Bridging the Narrative Divide:
Rethinking Social Networks Through Shared Discourse

Narratives don't respect platform boundaries — our models shouldn't either.

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Springfield: Same Narratives, Different Ecosystems

When a small local rumor emerged, **fragmented communities told different versions**:

- **Facebook groups** shared park and duck anecdotes
- **Telegram and Gab** reframed it into racist conspiracies
- **X influencers** amplified screenshots and memes to millions

Despite these differences, **a unified narrative form emerged across platforms**, eventually reaching the U.S. Presidential debate.

January 6th: Same Narratives, Different Ecosystems

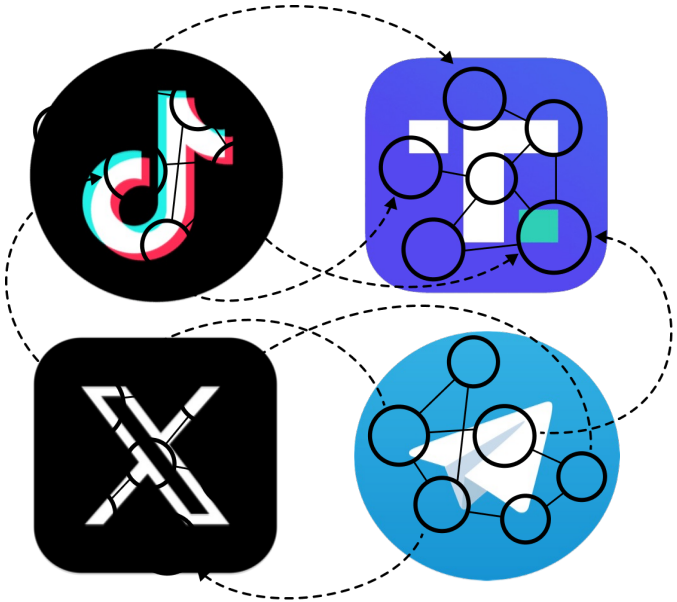
January 6th was fundamentally a **cross-platform event**—coordination happened across platforms, not just within them.

Ng et al. 2022 showed that users on Parler and Twitter consumed **completely different information sources.**

Yet, **narrative themes converged** across platforms.

Source: NPR

Modern Narratives Take Shape *Across* Platforms

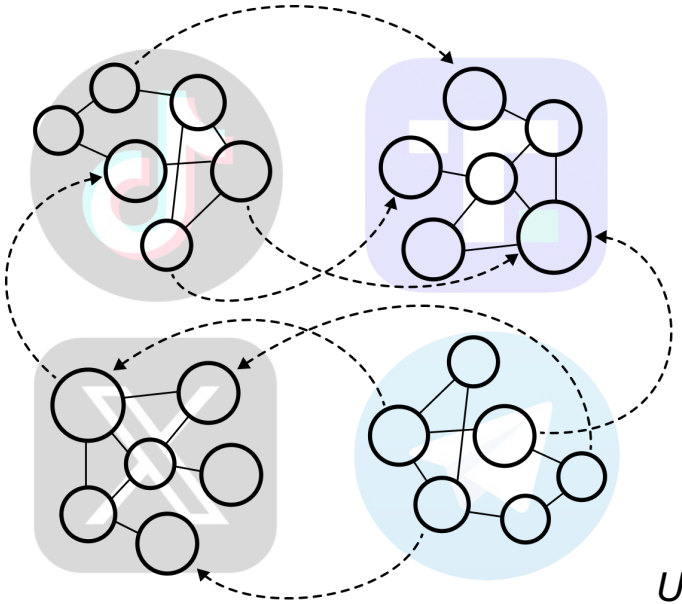


The online information ecosystem is fragmented.

- Users consume and share content across many platforms.
- The **borders between platforms are arbitrary — ideas and narratives do not respect them**.
- Without cross-platform visibility, we fail to anticipate real-world impacts.

If we treat platforms as islands, we will always be surprised when ideas jump between them

Why Traditional Methods Fail

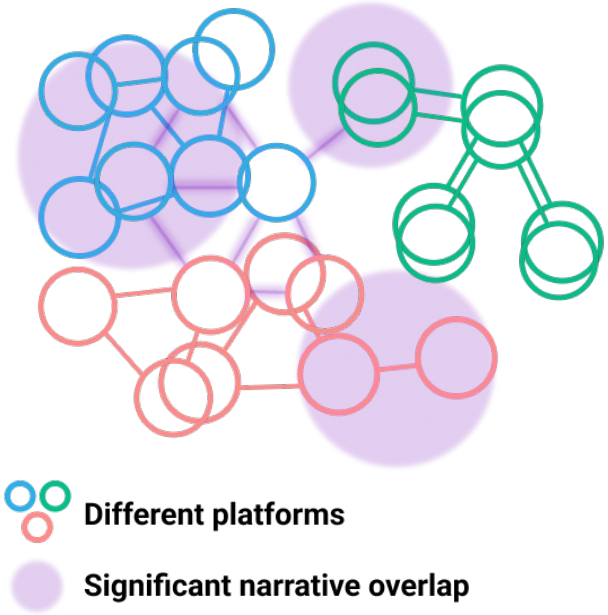


Traditional networks break at the platform boundary. Ideas don't.

- Follower graphs, reposts, hashtags → **platform-locked**
- Semantic similarity → brittle under platform-specific language
- APIs → disappearing, incomplete, inconsistent

Understanding modern information flow requires understanding how users connect across platforms, not just within them.

Rethinking User Representation Through Shared Discourse

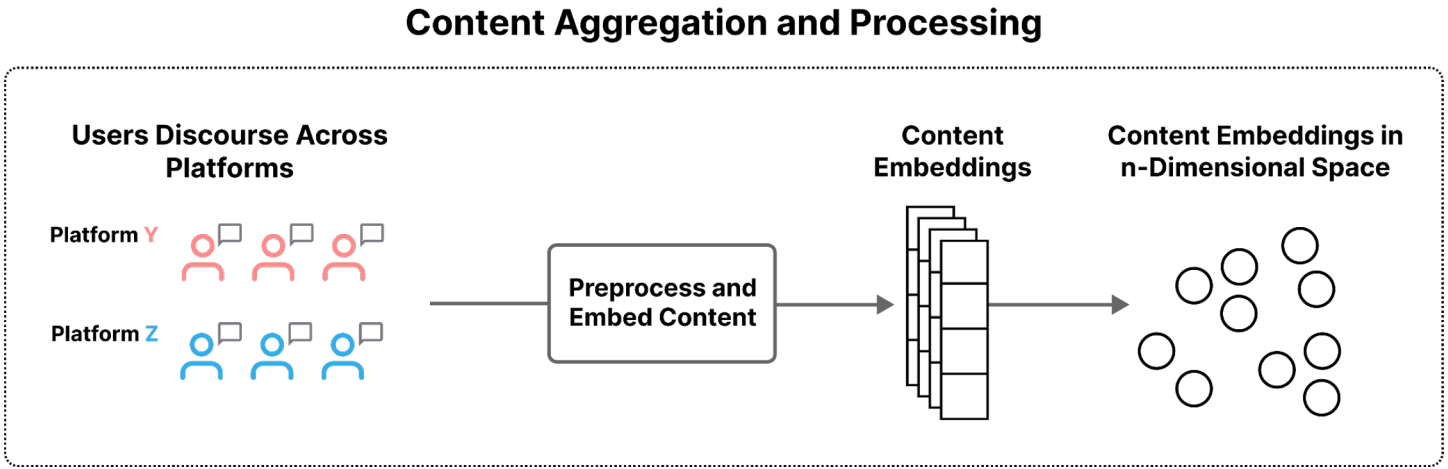


Represent users through shared narrative participation, not platform behaviors.

- Each user = **distribution over latent narratives**
- Users connect via **shared discourse**, not interactions
- Works across platforms simultaneously

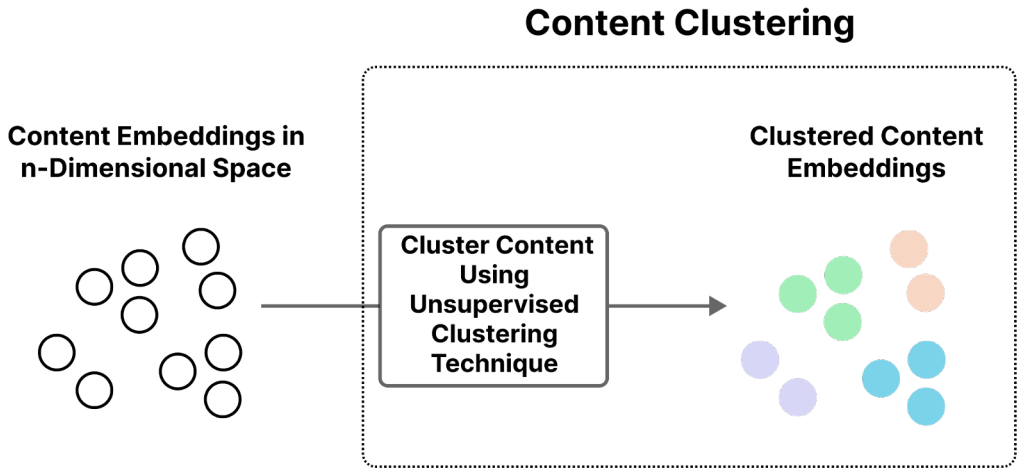
Content → Embeddings → Narratives → User Distribution → Unified Network

Our Approach: Modeling Discourse as Network



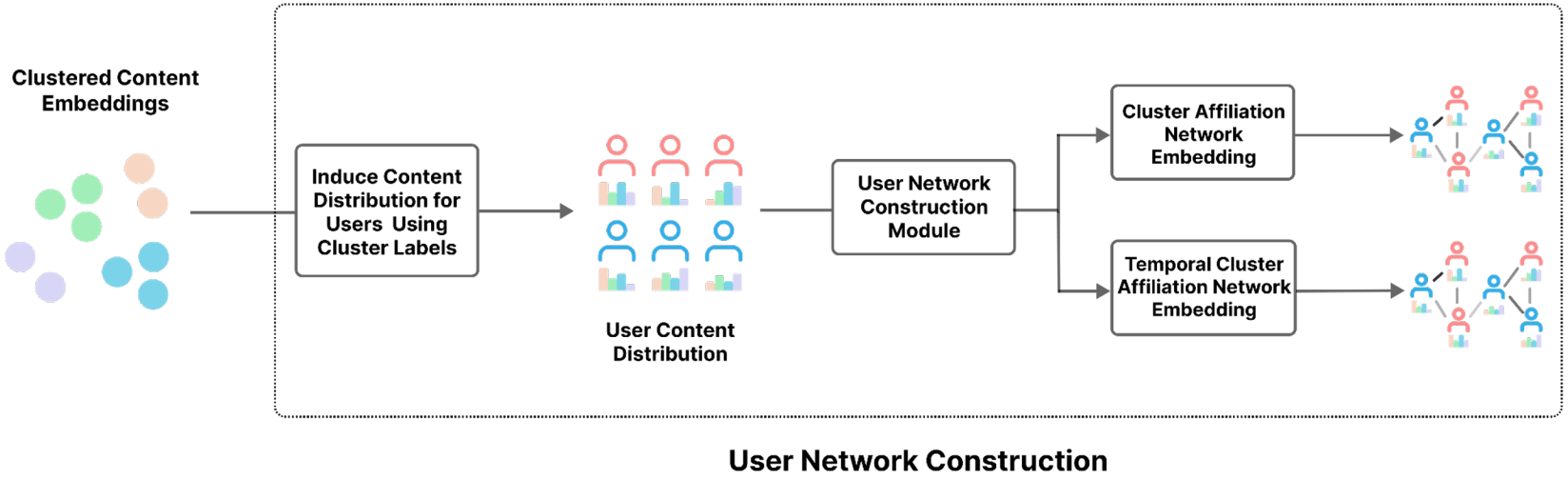
Step 1: Content Aggregation and Processing *Collect cross-platform discourse and transform text into comparable embeddings*

Our Approach: Modeling Discourse as Network



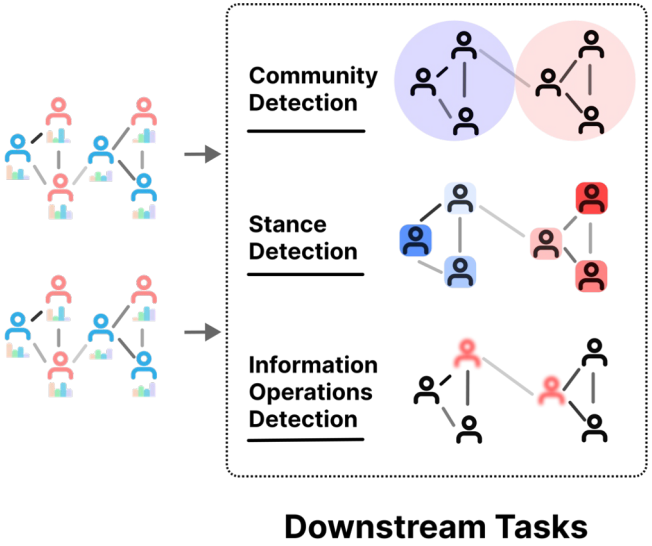
Step 2: Content Clustering *Group similar discourse into thematic clusters using unsupervised learning*

Our Approach: Modeling Discourse as Network



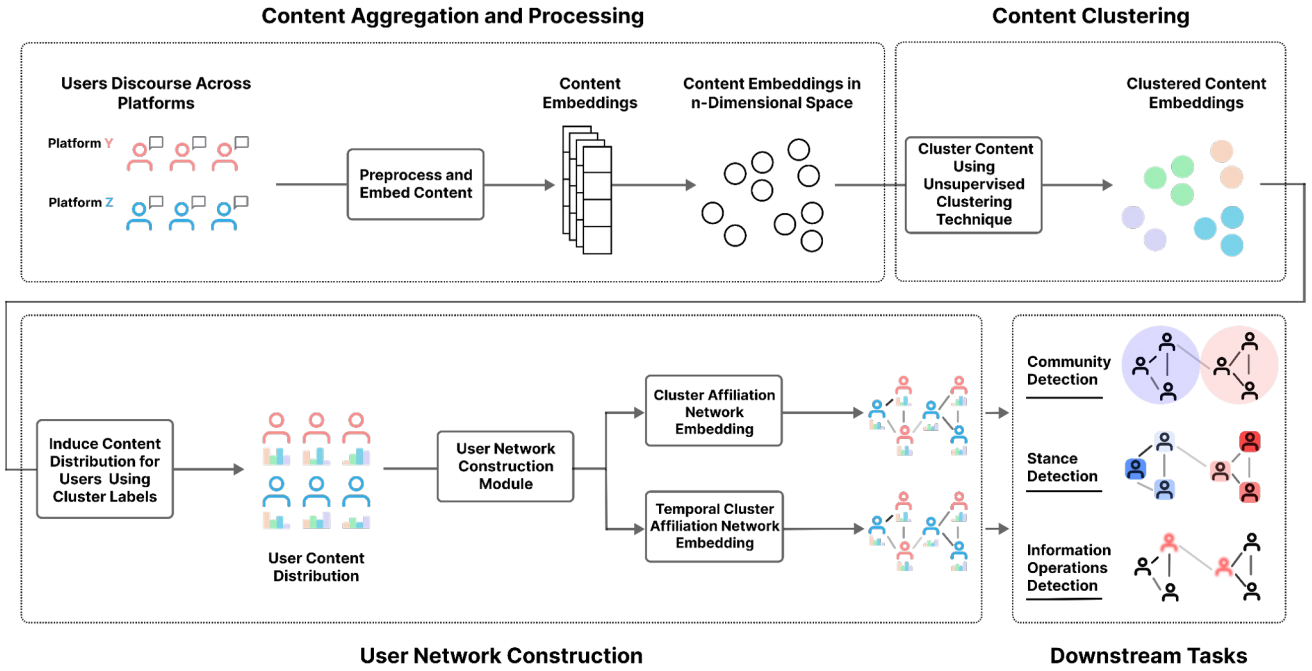
Step 3: User Network Construction *Transform content clusters into user networks based on shared discourse patterns*

Our Approach: Modeling Discourse as Network



Step 4: Network Applications *Use the constructed networks for traditional network analysis and detection tasks*

Across Platforms: Discourse Networks

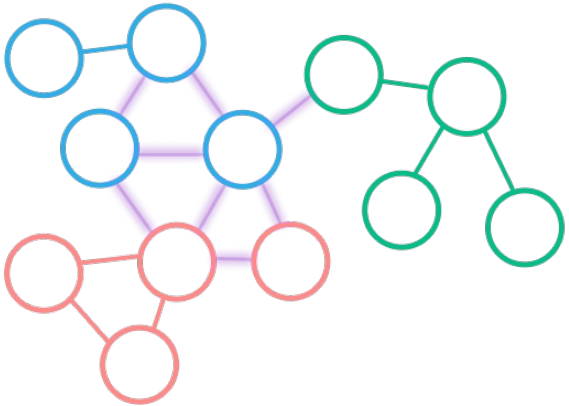


Full Pipeline: From Cross-Platform Discourse to User Networks

Building behavioral networks from shared discourse patterns across platform boundaries

Within Platforms: Discourse Networks

Perform Better, Need Less Data, and Cover More Users



Different platforms

Significant narrative overlap

Discourse Networks:

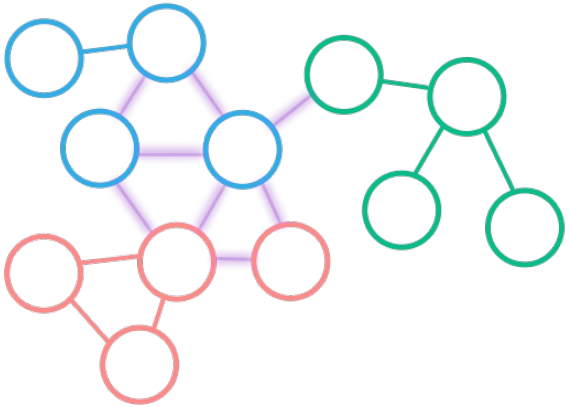
Match or beat behavioral networks
On classic CSS tasks like stance or IO detection.

Need a fraction of the data
Traditional methods need 3-5x more to get close.

Cover nearly all users
Significantly more user coverage than traditional methods.

Across Platforms: Discourse Networks

Extend Discourse into a Unified Ecosystem



Different platforms

Significant narrative overlap

Discourse Networks:

Extend social proximity beyond platform boundaries
Provide a foundation for predicting cross-platform information spread.

Capture cross-platform “bridge zones”
Invisible to traditional traditional methods.

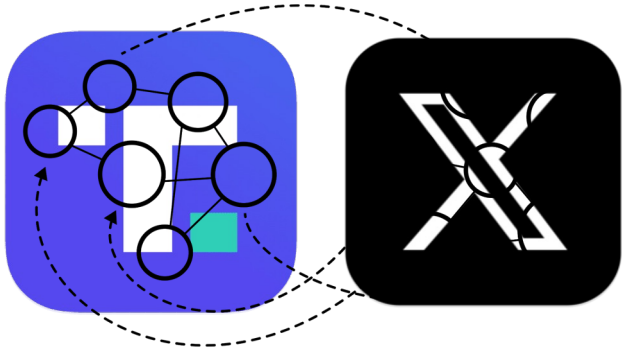
Integrate platforms into a single actionable view
Allow operators to monitor narrative movement across the information ecosystem.

Case Study: A Tiny Bridge Zone Spans Both Worlds

Do shared narrative communities emerge despite different ecosystems?

Studying discourse on X and Truth Social leading up to the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election:

- **0.33% of users** form one mixed-platform community associated with **>68% of cross-platform narrative flow**
- Only visible through **discourse modeling**, not traditional methods



There's a hidden bridge between these platforms, but you need the right lens to see it.

Future Directions

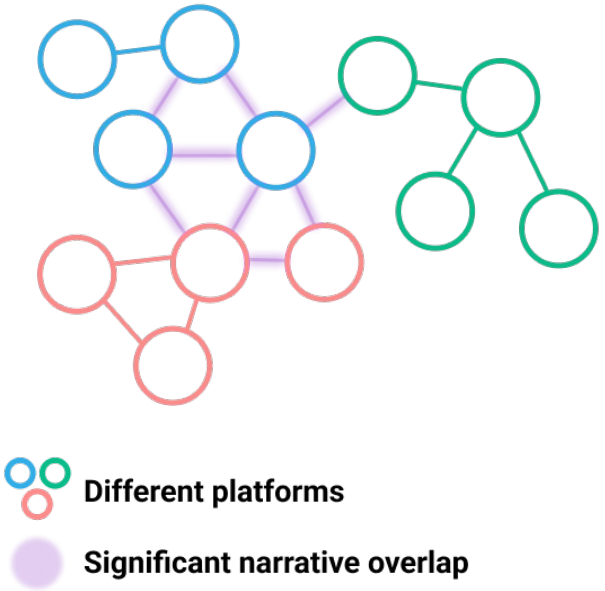
From platform silos to an integrated view of online discourse

Rethink platform-based information diffusion through social proximity

Active discourse neighbors are associated with a 22.4× increase in adoption odds.

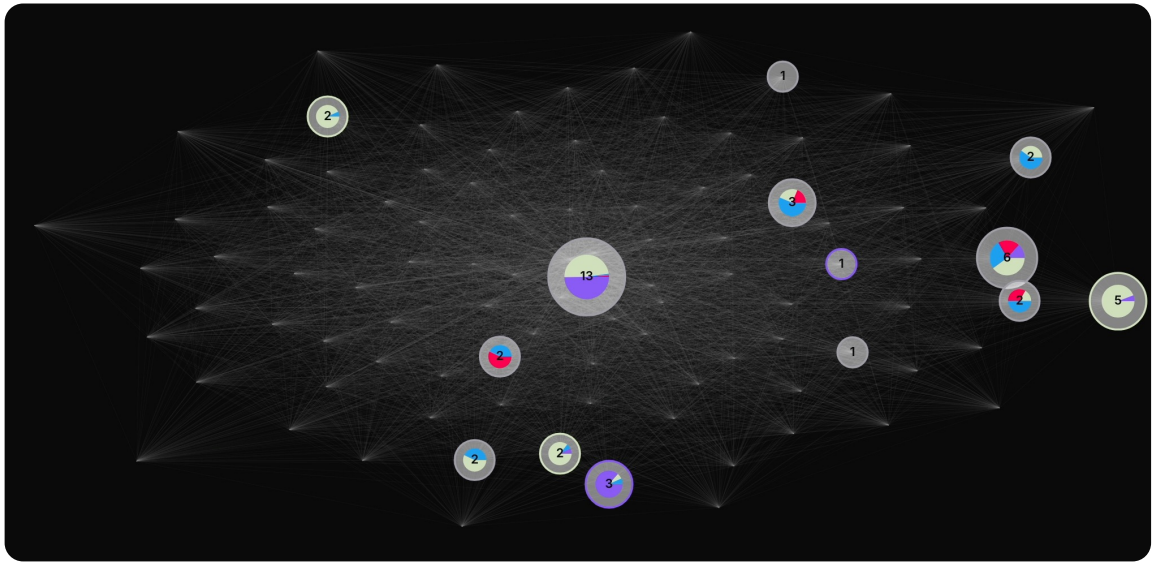
Map the online information ecosystem as a unified structure

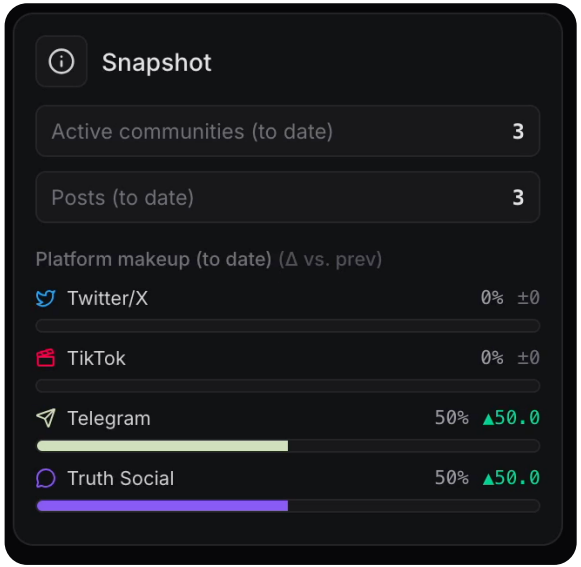
Unify fragmented platforms into one coherent representation of user and narrative alignment.



Future Directions

Narrative activation mapped across the online ecosystem





Narrative: Fauci and NIH involved with releasing COVID-19 from lab.

Takeaways: Birds of a Feather *Think* Together

Discourse-based graphs:

Outperform traditional ones

Discourse-based networks capture **more users** with **less data**, while matching or exceeding traditional methods.

Cross-platform by design

The approach **works across fragmented ecosystems**, without needing reposts, URLs, or user overlap.

Uncover the hidden architecture of the online information ecosystem

Discourse networks surface alignment and migration patterns invisible to traditional graphs.

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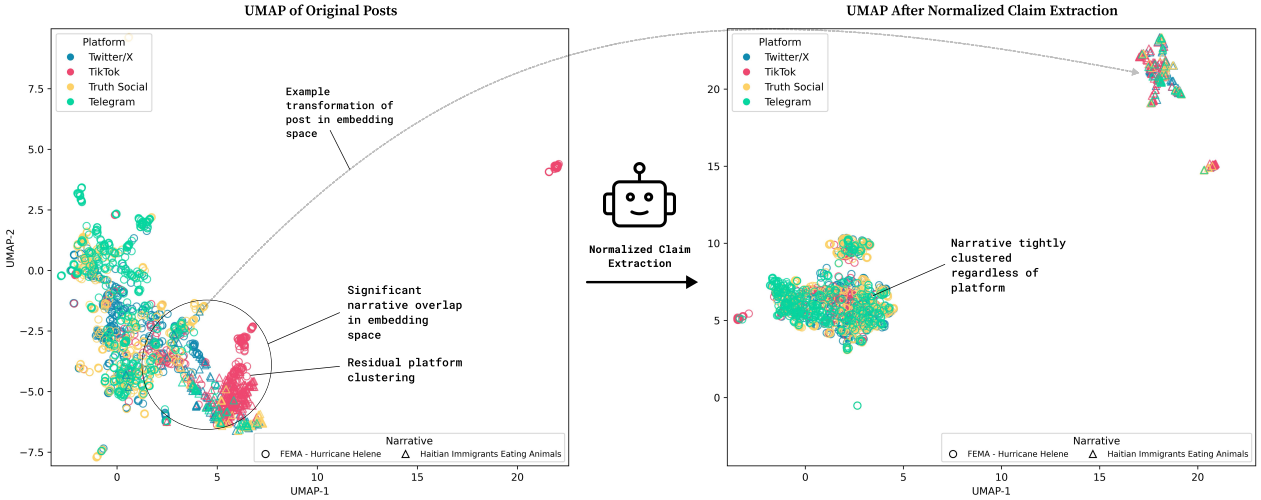
Appendix

From platform silos to an integrated view of online discourse



Towards Platform-Adjacent Embedding Spaces

Claim normalization collapses residual platform clustering and reveals the underlying narrative structure.