

Tomáš Tinák

University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava

ORCID: 0009-0001-0063-130X

Michal Radošinský

University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava

ORCID: 0009-0004-0986-8604

## The Crisis of Reality in the Age of AI: A Case Study of the Reception of a Controversial Video on Facebook

### Introduction

The new millennium brings a number of challenges that we as a society will have to face. One of them is the groundbreaking technology of artificial intelligence. Today, it can modify, transform, or completely create new patterns, meanings, and images – at such a sophisticated level that their origin is often impossible to detect. Although *Homo sapiens* has rich cognitive abilities, the question arises: Is this still sufficient? Is our “cognitive muscle” weakening due to the phenomenon of AI? And are we still able to distinguish reality from fiction?

According to Immanuel Kant (1998), we do not see and perceive the world as it really is, but as it appears to us thanks to our rational and sensory abilities. It seems that this classic philosophical insight is experiencing a renaissance – we can even say that it is more relevant than ever before. This is because hypermodern forces are coming into play – algorithmic processes, data models, and artificial intelligence. The world we perceive on a daily basis

is increasingly mediated and at the same time less certain. The boundary between reality and digital representation is becoming fluid and unstable. As Jean Baudrillard (1994) points out, the problem today is no longer the false representation of reality, but its complete replacement by simulation. In this sense, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a time when this idea is coming true with disturbing accuracy. Artificial intelligence is becoming an indispensable companion to humans, often even a modern extension of them. Although it extends our senses, it also paradoxically distances us from them. Deepfake videos and synthetic images are produced with such precision that they destroy our very trust in what we see. Each published work thus becomes a test of our ability to distinguish between the real and the artificial. The struggle for authenticity is taking on a new value framework today. At the same time, the very way we perceive information is changing – from fact-checking to intuitive, often emotional evaluation. This shift reflects not only a technological but also a psychological transformation of humanity.

Along with it, the digital space is also changing – a complex ecosystem in which personal data is becoming the most valuable commodity for tech giants such as Meta Platforms (Facebook, Instagram), Google, Amazon, and TikTok. These companies are gradually becoming curators of reality – they determine what appears to be true, trustworthy, or relevant. Their power no longer lies solely in data processing, but in colonizing attention and manipulating meanings. Digital consumers find themselves in an increasingly unclear and fragile position, having to decide what and to what extent they can still trust.

## Algorithm as a New Epistemic Authority

Faith, or placing trust in something or someone, is an integral part of human existence. For centuries, people entrusted their decisions to various deities and supernatural forces. Based on this belief, they shaped social life, performed sacrifices and rituals – they prayed for rain during droughts, for the healing of the sick, or for victory in battle. Over the centuries, however, the source of authority gradually changed. With the advent of fundamental innovations such as writing and later printing, the field of knowledge and thought expanded; literacy became a key element of human emancipation. Although myths and religious beliefs persisted, societies increasingly placed their trust in human authorities – rulers, thinkers, and philosophers. For a long time, the epistemological tradition of Western thought was based on the idea of man as the central subject of knowledge, who reflects on the world through reason. As Rorty (1979) states, man became the “mirror of nature,” while Foucault (1994) writes of man as a being placed at the very center of knowledge.

However, it seems that the era of Humanism, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, in which humans were at the center of the cognitive process, is a thing of the past. The present era suggests a shift in authority – this time not to deities or monarchs, but to the invisible yet omnipresent power of algorithms (Harari 2020). The advent of the internet and global digitization are fundamentally changing the epistemological paradigm. Harari (2019) speaks of an “era of dataism” that brings with it a new form of ideology. In it, data and algorithms acquire the status of the highest authority in determining truth. Whereas knowledge was once defined by human experience and rational thinking, today it is increasingly shaped by calculations and models. Is there a danger that we as humanity are becoming replaceable – and thus epistemically redundant? The cognitive muscle of an individual immersed in a cybernetic environment may weaken as a result of passive information reception. This leads to a loss of the natural relationship between the knower (subject) and the known (object). Floridi (2014) points out that in the digital infosphere, information becomes an ontological unit – a basic building block of reality. The algorithm that processes these units thus gains the power to decide what will be visible and what will remain hidden. In this sense, artificial intelligence becomes a new epistemic actor – a subject that not only cognizes but also co-creates the world.

The question therefore remains open as to whether humans will be able to preserve the values that have defined their cognitive and moral essence for centuries. It is extremely easy to succumb to the logic of calculations, which subtly redefines the way we will think, perceive, and learn in the future. All we have to do is give up resistance and hand over the most valuable thing we have today – our own data.

## The Future Lies in Data

The world is constantly changing, and we, its inhabitants, are part of it. If we look back at history, we see that civilization has constantly changed, especially depending on what resource was considered most valuable at the time. This idea is also confirmed by sociologist Alvin Toffler (1980) and his wife Heidi, who described the development of civilization through three waves.

In the first, agrarian wave, land was the most important asset. The struggle for control of it became a key moment in the social order. If only a few people owned this commodity, society became divided and hierarchical, with aristocrats and plebeians (Harari 2020). Land thus became a symbol of power over space. In the second wave, mineral resources played a decisive role. Those who concentrated the means of production in their hands gained power over production and thus over the economy. The Toffler (1980)

described the last, third wave of civilization as the information wave – a period in which information became the most important value. The group that had information had “power over meaning.” Information flows became a new source of global imbalance, even though we have often heard in recent decades that humanity is moving toward equality.

Globalization and the advent of the internet in the 1990s bridged the gap between developed and developing countries, but at the same time deepened the differences between their social classes (Harari 2020). The extent of digitization brought about by the third millennium is creating a new – fourth-wave in which data and attention play a dominant role. The Toffler (1980) spoke of an “information revolution,” but today’s society is facing more of a “data revolution.”

The battle to acquire data – metadata about human behavior – has already begun. It is led by data giants such as Google, Meta (Facebook, Instagram), Amazon, and others (van der Aalst et al. 2019). These companies quickly realized that data will be the key to controlling and shaping human life in the future. In addition to its economic value, data also has a social and power dimension – it allows for accurate prediction and influence on individual behavior.

In this context, we can talk about trading attention. Nothing is free – the free information, services, and entertainment that technology companies provide us with are in exchange for our attention, which they then sell to advertisers for further influence and manipulation (Cramer 2017). Shoshana Zuboff speaks in a similar vein, referring to this phenomenon as “surveillance capitalism” (Mendoza 2022). Simply put, the more companies know about the behavior of their users – especially thanks to the digital footprint they leave behind (reactions and emotions) – the more accurately they can predict and shape their future decisions.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, representatives of the Frankfurt School – Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer – sharply criticized the commodification of art, which they called “the commodification of culture.” They warned that this was causing various works of art (films, paintings, etc.) to lose their true aesthetic value, even their very essence. According to them, the critical approach of the recipient is being transformed – people are becoming increasingly passive and live only in the illusion of choice (Horkheimer, Adorno 2002). While these thinkers criticized the industrialization of culture, the current phenomenon known as “data colonialism” (Couldry, Mejias 2019) takes this logic of the market and profit to an even higher level. Today, we face a different but equally serious problem: people are no longer customers, but are becoming a tradable commodity within the digital ecosystem (Cramer 2017). Power in this environment is taken over by those who can effectively extract, analyze, and transform data into knowledge or profit.

An example of this is a situation where even an application that does not show a profit in the short term can be worth several billion dollars – provided it has extensive data on user behavior (Bates 2015). The power and epistemic asymmetry that this creates is invisible to the naked eye, but all the more ubiquitous and dangerous. People are both producers and products, but they have no access to information about how their data is further processed. On the one hand, there is a large group of people who remain indifferent to this phenomenon. They unhesitatingly hand over their most valuable asset – their personal data – in exchange for “free” access to platforms and applications that offer them entertainment, games, or visual content (Harari 2020). In the chaos of information, users see only the surface of the interaction – posts, advertisements, or recommendations – but behind the scenes, a comprehensive behavioral profile is quietly being created. On the other hand, there are people who legitimately ask who owns, uses, and possibly misuses their data. In recent years, there have been several cases that have revealed unethical and manipulative practices by digital platforms.

One of the most famous and controversial scandals that shook public confidence in social networks was the Cambridge Analytica scandal. Since 2014, the company has been collecting personal data from more than 87 million Facebook user accounts, mainly from the US, in a dishonest and unauthorized manner. It then used this data without any consent for political targeting during the 2016 US presidential election, primarily to support candidate Donald Trump, who ultimately won the election (Schneble et al. 2018). The mechanism was quite sophisticated – the company monitored and analyzed user behavior, interactions, likes, comments, and emotional responses. This data then enabled it to target the relevant audience with highly personalized political content. In this case, there was a synergy of several elements – data, algorithms, and psychology – that came together to influence people’s thinking and decision-making. More serious than the data theft itself, however, was the fact that users became subjects of a large-scale psychological experiment without their knowledge. Their behavior, attitudes, and moods were deliberately modeled to respond to certain types of stimuli. This case clearly showed that data has become a modern weapon, capable of penetrating the most intimate layers of our consciousness and emotional experience.

The question that arises from this is vital and urgent: Are we, as a digital society, becoming increasingly vulnerable? Most people do not realize that algorithms already know their inner tendencies, fears, and desires more accurately than they do themselves. There are three forces at play in this dynamic: data as raw material, algorithms as processing logic, and artificial intelligence as their synthesis. These two pillars have given rise to modern intelligence, which has an ambivalent character – it offers quick and easy

access to information, but at the same time overwhelms people with its excess, thereby weakening their cognitive ability to distinguish reality from fiction.

## Artificial Intelligence on Social Media

The social networks through which people live, work, create, and communicate today represent an extremely dynamic space in which the influx of new information in the form of visual or audiovisual posts is exponential in relation to our natural cognitive rhythms. It is becoming increasingly common for a single misleading post published on these platforms to have a greater social impact than the long-term and responsible work of journalists, scientists, or experts who provide relevant and fact-based explanations (Ivančík 2024). What J. Habermas (1987) once said – that society should be formed within the framework of rational discussion based on the exchange of arguments and evidence – seems like a difficult goal, even a utopia, in the era of digitalization and information overload. People are “overeating” information on a daily basis and losing the ability to approach it with a sufficient degree of rationality: to process it, distinguish it, or evaluate its veracity. In this “information obesity” (Toffler 1970), which is co-created by artificial intelligence, critical thinking is becoming a rare but all the more valuable skill.

Today’s average user does not have the time or energy to verify all the content that appears during the day. Therefore, they react mainly emotionally, intuitively, or rely on their subjective beliefs. The advent of AI further exacerbates this problem – in a single day, artificial intelligence generates more than 30 million visual works (Marr 2025). Among other things, the Capgemini research institute (2023) found that up to 71% of images shared on social networks were created using AI. At the same time, it was confirmed that a small information label about the origin of the work has almost no effect on the recipient’s perception, while a full-screen label increased their caution by up to 21% (Lockhart, Tessono 2025). Despite this, none of the major platforms have yet introduced such labeling. In an overloaded information environment, there is a growing need for such measures, as users find it increasingly difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is artificially created. This is confirmed by research by Lu et al. (2023), according to which the rate of misclassification of visual works – determining whether they are real or synthetically generated content – reached 38.7%. However, a recent study (Cooke et al. 2025) showed that people can only distinguish between AI-generated content and human-created content at a rate of 51.2%, which in practice corresponds to random guessing. Is this really the limit of our cognitive abilities, or just proof that we have stopped using them?

One thing is certain: artificial intelligence does indeed amplify information noise, produce an enormous amount of synthetic works, and use algorithms to filter what we see on our screens. Data giants such as Meta provide this technology with room to flourish – not to deliver truthful and authentic content, but to produce visual stimuli that keep our attention for as long as possible. In an attention-driven economy, truth becomes secondary, while the primary goal is to capture and monetize our time, interest, and emotions. Every click, every view, and every reaction is converted into data – “fuel” for the next cycle of personalization and manipulation. In the digital world, *Homo sapiens* becomes a “lab rat.” Social networks test the limits of his emotional stability and intellectual alertness. The question is whether he will decide to think – or succumb to comfort and allow algorithms to think for him.

## Methodology

A combination of digital forensic analysis tools was applied to verify the authenticity and contextual accuracy of the video. Primarily, the InVid WeVerify tool was used to fragment the video into individual frames. Subsequently, reverse image analysis (Google Lens) of the extracted frames was performed, which allowed the original source of the material to be identified. At the same time, the outputs were also checked by two independent fact-checking platforms – Misbar (Kassem, 2025) and PesaCheck (2025) – which dealt with the content in question as part of their monitoring activities.

For the analysis of comments, we chose a combination of cloud-based spreadsheet tools and advanced artificial intelligence algorithms. As our primary analytical environment, we used Google Sheets, a cloud-based spreadsheet application that provides a flexible development environment for data processing and visualization. Google Sheets not only allows basic spreadsheet operations, but also integration with external services via API (Application Programming Interface). The advantage of a cloud solution is its availability from various devices, automatic saving of document versions, and the possibility of collaborative work by multiple researchers in real time.

To connect to artificial intelligence capabilities, we have implemented the Claude for Sheets™ version 0.8.6 extension, which is a bridging tool between the spreadsheet processor and the API of the Claude anthropic large language model. The extension adds the `=CLAUDE()` function to the environment, which allows direct calling of the language model from spreadsheet cells. In the background, it handles API request authentication, input data serialization, communication with the Anthropic API endpoint, and deserialization of output responses back into spreadsheet format. This approach

eliminates the need to program complex scripts and makes LLM capabilities accessible to researchers without advanced technical knowledge.

For the text analysis itself, we used the Claude Sonnet 4.5 model with the identifier `claude-sonnet-4-5-20250929`, which was one of the most powerful generative language models available at the time of the research. The Claude model was chosen for its ability to follow precise instructions, consistency in structured outputs, and relatively low hallucination rate. A key technical parameter of our implementation was the generation temperature set to 0. Temperature is a hyperparameter that controls the degree of randomness in selecting the next token in the generated sequence. At a temperature of 0, the model deterministically selects the token with the highest probability, resulting in maximally consistent and reproducible responses for identical inputs. Repeatedly running the analysis on the same data will yield identical results, which is a fundamental prerequisite for the verifiability and replicability of scientific findings. Our analytical strategy consisted of a four-dimensional evaluation of each comment through separate API calls:

- **Sentimental polarity** measures the overall value charge of the text on a five-point scale, where 1 represents the most negative and 5 the most positive sentiment. Prompt: "Rate the sentiment of this text on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is most negative and 5 is most positive. Return ONLY the number:" (Farhadloo, Rolland 2016; Al-Otaibi et al. 2018).
- **Emotional intensity**, unlike polarity, measures the strength of emotional expression regardless of its charge. This dimension was rated from minimal emotion (1) to extreme emotion (5). Prompt: "Rate the overall emotional intensity of this comment on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is minimal emotion and 5 is extreme emotion. Return ONLY the number:" (Bachorowski, Braaten 1994; Rachakonda et al. 2020).
- **Degree of skepticism** assesses the critical attitude towards the authenticity and source of video content. In the context of today's information environment characterized by disinformation, manipulative content, and deepfake technologies, the ability to critically evaluate the credibility of sources is a key component of media literacy. Scale from implicit trust (1) to strong skepticism (5). Prompt: "Rate the commenter's expressed level of skepticism towards the video's authenticity and source on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means implicit trust and 5 means strong skepticism. Return ONLY the number:" (Lange, Grünbaum 2023).
- **Cognitive depth** measures the sophistication of thought processes reflected in the comment. This variable distinguishes between superficial emotional responses and complex, multi-layered arguments that take into account different perspectives and factors. Rating from superficial response (1) to detailed, multi-factorial argument (5). Prompt: "Rate

the cognitive depth and complexity of the argument presented in the comment on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is a superficial and 5 is a detailed, multi-factorial argument. Return ONLY the number:" (Li, Rong 2018; McIlwain, Sutton 2015).

We included only primary comments in the corpus, i.e., direct responses from users to the original video. Secondary interactions in the form of replies to existing comments (threaded replies) were not included in the analysis. There are several reasons for this decision. First, primary comments represent an immediate reaction to media content and more directly reflect the impact of the video on recipients, while replies often respond to other commenters rather than the original content. Second, including replies would introduce conversational dynamics and interpersonal arguments into the analysis, which follow a different logic than direct responses to the video. Third, replies are often shorter, contextually dependent on the previous comment, and their interpretation would require taking into account the entire conversation thread, which would significantly complicate the analytical process. Similarly, we did not evaluate the different types of reactions (likes, loves, angry reactions, etc.) that Facebook offers as non-verbal forms of interaction with content. Although these reactions provide some information about the reception of content, their semantic value is limited to a few predefined categories and does not allow for the nuances of expression that are accessible to text content analysis.

## Case Study

The empirical part of the research is based on an analysis of comments extracted on September 24, 2025, from a video posted on Facebook on September 15 entitled "NATO convoy heading to protect the eastern border to Poland! ♥ We are NATO - One for all, all for one! That's what Article 5 says!" (STOP FicoPelle Maffi 2025). The video, which had approximately 356,000 views, showed the movement of military equipment on the Polish-Belarusian border in September 2025. A total of 500+ comments were extracted from the publicly available discussion below the video, which formed the primary data corpus for further analysis.

## Results

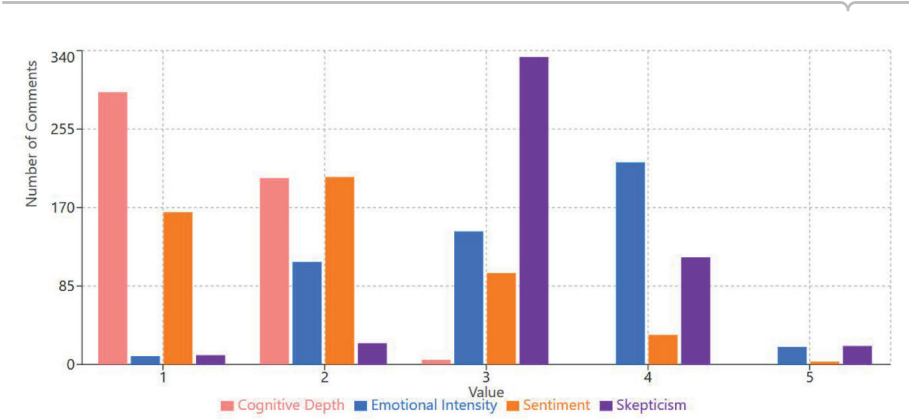
The verification process showed that the analyzed video does not originate from the current period or from the territory of Poland. The original material was published by the Defense Visual Information Distribution Service

(DVIDS), the official communication platform of the United States Department of Defense, on October 24, 2023 (PesaCheck 2025). The video documents the tactical movement of the US Army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry between Grafenwöhr and Hohenfels in Germany as part of the Combined Resolve 24-01 international military exercise (Kassem 2025).

The Combined Resolve 24-01 exercise took place from October 10 to November 11, 2023, at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center near Hohenfels, Germany. Approximately 4,000 soldiers from 14 NATO and partner countries participated, with the primary goal of improving interoperability and readiness of units within the collective defense of the alliance (Kuang 2023). Therefore, the analyzed case represents a typical example of a disinformation strategy known as recontextualization – a process in which authentic audiovisual material is deliberately placed in a different temporal, geographical, or situational context, thereby creating a misleading narrative (Van Dijk 2008). In the case under investigation, there were several dimensions of recontextualization:

- Temporal: A video from October 2023 was presented as current content from 2025.
- Geographical: Material from German territory was presented as being from Poland
- Situational: A routine military exercise was interpreted as an urgent deployment in response to a security crisis
- Purposeful: The training activity was presented as an operational response to a specific threat. It should be noted that although Polish President Karol Nawrocki did sign a resolution authorizing the presence of NATO forces on Polish territory as part of Operation Eastern Sentry in response to Russian drone incidents (Kassem 2025; PesaCheck 2025), the analyzed video is not related to this current event in any way.

The recontextualization of audiovisual content is a manipulative technique primarily because it occurs outside the usual detection schemes aimed at identifying AI-generated or technically manipulated content. The authentic nature of the video material itself can increase its credibility and make it difficult for ordinary social media users to identify disinformation. The emotional charge of the accompanying text, which uses the symbolism of solidarity (a reference to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty on collective defense) and emoticons with affective potential, serves as a catalyst for content sharing. This can be classified as an emotional bomb – a content strategy designed to initiate spontaneous distribution behavior based on the affective, rather than cognitive, response of recipients.



**Chart 1.** Comparative Distribution Across All Metrics

Source: own processing, 2025.

**Table 1.** Frequency Distribution Table: Count and Percentage by Metric and Scale Value

| Value | Cognitive Depth<br>1 = superficial, 5 = detailed | Emotional Intensity<br>1 = minimal, 5 = extreme | Sentiment<br>1 = negative, 5 = positive | Skepticism<br>1 = trust, 5 = strong skepticism |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | 295<br>58.8%                                     | 9<br>1.8%                                       | 165<br>32.9%                            | 10<br>2.0%                                     |
| 2     | 202<br>40.2%                                     | 111<br>22.1%                                    | 203<br>40.4%                            | 23<br>4.6%                                     |
| 3     | 5<br>1.0%                                        | 144<br>28.7%                                    | 99<br>19.7%                             | 333<br>66.3%                                   |
| 4     | 0<br>0.0%                                        | 219<br>43.6%                                    | 32<br>6.4%                              | 116<br>23.1%                                   |
| 5     | 0<br>0.0%                                        | 19<br>3.8%                                      | 3<br>0.6%                               | 20<br>4.0%                                     |

Source: own processing, 2025.

We found that the discussion is significantly marked by negative sentiment (average 2.01), with more than 73% of comments expressing a critical to negative opinion. Positive reactions account for only 7%, indicating that the post provoked a controversial response and mobilized primarily critically-minded users. At the same time, there is a high level of emotional intensity (average 3.25), with almost half of the comments reaching a level of strong to extreme emotionality. The level of skepticism shows a concentration around the middle values – a dominant 66.3% of comments express cautious reserve towards the content, while the extreme poles (complete trust or strong rejection) are minimally represented. The most striking finding is the extremely low cognitive depth (average 1.42), with almost 99% of comments being simple to superficial.

## Limitations

State-of-the-art LLMs provide valid sentiment prediction in most ambiguous scenarios, but often fail to recognize nuances. Research by Buscemi & Proverbio (2024) revealed linguistic biases and specific problems such as censorship in Gemini and optimistic biases in LLaMA2, which fail to recognize negative sentiment in sarcasm or double entendres. Despite advances, gaps remain in the applicability and transferability of LLMs when processing ambiguous scenarios (Buscemi, Proverbio 2024). Another study found that although LLMs can achieve comparable evaluation accuracy, the sentiment and style of their feedback differ significantly, with only minimal consistency in sentiment demonstrated across models. There is no clear relationship between model size and feedback length. Sentiment was mostly influenced by the quality of the response: higher scores led to more positive and shorter feedback, while lower scores elicited longer and more critical comments. Jukiewicz (2025) argues in his findings that automated analysis using LLM is not tone-neutral and its emotional valence depends on the choice and configuration of the model.

The training set used to train Claude's sentiment cannot be found. Therefore, we cannot reliably evaluate its moral and ethical compass. This is because the training set represents intellectual property and a competitive advantage. Of course, using Chinese or Russian models could yield diametrically different results. LLMs were probably not specifically designed to analyze sentiment or other parameters; instead, the models identify general language comprehension, emotionally charged words, phrases, and context. However, this may be the subject of further research.

## Conclusion

The digital era, defined by the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and the data revolution, is fundamentally redefining social and epistemological norms. Desk research has shown that the boundary between reality and digital simulation is becoming increasingly unstable as a result of the shift of epistemological authority from humans to algorithms. In the context of surveillance capitalism and data colonialism, this change weakens the "cognitive muscle" of humans, who face information obesity in a social media environment overloaded with synthetic content. Empirical findings from the case study confirmed our prediction. Analysis of a video of questionable origin revealed recontextualization – authentic military footage was deliberately placed in a misleading geographical and temporal context. This archetype of manipulation is particularly dangerous because it bypasses AI content detection

schemes and acts as an emotional bomb, triggering an affective rather than a rational response. A key finding is the epistemic asymmetry confirmed by the analysis of comments through quantitative analysis. The data show that a Facebook post, in our case, served more to vent feelings than to engage in rational discussion, and that a high level of interaction does not necessarily mean a meaningful exchange of views. Although a moderate level of skepticism was expressed, we can conclude that it was most likely emotional doubt rather than the result of clear critical evaluation. Low cognitive depth shows the vulnerability of users even to simply conceived disinformation. If people are to maintain their autonomy of thought, it is essential to emphasize the restoration of cognitive alertness and critical thinking so that they do not succumb to the comfort of algorithms.

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## Abstract

Three pillars of power and epistemology – data, algorithms, and artificial intelligence – now shape what people see and how they interpret it. Algorithms are becoming the new authority, data the most valuable asset, and artificial intelligence a tool that blurs the line between reality and fiction. The aim of the study is to find out how Facebook users reacted to audiovisual content of unclear origin and to clarify whether they displayed a rational or emotional approach. The empirical part is based on an analysis of more than 500 comments under a video showing the movement of military equipment on the Polish-Belarusian border in September 2025. The reactions were evaluated using advanced algorithms of large language models. We discovered that the digital environment, characterized by information overload and the unused

cognitive capacity of users, leads to a significantly higher degree of emotionality and negativity in their comments.

**Keywords:** algorithm, artificial intelligence, data colonization, epistemology, social media

**Tomáš Tinák** is a full-time PhD student at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. His research focuses on media philosophy, epistemology, and legal and ethical aspects of media communication. His interests extend to media plurality, the analysis of disinformation and hoaxes, as well as the examination of geopolitical developments and their media representation within a foreign and domestic context. He is also actively exploring contemporary phenomena – artificial intelligence and its integration into media processes.

**Michal Radošínský** is a PhD student at the Department of Mass Media Communication, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovak Republic. His research focuses on artificial intelligence, manipulation, post-truth in contemporary mass media, and music.