are important because "marketing strategies of news outlets actually create political associations through social identifiers and taste-based appeals" (Peck 2019, 14).

Musk's tweets about his digital newsroom blend a techno-utopian vision of collective liberation through the free exchange of ideas with a deep-seated pessimism, bordering on conspiracism, of the corrupted flow of information in mainstream media and on technology platforms. While seemingly contradictory, he often invokes both simultaneously, as in the following post: "Twitter gives you immediate news from the actual sources themselves vs filtered, hidden-agenda 'news' that is days old" (Musk, Dec 30, 2022). Setting up a dichotomy between old and new forms of information consumption, Musk articulates the widespread dearth of trust in epistemic institutions to establish X-based information as the technosocial corrective to legacy modes of information production. In a populist fashion, he implicitly depicts citizens as the *real* experts in comparison to the propagandists of mainstream media. In doing so, he prioritizes embodied, working-class, anti-elitist forms of knowledge in a similar fashion to that of Fox News hosts.

In the aforementioned post, a hint of technocracy begins to creep into an otherwise populist assertion, where technological progress via social media is how "actual sources" will displace the "hidden-agenda news" of the past. This bleeding together of technocracy and populism becomes more explicit in other posts. Shortly after purchasing Twitter, Musk posted that "because it consists of billions of bidirectional interactions per day, Twitter can be thought of as a collective, cybernetic super-intelligence" (Musk Nov 3 2022). Built atop his critiques of mainstream media, Musk's assertion offers a technological "solution" to the problems of the public sphere. As Drapalova and Wegrich observe, this is characteristic of technocratic populism, where "in populist hands, technocracy becomes an excellent tool to 'find' the simple solutions that people need" (2021, 645).

While some of Musk's critiques of mainstream media invoke a conspiratorial discourse of its "hidden agenda," many others draw upon widespread and cross-partisan discontents with our information environment:

"I don't read the legacy media propaganda much anymore. It's a waste of time and a sadness generator. Just get my news from X - much more immediate [and] has actual world-class subject matters experts and tons of humor. Sooo much better!" (Musk, Sept 29 2023)

Musk's comment about news as a "sadness generator" taps into a widespread discontent with professional journalism. Growing numbers of readers report feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, saddened, and angered by consuming news (Wagner and Boczowski 2021), which leads some to adopt news avoidance tactics (Mannel and Meese 2020). Identifying himself with this widespread trend allows Musk to posit a corrective in the form of X's humor-infused, crowdsourced content. By claiming that news should be entertaining, Musk draws upon the established tabloid tradition and simultaneously taps into critiques of dominant forms of journalism. In doing so, he moves beyond an information-centric understanding of media and adeptly understands that, as Hagood (2019, 4) asserts, "the real essence of



**Fig. 1** A meme posted by Elon Musk [@elonmusk] on September 28, 2022. This image derives from the epic fantasy role-playing game, Elden Ring. Two labels, "Mainstream Media" and "X," are added to the image.

media use is not the transmission of information but rather the attempted control of affect." By combining widespread affective discontent with legacy newsrooms as "sadness generators" with the narrower and more conspiratorial invocation of newsrooms as "hidden-agenda propagandists," Musk broadens the appeal of his newsroom alternative.

Throughout his posts, Musk deploys a distinct communicative style where he conveys serious information with a playful, satirical, or raunchy tone that invokes both moral and class frames. In one representative post from September 2022, Musk posted a meme of a single man, naked except for the loincloth around his waist and the large pot atop his head (Fig. 1). The man faces down a mob of armored and cloaked figures as they descend upon him with swords. The man is captioned "X" while the figures are labeled "Mainstream Media". This image derives from the epic fantasy role-playing game, Elden Ring. Through this captioned image, Musk is claiming that X represents the average, forgotten man, who bravely fights for his freedom against impossible odds. The mainstream media is explicitly associated with the armored figures, who descend as an indiscernible mob. Musk uses this image to establish moral frames (X stands up for against the oppressive mainstream forces that wish to do it harm) and assert masculine authority (X is a tough, muscular man taking on impossible odds).

Moreover, because the meme is derived from Elden Ring, it is implicitly associated with gamer communities, which are historically masculine, stigmatized, and subcultural. This works to enhance Musk's populist appeal, in that it offsets his elite position by aligning him with the historically negative and "socially dysfunctional" stereotypes targeted at gamer communities (Miryagalla et al 2023). This is a common strategy deployed by Musk, who frequently aligns himself and his platform with gamer culture by using terminology such as "Twitter is the PvP of social media" (Musk, Jan 27 2023). This reference to "PvP," or "Player versus player" games, linguistically enhances Musk's masculine image by associating him with a gamer culture where "performances of masculinity" are afforded a "privileged status" (Condis 2018, 9).

Humorous caricatures of X as the embodiment of the everyday citizens' war against the media are bolstered by sober, activist-inflected assertions that everyday citizens, working in tandem, will inevitably create a more accurate, authentic, and representative information ecosystem. Populist calls-to-action such as the following suffuse his feed: "Please encourage more citizen journalism! You can do live video easily from your phone. More on-the-ground reporting from regular citizens will change the world" (Musk, Sept 28 2023). Speaking directly to users, he invites everyone to be part of a movement to change the world. This call-

to-action carries a moral binary, where “X as humanity’s collective consciousness” is juxtaposed with “the legacy media is a pure propaganda machine” (Musk Aug 8 2023; Musk July 14 2024). In these statements, he draws upon existing populist repertoires by echoing the rhetoric of the technologically and organizationally centered public journalism movement of the 1990s, as described by Anderson (2011). These populist framings of media production and consumption are supplemented by cultural appeals to working class populism through memes that deride the value of higher education (Musk, Sept 9 2023).

Although it would be easy to assume that Musk’s rhetoric is a manifestation of his newly adopted right-wing political ideology, his dual positive and negative appeals cannot be attributed solely to a left-right binary. His utopian conception of an X-based newsroom mirrors the rhetoric of early leftist proponents of Twitter, who celebrated the platform’s potential to facilitate social movements and decentralize communications in a way that gives voice to marginalized groups. Musk’s biting criticisms of the mainstream information environment, too, pick up on leftist critiques of how professional journalism often excludes marginalized voices and bolsters the status quo. As Jackson et al write in *Hashtag Activism*:

...for those individuals and collectives unattached to elite institutions, Twitter, and the unifying code of the hashtag, have allowed the direct communication of raw and immediate images, emotions, and ideas and their widespread dissemination in a way previously unknown. While the public waits for print journalists to narrativize national crises and controversies, ordinary people on the scene are able to tweet firsthand accounts. While politicians embed particular issues in opaque language and meaningless euphemisms in their public discourse, ordinary people are able to explicitly advocate using unrepentant and concise rhetoric on these same issues (Jackson 2020, xxxi).

In the above, Jackson et al simultaneously depict the promises of social media and the failings of professional journalism. Marginalized from the pages of legacy media, African Americans turned to Twitter to mobilize against racial injustice and police brutality through hashtags such as #blacklivesmatter. Jackson emphasizes the *speed* and *decentralization* of Twitter—qualities which allow information to flow freely and circumvent traditional gatekeepers, delivering content that represents the *real* challenges facing marginalized people.

A populist binary is at play in both Musk’s framing of X and Jackson et al’s analysis of Black Twitter. Both create moral frames that, to draw from Jackson et al, juxtapose the “ordinary people” who disseminate “raw and unmediated images, emotions, and ideas” on Twitter against the “politicians,” “elite institutions,” and “print journalists” who gloss over these issues with “opaque language and meaningless euphemisms”. But while both invoke the populist imaginary of “the people,” their conception of who constitutes “the people” differs greatly. Through his numerous condemnations of the woke mind virus and his use of hypermasculine cultural referents, such as wearing a cowboy hat or posting images of himself with firearms, Musk implicitly signals a narrow white, male, and conservative base. Musk thus uses populist appeals and moral frames to further a very different, implicitly exclusionary version of journalism and digital media than that of Jackson and leftist media critics. Put otherwise, Musk offers a moral imagery to legitimize his platform, invoking a leftist discourse about the democratic role of journalism in building an inclusive public sphere, while simultaneously asserting exclusionary politics through aesthetic and stylistic techniques that signal an implicitly narrow public.

**Inverting power dynamics: James Clayton and Elon Musk.** Musk’s interview with BBC’s James Clayton shows how Musk establishes his populist authority through transgressive acts. From the start of the interview, Musk exudes a casual disregard for the established norms of a formal journalistic interview by behaving more like an internet troll than a CEO. While Clayton wears a neat suit, Musk sports a T-shirt and jeans. When Clayton asks Musk why he agreed to sit for the interview, Musk responds, “I actually do have a lot of respect for the BBC, although sometimes I forget what the BBC stands for... What does it stand for? Just kidding!” Musk cackles at his own joke, while Clayton gives an awkward chuckle and says “You know what it stands for”. Musk responds, amused, “yes I do!” before sobering and taking Clayton’s initial question seriously.

Musk’s choice of clothing and decision to troll the BBC at the start of the interview are meaningful transgressive acts. The former helps cultivate Musk’s image as a representative of the average citizen rather than aligning him with the journalistic establishment. The latter clearly unsettles Clayton and, for a moment, inverts the traditional power dynamic of interviewer to interviewee. It asserts Musk’s authority and unwillingness to conform. Throughout the interview, he reasserts this quality by turning questions back on Clayton and dominating how the interview unfolds.

As the interview progresses, Clayton asks Musk about his relationship with the mainstream media. After quipping that it’s a “love hate relationship,” Musk reflects on the nature of journalistic knowledge:

Who knows best? Someone who is an average citizen, or someone who is a journalist? I think in a lot of cases it is the average citizen who knows more than the journalist. Very often when I see an article about something that I know a lot about and I read the article, it’s like, they get a lot wrong. And you know, the best interpretation is that it’s someone who doesn’t really understand what’s going on in the industry, has only a few facts to play with, and has to come up with an article. It’s not going to hit the bull’s eye.

In these statements, Musk positions the embodied, situated, and local knowledge of the average citizen as having a greater epistemic value than that of a professional journalist who is just trying to “come up with an article”. Like Fox news anchors, he frames professional journalists as out of touch with the populations they cover, juxtaposing the lived experiences of everyday citizens with the professional, routine fact-finding practices of journalists who strive to represent those experiences. These appeals to common sense and situated knowledge are particularly salient in today’s polarized information environment, because “unlike formal expertise, these populist sources of legitimacy do not require institutional verification” (Peck 2019, 26).

While invoking a populist frame, Musk’s statements also have a technocratic ring. Rather than rejecting expertise as such, he insists that citizens know “what is going on in the industry” and have more “facts” than journalists, who are just paid to pump out a story. Rather than upholding the knowledge of citizens in general, he is in fact arguing for domain-specific expertise. In this way, he promotes a form of journalism that is deferential to a particular *type* of citizen—a technical or industry expert—rather than citizens in general. However, he does this in such a subtle way that populist and technocratic appeals coexist neatly.

**Citizen journalism in action: Musk goes to the border.** Returning to the sketch that opened this article, Musk’s journey

to Eagle Pass serves as a final embodiment of Musk's articulation of citizen journalism. In the months leading up to this trip, Musk made several posts about the crisis at the US-Mexico border and claimed that it was being overlooked by professional journalists. On September 7th 2023, he shared a post from Fox News correspondent Bill McLugin that includes photos and videos of migrants crossing the border at Eagle Pass. This is followed by a video from Auden Cabello, an X-based content producer whose bio at the time read "citizen journalist documenting the migrant journey through Coahuila and Texas". By sharing content from a local, self-identified citizen journalist, Musk projects a commitment to upholding local voices. He juxtaposes this with the legacy media, commenting "strange that there is almost no legacy media coverage of this" (Musk, August 7 2023).

These previously-shared materials began to establish a binary between the "local people" and the legacy media organizations or Washington bureaucrats who left them behind. By sharing citizen journalism content and filming his own video footage on a smartphone, Musk positions himself on the side of the forgotten men and women of Texas. When he streams his video from Eagle Pass, his stylistic decisions perform a working-class identity. Musk sports a T-shirt, aviator sunglasses, and a chin full of stubble—an ensemble that exudes a careless disregard for the polished, clean-shaven aesthetic norms of professional news anchors. His video is filmed beneath a decrepit underpass with a railroad in the background, signaling Musk's willingness to put his body on the line by going to remote locations that are underserved by professional journalists and career politicians.

With his phone held at an awkward angle below his stubbly chin, Musk begins the video: "Here we are at Eagle Pass, and we are going to be meeting with the major officials and law enforcement who are responsible for the border. We will hear directly from them and [you can] see exactly what is going on for yourself". This statement navigates multiple bases of authority. While asserting that his video allows the viewer to "see exactly what is going on for yourself," Musk also relies on the testimonies of "major officials and law enforcement." In doing so, he simultaneously challenges and embraces official knowledge and credentials. In interviewing *local* officials, Musk demonstrates an astute awareness of how locality can be leveraged to legitimize official knowledge claims. Moreover, the blue-collar ethos of law and border enforcement officers lends an additional cultural layer of authenticity, outside of credentials, to his interviewees. Thus, Musk claims to allow citizens to see the truth for themselves, while simultaneously mediating those truth claims through the expertise of "major," but *local*, officials. In this way, his claim blends professional, credentialed expertise with firsthand, lay knowledge and working-class cultural appeal.

Rather than feeling disjointed, these appeals meld seamlessly together and strengthen one another. While introduced by their credentials, the "major officials" who are interviewed draw upon their local, experiential knowledge when they convey information. Local Congressman Tony Gonzalez features centrally in the video, speaking as a representative of the local people by using "we," and rarely "I," statements. "We've been at the epicenter of this border crisis," he asserts, while the federal government and legacy media are disconnected from the local conditions. He speaks by and for local sheriffs and elected officers who are "being forgotten, their stories are being left out".

Randy Brown, a sheriff from Medina County, also appears in the video. Brown looks like he has walked straight off the set of a Western film—a sheriff's badge adorns his shirt and a thick handlebar mustache stretches below his broad cowboy hat. Musk coaches Brown on how to address the audience. "Just imagine that you are just talking to America here, and people just want to understand what's going on. But assume that people do not know

what is going on". Later, he provides similar coaching to another sheriff. "This is really just for the general public. We want to frame the situation because not everyone knows the magnitude, and you know, [if] this [is] normal. So, if you could just frame the situation for the general public, that could be helpful."

A populist rhetoric undergirds this guidance, where the video is made for "the general public," "America," and "the people". The moral framing of the video is clear—it is a public service video that uses language that anyone can understand to show what is happening in real time. Although the "legacy media" is not invoked, claims that the public may not be informed speak to the failings of mainstream media by proxy. After all, the media is meant to inform the public. The class-based stylistic referents of the participants' dress and language also signal that they have been forgotten precisely *because* they are the real people whose stories have not been deemed important enough to make it into the urban, elite halls of the *New York Times*. By using populist moral frames and cultural and stylistic references, Musk's video is able to make implicit political claims and assert its authenticity. This performance of citizen journalism, working class authenticity, and local experience almost entirely masks the underlying conservative ideological orientation that guided Musk to choose the migrant crisis as the topic of his video. In his selection and framing of content, Musk presents border security as the *true* issue facing working-class Americans—an issue that mainstream media and politicians are supposedly ignoring in favor of their own self-serving agendas.

## Conclusion

I have analyzed how Elon Musk brands X as a participatory medium for journalism that is avowedly by-and-for the people. By attending to his image and political trajectory, as well as the stylistic and discursive frames of his content, I have elucidated the methods by which his vision of X achieves salience with its audience. Musk's journalism, like his persona, is contradictory, inconsistent, unpredictable, and controversial. His vision of X as a newsroom blends the transgressive elements and moral frames of populism, with working class cultural and stylistic referents, with technocratic appeals to industry expertise and results over process. These elements are divergent, but rather than contradicting one another, they resonate together and coalesce into a cohesive message that is greater than the sum of its parts. Through a mix-and-match of disparate appeals to cultural and moral authority, Musk re-enchants digital journalism as a populist and technoutopian enterprise, capturing the imagination of a populace that is increasingly skeptical of institutional and professional sources of authenticity and authority.

Musk's vision comes at a time when professional journalism is in crisis and our information environment is undergoing seismic shifts (Lemann 2020). These changes create a space for the reworking of traditional practices and the reallocation of what constitutes authenticity and legitimacy (Schudson 2018, 44). Musk's vision, and its appeal, are inseparable from this landscape. His vision grows out of and in opposition to the "dominant bloc" at a time where hegemonic systems are in flux, which catalyzes the emergence of new configurations of power, politics, and culture. We can and should condemn the harmful impacts and contradictions of Musk's Twitter takeover, which has allowed hate speech to flourish and has weakened guardrails against disinformation and propaganda (Navaroli 2023). However, Musk's ability to enchant and maintain a conservative user base provides us with an example of how radical alternatives to traditional media achieve salience. At a time when "something about the traditional mechanisms for delivering information to the American electorate seem to be broken" (Crowell 2024),

scholars and journalists would do well to attend to these dynamics.

This article offers a limited analysis of a multifaceted phenomenon and thus suggests numerous areas for further study. First and foremost, I have left aside questions of *whether* a platform such as X can realistically be depicted as a replacement for the traditional newsroom, instead investigating *how* Musk has articulated this vision. As the boundaries of what constitutes “news” weaken in the platform economy, scholars should continue to conceptually and empirically investigate practices of how the news is being formulated, consumed, and conceptualized. In addition, questions over what constitutes the popular bloc and the nature of hegemony in our hyper-mediated and networked society require further theoretical exploration. Evaluating how the actual practice of citizen journalism on X relates to the long history of citizen journalism, on the left and the right, would also be a fruitful avenue of inquiry. In addition, I have not evaluated the economic models or technological infrastructures underpinning and guiding Musk’s branding of X as a newsroom. Investigating the economic incentives and impact of X’s reformulation for Musk himself, platform users, advertisers, and media figures is thus an essential line of inquiry. Finally, interviews with X users, including content producers and self-described citizen journalists, would provide invaluable insights into how Musk’s image and platform are being received. This would aid in understanding which of his performances achieve salience, and which fall flat.

### Data availability

The author did not create a publicly available dataset in relation to this research. However, archives of Elon Musk’s Twitter/X feed are available in several locations. For an up-to-date archive of Musk’s tweets created by a data journalist, see <https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/dadalyndell/elon-musk-tweets-2010-to-2025-march>.

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### Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

### Ethical approval

No ethical review was necessary for this research, as it relies on publicly available statements from a public figure. Thus, it is exempt research.

### Informed consent

No informed consent was necessary or sought for this research because it solely relies on publicly available statements from a public figure.

### Additional information

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