Appendix 6: Operational Stance Definitions

This appendix outlines the final definitions for each stance category identified in the discourse surrounding Elon Musk on Reddit. It includes detailed descriptions, examples, and an overview of the qualitative content analysis (QCA) process detailing how initial candidate categories were refined and merged to arrive at these final definitions. This aligns with the reporting phase of QCA, ensuring transparency and trustworthiness of the findings by detailing the analytical process.

Evolution of Stance Categories: The QCA Process

The development of the final stance categories was an iterative process involving multiple readings and coding phases of a representative subset of 900 Reddit posts and comments. The approach combined deductive and inductive methods of discovery.

1. **Initial Familiarization and Open Coding:** The first reading aimed to understand how stances towards Elon Musk were expressed. Initial codes were developed to mark segments indicating favorability, opposition, or neutrality, resulting in a large number of overlapping codes.
2. **Candidate Category Development:** Initial codes were grouped based on their shared evaluative direction (positive/favorable, negative/critical, or neutral/objective) towards Elon Musk, leading to a set of candidate stance categories.
3. **Review, Refinement, and Merging:** Subsequent review phases involved re-reading the data and refining these candidate stances. Some initially separate candidate categories were merged when significant overlap was discovered, indicating they captured very similar aspects of the discourse. For instance, various distinct expressions of criticism were consolidated into the single 'Against/Critical' category to ensure robustness and minimize overlap. This process aimed to create categories that were distinct and not difficult to differentiate during the classification phase. Ideas for categories that captured too small, unclearly separable aspects of the data, or were inconsistent with others were discarded.
4. **Final Category Crystallization:** This iterative process of coding, category development, and refinement led to the crystallization of three core stances that effectively capture the primary evaluative patterns in the online discourse about Elon Musk on Reddit. The definitions and coding rules were continuously refined to minimize overlap while capturing the broadest possible evaluative positions.

The final three stance categories identified are: Favor/Supportive, Against/Critical, and Neutral/Objective.

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1. Favor/Supportive

- **Definition:** Posts or comments expressing approval, admiration, defense, or general support for Elon Musk, his companies (e.g., Tesla, SpaceX, X), his actions,

statements, innovations, or vision. This category captures positive sentiment and endorsement.

- **Examples:**
  - "Elon is a true visionary of our time. SpaceX is revolutionizing space travel, and what he's doing with Neuralink could change humanity forever."
  - "This is yet ANOTHER post on reddit attacking musk....bc he supports free speech...Why do I keep getting these negative posts about him?"
  - "I don't get all the hate for Elon. He's single-handedly pushing the EV market forward with Tesla. My Model 3 is the best car I've ever owned, and it's all thanks to his drive and innovation."
  - "He's shaking up the establishment, and that's why so many are against him. With him all the way, he saved free speech in America!"
  - " Elon is more trustworthy than the media."
- **Categories Merged/Evolution:** This category emerged from consolidating various initial codes that indicated:
  - Praise for innovations
  - Defense against criticism
  - Support for business acumen
  - Admiration for personality/vision
  - Positive comments about his specific companies or projects.

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2. Against/Critical

- **Definition:** Posts or comments expressing disapproval, criticism, opposition, skepticism, or negative sentiment towards Elon Musk, his companies, his actions, statements, behavior, or impact. This category captures various forms of negative evaluation.
- **Examples:**
  - "Elon Musk's behavior is increasingly erratic and irresponsible. He seems to care more about his ego than the consequences of his actions."
  - "The way he handled the Twitter takeover and mass layoffs was appalling. It shows a complete disregard for his employees and the platform's stability. He's running it into the ground."
  - "All this talk about Mars colonization is a distraction from the real problems on Earth that his wealth and influence could be used to address. It's billionaire escapism."
  - " Elon Musk a fat pile of shit. That's all."
  - "He claims to be a free speech absolutist, but then censors critics or promotes questionable accounts. It's hypocritical."
- **Categories Merged/Evolution:** This category was formed by merging numerous initial codes that captured different expressions of negativity, such as:
  - Criticism of business practices (e.g., "anti-worker," "poor management")
  - Disapproval of public statements/behavior
  - Skepticism about projects/claims
  - Concerns about societal impact

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3. Neutral/Objective

- **Definition:** Posts or comments discussing Elon Musk, his companies, or related topics without expressing a clear positive or negative viewpoint. This includes factual news reports, objective questions, technical discussions, ambivalent statements, or statements where the stance is unclear or mixed without a dominant lean.
- **Examples:**
    - o   " Holy crap this article was written tomorrow."
    - o   " There is no influence from some obscure Arizona mayor. Not sure why people are turning this into some big story."
    - o   " On S29, is there any chance SpaceX would have intentionally left the tiles off to see how Starship fairs with a few missing? Seems unlikely, but it seems strange that they didn't put them on last time it was down. I've heard they stacked early for the Tim Dodd interview, but still seems strange unless they were planning to destack after the interview anyways."
    - o   " Have SpaceX released a report yet on what went wrong with the 3rd test flight?"
    - o   " ust before 10AM CDT the Demag CC8800-1 crane at the launch site started to rise"
- **Categories Merged/Evolution:** This category grouped codes such as:
    - o   Factual reporting (e.g., "news update," "sharing information")
    - o   Requests for information/clarification
    - o   Technical discussions (e.g., "engineering aspects," "product specifications")
    - o   Ambivalent or balanced statements
    - o   Statements where the author's evaluative stance was not discernible.