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THE SKY IS BLUER ON THE OTHER SIDE: FLEEING FROM TOXIC VIBES ON #XODUS

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Introduction

For almost two decades, Twitter (now X) has been a crucial component of online communication and social coordination for millions of users worldwide. Although the platform has been subject to modifications since its conception (Baym & Burgess, 2020), the acquisition by Elon Musk in 2022 represented its most dramatic vibe shift (Bisbee & Munger, 2025). Changes implemented by Musk include the rebranding and renaming of the company, and a new explicit focus on protecting 'freedom of speech'. Such changes had already provoked the disengagement of part of the userbase (Ibid.), which was exacerbated in 2024 by the temporary banning of the application by the Brazilian government in August and the re-election of Donald Trump in November. In the wake of such events, there was a mass exodus of users to alternative apps such as Threads, Mastodon, and Bluesky – a pattern of migration many referred to as #Xodus. We explore this transition in which ordinary users have decided that it was time to move away from Twitter/X and, simultaneously, attempt to make sense of the logics, affordances, and atmospheres of competing apps – particularly, Bluesky.

Good vibes and toxic vibes

In making sense of #Xodus, we explore how users perceive and articulate the 'atmospheres' of Twitter/X and Bluesky. The term 'atmosphere' has been gaining traction in media studies (Salazar, 2023; Lunt, 2024), and is meant to capture fluid, indeterminate feelings and sensations (Böhme, 2018) while conveying the idea that we are immersed in an ephemeral 'microclimatic condition' (Coyne, 2016:37). When it comes to digital cultures, this idea of a distributed tonality of feeling is often encapsulated by the term 'vibe' (Brown et al., 2024; James, 2022). Social media users often develop vernaculars for commenting on the 'feel', energy, and vibes of different

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apps, and Twitter/X has been previously described as a 'toxic' place (Kender, 2022). Yet, recent studies point out that 'toxicity' (Gibson et al, 2023) has risen on Twitter/X since Elon Musk's takeover (CCDH, 2023; Hickey et al., 2025), and that Musk himself has been responsible for spreading disinformation (CCDH, 2024).

Compared to Twitter/X, Bluesky offers users more possibilities for tailoring their informational flows to their interests, including by developing customized feeds that might protect them from toxicity. While the 'vibes' of a given platform are certainly somewhat contingent on its interface and affordances (Kender, 2022), they are not reducible to them. As a response to the widespread conception of social media as 'toxic', platforms continuously highlight in their institutional communication and promotional campaigns values such as positivity and well-being (Scharlach, 2024). However, rather than focusing on platforms' design, technical affordances, or institutional discourse, we are interested in how ordinary users communicate the perceived atmosphere of Bluesky and how these perceptions represent a 'vibe shift' in relation to their previous social media experiences. This paper responds to a growing demand for research on the fleeting flows of energy and feeling that characterize digital platforms (Kender, 2022), emphasizing both the perception of certain vibes and the staging of these atmospheres (Salazar, 2023).

Methods

We used Bluesky's public API via Communalytic (Gruzd & Mai, 2023) to collect 472,268 messages mentioning 'Twitter' posted between one week before the 2024 US election (29 Oct) and three weeks after the election (25 Nov). This is a relevant timeframe, since it was when most users moved from X to Bluesky. We use a mixed-methods approach to analyze this dataset, combining NLP Semantic Analysis and qualitative Thematic Analysis. For the Semantic Analysis, we used the Voyage-3 Multilingual Embedding Model to identify the semantic meaning of the text, and later created a 3D semantic similarity map via Communalytic (Gruzd & Mai, 2023). We used Semantic Analysis to explore the entire dataset and although the Davies-Boulding Index (DBI) showed a good clustering quality, only one major thematic cluster was identified alongside two very small clusters. We tested various parameters, but breaking down the major cluster into smaller ones considerably reduced the DBI. Therefore, we decided to re-run the Semantic Analysis using only messages that received at least 10 reposts on Bluesky (n=13,165), a sample that represents the most popular messages in our dataset. More meaningful clusters were identified alongside a good DBI of 0.503 (Figure 1).

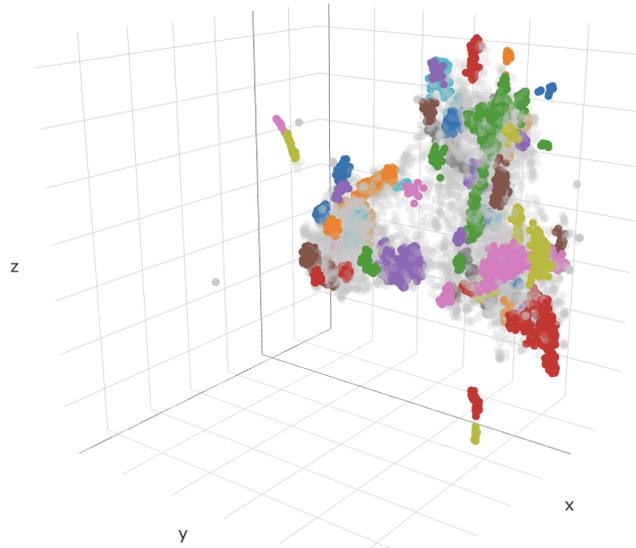


Figure 1. 3D semantic similarity map of Bluesky messages about 'Twitter'

We are currently conducting a qualitative Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the messages in our dataset. The preliminary findings of this analysis help to make sense of the key clusters identified in the Semantic Analysis with more granular results and in-depth insights.

Preliminary findings and conclusions

The Semantic Analysis identified 65 thematic clusters (Figure 1). We created automated labels for each cluster, reviewing and adjusting them as necessary. After reviewing the clusters and a sample of the messages from each cluster, and in combination with the Semantic Analysis, our preliminary qualitative Thematic Analysis indicates that some of the main themes are: mourning the Twitter that once was; celebrating the escape from a toxic environment; and actively cultivating Bluesky as a 'good place'.

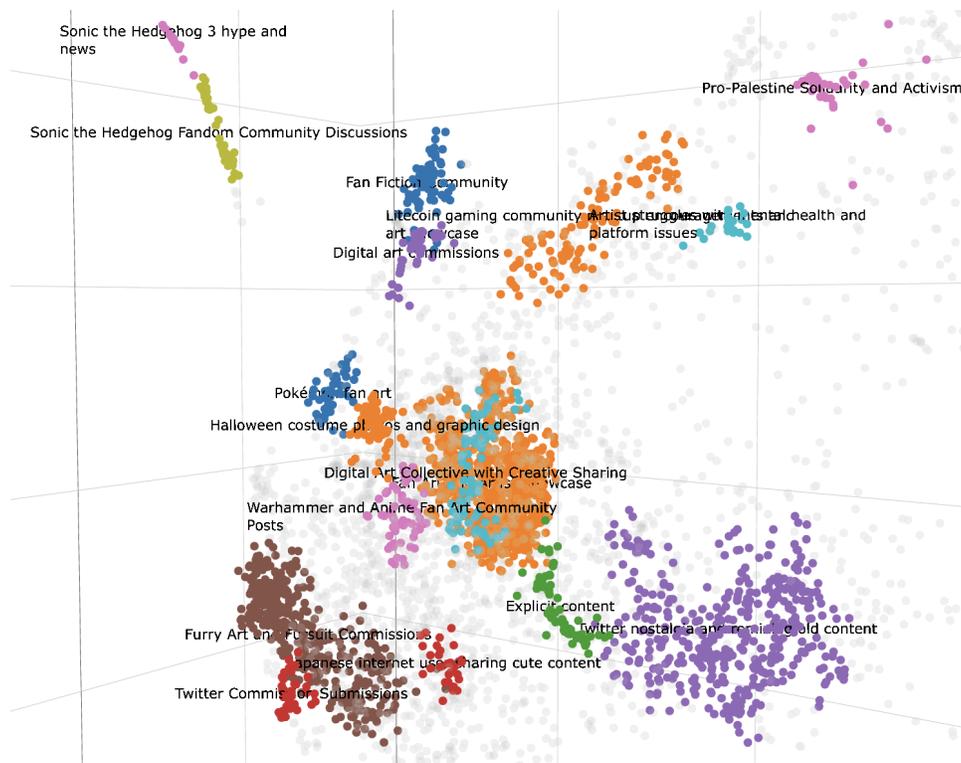


Figure 2. Thematic area around communities

One of the thematic areas (Figure 2) covers clusters of posts about various communities moving from Twitter to Bluesky, especially from users trying to (re)build their networks. In the qualitative analysis, we identified that users manifest feelings of sadness and frustration for the loss of the community, the memories, and the ‘good old days’ of Twitter, which demonstrates a nostalgic appreciation for the platform that they once found so enjoyable and that was then ‘corrupted’ and lost its innocence and charm – a pattern that connects to previous theorizations of social media nostalgia (Lupinacci et al., 2015; Wieghorst, 2021; Miltner & Gerrard, 2021). While Bluesky’s technical affordances are described in many posts as ‘almost identical’ to Twitter’s, users seem to associate its ‘vibe’ with that of an older, better, pre-Musk social medium.

The third thematic area (Figure 4) includes users trying to navigate Bluesky's new atmosphere and learn about the platform's affordances. In the preliminary qualitative analysis we found that there's also awareness that the maintenance of 'good vibes' and of this 'good place' aura requires effort and active work from users themselves – that is, they recognize that atmospheres are inherently sociotechnical, resulting both from the infrastructure of the environment and from the practices and relationships established within it (“Bluesky will be what you make of it!”). Many of the analyzed posts included tips and suggestions on how to protect the new space from toxicity, such as how to block and avoid feeding trolls – demonstrating the acquired literacy of atmosphere staging and the resistance tactics of platform migration.

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