"R-word" slurs triple on X after Donald Trump's Thanksgiving post used the word

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ABSTRACT

A joint study from Montclair State University faculty in the Joetta Di Bella and Fred C. Sautter III Center for Strategic Communication in the School of Communication and Media and the Department of Justice Studies shows a dramatic increase in content containing the slur "retard" on X after Donald Trump's Thanksgiving Day Truth Social post used the word. Findings showed a 225.7% increase in posts containing the r-word on X with 1,129,438 posts in the studied period. The most viewed, liked, and shared content analyzed enthusiastically endorsed use of the r-word. Results appear consistent with the period after other prominent accounts used the word, but with greater overall volume reflecting the reach of a U.S. President.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

A robust body of academic scholarship has investigated the pejorative use of the word "retard" (called the "r-word" subsequently in this report). Current usage reinforces a stigmatizing function for those with a range of cognitive challenges including the developmentally disabled
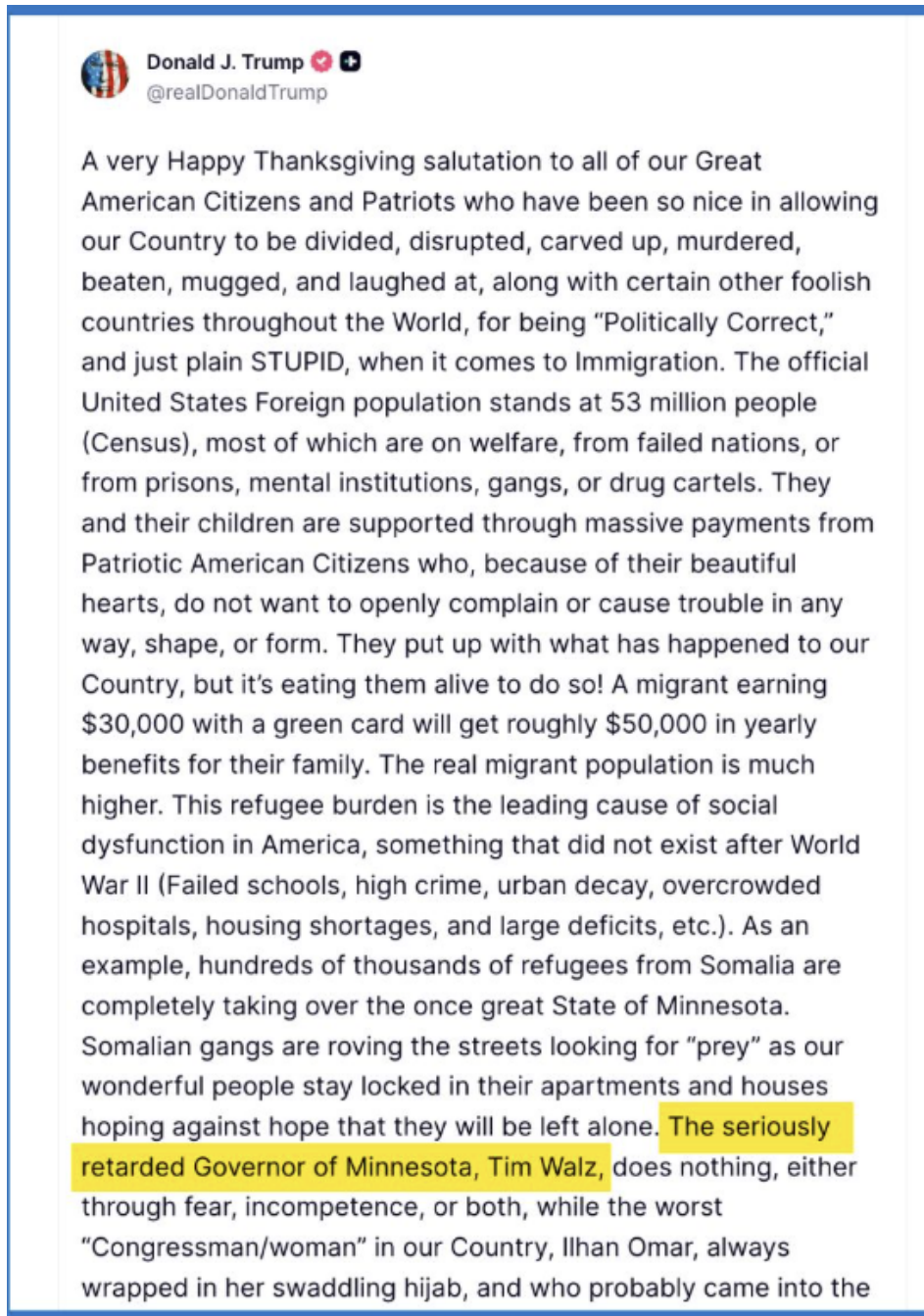
(Albert et al., 2016) and the neurodiverse (Dababnah et al., 2018). Broad efforts have been made to reduce use of the r-word as an invective (Siperstein et al., 2018) with advocacy against the word supported by organizations and the media (*Specialolympics.org*, 2020). President Barack Obama signed Rosa's Law in October 2010, which mandated the replacement of the terms "mental retardation" and "mentally retarded" with "intellectual disability" and "individual with an intellectual disability" in all federal health, education, and labor statutes to avoid linkage to the stigmatizing term (Stavrakantonaki and Johnson, 2018).

Unfortunately, however, research suggests social media has seen a resurgence in the word's use online. A study from Kantar Social Listening found that seven in every ten posts are negative toward people with intellectual disabilities and six in every ten posts contain a slur (Mellas, 2018). Previously, many social media sites sought to mitigate the reach of the r-word through guidelines and policies (Lubben, 2018). These efforts receded when Elon Musk became the CEO of Twitter (later X). Musk's use of the term in a post in January of 2025 led to a 205.7% increase in posts using the r-word on the platform (Benton and Peterka-Benton, 2025). While Musk's post spurred an immediate spike, ongoing use of the r-word on the platform never receded to previous levels and has remained present in discourse on X.

FROM VISIBLE TO AMPLIFIED: TRUMP AND THE R-WORD

On November 27, 2025, President Donald Trump used the r-word to describe Minnesota Governor Tim Walz (Boak, 2025) in a Thanksgiving address on the Truth Social platform.

Figure 1

Donald J. Trump ✓ ⊕
@realDonaldTrump

A very Happy Thanksgiving salutation to all of our Great American Citizens and Patriots who have been so nice in allowing our Country to be divided, disrupted, carved up, murdered, beaten, mugged, and laughed at, along with certain other foolish countries throughout the World, for being "Politically Correct," and just plain STUPID, when it comes to Immigration. The official United States Foreign population stands at 53 million people (Census), most of which are on welfare, from failed nations, or from prisons, mental institutions, gangs, or drug cartels. They and their children are supported through massive payments from Patriotic American Citizens who, because of their beautiful hearts, do not want to openly complain or cause trouble in any way, shape, or form. They put up with what has happened to our Country, but it's eating them alive to do so! A migrant earning $30,000 with a green card will get roughly $50,000 in yearly benefits for their family. The real migrant population is much higher. This refugee burden is the leading cause of social dysfunction in America, something that did not exist after World War II (Failed schools, high crime, urban decay, overcrowded hospitals, housing shortages, and large deficits, etc.). As an example, hundreds of thousands of refugees from Somalia are completely taking over the once great State of Minnesota. Somalian gangs are roving the streets looking for "prey" as our wonderful people stay locked in their apartments and houses hoping against hope that they will be left alone. The seriously retarded Governor of Minnesota, Tim Walz, does nothing, either through fear, incompetence, or both, while the worst "Congressman/woman" in our Country, Ilhan Omar, always wrapped in her swaddling hijab, and who probably came into the

@realDonaldTrump Truth Social post, 11/27/2025

When asked for clarification on his use of the r-word from reporters on Air Force One, President Trump reiterated posting the term stating, "Yeah, I think there's something wrong with him.

Absolutely. Sure. You have a problem with it? You know what? I think there's something wrong with him" (Scott, 2025).

Influential voices such as Elon Musk using the r-word as a pejorative in a widely seen social media post correlated to increased use of the term on the X platform, as documented by previous research (Benton and Peterka-Benton, 2025). Given the significantly higher visibility of a U.S. President and considering the term's existing frequency on X compels consideration of the following exploratory question:

To what extent did Donald Trump's post increase content on the X platform that used the "r-word?"

To answer that question, the Tweet Binder analytics program was utilized. The aggregated 7-day (from 11/27/2025 - 12/4/2025) X data was collected to show activity in the period immediately before and after the President's post. A total of 1,129,438 posts on X were evaluated for this report.

The term associated with this investigation ("retard") was examined to see if frequency of use increased in correlation to the Trump's post. Beyond frequency, the posts receiving the most "likes," "views," and "reposts" were also identified to offer context on the main conversation drivers associated with posts containing the r-word (*Tweet Binder*, 2019; *Tweet Binder*, 2020).

RESULTS

The day after Trump's post correlates to a tripling of content using the r-word on X from the day prior, with a 225.7% increase in the hours that followed.

Figure 2: Increase on X after Trump "r-word" post
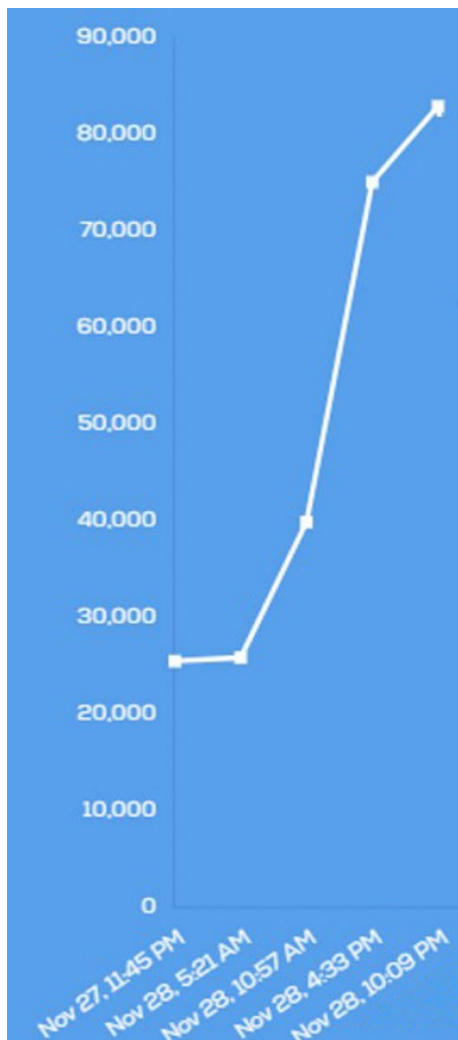
SOURCE: Tweet Binder

Cumulatively, a total of 1,129,438 posts containing the term were identified in the period studied, with corresponding views and reach easily cresting the hundreds of millions. A high volume of r-word posts persisted on the platform in the days following the initial spike.

Figure 3: R-word posts 11/27/25 to 12/4/25
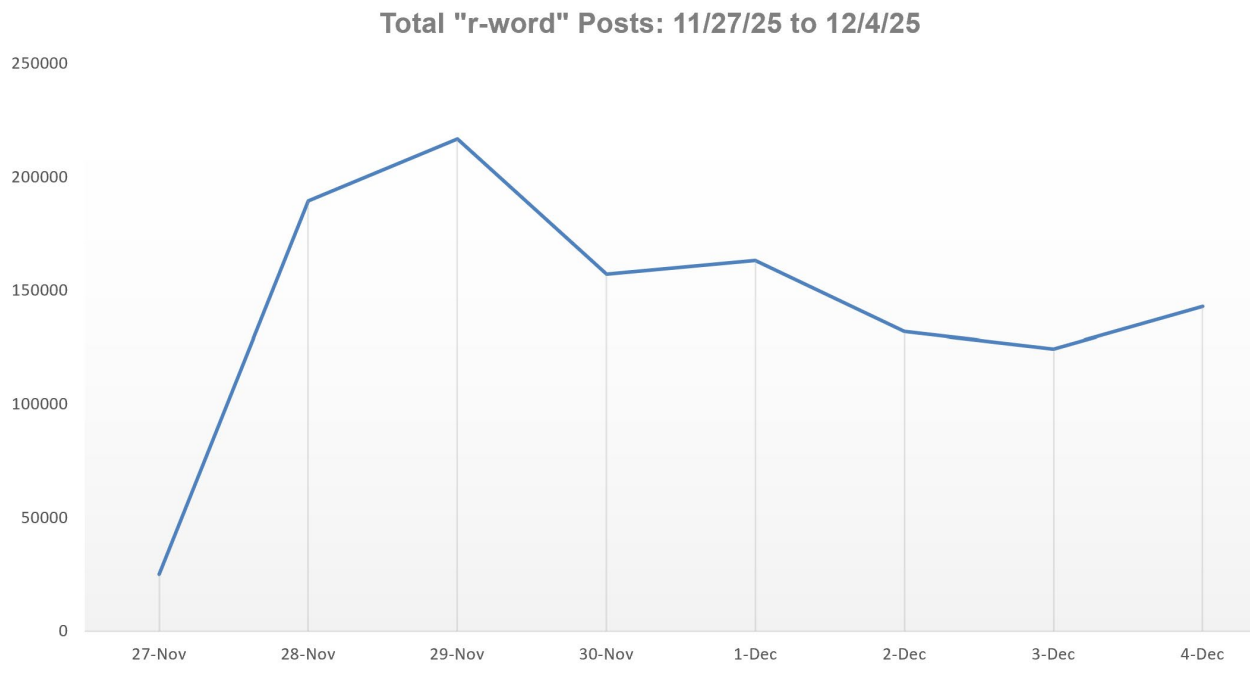
SOURCE: Tweet Binder

When comparing the spike generated by Donald Trump's post containing the r-word to Elon Musk's post in January of 2025, the percentage increase was similar, yet the volume of such posts in the weeks studied were dramatically higher.
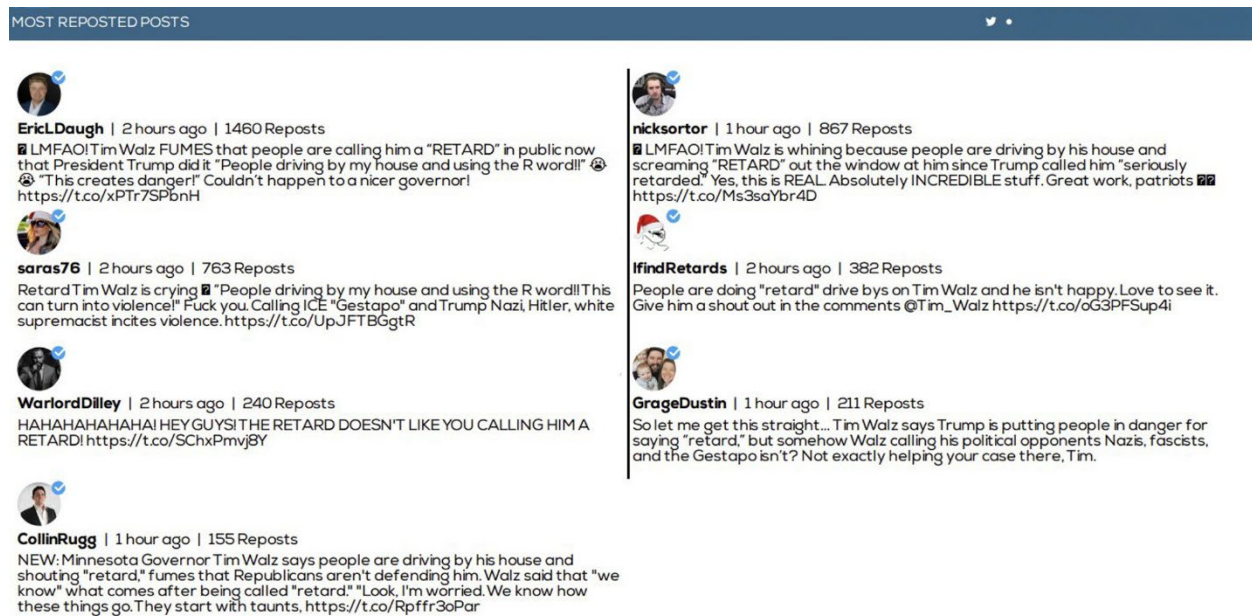
Figure 4: Comparison in r-word posts following Musk and Trump's respective use of the term

"r-word" Post Increases on X

— 12/31/2024 - 1/8/2025   — 11/27/2025 - 12/4/2025
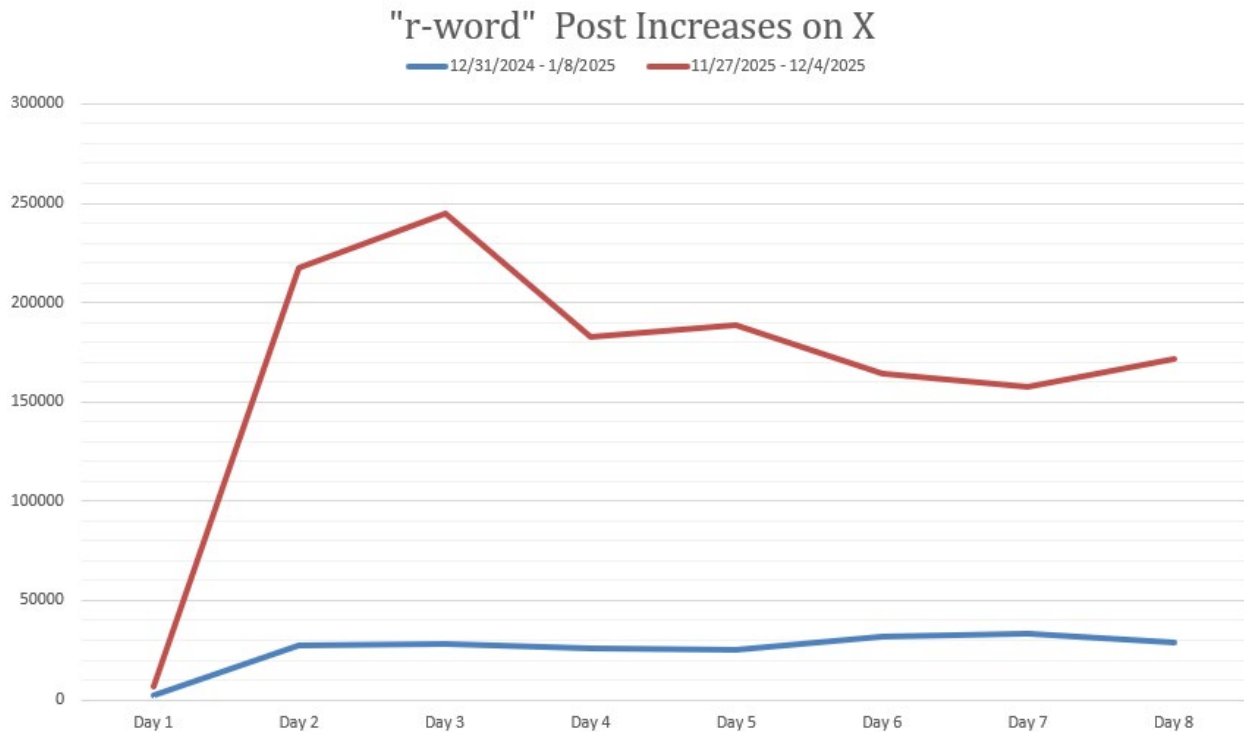
SOURCE: Tweet Binder

It is possible that some posting about the r-word on the platform may have been critical of the President using the term, however the widespread prevalence still serves a normalizing function. Noting that negative content is regularly shared for purposes of criticizing such content, Zhang et al. suggest that people may be "reproducing his message specifically to add their own comment—likely critique—to it" but doing so still serves an amplification function (2018: 3574). Furthermore, looking at the most influential accounts posting the r-word, tone and content would suggest that use of the term was enthusiastically supported. Accounts generating the most shares of content greatly increase visibility and the frequency with which platform users will view their posts (*AgencyAnalytics*, 2025). In this instance, content shared most frequently tended to view use of the r-word favorably on the X platform.
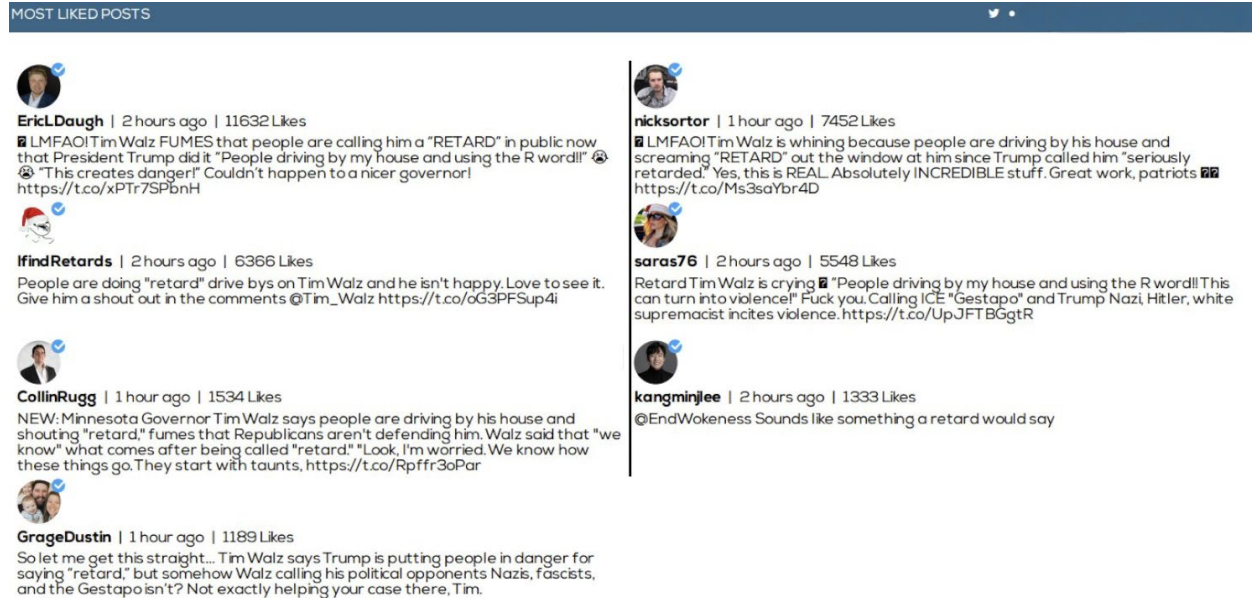
Figure 5: Most shared r-word posts

MOST REPOSTED POSTS

EricLDaugh | 2 hours ago | 1460 Reposts
🚨 LMFAO! Tim Walz FUMES that people are calling him a "RETARD" in public now that President Trump did it "People driving by my house and using the R word!!" 😂 😂 "This creates danger!" Couldn't happen to a nicer governor! https://t.co/xPTr7SPbnH

saras76 | 2 hours ago | 763 Reposts
Retard Tim Walz is crying 🚨 "People driving by my house and using the R word!! This can turn into violence!" Fuck you. Calling ICE "Gestapo" and Trump Nazi, Hitler, white supremacist incites violence. https://t.co/UpJFTBGgtR

WarlordDilley | 2 hours ago | 240 Reposts
HAHAHAHAHAHA! HEY GUYS! THE RETARD DOESN'T LIKE YOU CALLING HIM A RETARD! https://t.co/SChxPmvj8Y

CollinRugg | 1 hour ago | 155 Reposts
NEW: Minnesota Governor Tim Walz says people are driving by his house and shouting "retard," fumes that Republicans aren't defending him. Walz said that "we know" what comes after being called "retard." "Look, I'm worried. We know how these things go. They start with taunts. https://t.co/Rpffr3oPar

nicksortor | 1 hour ago | 867 Reposts
🚨 LMFAO! Tim Walz is whining because people are driving by his house and screaming "RETARD" out the window at him since Trump called him "seriously retarded." Yes, this is REAL. Absolutely INCREDIBLE stuff. Great work, patriots 🇺🇸🇺🇸 https://t.co/Ms3saYbr4D

IfindRetards | 2 hours ago | 382 Reposts
People are doing "retard" drive bys on Tim Walz and he isn't happy. Love to see it. Give him a shout out in the comments @Tim_Walz https://t.co/oG3PFSup4i

GrageDustin | 1 hour ago | 211 Reposts
So let me get this straight... Tim Walz says Trump is putting people in danger for saying "retard," but somehow Walz calling his political opponents Nazis, fascists, and the Gestapo isn't? Not exactly helping your case there, Tim.

SOURCE: Tweet Binder

Similarly, "likes" on a social platform also tend to make content more seen, sharable, and influential on platform discussions (John et al., 2017). As with the most shared content using the r-word, the most liked posts showed similar levels of favorability towards the term.

Figure 6: Most liked r-word posts

MOST LIKED POSTS

EricLDaugh | 2 hours ago | 11632 Likes
🚨 LMFAO! Tim Walz FUMES that people are calling him a "RETARD" in public now that President Trump did it "People driving by my house and using the R word!!" 😩 "This creates danger!" Couldn't happen to a nicer governor! https://t.co/xPTr7SPbnH

IfindRetards | 2 hours ago | 6366 Likes
People are doing "retard" drive bys on Tim Walz and he isn't happy. Love to see it. Give him a shout out in the comments @Tim_Walz https://t.co/oG3PFSup4i

CollinRugg | 1 hour ago | 1534 Likes
NEW: Minnesota Governor Tim Walz says people are driving by his house and shouting "retard," fumes that Republicans aren't defending him. Walz said that "we know" what comes after being called "retard." "Look, I'm worried. We know how these things go. They start with taunts. https://t.co/Rpffr3oPar

GrageDustin | 1 hour ago | 1189 Likes
So let me get this straight... Tim Walz says Trump is putting people in danger for saying "retard," but somehow Walz calling his political opponents Nazis, fascists, and the Gestapo isn't? Not exactly helping your case there, Tim.

nicksortor | 1 hour ago | 7452 Likes
🚨 LMFAO! Tim Walz is whining because people are driving by his house and screaming "RETARD" out the window at him since Trump called him "seriously retarded." Yes, this is REAL. Absolutely INCREDIBLE stuff. Great work, patriots 🫡🫡 https://t.co/Ms3saYbr4D

saras76 | 2 hours ago | 5548 Likes
Retard Tim Walz is crying 🚨 "People driving by my house and using the R word!! This can turn into violence!" Fuck you. Calling ICE "Gestapo" and Trump Nazi, Hitler, white supremacist incites violence. https://t.co/UpJFTBGgtR

kangminjlee | 2 hours ago | 1333 Likes
@EndWokeness Sounds like something a retard would say

SOURCE: Tweet Binder

The five accounts generating the most impressions (total views of content) that used the r-word each used the term as a pejorative and have expressed validation of President Trump's discourse.

Figure 7: Accounts using the r-word generating the most views

HIGHEST IMPACT	Impressions
@grok Grok	94,274,849
@CollinRugg Collin Rugg	5,824,556
@libsoftiktok Libs of TikTok	4,551,701
@nicksortor Nick Sortor	3,914,852
@EndWokeness End Wokene...	3,913,811

SOURCE: Tweet Binder

The account making the most posts using the r-word in the period studied was **@of_ceo24460**, the handle of X CEO Elon Musk.

Figure 8: Most active account making posts containing the r-word

MOST ACTIVE	Posts
@of_ceo24460 CEO of Tesla	27

SOURCE: Tweet Binder

Cumulatively, Trump's use of the r-word in his Thanksgiving Day 2025 Truth Social post created an immediate spike in X posts using the term that was sustained throughout the period studied. This both drew upon and expanded sentiment on X consistent with other high-profile accounts previously making r-word posts. Evaluation of the main conversation drivers in terms of views, likes, and shares showed broad endorsement of use of the term by prominent accounts on the platform.

DISCUSSION

Results indicate that President Donald Trump's use of the r-word in a post corresponded with significant usage and activity on X related to the term. This may further indicate a continuing shift against efforts to push the term to the margins of acceptable public discourse (Teitell, 2024). Advocates previously expressed fears with Musk's post in January of 2025 that it could represent a broader normalization of the r-word (Klee, 2025). This report builds upon previous work and further validates the anticipated rapidity with which high profile accounts on social media can normalize a term on a platform.

In conclusion, the ongoing amplification of terms like the r-word as legitimate discourse in social media reinforces the ongoing need for vulnerable communities to approach participation in the online space with vigilant awareness. Stigmatizing content, while always prevalent online, is increasingly becoming a consistent dimension of social media. The implication of this sentiment, especially when shared by prominent voices, has the potential to produce broader, real-world dangers to the disabled.

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