

Mockery, Populism and The Textual Devaluation of Humanities Research on Twitter

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Abstract.

Digital platforms have increasingly become arenas for cyber anti-intellectualism, where academic expertise is actively devalued by the public. This study investigates the linguistic construction of this hostility through a case study of the viral backlash against Dr. Ally Louk on Twitter (X). Employing Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research analyzes a corpus of 50-high-engagement replies to identify how anti-intellectual sentiment is textually produced and socially legitimized. The findings reveal that this backlash was not a series of random insults but a structured ideological performance driven by five discursive strategies, predominantly Hostile Populist Rhetoric (48%) and Mockery (46%). The analysis demonstrates that these strategies function to enforce a "market audit" on higher education, where a potent alliance of neoliberal rationality and cultural populism delegitimizes humanities research as economically "wasteful". Furthermore, the study uncovers a distinct gendered dimension, where patriarchal norms are weaponized to reframe female intellectual labor as socially deviant. The study concludes that digital anti-intellectualism is infrastructurally amplified by platform affordances, underscoring the urgent need to shift the narrative of higher education from economic utility to civic necessity to counter the algorithmic amplification of populist resentment.

Keywords: *Cyber anti-intellectualism; critical discourse analysis; twitter; neoliberalism and populism.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of public discourse has undergone a significant transformation, as traditional skepticism toward expertise evolves into a sophisticated digital weapon. Historically, anti-intellectualism, defined as a systemic hostility toward intellectuals and critical inquiry was viewed primarily as a cultural disposition. This was most notably documented by Hofstadter (1963), who identified a persistent resistance to the perceived 'detachment' of the academic elite. However, in the age of digital mediation, this sentiment has manifested as 'cyber anti-intellectualism' (Mede & Schäfer, 2020). In these contemporary digital ecologies, the traditional gatekeepers of knowledge are increasingly bypassed. Supported by the affordances of social media, algorithmic structures now prioritize populist rhetoric and emotional appeal over nuanced scholarship, fundamentally shifting the weight of public belief from empirical evidence to virality (Papacharissi, 2015). Scholars have identified three core pillars of modern anti-intellectualism: populist anti-elitism, unreflective instrumentalism, and anti-rationalism. Populist anti-elitism suggests that "common sense" is superior to specialized training; unreflective instrumentalism demands that all inquiry result in immediate, tangible utility; and anti-rationalism fosters a general suspicion toward complex, abstract reasoning. These pillars are significantly amplified by the structural affordances of digital platforms like Twitter (X), where disinformation and manipulation tactics thrive (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). In these online spaces, intellectual authority is increasingly undermined, particularly in academic fields that challenge dominant cultural norms or offer critical perspectives.

The Neoliberal Commodification of the Humanities

One specific area where cyber anti-intellectualism becomes most visible is in the persistent, and increasingly violent, divide between the STEM disciplines and the Humanities. This divide is not merely an academic preference but a reflection of neoliberal educational paradigms that have dominated the global North and South alike. Under neoliberal hegemony, higher education is reframed as a site for human capital production rather than civic enlightenment. As Nussbaum (2010) argues, the "silent crisis" of modern education is the systematic erosion of the humanities, which are disciplines that emphasize ethics, critical thinking, and cultural literacy, because they are perceived as "superfluous" to the market's needs. This ideological stratification is discursively maintained through the mocking of humanities research as

"impractical" or "wasteful." Neoliberal metrics of productivity, such as grant income, employability rankings, and Return on Investment (ROI), are leveraged by the public to police the boundaries of legitimate knowledge. Consequently, humanities scholarship is socially constructed as "wasteful" precisely because its contributions often resist commodification (Shumway, 2017). This creates a "market audit" mentality, where the public, acting as neoliberal enforcers, demands that scholars justify their labor through the lens of economic utility.

The Case of Dr. Ally Louk and Digital Hostility

The case of Dr. Ally Louk, a literary scholar at the University of Cambridge, serves as a quintessential example of this sociotechnical hostility. Dr. Louk's doctoral research, *Olfactory Ethics: The Politics of Smell in Modern and Contemporary Prose*, represents the kind of specialized, theoretically dense inquiry that neoliberal populism finds most "offensive." When Dr. Louk announced her successful PhD defense on Twitter in November 2024, the post went viral, amassing over 120 million views. However, this visibility triggered a massive wave of "context collapse," where her academic milestone was stripped of its scholarly framework and thrust into the "attention economy" of populist outrage. The resulting backlash was characterized by a synthesis of misogyny and anti-academic sentiment. Louk faced personal attacks, sexist trolling, and even death threats, many from accounts that targeted the very idea of a humanities career. This incident underscores the extreme vulnerability of scholars on public-facing platforms and illustrates how digital discourse constructs the humanities as inherently detached or irrelevant (Eslen-Ziya et al., 2024). This study argues that such hostility is not a series of isolated insults but a structured ideological performance: a form of "epistemic populism" where users collectively normalize suspicion toward expertise.

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework for Digital CDA

To provide a rigorous analysis of the hostility directed toward Dr. Ally Louk, this study adopts Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This framework is uniquely suited for digital discourse because it conceptualizes language not as a static text, but as a dynamic social action interrelated across three levels: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough's model is widely regarded as one of the most systematic frameworks for CDA, offering a methodological bridge between the micro-level of linguistic structures and the macro-level of social and ideological formations. By utilizing this triad, the research can demonstrate how a single 280-character tweet is simultaneously a linguistic artifact, an instance of digital communicative practice, and a manifestation of broader neoliberal and populist dynamics.

a. The Textual Dimension

At the textual level, the focus is on the formal linguistic features of the tweets, which directly shape how meaning is constructed and conveyed to the online public. This involves a granular examination of vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and rhetorical strategies (Fairclough, 2001). Each of these elements plays a distinct role in reinforcing the anti-intellectual ideologies that target humanities scholarship. One crucial sub-dimension is vocabulary and lexical choice. The words chosen in a text often carry implicit evaluative meanings that frame subjects in specific, often derogatory, ways (Fairclough, 1995). In the context of cyber anti-intellectualism, the use of terms like "elitist," "out-of-touch," or "so-called experts" represents a deliberate lexical strategy to delegitimize intellectual authority. These word choices create symbolic boundaries between academics and the "virtuous public" (Barker et al., 2022). In the case of Dr. Louk, lexical markers such as "junk," "wasteful," or "woke nonsense" serve as evaluative tokens that bypass the complexity of her dissertation, reducing a decade of scholarly labor to a dismissive soundbite. Beyond vocabulary, grammar and syntax play a vital role in shaping the relationships between social actors. CDA scholars have long argued that sentence structures, such as the choice between active and passive voice, can obscure responsibility or undermine professional authority (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

For example, by using imperative structures, as seen in the 'Barista Trope' where users command Dr. Louk to 'serve coffee,' the public linguistically enforces a master-servant hierarchy. Furthermore, textual analysis must consider speech acts (Lestari & Hartati, 2020), where utterances like representatives, directives, or expressives function to reveal communicative intentions. In anti-intellectual tweets, these speech acts are manipulated to ridicule or dismiss expertise, often adopting a "spoken-like" informal tone

that characterizes social media interaction. Cohesion and coherence are also essential textual markers. These refer to how a text is internally connected through devices such as pronouns and repetition (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). In polarized online discourse, pronouns like "they," "those people," or "these scholars" are frequently used to construct an in-group versus out-group dynamic. This reinforces a sense of opposition between 'ordinary citizens' and 'academics' (van Dijk, 1998), framing intellectuals as outsiders who do not share the community's values. Finally, rhetorical structures, including metaphor, irony, and hyperbole, amplify the emotional impact of the discourse (Charteris-Black, 2004). Describing humanities research through metaphors like the "ivory tower" portrays scholars as detached from reality, while memetic ridicule targets academic figures to entertain audiences while simultaneously eroding their expert authority (Zolides, 2022).

b. The Discursive Practice

The second level of Fairclough's model, discursive practice, shifts the focus toward how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed in the digital ecology of Twitter (X) (Fairclough, 2001). This dimension bridges linguistic features with the broader processes that shape how discourse circulates. In the case of Dr. Louk, production involves how users create content by combining personal opinion with the "lifted" title of her dissertation. This process is inherently tied to power dynamics, as ordinary users can challenge institutional authority through accessible modes like hashtags or viral images (Zolides, 2022). Distribution on social media is governed by algorithmic curation and platform logics that often prioritize engagement over accuracy (Boyd, 2020). Emotionally charged anti-intellectual content, such as the viral backlash against Dr. Louk, spreads faster and wider than factual, evidence-based academic responses due to the affordances of virality (Barroso-Moreno et al., 2023). This is further complicated by consumption, or how audiences interpret and engage with these texts. On Twitter, this engagement occurs through comments, retweets, and "quote-tweets," which add new layers of interpretation and often amplify the original hostility (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). By studying these practices, this research uncovers how anti-intellectual ideas gain legitimacy through the sheer volume of digital circulation and shared skepticism in the digital platform.

c. The Social Practice

The third and most critical dimension is social practice, which situates the discourse within broader ideological and institutional contexts. At this level, discourse is analyzed as a form of social action that reflects and reshapes the societal structures of higher education (Fairclough, 2010). The rejection of Dr. Louk's expertise is deeply rooted in the socio-political struggle over the value of knowledge in a market-driven world (Fairclough N. & Fairclough I., 2018). Social practice analysis considers how discourse is connected to ideologies that legitimize particular power relations (van Dijk, 1998). The framing of Dr. Louk as "elitist" reflects neoliberal and populist ideologies that position academic expertise as disconnected from "common sense" (Motta, 2024; Thompson, 2022). These ideological framings contribute to the delegitimization of educational institutions, reinforcing a systemic distrust in intellectual labor.

Furthermore, the marginalization of the humanities cannot be separated from the politicization of expertise and the neoliberal demand for immediate economic utility (Merkley & Loewen, 2021). At this level, CDA reveals how the widespread spread of ridicule and conspiracy against experts contributes to a broader erosion of trust in the production of knowledge, aligning digital discourse with wider social inequalities and institutional decay. While previous scholarship has addressed anti-intellectualism in scientific communication (Chen et al., 2023) or political polarization (Alaghbary, 2022), there remains a significant lacuna in the analysis of hostility directed specifically toward the humanities. This study fills that gap by investigating how discursive practices on Twitter facilitate the transformation of humanities scholarship into anti-intellectual narratives. Specifically, it explores how these digital interactions reflect and legitimize neoliberal and populist ideologies regarding the value of academic labor.

II. METHODS

Research design

This study employed a qualitative research design centered on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary analytical framework. CDA was uniquely positioned to deconstruct the dialectical relationship

between micro-linguistic choices and macro-social power structures (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Specifically, this study adopted Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, which treated discourse as a simultaneous enactment of text, discursive practice, and social practice. Given that cyber anti-intellectualism is a communicative phenomenon increasingly driven by algorithmic mediation and collective affect (Merkley, 2020; Zolides, 2022), this framework allowed for an investigation into how digital interactions normalize suspicion toward academic expertise.

While Fairclough's framework encompasses three dimensions, this study deliberately prioritized the discursive practice and social practice dimensions. This analytical weighting was chosen because the phenomenon of cyber anti-intellectualism is fundamentally rooted in the rapid circulation of narratives and the broader ideological shifts within higher education. Consequently, the textual dimension was treated as a gateway to access deeper sociopolitical insights rather than an end in itself. Specifically, the discursive practice level analyzed the production and recontextualization of tweets, focusing on how Twitter's (X) technical affordances shaped the intertextual trajectory of the discourse. Meanwhile, the social practice level situated these interactions within broader ideological hegemonies, including neoliberal rationalities and the rise of "epistemic populism," which demanded economic utility from intellectual labor (Motta, 2024).

Participants

The data for this research consisted of digital artifacts retrieved from Twitter (X), produced by users participating in the discourse surrounding Dr. Ally Louk in November 2024. In Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS), such artifacts are treated as primary sites where power relations and ideological struggles are performatively enacted (KhosraviNik, 2022). Although the platform was rebranded as "X" in 2023, this study retained the term "Twitter" to maintain terminological continuity with established academic literature and to reflect the platform's sociocultural identity at the time of the event (Bouvier & Machin, 2018). The primary site of data collection was the viral thread announcing Louk's PhD defense, which functioned as a "discursive event" where public and academic contexts collapsed (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). The corpus was constructed using purposive sampling, a method chosen to identify and select information-rich cases that are most relevant to the phenomenon of cyber anti-intellectualism (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The analysis focused on 50 high-engagement replies to the original post. This sample size was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation, where the 50 units provided a comprehensive cross-section of dominant anti-intellectual tropes, ensuring that additional data would likely yield diminishing returns for the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2018). To ensure the quality and validity of the corpus, data were gathered through systematic digital archiving, including screenshot documentation and metadata logging. This process was crucial to preserve the intertextual context, ensuring that the discourse was not analyzed in isolation but within its original digital ecology (Zappavigna, 2012). Engagement metrics, such as likes and retweets, were treated not as mere statistical data but as proxies for discursive authority and audience alignment. As argued by Gerlitz & Helmond (2013), such metrics function as "affective measures" that signal the social legitimacy and algorithmic resonance of specific ideological positions within the platform's attention economy.

Ethical considerations

To ensure ethical integrity in internet-based research, all retrieved data were anonymized in accordance with established ethical guidelines (Bryman, 2016). Although the tweets were publicly accessible, the researchers redacted the usernames and profile pictures of the original posters to focus on the discursive patterns rather than individual identities. This step was taken to protect users from potential secondary harassment while still allowing for a rigorous analysis of the public discourse.

Data analysis

Following Fairclough's (1995) recursive model, the analysis proceeded through three integrated stages. First, textual mapping was conducted as a preliminary linguistic screening to identify surface-level markers of hostility, such as the use of scare quotes and evaluative adjectives. This served as the evidentiary base for deeper analysis. Second, the discursive practice analysis investigated how Louk's original academic announcement was recontextualized, examining how users "lifted" the dissertation title to insert it into

populist narratives. Finally, the social practice interpretation linked these discursive patterns to macro-level structures. Each unit was coded into five synthesized ideological categories: (1) Mockery and ridicule towards experts or intellectuals; (2) Oversimplification of complex issues; (3) Hostile populist rhetoric; (4) Anti-expertise amplification; and (5) Delegitimization of educational institutions. This analytical procedure placed greater emphasis on the second and third levels of Fairclough's model. In the discursive practice analysis, the focus shifted from mere sentence structure to the processes of production and consumption: specifically, how Twitter's affordances allowed academic texts to be decontextualized. In the social practice interpretation, the analysis transcended linguistic description to provide a critical explanation of how these tweets reflect the 'market audit' mentality of neoliberalism. This approach ensured that the research remained focused on the sociopolitical implications of the backlash rather than exhaustive micro-linguistic cataloging.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of 50 high-engagement replies revealed that cyber anti-intellectualism was constructed through the strategic deployment of five interrelated textual strategies. These strategies functioned to shift epistemic authority from the academic expert to the collective "common sense" of the online public. The distribution of these categories is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Cyber Anti-Intellectualism Categories

No.	Category	Quantity	Percentages
1	Hostile Populist Rhetoric	24	48%
2	Mockery or Ridicule towards Experts or Intellectuals	23	46%
3	Delegitimization of Educational Institutions	18	36%
4	Oversimplification and Misrepresentation	14	28%
5	Anti-Expertise Amplification	4	8%
Total		50	*

**Note: Percentages exceed 100% as some units contained multiple categories*

Hostile Populist Rhetoric: The Performance of Status Reversal

Hostile populist rhetoric emerged as the most dominant strategy within the corpus, appearing in 24 replies (48%). This strategy is characterized by a deliberate status reversal, where the "common man" identity is linguistically constructed as morally and economically superior to the "academic elite." This finding aligns with the "people-centric" vs. "elite-hostile" dichotomy where digital platforms facilitate a direct challenge to traditional gatekeepers of knowledge (Mede & Schäfer, 2020). Within the digital public sphere, this rhetoric serves as a mechanism for the "virtuous public" to reclaim discursive space from those perceived as detached from reality (Papacharissi, 2015). A primary example of this reversal is found in Tweet 26, which utilizes a sharp comparative structure to devalue doctoral labor: "I dropped out of high school...and I provide more value to the world in one day than you will in your entire life." From a CDA perspective, this tweet is a profound redefinition of "value." The user juxtaposes a lack of formal education ("dropout") with superior productivity, reflecting Hofstadter's (1963) observation that anti-intellectualism often functions as a defense mechanism to frame practical experience as more "authentic" than specialized training. This hyperbolic contrast serves to construct humanities scholarship as a form of ontological waste, reflecting a social practice that views intellectualism as an obstruction to "real" societal contribution (Thompson, 2022). The rhetoric is also deeply embedded in neoliberal rationality, which reframes intellectual inquiry as a failed business transaction. Tweet 28 exemplifies this by asking: "What type of business do you open with this degree?" This functions as an interrogative delegitimization that ignores the civic value of the humanities.

By using the lexical item "business," the discourse reframes the PhD through a "market audit" mentality where academic legitimacy is predicated entirely on its Return on Investment (ROI) (Shumway, 2017). Under this neoliberal hegemony, labor that does not produce immediate, marketable commodities is discursively categorized as "junk," prioritizing economic utility over critical inquiry (Giroux, 2014; Nussbaum, 2010). Furthermore, the strategy involves linguistic denaming and socio-economic projection to challenge institutional authority. In Tweet 11, the user asserts: "I'm not calling you doctor. Not for that field,"

an attempt to strip the scholar of her symbolic power and demote her in the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 2003). This is reinforced by the Barista Trope in Tweet 18: "Just spell my name right on the cup when you serve me at Starbucks." This imperative command projects the Cambridge scholar into a future of precarious service labor, suggesting that despite her "elite" education, she remains subservient to the consumer class (Standing, 2011). Such interactions demonstrate how digital platforms empower users to engage in systemic institutional distrust (Best et al., 2021). Lastly, this rhetoric is synthesized with patriarchal expectations of "useful" labor. Tweet 12 utilizes an adversative conjunction to present a binary choice: "Or you could've had a kid and actually benefited the world. What a waste." The doctoral degree is framed as a "waste" because it deviates from the "natural" labor of motherhood. This discursive move aligns with "popular misogyny," where female intellectuals are hyper-visible targets for social correction (Banet-Weiser, 2018). It underscores a neoliberal-populist alliance that punishes women for prioritizing intellectual careers over domesticity, reframing academic labor as a socially deviant pursuit (Federici, 2020).

Mockery and Ridicule Towards Experts and Intellectuals

Mockery appeared in 23 replies (46%), functioning as the primary vehicle for affective aggression. The analysis reveals that digital anti-intellectualism thrives on the infantilization of expertise, where academic labor is linguistically reduced to a trivial or childlike endeavor. For instance, Tweet 8 employs a condescending tone by stating: "Wow you wrote something worthless... Here's a sticker. ☐" The use of the "gold star" emoji, a symbol typically reserved for primary school achievements, functions as a textual marker of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2003). This is further exemplified by Tweet 15, which utilizes memetic wordplay to rename the PhD as "PhDaycare." From a CDA perspective, this lexical choice serves to strip the scholar of her professional maturity, framing the university not as a site of rigorous production but as a space for intellectual "play" or "supervision" (Fairclough, 2001; Zolides, 2022). Furthermore, this mockery is deeply intersectional, blending anti-intellectualism with popular misogyny. The discourse frequently engages in correctional shaming, where Dr. Louk's PhD is framed as a barrier to traditional domestic roles. Tweet 27 asserts that "not one ounce of that effort made you more marriageable," while Tweet 9 frames her research as "junk" produced in place of a baby. These tweets demonstrate how female intellectuals are hyper-visible targets for social correction (Banet-Weiser, 2018). By ridiculing her intellectual output through a patriarchal lens, the discourse attempts to shame the scholar back into the private sphere, ensuring that the authority to define "legitimate knowledge" remains masculine-coded (Federici, 2020; Mostov, 2021). The use of the lexical item "welfare" in Tweet 9 to describe academic funding further implies that women's intellectual labor is a parasitic drain on societal resources unless it serves reproductive ends.

As seen in Tweet 44, which frames the dissertation as a drinking game ("Take a shot every time she says 'olfactory'"), academic work is often subjected to context collapse. This occurs when specialized research is stripped of its theoretical framework and thrust into an attention economy that rewards "conversational humor" and memetic engagement (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Zappavigna, 2012). In this "gamified" environment, the scholar's research is not something to be understood, but something to be consumed as entertainment. Tweet 4 ("Lmao what a waste of time") and Tweet 7 ("bitch got a phd in utter woke nonsense ☐") illustrate how digital affordances, such as emojis and informal slang, lower the barrier for public ridicule. This gamification transforms academic critique into a social "ritual" that builds in-group solidarity among anti-intellectual actors while delegitimizing the expert (Mede & Schäfer, 2020). Lastly, the mockery often escalates into intersectional hostility and intelligence-shaming. Tweet 41 utilizes the slur "midwit" to target the scholar's perceived intelligence, while Tweet 3 employs aggressive racial and derogatory language to dismiss the research as being about "stinky niggas from books." These linguistic choices serve a dual purpose: they attack the scholar's personal identity while simultaneously framing humanities research as fundamentally detached from "real" human concerns. As Fairclough (1995) argues, such aggressive lexical choices are never neutral; they reflect and reproduce broader social struggles over who is allowed to possess and produce knowledge. By collapsing the distinction between professional critique and personal attack, the discourse successfully creates a hostile digital ecology that discourages scholarly participation in public discussions (Dallyn et al., 2015; Eslen-Ziya et al., 2024).

Delegitimization of Educational Institutions

Systemic indictment of the university appeared in 18 replies (36%). This strategy utilizes metonymic delegitimization, where Dr. Louk's research serves as proof of total institutional failure. Tweet 5 explicitly states, "I hate advanced degrees," while Tweet 36 asks if higher education is now "garbage." Such evaluative adjectives suggest a perceived loss of the university's intellectual compass, reflecting a social practice of deep-seated institutional distrust (Fairclough, 2013; Merkley & Loewen, 2021). This delegitimization is further performed through linguistic denaming and infantilization. In Tweet 11, the refusal to acknowledge the scholar's title ("I'm not calling you doctor") directly challenges the university's authority to confer symbolic capital. Similarly, Tweet 15 renames the PhD as "PhDaycare," suggesting the university has abandoned rigor for supervised "play." From a CDA perspective, this constitutes a symbolic revolution against the institution's right to define and validate expertise (Bourdieu, 2003; Nichols, 2017).

Furthermore, the critique is framed as a financial grievance under a neoliberal "market audit." Tweet 17 invokes the identity of the "taxpayer," while Tweet 22 links the degree's value to the debt debate: "Your 'degree' is fn worthless." Here, legitimacy is predicated entirely on Return on Investment (ROI). Under neoliberal hegemony, education is valued only as human capital production; degrees perceived as lacking immediate market utility are discursively constructed as scams or burdens on public resources (Giroux, 2014; Shumway, 2017). Lastly, the university is indicted for supposedly misleading women away from traditional roles. Tweet 31 frames the PhD as a "useless" and "stupid degree" that offers no fulfillment compared to a family. This reflects a populist imaginary where the university is an "ideological factory" producing socially deviant subjects (Banet-Weiser, 2018). This underscores a potent alliance between neoliberal instrumentalism and popular misogyny, where the humanities are delegitimized for being both economically and socially "valueless" (Federici, 2020; Mostov, 2021).

Oversimplification and Misrepresentation of Complex Issues

Approximately 14 replies (28%) engaged in the strategic reduction of complex research. This was linguistically achieved through the use of scare quotes to mark specialized terminology as suspicious or illegitimate, as seen in Tweet 29: "Wait. You got a PhD for writing about 'olfactory oppression'?" By isolating a single term from a 300-page dissertation, the user performs a recontextualization that strips the research of its theoretical depth. This represents a deliberate discursive refusal to engage with academic nuance, where complexity is treated as a liability in the "TL;DR" (Too Long; Didn't Read) culture of digital platforms (Carr, 2011). Tweet 48 reinforces this by admitting a superficial engagement: "This is a joke. I knew it would be at the abstract," demonstrating how social media affordances prioritize "gut reactions" over rigorous reading. Beyond linguistic reduction, this category is sustained by context collapse, where specialized academic discourse is forcibly merged with the mundane, informal registers of Twitter (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). The research is subjected to what Fairclough (1995) describes as a "flattening" of hierarchies, allowing users to bypass traditional peer-review mechanisms and replace institutional validation with the visceral metric of "relatability."

This is evidenced by the renaming of Dr. Louk's work through lexical simplifiers such as "smell paper" or "junk." These labels function to categorize the research into pre-existing ideological buckets of "academic elitism," thereby avoiding the intellectual labor required to process its actual ethical and political implications (Zappavigna, 2012). This flattening process ensures that the "expert" is judged not by the quality of their inquiry, but by how easily their work can be mocked in 280 characters. Furthermore, this oversimplification is used to enforce a utilitarian "market audit" of the humanities. Tweet 25 asks a deceptively simple question: "How does this help anyone?" which functions as a discursive tool of neoliberal instrumentalism where high education is reframed strictly as a training site for human capital rather than a public good (Giroux, 2014). This demand for immediate, tangible utility ignores the civic and critical functions of humanistic inquiry, which are essential for democratic citizenship but are increasingly marginalized in favor of profit-driven education (Nussbaum, 2010). Consequently, anything falling outside of STEM-based productivity is framed as "deeply stupid" (Tweet 34), reflecting a broader societal trend where intellectual labor is only validated if it serves the market.

Tweet 38 further devalues the institution itself, stating that an elite PhD "means nothing anymore" because the subject of study is perceived as frivolous. As Shumway (2017) argues, neoliberal ideology has successfully narrowed the public's perception of "valuable knowledge" to only that which can be readily commodified or turned into a "practical" application. By performing this epistemic closure, the public normalizes what Nichols (2017) calls the "death of expertise." This is exemplified in Tweet 39, which proudly states, "You lost me at...", framing an unwillingness to process complex information as a pragmatic virtue. This logic creates an epistemic equivalence where a layman's intuition is positioned as equally valid to a scholar's decade of labor (Moffitt, 2016). Consequently, intellectual rigor is reframed as an elitist deception designed to exclude the "virtuous public" from knowledge production. This algorithmic erasure of nuance ensures that anti-intellectual narratives remain highly shareable, as reductive certainty is more algorithmically "efficient" than scholarly complexity (Papacharissi, 2015; Zolides, 2022)

Anti-Expertise Amplification

Although appearing in only 8% of the data, Anti-Expertise Amplification represents the most radical form of discursive hostility, as it seeks to replace formal scholarship with ideological "alternative truths." This is infrastructurally facilitated by Twitter's attention economy, where the platform's logic rewards affective outrage over factual accuracy (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). A primary mechanism of this amplification is "ratioing," where a scholar's achievement, such as Dr. Louk's defense, is met with an overwhelming volume of hostile replies compared to likes. Tweet 4 ("Lmao what a waste of time") exemplifies this low-effort but high-visibility aggression. This creates a sociotechnical feedback loop where attacking institutional authority becomes a route to accumulating digital social capital, effectively normalizing the dismissal of expertise within the digital public sphere (Mede & Schäfer, 2020). Furthermore, this category often frames formal education as a site of indoctrination rather than enlightenment. Tweet 10 asserts that the backlash is "Proof that college makes you retarded," using ableist slurs to suggest that higher education actively harms cognitive ability and "common sense."

This reflects a broader social practice of institutional distrust, where the university is portrayed as an ideological "bubble" detached from the "real world" (Best et al., 2021). As Nichols (2017) argues, the "death of expertise" is not merely a lack of knowledge, but an active hostility toward the idea that specialized training confers a superior understanding of a subject. By presenting the scholar as a victim of institutional "brainwashing," the public justifies its aggressive rejection of her decade of doctoral labor. Lastly, this strategy relies on intertextual recontextualization to fit academic terminology into populist narratives of "culture wars." Tweet 29 mocks the dissertation title by asking, "You got a PhD for writing about 'olfactory oppression'?", while Tweet 7 dismissively labels the research as "utter woke nonsense." By "lifting" specialized terms out of their 300-page theoretical framework, users insert them into the broader ideological category of "wokeness" to facilitate rapid, memetic delegitimization (Zolides, 2022). This process ensures that expert knowledge is systematically silenced by being reframed as a political provocation rather than a scholarly contribution. As Fairclough (2013) notes, such discursive moves are social actions aimed at reshaping the power dynamics between the academy and the public, ultimately delegitimizing the humanities' role in critical social analysis.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the sociotechnical construction of cyber anti-intellectualism through the case of Dr. Ally Louk. By situating the textual data within Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework, the research reveals that the viral backlash was not a series of spontaneous linguistic events but a structured ideological performance. The dominance of Hostile Populist Rhetoric (48%) and Mockery (46%) provides empirical evidence that the attack was driven by a potent alliance between affective ridicule and neoliberal antagonism. This demonstrates that in the digital sphere, anti-intellectualism functions as a mechanism of social bonding, where a "virtuous public" unites to discipline the "detached expert" through gamified aggression. Furthermore, the findings underscore that this discourse is inextricably linked to patriarchal ideologies that reframe female intellectual labor as frivolous or socially deviant, ensuring that intellectual authority remains a contested, masculine-coded privilege. The implications of this study are twofold.

Theoretically, it expands the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by demonstrating how digital affordances, such as "ratioing" and "context collapse", serve as infrastructural catalysts for ideological reproduction. It moves the conversation beyond anti-intellectualism in political or scientific domains into the humanities, revealing a "market audit" mentality where scholarly work is policed based on its immediate economic utility. Practically, this research highlights the precarious position of scholars in the attention economy.

The "epistemic closure" observed in the data suggests a widening gap between academic expertise and public perception, where algorithmic visibility rewards reductive certainty over intellectual nuance. Based on these findings, several suggestions are proposed. First, academic institutions must move beyond individual resilience and develop systemic protection frameworks for scholars facing digital hostility, particularly for women and those in marginalized disciplines. Universities should re-evaluate their public engagement strategies, shifting the narrative of the humanities from "economic utility" to "civic necessity" to counter neoliberal delegitimization. Second, regarding future research, while this study is limited by its focus on a single viral event and a corpus of 50 replies, it provides a foundational framework for larger-scale investigations. Future studies should consider using computational methods to analyze larger datasets (Big Data) to verify if these five strategies hold true across broader academic fields and different social media platforms like LinkedIn or TikTok. Additionally, reception studies are encouraged to investigate how the silent majority of the general public interprets these narratives, providing deeper insights into the long-term erosion of trust in higher education. Without such interventions, the digital public sphere risks becoming an environment where expert knowledge is systematically silenced by populist resentment.

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