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Editorial

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Ubiquitous digital technologies, artificial intelligence and new media are no longer simply tools for communication; they have become an infrastructure that helps shape the way we understand the world, build relationships and participate in community life. Their presence is now so widely taken for granted that it is almost imperceptible. As a result, we tend to lose our critical distance from them, since what is invisible is the hardest to scrutinise. The study of these technologies themselves—and, above all, their impact on people and social relations—therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach combining the perspectives of communication and media studies with sociology, cultural studies, education and political science. None of these disciplines, taken in isolation, encompasses the full scope of a phenomenon that is simultaneously transforming the flow of information, cultural forms, educational practices and the rules of public life.

The anthropological and ethical dimensions must not be overlooked in this research. Questions concerning human dignity, privacy, mental wellbeing and inequalities in access to technology appear to be central. Equally important is the extent to which the individual retains autonomy in the face of systems that are increasingly making decisions on their behalf. Thorough reflection on these phenomena should avoid both technological enthusiasm and alarmist pessimism, drawing on empirical data and well-established theory. Both extreme positions oversimplify reality. The former obscures the costs and risks, whilst the latter overlooks the real benefits and opportunities. Such a balanced approach enables us to understand how digital technologies are transforming contemporary society and to identify ways of using them responsibly.

In this issue, we present four articles that contribute to this scholarly reflection.

In the article *Technology, culture, and values: The ethical dimension of Neil Postman's concept of technopoly in the age of AI*, Krzysztof Marcyński synthesises the ethical dimensions of Neil Postman's critique of technopoly in the context of media ecology, relating his analysis to contemporary challenges associated with artificial intelligence.

The author demonstrates that in the culture of technopoly, the relationship between human and machine is inverted. Efficiency, bureaucracy and scientific procedures ("scientism") become the highest values, reducing the human being to a subject subordinate to technology. Marcyński emphasises the lack of ideological neutrality in digital tools and examines the problem

of information noise, in which an excess of data devoid of a moral framework leads to a loss of the ability to make value judgements. As a humanistic response, the author promotes the attitude of a "loving resistance fighter," who maintains psychological and cognitive distance from technological determinism whilst defending non-quantifiable human values.

Yang Zhoulanxin's article *Three-dimensional paths for content innovation in micro-short drama: IP linkage, niche cultivation, and interactive narrative* presents a conceptual study of content innovation in Chinese micro-dramas (very short video series created for smartphone screens), aimed at overcoming the widespread problems of homogenisation, formulaic storytelling and low artistic quality in these productions.

The author proposes a three-dimensional model of innovation. Its first pillar is two-way IP linkage, which involves treating short series as prototypes on which characters and plotlines are tested before being developed into full-length productions, as well as using them as a means of adapting and revitalising traditional cultural texts. The second pillar is precise niche cultivation, which involves moving away from simple demographic divisions, such as age or gender, in favour of content targeted at specific professional groups, subcultures and regional communities, for example by utilising local dialects and settings. The third pillar is interactive narrative, which engages viewers' agency through narrative choices and the analysis of paratextual elements, such as bullet comments or memes, thereby enabling audiences to help shape the plot without compromising its internal coherence.

Vladimir S. Oskolkov's paper *The use of artificial intelligence when working with first-semester students* analyses the practical opportunities and challenges associated with the implementation of artificial intelligence tools (such as Gemini and ChatGPT) in the education of first-year students in Kazakhstan, using the example of political science classes at Caspian University in Almaty.

The author highlights the stringent state regulations and top-down programmes imposed by the Ministry, as well as the low analytical skills and functional literacy of secondary school leavers (as confirmed by PISA studies). The article presents the author's own methodology based on four-stage tasks (including the compilation of bibliographies and structural tables), in which AI is used to support the initial verification of the formal requirements of students' work. Oskolkov emphasises that artificial intelligence is intended to serve as an assistant rather than a substitute for the teacher, whilst the final assessment, plagiarism checks and the detection of so-called generative

'hallucinations' always remain the responsibility of the teacher supervising the public defence of theses.

Jan Szepielak's thesis *Analysis of Donald Trump's political communication on social media regarding the Iran conflict: A comparative analysis with George W. Bush's narrative during the Iraq war* analyses Donald Trump's communication strategy on the Truth Social platform during the first month of the war in Iran in 2026 and compares it with George W. Bush's war narrative from the 2003 Iraq War.

The study shows that both presidents portrayed the enemy as morally evil ("a terrorist regime"), emphasised the need to deprive it of weapons of mass destruction, and highlighted the global dimension of the conflict. Szepielak, however, points to profound differences: Trump completely rejects Bush's rhetoric of a civilising mission, the promotion of democracy and the forging of alliances (criticising, amongst other things, NATO). Instead of pledging post-war reconstruction or the protection of civilians, Trump exploits the direct and emotive nature of social media to loudly glorify absolute military dominance and the total destruction of the enemy.

All four texts are linked by an analysis of the impact of digital technologies, artificial intelligence and new media on communication, culture, education and socio-political life. These technologies are presented as a new environment for human activity, one that is transforming not only ethical reflection and teaching practice, but also the production of cultural content and political communication. Another common thread is the transformation of forms of narration and reception: the compression and interactivity of communication, the emotionalisation of public rhetoric, and information overload, which makes it difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood and fosters the homogenisation of content. Together, the studies emphasise the need to preserve human agency in the face of algorithms and thus the primacy of human judgement in decision-making and evaluation, the impossibility of reducing moral values to technical indicators, and the need for caution regarding the subordination of communication to the logic of click-through rates and immediate stimuli.

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Technology, culture, and values: the ethical dimension of Neil Postman's concept of technopoly in the age of AI

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Abstract

Technology, culture, and values: the ethical dimension of Neil Postman's concept of technopoly in the age of AI

Th The aim of this article is to identify and characterize the ethical dimensions of the critique of technopoly formulated by Neil Postman in his book „Technopoly: The surrender of culture to technology" (1992) and in the public addresses that accompanied it. The article describes the genesis of media ecology as the principal theoretical context within which Postman formulated his critique and then explains the concept of technopoly itself as a cultural stage following tool-using culture and technocracy. The main part of the article offers a synthesis of the ethical aspects of this critique. The conclusions, set against Postman's critical reception in the English- and Polish-language literature, indicate that his critique rests on the conviction that the human person cannot be reduced to measurable categories, yet it does not draw on any single, systematically elaborated philosophical tradition.

Keywords: Neil Postman, technopoly, media ethics, media ecology, technocracy, values, AI

Contemporary technology is no longer confined to the role of a tool that human beings consciously choose and just as consciously employ. Increasingly, it functions as an environment within which the full range of human experience unfolds: education, politics, work, family relationships, and religious life. This diagnosis, formulated by Neil Postman in *Technopoly: The surrender of culture to technology* (Postman, 1992), has gained renewed relevance today in the context of artificial intelligence, algorithmic attention distribution, and the ongoing reduction of human experience to measurable or material data. Postman, however, was not the first to draw attention to the ambivalent character of technological change as such. He situated himself within an intellectual tradition that he, together with his collaborators at New York University, named media ecology (Postman, 2000) — a tradition whose roots reach back to Harold Innis, Walter Ong, and Marshall McLuhan (Marcyński & Laskowska, 2019), and which today is sustained chiefly by scholars affiliated with the Media Ecology Association (MEA). On the European side of this tradition, mention should certainly be made of Jacques Ellul's celebrated *The technological society* (1964), in which the French theorist offers, among

other things, a critique of the position that technology is merely a neutral tool.[1]

The critique of technopoly tends to be read primarily as a cultural diagnosis, consisting chiefly of a description of the mechanisms by which technology takes over functions once performed by religion, philosophy, or tradition. Less often addressed is the question of which ethical aspects this diagnosis encompasses.[2]

The aim of the article is to identify and characterize the most prominent ethical aspects of the critique of technopoly in Neil Postman's work. The article employs qualitative content analysis of the following research materials: (1) Neil Postman's publication on the concept of technopoly, *Technopoly: The surrender of culture to technology* (1992), and three accompanying public addresses: (2) *Informing ourselves to death* (1990), (3) *The humanism of media ecology* (2000), and (4) *Five things we need to know about technological change* (1998). These materials were supplemented with scholarship on Postman's reception (Cieślarek, 2013; Stephens, 2014) and with texts that apply his categories to contemporary technologies and challenges (Wang, 2019; Walsh, 2025).

The research questions were formulated as follows: RQ1: What ethical aspects are present in Neil Postman's account underlying the critique of technopoly? RQ2: What anthropological and axiological assumptions underlie this critique? Answers were sought through several analytical categories, derived deductively from a reading of the research materials: the absence of ethical neutrality in technology; the divergence between efficiency and ethical judgment; bureaucracy as a procedure devoid of ethics; scientism as an ersatz moral authority of science; the diagnosis of information devoid of ethical foundations; the stance of the "loving resistance fighter";[3] and

1 For further discussion of other scholars who held views similar to Postman's on technopoly and who examined this theme, including its ethical dimension, see Franssen et al. (2026).

2 Among scholars who have addressed the ethical aspects of technopoly, the following may be mentioned: J. M. van der Laan (2004), Phil Rose (2012), Robert Albrecht and Carmine Tabone (2015), and Umut Eldem and Beşir Özgür Nayır (2022).

3 To better understand this metaphor as Postman employs it, it is worth quoting a longer passage from his book: "It is this: You must try to be a loving resistance fighter. That is the doctrine, as Hillel might say. Here is the commentary: By 'loving', I mean that, in spite of the confusion, errors, and stupidities you see around you, you must always keep close to your heart the narratives and symbols that once made the United States the hope of the world and that may yet have enough vitality to do so again. [...] Which brings me to the 'resistance fighter' part of my principle. Those who resist the American

the irreducibility of the human person to measurable or material categories. The article concludes with a discussion of the coherence — and, above all, the contemporary relevance — of the ethical aspects of Postman's technopoly within today's dimensions and contexts of technology.

Neil Postman and media ecology as a theoretical foundation

Postman's way of thinking is grounded in a broader media-ecological perspective that understands technologies not simply as tools, but as environments that shape human perception, communication, culture, and patterns of thought. Building on an earlier intellectual tradition, Postman developed and applied this perspective to examine how technological change can transform the cultural conditions within which people construct knowledge, make judgments, and determine what is considered valuable. Postman examines how technology acquires authority over cultural values and social life. Media ecology thus provides an essential theoretical foundation for understanding his critique of technopoly and its ethical implications.

Meaning of media ecology

The term "media ecology" derives, as Postman himself noted, from a biological metaphor. Just as the growth medium (*medium*) in a Petri dish[4] is

Technopoly are people who pay no attention to a poll unless they know what questions were asked, and why; who refuse to accept efficiency as the pre-eminent goal of human relations; who have freed themselves from the belief in the magical powers of numbers, do not regard calculation as an adequate substitute for judgment, or precision as a synonym for truth; who refuse to allow psychology or any 'social science' to pre-empt the language and thought of common sense; who are, at least, suspicious of the idea of progress, and who do not confuse information with understanding; who do not regard the aged as irrelevant; who take seriously the meaning of family loyalty and honor, and who, when they 'reach out and touch someone', expect that person to be in the same room; who take the great narratives of religion seriously and who do not believe that science is the only system of thought capable of producing truth; who know the difference between the sacred and the profane, and who do not wink at tradition for modernity's sake; who admire technological ingenuity but do not think it represents the highest possible form of human achievement" (Postman, 1992, pp. 182–184).

4 This refers to Julius Richard Petri, the German bacteriologist who lived from 1852 to 1921. He worked as an assistant to Robert Koch. In 1887, he invented the flat glass dish used for culturing bacteria, which was named after him: the Petri dish.

the substance within which a culture of bacteria grows, so a medium, in the communicative sense, is the technology within which human culture grows: "a medium is a technology within which a culture grows; that is to say, it gives form to a culture's politics, social organization, and habitual ways of thinking" (Postman, 2000, p. 10). To this metaphor Postman added a second, drawn from the Greek *oikos* — "house," "household" — whose meaning the nineteenth-century German zoologist Ernst Haeckel extended into the science of the mutual relations among the elements of the natural environment. The conjunction of the two metaphors was meant to underscore that the object of interest is not media themselves, but the way in which the interaction between media and human beings gives a culture its character and helps it — or fails to help it — maintain "symbolic balance" (Postman, 2000, p. 11).

Media ecology: continuing an earlier line of reflection

Media ecology, in this sense, did not arise as a response to the emergence of electronic media. Rather, it continued a line of reflection pursued earlier by, among others, Harold Innis, Walter Ong, and Marshall McLuhan (Marcyński & Laskowska, 2019, pp. 55–59). When Postman, together with Christine Nystrom and Terence Moran, founded a graduate program under this name at New York University in 1971, he himself insisted that he was not the inventor of this intellectual tradition but had merely given it a name (Strate, 2002, p. 3). What matters, however, is how Postman interpreted and carried this tradition forward and it is here that a distinctly ethical choice emerges, one that sets him apart from McLuhan. The Canadian media theorist, discussing the New York media ecology program with Postman, warned him against turning it into a moralizing enterprise. He invoked, in this connection, the closing lines of Stephen Vincent Benét's poem *John Brown's body*, in which the author, describing the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, advises: "Say neither, it is blessed nor cursed. Say only *It is here*" (quoted in Postman, 2000, p. 11). McLuhan held that this kind of moral or ethical neutrality offered the best chance of genuinely understanding how new media operate, and that evaluation or judgment obscures understanding. In other words, McLuhan believed that focusing on whether the effects of media are good or bad could distract from understanding their mechanisms. Postman rejected this approach: "I don't see any point in studying media unless one does so within a moral or ethical context" (Postman, 2000, p. 11).

As he himself recalled: "From the beginning, we were a group of moralists" (Postman, 2000, p. 11).

The adoption of an ethical, rather than neutral research perspective

This aspect of Neil Postman's approach to the study of media and technology and his adoption of an ethical, rather than neutral, research perspective is not a secondary matter for the remainder of this article. It establishes the fundamental status of the critique of technopoly itself. That critique is not merely a description of a particular cultural position or mechanism toward which the researcher maintains a distance. It is, above all, a media-studies, communication-studies, and social evaluation demanding axiological justification. The question that must be asked at this point is: what, precisely, does this ethical evaluation of technopoly consist in? What does it concern? What specific aspects does it contain? The answers must be sought in *Technopoly* itself, to which the next section of the article is devoted.

Neil Postman's concept of technopoly

Postman opens *Technopoly* by invoking the Platonic legend of King Thamus, to whom the god Theuth presents his inventions — writing among them — as a means of perfecting the memory and wisdom of the Egyptians. Thamus replies that the inventor is not the best judge of the benefit or harm that his invention will bring to those who use it. Writing, he argues, will weaken memory by substituting external record for it, and will produce the appearance, not the reality, of wisdom (Postman, 1992, pp. 3–4). From this legend Postman derives several principles that form the foundation of his subsequent argument regarding the critique of technopoly.

The ambivalence of technological change

One of these is the principle of the ambivalence of technological change: "Every technology is both a burden and a blessing; not either-or, but this-and-that. [...] Nonetheless, we are currently surrounded by throngs of zealous Theuths, one-eyed prophets who see only what new technologies can do and are incapable of imagining what they will undo" (Postman, 1992, pp. 4–5).

Seeing technology honestly, then, requires simultaneously perceiving what it gives and what it takes away, and Postman treats the inability to sustain this double perspective as an error committed by enthusiasts and critics of technology alike.

"Faustian bargain"

Another principle is that of the "Faustian bargain," to which Postman returned in nearly identical formulations throughout his career, across numerous publications and addresses:

> all technological change is a trade-off. I like to call it a Faustian bargain. Technology giveth and technology taketh away. This means that for every advantage a new technology offers, there is always a corresponding disadvantage. The disadvantage may exceed in importance the advantage, or the advantage may well be worth the cost. Now, this may seem to be a rather obvious idea, but you would be surprised at how many people believe that new technologies are unmixed blessings (Postman, 1990; cf. Postman, 1992, p. 5).

Naming this mechanism "Faustian" is no accident. Postman invokes the image of a transaction whose price is revealed only after the fact and can no longer be undone, suggesting that adopting a new technology without reckoning its costs and benefits is closer to moral recklessness than to mere cognitive naivety. He stresses, moreover, that the problem is not a lack of awareness of this principle. He himself admits that it is "rather obvious" but rather how many people nonetheless continue to treat new technologies as "unmixed blessings," gifts that come at no price at all.

The conviction that no technology is neutral with respect to values

A further principle, decisive for the argument that follows, is the conviction that no technology is neutral with respect to values, and that its effects arise from its form, not from the user's intentions: "embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another" (Postman, 1992, p. 13). From this principle follows directly the question that Postman poses as fundamental to any reflection on technology: to whom does a given technology give power, and whose power and, above all, whose freedom does it reduce?

"To whom will the technology give greater power and freedom? And whose power and freedom will be reduced by it?" (Postman, 1992, p. 11).

The relationship between culture and technology

The legend of Thamusprovides the interpretive principles for understanding technopoly. The historical reconstruction itself follows in subsequent chapters of the book, in which Postman proposes a scheme for the development of the relationship between culture and technology. In a tool-using culture, technology remains subordinate to purposes set by the religious, philosophical, and aesthetic values of a given community. Technocracy — whose symbolic starting point Postman locates in James Watt's invention of the steam engine (1765) and the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of nations* (1776) — marks a stage in which technology gains autonomy and begins to compete with tradition for the authority to define what is real and valuable. Tradition in a technocracy nonetheless remains alive, "still functional, still exerting influence, still too much alive to ignore" (Postman, 1992, p. 48).

The transition from technocracy to technopoly and its consequences

Postman then devotes particular attention to the transition from technocracy to technopoly, a transition essential to understanding the concept. As the symbolic turning point, he identifies the year 1911 and the publication of Frederick Taylor's *The principles of scientific management*. In this work he discerns "the first explicit and formal outline of the assumptions of the thought-world of Technopoly" (Postman, 1992, p. 51). This book, in Postman's view, embodies the conviction that the sole or principal aim of human work and thought is efficiency. That technical calculation surpasses human judgment and human capacities in every respect; that human judgment and perspective cannot be trusted, since they are burdened by ambiguity and needless complexity; that subjectivity, characteristic of the human being, is an obstacle to clear thinking; and that whatever cannot be measured either does not exist or has no value (Postman, 1992, p. 51). The consequence of these assumptions is a sentence that may be regarded as the most concise summary of the ethical core of the entire critique: Taylor's system, Postman notes, rests on the conviction "that human beings are, in a sense, worth less than their machinery" (Postman, 1992, p. 52).

Thus, in Postman's interpretation, the difference between technocracy and technopoly is, above all, a qualitative one. Technocracy makes human life an object acted upon by technology, whereas technopoly turns the subordination of the human being to technology into a defining and central cultural program. As Postman explains: "technocracy does not have as its aim a grand reductionism in which human life must find its meaning in machinery and technique. Technopoly does" (Postman, 1992, p. 52). The consequence of this program is not so much a conflict between technopoly and alternative worldviews — religious, humanistic, traditional — as their invalidation through being rendered invisible: "It does not make them illegal. It does not make them immoral. It does not even make them unpopular. It makes them invisible and therefore irrelevant. [...] Technopoly, in other words, is totalitarian technocracy" (Postman, 1992, p. 48).

The definitions of technopoly

Neil Postman formulates at least two definitions of technopoly in the course of his book. The first reads: "one way of defining a Technopoly is to say that its information immune system is inoperable. Technopoly is a form of cultural AIDS, which I here use as an acronym for Anti-Information Deficiency Syndrome" (Postman, 1992, p. 63). He returns frequently to this metaphor in other writings and addresses. In the second definition, he describes technopoly as the condition of a society in which the defenses against an excess of information have broken down: "it is what happens to society when the defenses against information glut have broken down. It is what happens when institutional life becomes inadequate to cope with too much information" (Postman, 1992, p. 72). Both definitions share the same underlying conviction: technopoly is a diagnosis of a culture that has lost the capacity to make sense of information, and that has surrendered the human being, together with his natural capacities and dispositions, to the service of technology.

The ethical aspects of Postman's critique of technopoly

Neil Postman's critique of technopoly contains numerous ethical references, several of them highly distinctive of his deeply humanistic approach to reading media and technology. Above all, as already noted, Postman consciously

rejected the stance of researcher neutrality regarding technology. This approach followed primarily from his own understanding of what technology is and of the influence it exerts on those who use it.

Media and technology require an ethical framework

Postman insisted explicitly that the study of media and technology should always be conducted within a moral or ethical framework, pointing in this connection to Lewis Mumford and Jacques Ellul as scholars who — like him — could scarcely write about technology without reference to its humanistic or anti-humanistic consequences (Postman, 2000, pp. 11–12). This does not amount to an endorsement of moral relativism in the evaluation of technology. Postman cautioned that although people differ in their assessment of what benefits them, and although such assessments change over time, this does not mean that every assessment is equally valid. It is possible to say that one side of a dispute over the effects of a new medium was mistaken, and that the passage of time itself, while it contributes to changes in how we judge, can also be a source of error (Postman, 2000, p. 12). Postman explained this ethical dimension of technology use precisely: "I mean, let us say, that the negative effects of a medium might still be a problem and remain one in spite of the passage of time. In other words, time does not always erase the disadvantages of a medium. Neither does it necessarily weaken the advantages" (Postman, 2000, p. 12).

Human beings as less valuable than their machines

The rationalization of production, and the efficiency arising from machinery discussed by the aforementioned Taylor, is for Postman more than a historical fact in the history of the world's successive eras and their technologies. In Taylor's system he discerns the first explicit outline of anthropology on which the whole later culture of technopoly rests: a human being whose judgment is by definition unreliable, and whose worth is measured by his usefulness to the demands of technology. Taylor did not write a philosophical treatise but a management manual, which makes it even more striking that the anthropology of technopoly is typically formulated inadvertently, in the course of reflections that appear purely practical. Postman summarizes this anthropology by writing that, on the Taylorist view, human beings are, in a sense, worth less than their machinery (Postman, 1992, p. 52). One may thus read in

this an inversion of the classical hierarchy of means and ends: it is not technology that is to serve the human being, but the human being who is to serve technology. This is another of the ethical aspects that Postman addresses in his treatment of technopoly.

Efficiency as a supreme value

On this basis Postman derives his understanding of what constitutes the central ethical aspect of the critique of technopoly. The opposition to which he repeatedly returns in his book is not an opposition between progress and backwardness, but between *efficiency* as a supreme value and *judgment* — understood as the capacity to distinguish the sacred from the profane, together with the conviction that not everything measurable is thereby important. In the chapter titled "The Broken Defenses," in explaining this ethical aspect of technopoly, Postman returns to his critique of Taylorist efficiency, supplementing it with an analysis of the institution that, in the culture of technopoly, has assumed the function once performed by the traditional guardians of the order of values: religion, family, law, and school. This role is today filled by bureaucracy, which Postman defines as "a coordinated series of techniques for reducing the amount of information that requires processing" (Postman, 1992, p. 84). Whereas in the nineteenth century bureaucracy served social institutions, in technopoly, as Postman notes following James Beniger, it transforms the relationship of mastery: from a tool it becomes an autonomous meta-institution that "not only solves problems but creates them [...] and defines what our problems are — and they are always, in the bureaucratic view, problems of efficiency" (Postman, 1992, p. 86).

Bureaucracy as the technical embodiment of evil

In this context, Postman invokes two references of clear ethical significance. The first is C. S. Lewis's warning, which identifies bureaucracy with the technical embodiment of evil: "my symbol for Hell is something like the bureaucracy of a police state or the office of a thoroughly nasty business concern" (Lewis, quoted in Postman, 1992, p. 84). The second is the invocation of Adolf Eichmann as "the basic model and metaphor for a bureaucrat in the age of Technopoly" (Postman, 1992, p. 87) — an official whose training and temperament rendered him indifferent to the human being and to any form of humanism,

and who considered the consequences of his decisions solely insofar as they affected the efficiency of the bureaucracy itself. This kind of stance exemplifies the dangers associated with technopoly which, as history has already shown, carry consequences for humanity that are enormously difficult to reverse.

Bearing in mind the ethical aspects of bureaucracy, understood as a system of techniques for reducing and controlling an excess of information, Postman also invokes the words spoken by Václav Havel before the United States Congress, to the effect that contemporary culture still cannot bring itself to place responsibility — "responsibility to something higher than my family, my country, my firm, my success" — above politics, science, and economics (Havel, quoted in Postman, 1992, p. 82). Bureaucracy, as Postman writes, "has no intellectual, political, or moral theory — except for its implicit assumption that efficiency is the principal aim of all social institutions and that other goals are essentially less worthy, if not irrelevant" (Postman, 1992, p. 86).

Scientism and the loss of sacred moral authority

The most extensively developed element of the ethical critique of technopoly, however, is the chapter devoted to what Postman calls scientism — a phenomenon distinct from science itself and from the legitimate application of scientific method. Its starting point is the observation that the desacralization of the world brought about by modern science deprived Western culture of its traditional source of moral authority, namely "sacred stories" (Postman, 1992, p. 160). Natural scientists themselves, as Postman notes, never claimed the right to have science determine what is good and what is evil: "the very principles of natural science [...] compel the natural scientist to abjure in his or her role as a scientist such moral judgments or claims" (Postman, 1992, pp. 160–161). Social researchers, in Postman's view, acted differently: eager to model their disciplines on the natural sciences, they began to attribute to their "discoveries" the power to determine how one ought to act.

Postman illustrates the consequences of this substitution with examples of considerable ethical and social weight. In his view, in the culture of technopoly it is not enough to say that racial segregation in schools is unethical; one must, above all, demonstrate through tests and statistics that segregation lowers the academic performance and self-worth of Black students (Postman, 1992, pp. 158–159). Nor is it enough to say that society's toleration of homelessness is unconscionable. What is needed, in his view, is statistical data

showing that homelessness burdens the economy or produces other quantifiable consequences (Postman, 1992, p. 159). Postman names this mechanism itself scientism: "the desperate hope, and wish, and ultimately the illusory belief that some standardized set of procedures called 'science' can provide us with an unimpeachable source of moral authority" for questions such as "What is right and wrong to do?" (Postman, 1992, p. 162). As an example on the level of an entire culture, particularly Western culture, he cites the statement of President Ronald Reagan, who replaced his personal conviction that abortion was immoral with the declaration that science should determine when life begins (Postman, 1992, p. 162). In Postman's view, this exemplifies how easily a moral question comes to be recast as a procedural one, so as to avoid having to settle it directly, on humanistic grounds.

Scientism, in this sense, is closely bound up with the critique of efficiency discussed earlier. Both mechanisms transfer to technology — understood here broadly, as method and procedure — the function once performed by human judgment grounded in values. The difference is that whereas efficiency, in Taylor's sense, concerns the organization of labor, scientism concerns the very source of moral authority: it is not that technology should serve as a tool in the hands of a person making an ethical decision, but that technology — disguised as science — is meant to make that decision on the person's behalf.

When information overwhelms meaning and the loss of judgment

This same mechanism, namely the detachment of technology from the function it was originally meant to serve in relation to values Postman examines even more forcefully in an address delivered in Stuttgart in 1990, at the invitation of IBM Germany, titled *Informing ourselves to death*. This address preceded the publication of *Technopoly* by two years, and passages concerning the consequences, including the ethical consequences, of technological change reappear in the book in almost identical form (cf. Postman, 1990; Postman, 1992, pp. 10–11). This suggests that Postman tested and refined his critique of technopoly across successive public addresses before it took its final, book-length form.

The central thesis of this address is that the computer, contrary to the promises of its enthusiasts, is unable to supply what human culture lacks most. Postman had in mind here values, humanism, and above all the ethical foundations within which information might acquire meaning: "The computer

cannot provide an organizing moral framework. It cannot tell us what questions are worth asking. It cannot provide a means of understanding why we are here or why we fight each other or why decency eludes us so often, especially when we need it the most" (Postman, 1990). Postman illustrated this claim with a series of rhetorical questions — do war, hunger, crime, or the collapse of marriage result from a lack of information? — consistently answering in the negative: what most afflicts human beings has nothing to do with the kind of information a computer can supply.

This diagnosis develops a theme already present in *Technopoly* but gives it a still more severe cast. The issue is no longer simply that technology subordinates the human being to itself, but that an excess of information, lacking any coherent picture of the world, produces a condition in which the ability to distinguish the credible from the absurd disappears. Postman describes this as the loss of an "immunological" resistance to informational noise: "our information immune system is inoperable. We don't know how to filter it out; we don't know how to reduce it; we don't know [how] to use it" (Postman, 1990). In this framing, the ethical dilemma of technopoly is no longer reducible to the question of whom a given technology serves, as it is in *Technopoly*, but becomes instead the question of whether a culture still possesses any humanistic foundation within which any piece of information might be recognized as significant.

Loving resistance fighter

Postman closes *Technopoly* with a chapter titled "The Loving Resistance Fighter," in which — while acknowledging that he has no ready-made solution to offer, only a principle of conduct — he proposes a formula joining two seemingly contradictory imperatives, or stances: "You must try to be a loving resistance fighter" (Postman, 1992, p. 182). "Loving" refers here to fidelity to the narratives and symbols that once gave meaning to a particular cultural community. In Postman's case, these are American symbols, but the principle is universal, applicable to any culture defending its identity against the expansion of technopoly. "Resistance," by contrast, denotes a conscious, unrelenting vigilance toward technology, which should never be accepted as part of the natural order of things: "a technological resistance fighter maintains an epistemological and psychic distance from any technology, so that it always appears somewhat strange, never inevitable, never natural" (Postman, 1992, p. 185).

The catalog of traits with which Postman describes this stance has an almost litanic character, and it is precisely this form that makes it something more than a mere list of practical recommendations. The resistance fighter is someone who pays no attention to a poll until he knows exactly what questions were asked, and by what methodology; who refuses to accept efficiency as the pre-eminent goal of human relations; who has freed himself from belief in the magical power of numbers and statistics, and who does not treat calculation as a substitute for judgment or precision as a synonym for truth. The resistance fighter is also one who takes the great narratives of religion seriously and does not regard science as the sole system of thought capable of producing truth, who distinguishes the sacred from the profane and does not forget tradition for the sake of modernity. He is, further, one who admires technical ingenuity and innovation but does not regard it as the highest possible form of human achievement (Postman, 1992, pp. 183–184).

This list, despite its form — resembling a decalogue of practical stances — reveals a coherent anthropological core: the conviction that the human person possesses capacities such as judgment, memory, a sense of the sacred, and family loyalty, which cannot be reduced to measurable categories and to which technopoly systematically denies significance. This is not a technophobic position. Postman states explicitly that the resistance fighter admires technical innovation (Postman, 1992, p. 184). The objection is not to technology as such, but to making it the measure of all things.

The enduring human dilemma in a technological age

Postman conveys a closelyrelated response, though formulated in a more personal register,at the conclusion of the address discussed above. He invokes figures from across the ages — Thoreau, Goethe, Socrates, the prophet Micah, as well as Confucius, Isaiah, Jesus, Muhammad, the Buddha, Spinoza, and Shakespeare — to show that the question of how to live well is not a new question, reserved for a single religion, denomination, or ideology, nor one that requires new tools: "There is no escaping from ourselves. The human dilemma is as it has always been, and we solve nothing fundamental by cloaking ourselves in technological glory" (Postman, 1990). In other words, no technology — including the computer, the very subject of the address — relieves the human being of the moral reflection that confronted every generation before us. The same idea is condensed in the figure invoked at the very end:

the opossum Pogo, from Walt Kelly's comic strip: "We have met the enemy, and he is us" (quoted in Postman, 1990) — meaning that the source of danger is not technology itself, but the human being: specifically, the human abandonment of a wise, humanistic approach to technology.

The contemporary relevance of Postman's ethics of technopoly

Postman's diagnosis has recently been applied directly to artificial intelligence by Toby Walsh, an AI researcher at the University of New South Wales, in a text based on the transcript of a lecture he delivered in Shanghai in 2024 (Walsh, 2025). Walsh describes Postman's 1998 essay, also drawn upon in this article, as "a fantastic speech" and "an excellent framework for understanding the potential impacts of AI" (Walsh, 2025). That a computer scientist working on the ethics of artificial intelligence should turn to a media scholar's text written a quarter-century earlier is itself confirmation of the thesis advanced in this article: Postman's critique was not a diagnosis of a single technology, or of the technology of a single era, but a timeless reconstruction of a mechanism that recurs with every technology that follows.

Walsh applies all five of Postman's principles of technological change directly to AI[5]. He illustrates the "Faustian bargain" principle with the example of satellite navigation. fMRI studies of London taxi drivers taking the "Knowledge" examination on the city's streets show that the hippocampus — the part of the brain responsible for spatial memory — grows by

5 These principles are: (1) The Faustian bargain: no technology is a pure gain; every technology gives something and takes something away at the same time, though not always in equal measure. Hence his formula: "technology giveth and technology taketh away" (Postman, 1990; 1992, p. 5; Postman, 1998). (2) The unequal distribution of gains and losses: the benefits and costs of a new technology are never distributed evenly across a population; there are winners and losers, and the winners typically persuade the losers that they, too, are winning. (3) The embedded idea (ideological bias): every technology carries within it a particular vision of the world and hierarchy of values; none is a neutral tool. (4) Ecological, not additive, change: a new technology does not simply add itself to an existing culture the way a new item is added to a list; it changes the entire system — much as a drop of dye changes the color of an entire glass of water, not merely a part of it. (5) The mythologizing of technology: over time, technology comes to be perceived as natural, self-evident, "given," rather than as the product of specific historical and political decisions, which makes it correspondingly harder to subject to critique (Postman, 1998). Some of these principles were already discussed earlier in the article.

15 percent among those who acquire this knowledge; among people who rely exclusively on satellite navigation and never learn spatial orientation for themselves, no such growth occurs. AI, as Walsh notes, "may 'dumb us down'" (Walsh, 2025): what we gain in convenience, we lose in cognitive capacity.

Walsh illustrates the principle of the unequal distribution of benefits and costs with the example of predictive policing: systems that forecast where crime will occur are trained on historical data reflecting the earlier, unequal intensity of policing in poorer and predominantly Black neighborhoods. As a result, such AI does not predict crime but reproduces and entrenches the bias embedded in the data it was trained on (Walsh, 2025). The third principle that a powerful idea is embedded in every technology ("ideological bias") Walsh locates in the assumption that thinking is computational ("thinking is computational"), warning that this assumption can too easily lead to the belief that machines possess other distinctively human traits — consciousness, the capacity to suffer, mortality as the boundary of responsibility — which computers do not, in fact, possess.

Walsh illustrates a further principle, that technological change is ecological rather than additive, with the example of the Boeing 747, introduced in 1969, whose inventors correctly foresaw the shrinking of distances and the growth of international tourism, but failed to foresee that acceleratedair travel would become a channel for the global spread of future pandemics — and with the example of Facebook's algorithm, designed solely to maximize user engagement, whose unforeseen consequences included the polarization of public debate and vulnerability to manipulation of the kind seen in the Cambridge Analytica affair (Walsh, 2025).

Walsh translates the fifth principle — the rejection of treating technology as part of the natural order of things, already familiar from the figure of the "loving resistance fighter" (Postman, 1992, pp. 184–185) — into a warning not to forget the first word in the term "artificial intelligence": "artificial." Machine intelligence, in his view, is fundamentally different from human intelligence, just as the flight of an airplane differs from the flight of a bird, even though both solve the same physical problem (Walsh, 2025).

Toby Walsh thus demonstrates convincingly that none of the principles Postman proposed with respect to technology needs to be modified in order to retain its explanatory force with respect to artificial intelligence. Postman's question of whom a given technology serves remains as pertinent as ever, as does his claim that a computer "cannot provide an organizing moral

framework" (Postman, 1990). Both, however, take on new weight in the face of systems capable of formulating answers that sound like moral determinations, while possessing nothing of what, for Postman, would have made such a determination legitimate.

Summary and conclusions

At its foundation, Neil Postman's critique of technopoly contains a coherent anthropological argument, expressed, among other contexts, in his interpretation of the legend of Thamus and in the motif of the "loving resistance fighter." Its central claim is grounded in the view that the human being possesses a capacity for judgment that cannot be reduced to calculation, to what is countable. A further important ethical aspect of the critique of technopoly is the inversion of the relationship between means and ends that Postman diagnoses in Taylor's system of scientific management: it is not technology that is to be subordinated to the human being, but, in the culture of technopoly, the human being who is always subordinated to technology. Hence Postman's statement that human beings are "worth less than their machinery" (Postman, 1992, p. 52) constitutes, in this sense, a pivotal moment in the entire book. Another important ethical aspect of Postman's critique of technopoly is his view of technology as never neutral with respect to values. Bureaucracy and scientism, in the New York media theorist's account, show, moreover, that the critique of technopoly is not confined to the relationship between an individual and a single technology, but extends to institutions that, within the culture of technopoly, have assumed the function once performed by the traditional guardians of value. Bureaucracy and the "scientific" pretensions of social research share the same defect: neither possesses a moral theory of its own, and yet both claim the right to settle questions that require one. Postman, in his broader critique of technopoly, also observes that an excess of information is closely bound up with the ethics of communication, since it leads to moral confusion in reception. A computer, Postman argues, can supply ever more data, but it cannot answer the question of which data matter—and that question is, by its nature, always axiological.

Postman proposed the stance of the "loving resistance fighter" as a humanistic response to technopoly. This resistance fighter represents an ethical stance in the fullest sense of the term: it requires constant vigilance, the

ability to distinguish efficiency from the good, and the willingness to accept that not every problem can be solved by supplying more information.

With these ethical aspects of the critique of technopoly in mind, Paweł Cieślarek (2013), who likewise examines Postman's place within the tradition of media ecology, proposes describing his position as a form of cultural conservatism — a stance rooted in the defense of the Greek ideal of *paideia* and in the conviction that education should shape character, not merely skills (Cieślarek, 2013, p. 331). Cieślarek also notes that Postman's reception in Poland has at times been dismissive: as he observes, Maciej Mrozowski, in his introduction to the Polish edition of *Amusing ourselves to death*, presented Postman as a brilliant but "unscholarly" commentator, passing over in silence his theoretical contribution to media ecology (Cieślarek, 2013, pp. 328–329). This observation reinforces the justification for undertaking, in the present article, an examination of the ethical — not merely journalistic — foundations of the critique of technopoly.

The contemporary relevance of the themes discussed in the preceding section does not mean, however, that Postman's critique is free of limitations. Its weakest point remains the uncertain status of its normative justification. In the recurring cascade of citations, across his addresses, from Thoreau, Goethe, Socrates, Micah, Confucius, and Shakespeare, one can discern Postman's conscious avoidance of grounding his anthropology in any single, systematic philosophical tradition. It is precisely this absence of systematic, philosophical grounding that constitutes the most promising direction for further research. The question of whether and under what conditions Postman's ethics of technopoly can be brought to closure within the framework of a specific philosophical tradition remains open.

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Three-dimensional paths for content innovation in micro-short drama: IP linkage, niche cultivation, and interactive narrative

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Abstract

Three-dimensional paths for content innovation in micro-short drama: IP linkage, niche cultivation, and interactive narrative

This article is a conceptual study of content innovation in micro-short drama. As the industry faces pressure to move from quantitative expansion toward higher production quality, homogenization remains its central content problem. Existing research explains parts of that problem — platform-driven production, the formal constraints of the small screen, recurring genre formulas, and audience feedback — but rarely integrates them into a framework for innovation. The article proposes three linked paths. Bidirectional IP linkage treats the short serial as neither a replacement for long-form drama nor merely its promotional residue, but as a format that can test and later extend narrative worlds. Niche cultivation shifts audience address from age and gender toward occupation, cultural interest, and regional identity. Interactive narrative activates user agency through consequential choice and through paratext such as comments and bullet comments, while remaining constrained by platform governance. The framework is an integrative explanation, not an empirically validated model. Some of its principles may travel beyond China; several of its devices depend on Chinese platform, linguistic, and regulatory conditions.

Keywords: micro-short drama, conceptual framework, content innovation, IP linkage, niche cultivation, interactive narrative, user agency

Micro-short drama has expanded rapidly as a serialized short-video form, but expansion has not solved the problem of content quality. Much of the output still relies on immediately legible conflict, flat character types, and repeatable emotional hooks. Studies of the Chinese short-video ecology describe this pattern from different angles. Genre criticism identifies a small set of recurring narrative types and warns that formulaic production produces aesthetic fatigue (Li, 2025). Formal criticism argues that the mobile small screen favors intensified bodies, efficient "database" recombination of familiar situations, and, at the extreme, addictive rather than continuous storytelling (Bian 2024). Production studies show writers compressing character complexity in order to remain visible within short production cycles and algorithmic selection (Cao, He, Liu, & LC, 2026). Regulatory and industry calls for a shift from traffic volume to quality make the contradiction explicit,

but they do not by themselves supply a model of content innovation. The practical challenge is to determine how a fast, fragmentary format can acquire narrative distinction and cultural value without being asked to imitate the long-form series in every respect.

Works discussed as reputation-driven successes, including Findra in Midsummer (《盛夏芬德拉》, 2025, Hongguo / iQIYI) and Inside and Outside the House (《家里家外》, 2025; Hongguo / Douyin / iQIYI), are useful only as illustrations of an emerging demand for recognition and empathy rather than mere stimulation. They cannot establish an industry-wide transition from a sensationalist "1.0" to a quality-oriented "2.0." What they do suggest is that content innovation is no longer adequately described as a change of theme. A drama can adopt a respectable subject and remain structurally generic. Innovation has to be located in the relations among storyworld development, audience specification, and authorship.

The relevant literature has not yet made those relations explicit. One strand examines platforms, creative labor, and feedback workflows. Cao et al. (2026), for example, show how micro-drama writers adapt plots and characters to comments, reposts, memes, and other audience traces, while also documenting the limits of those traces. Their contribution is an empirical account of feedback-responsive authorship, not a general model of content innovation. A second strand examines the form itself: vertical framing, windowed attention, genre typology, and the narrative consequences of the small screen (Bian, 2024; Li, 2025). A third strand, older and more theoretical, explains transmedia extension and participatory meaning-making. Jenkins (2006; 2013) treats convergence culture as a movement of narrative and interpretive activity across media, while Murray (1997) defines agency as meaningful action within a narrative environment rather than the mere presence of options. A fourth, more applied strand shows how micro-short drama can reactivate traditional cultural material as serial intellectual property (Xu & Yang, 2024).

These studies identify important mechanisms, but they leave a conceptual gap. Platform studies explain why production is compressed and data-sensitive. Formal studies explain why the small screen encourages intensification and formula. Participatory theory explains how audiences can become interpreters or agents, but not how that capacity should be specified for micro-short drama. None of these approaches integrates intellectual-property strategy, audience segmentation, and interactive authorship as related paths of content innovation. Nor do they distinguish clearly between features

peculiar to the Chinese industry and principles that might apply more broadly. That integration and distinction are the task of this article.

The manuscript is intended as a conceptual study. It is not an empirical investigation and does not meet, or claim to meet, the methodological requirements of interview research, content analysis, or platform-data analysis. Its research problem is how content innovation in micro-short drama can be conceptualized so that the format's brevity becomes a condition of innovation rather than only a cause of homogenization. Its objective is to construct a three-dimensional framework—IP linkage, niche cultivation, and interactive narrative—and to show how that framework follows from the different mechanisms of homogenization identified above.

The methodological basis is integrative conceptual analysis. The procedure has four steps. First, the content problem is specified as a series of distinct mechanisms rather than as a general complaint about low quality. Second, concepts already available in transmedia, audience, and participatory theory are revised against documented micro-short-drama practices. Third, publicly discussed cases are used illustratively, to clarify what a mechanism can explain, not as a sample from which general effects can be inferred. Fourth, the resulting framework is bounded by stating which claims are context-specific and which are offered as more general principles. The criterion is conceptual coherence: whether the distinctions clarify the problem and whether the conclusions follow from the analysis. It is not statistical representativeness.

Three terms need definition before they are applied. IP linkage does not mean any adaptation of a known title. It refers to a bi-directional relation between short and long narrative forms, and between an existing cultural text and its short serial development. In one direction, a micro-short drama functions as a limited prototype with which audience response to characters, relations, and story premises can be observed before a larger investment. In the other, a short-form storyworld is expanded into a longer narrative, retaining its concentrated conflict while adding motivations, subplots, and social implication. The concept also includes the reactivation of archival cultural material as a serial storyworld. Linkage is therefore a relation among formats and texts, not a guarantee that traffic will become cultural value.

Niche cultivation translates an industry metaphor of cultivation into an analytical term. "Cultivation" means sustained address to a narrowly specified social world, as distinct from one-off harvesting of broad traffic. The relevant niches are not primarily age and gender cohorts. They are communities

organized by occupation, cultural interest, or regional and linguistic identity. The concept requires knowledge of that community's codes and lived contradictions. It fails when a profession, subculture, or locality is used only as a costume for a generic plot.

Interactive narrative, as used here, is not identical with audience reaction. Following Murray (1997), interaction becomes narrative agency only when audience action has consequences for story or meaning. In micro-short drama that action takes at least two forms: explicit choices among consequential branches, and latent participation through paratext such as bullet comments, comments, reposts, and memes (Jenkins, 2013; Cao et al., 2026). Metrics can inform either form, but optimization for clicks is not itself interactive narrative. The concept also includes a negative condition. Feedback serves innovation only when it is interpreted in relation to narrative coherence. When it replaces judgment, it reproduces the formulas it appears to disrupt.

These definitions indicate why the framework has three dimensions rather than a list of desirable topics. Homogenization, on the analysis above, has three sources: narrative value is truncated by duration; audiences are addressed through overly broad demographic and trope categories; and authorship remains one-directional even when viewers are constantly measured. IP linkage responds to the first, niche cultivation to the second, and interactive narrative to the third. Each section below develops one response and ends by stating what it contributes to the framework and what it cannot solve alone.

Bidirectional IP linkage: Short drama empowering long formats

If the first limit of micro-short drama is duration, innovation cannot consist simply of asking every episode to carry the moral and psychological density of a long series. IP linkage addresses truncation by moving narrative value across formats. The short form and the long form do different work, and the relation between them can be designed rather than left to opportunistic spinoffs.

The first direction runs from short to long. Long-form production typically commits capital before audience response is known, and its stages are difficult to revise once underway. Micro-short drama, by contrast, can be produced and circulated quickly enough to function as a provisional test

of a premise, a relationship, or a character configuration. Cao et al. (2026) describe a related industrial practice in which teams release highlight clips or interpret the performance of an initial batch of episodes before deciding how to continue. This supports the conceptual claim that short serials can generate early audience signals. It does not support the stronger claim that they transform commercial uncertainty into reliable data assets. The same research shows that views and comments may be inflated by promotion, that active commenters do not represent silent viewers, and that some visible interaction is itself manufactured. A short drama can reduce one kind of uncertainty—whether a premise elicits immediate recognition—while leaving intact another: whether the premise can sustain a longer narrative. IP linkage is therefore a strategy of partial and early learning, not a method of risk elimination.

The short prototype also has a character-specific function. Compressed storytelling pressures writers to make characters recognizable at once, which often means using flat types (Cao et al., 2026). Used reflexively, however, the same compression can reveal which traits and relationships viewers actually retain. The useful output is not a command to reproduce the most clicked type. It is evidence of where a character has been understood only as a function of the plot and therefore needs motivation before any long-form expansion. In this respect, the short drama is a diagnostic form. It shows the narrative debt that a longer adaptation would have to repay.

The reverse direction runs from a circulated short-form storyworld to a longer drama. Earlier industrial practice often adapted established television or film properties into short supplements. The emerging reverse path is different. A micro-short drama may already have a recognizable premise and an engaged audience, but its duration restricts character change, subordinate plots, and engagement with social experience. Expansion is justified only if it does more than prolong the original stimulus. Jenkins's (2006) account of transmedia storytelling is useful here because it distinguishes extension from repetition: a storyworld grows by distributing narrative information across forms, not by retelling the same event at greater length. Applied to this industry, the common narrative denominator is the concentrated conflict that made the short version legible, while the long version must add the relations that conflict alone cannot supply—a character's capacity to change, a moral problem that cannot be settled by reversal, and a social situation that gives the conflict a world.

This is a normative principle for adaptation, not a description of what all successful adaptations achieve. Cases such as the movement between an established long-form property and a short-form derivative, exemplified in industry discussion by There Is Wind on My Return Way (《我的归途有风》, 2024, Douyin), clarify the older direction. They do not prove that every viral short drama possesses a storyworld deep enough to be lengthened. Some viral works exhaust their premise in the hook. The conceptual test is whether enough narrative information remains undeveloped, not whether the short version has already attracted attention.

A further modality should be included if IP linkage is to be defined by relation rather than by one commercial route. Xu and Yang (2024) discuss AI-produced micro-short dramas that serialize mythic and classical material, such as Chinese Mythology (《中国神话》, 2024, CCTV Video) and AI Reading the Classics (《AI看典籍》, 2024, CCTV Video). Whatever judgment one makes of their aesthetic results, they show that linkage can also run from a cultural archive to a short serial. Here the existing "long form" is not a television series but a body of stories already held in common. The short drama does not validate a market in the ordinary sense; it re-specifies an inherited storyworld for contemporary viewers. This modality matters because it prevents IP linkage from being reduced to traffic conversion. It also shows why the concept can include public-cultural as well as commercial development, without making artificial intelligence a separate dimension of the present framework.

IP linkage thus gives the framework its narrative economy. It explains how micro-short drama can contribute to cultural value without pretending that a one-minute episode is a complete long-form work. It does not decide whose social world the story addresses, and it does not decide whether viewers have any agency in the story's development. A storyworld can be carefully extended and still speak to no one in particular. That is the problem taken up by niche cultivation.

Niche cultivation: From demographic stratification to multi-dimensional segmentation

IP linkage can move a narrative between formats while leaving its imagined audience unchanged. The second source of homogenization lies in that audience construction. Micro-short drama frequently addresses viewers through

broad demographic categories and through a reusable inventory of situations: domination and romance, revenge and rebirth, family conflict, and sudden reversal of status. Bian (2024), drawing on the logic of database narrative, argues that such situations can be connected without strong causal continuity. Li (2025) likewise treats genre repetition as a source of fatigue rather than of distinction. Under these conditions, a new setting does not constitute innovation if the underlying address remains interchangeable.

Niche cultivation names a different principle of address. Demographic variables such as age and gender still describe markets, and the recent visibility of silver-economy drama shows that demographic targeting remains an industry logic. The point is not that such targeting is always invalid. It is that age or gender cannot specify the knowledge, obligations, and contradictions that make a story non-substitutable. A shift toward sociological segmentation asks which social world the drama knows well enough to represent from within.

Occupation is one such world. A profession carries technical knowledge, a hierarchy, a vocabulary, and a set of practical dilemmas. Narratives about clinicians, teachers, or legal workers therefore cannot be credible if the occupation is only a label attached to a generic romance or revenge plot. The conceptual requirement is twofold. The drama must be accurate enough for members of the occupation to recognize the practice, and it must translate a profession-specific dilemma into a human stake that other viewers can understand. Neither condition is sufficient alone. Accuracy without translation becomes insider display; translation without accuracy becomes costume drama in occupational dress.

Claims about circulation require similar caution. Professional and interest communities often have dense communication networks, so a drama that touches a recognized pain point may travel first within the group. That is a plausible mechanism of word-of-mouth, not a predictable stage before mainstream crossover. Community approval can also confine a work. Cultivation seeks recognition by a specified audience; it does not promise that every specified audience will become a mass audience.

Interest-based communities make the same requirement more explicitly cultural. Audiences organized around animation and games, historical costume, science fiction, or other shared aesthetic practices are held together by codes: what counts as a competent reference, an authentic object, or an offensive simplification. Jenkins's (2013) account of fan interpretation is relevant

because it treats these codes as participatory knowledge rather than as marketing attributes. A micro-short drama can borrow the visible signs of such a community and still fail the test of cultivation. The key question is whether the narrative can be understood only by using the community's knowledge, or whether that knowledge can be removed without changing the story. If it can be removed, the niche has been decorated rather than cultivated.

Regional culture adds a third mode of specification. Locality is not background color. It is produced through place, shared memory, custom, and language. Dialect, in particular, can organize humor, status, and intimacy in ways that standard speech does not. Inside and Outside the House (《家里家外》, 2025; Hongguo / Douyin / iQIYI) is cited here only as an illustration of how Sichuan-Chongqing speech may be used as a narrative resource rather than as an ornament. The example clarifies the concept; it does not measure the effect of dialect on attention or loyalty. The same caution applies to foodways, garden aesthetics, and ethnic custom. Any of these can anchor a storyworld, but none innovates by its mere appearance.

There is a further boundary. Cao et al. (2026) note that, in cross-cultural circulation, an emphasis on visibly "Eastern" signs can increase discoverability while flattening the culture it claims to mark. Regional cultivation is therefore not the extraction of local symbols for algorithmic legibility. It binds plot decisions to a local social world. A hotpot meal, a dialect joke, or a local landscape innovates only when it changes what the characters can say, risk, or understand. Otherwise it is a transferable sign, and transferable signs are the material of homogenization.

Niche cultivation contributes the framework's principle of specification. It answers why a storyworld made extensible by IP linkage may nevertheless remain generic, and it identifies the kinds of knowledge required to differentiate it. It still treats the audience primarily as the addressee of a producer-made story. It does not explain how viewers participate in narrative development. That requires a separate concept of interactive narrative.

Interactive narrative and audience co-creation: Activating user agency

The third source of homogenization is authorship. Even a precisely addressed and carefully extended drama can treat viewers only as targets of delivery.

Micro-short drama is a weak candidate for that model because its circulation already depends on continuous audience traces. The conceptual task is to distinguish traces that merely rank a work from actions that enter its narrative.

The first mode is explicit choice. Interactive cinema and games have long demonstrated branching structures, but their presence in micro-short drama remains limited and often superficial. A prompt that asks viewers to select an option, while every selection returns them to the same plot, imitates agency without granting it. Murray (1997) provides the relevant criterion: agency is meaningful action, not the display of an interface. A choice becomes narratively interactive when it alters relations, consequences, or the ethical position from which the story can be understood. The strongest form is not a binary contest between two desired outcomes but a dilemma in which each available action carries a loss. Such a design can move the viewer from observer to decision-maker. It does not, however, automatically produce philosophical depth, break the boundary between fiction and audience, or improve aesthetic quality. Those are possible effects of a well-constructed dilemma, not properties of interaction as such. At present, explicit branching is better treated as an emerging possibility of the format than as its dominant practice (Li, 2025).

The second mode is more characteristic of current platforms. Audiences comment, post bullet comments, repeat lines, invent memes, and repost selected scenes. Jenkins (2013) describes this kind of activity as interpretive production rather than as passive reception. In micro-short drama, Cao et al. (2026) give the practice a more specific form. Writers do not usually receive a synchronous instruction from viewers. They infer preferences from dispersed signals—repeated descriptions of a character, attention to a secondary role, meme-like rephrasing, and reposting—and then adjust later episodes. Cao et al. call the audience role "narrative steering": viewers seldom write the text, but their interpretations can influence pacing, emphasis, and plot direction. This distinction should be retained. Calling all audience response "co-creation" collapses a useful difference between making narrative material and supplying traces that others interpret.

Paratext also extend the work after the episode ends. Bullet comments can make a scene's emotional peak visible, while comment sections can prolong argument about a character's choice. They may become part of the viewing experience rather than an external supplement. This is the sense in which micro-short drama can be described as bi-directional. The direction is real,

but it is uneven. Not every comment enters the work. Producers, moderators, and ranking systems select which traces become visible and actionable (Cao et al., 2026). User agency is therefore not the transfer of authorship from writer to audience. It is participation within a procedure whose terms the audience does not control.

The limits are internal to the concept, not objections to it. Comment sections overrepresent active users and can be inflated by paid or automated interaction. Small producers may see only crude keyword summaries. Most importantly, rapid obedience to feedback encourages the stacking of already successful memes and conflicts, which returns production to homogenization (Bian, 2024; Cao et al., 2026). Interactive narrative supports content innovation only under a condition of narrative resistance: audience signals may revise a story, but they cannot be allowed to dissolve its point of view, its internal continuity, or the specificity achieved by niche cultivation. Without that condition, participation is another name for demand optimization.

This dimension completes the framework without absorbing the other two. IP linkage decides how a storyworld can move between short and long forms. Niche cultivation decides which social knowledge makes the storyworld specific. Interactive narrative decides how audience action — explicit or latent, productive or interpretive — can enter the work without becoming the sole author of its value. The three paths are complementary because each failure is different. A participatory drama can be generic; a precisely targeted drama can be closed to its audience; an extensible storyworld can remain socially unspecified.

Conclusions

The three-dimensional framework follows from the separation of mechanisms in the preceding analysis. The argument did not begin with a model and then search for confirming examples. It began with the observation that "homogenization" names more than one problem. Duration truncates narrative development; demographic and database-like address makes different stories interchangeable; one-way authorship wastes the participatory capacity of the platform while uncritical feedback reproduces formulas. No single remedy covers all three. Lengthening a short drama does not specify its audience. Knowing a professional community does not give that community narrative

agency. Opening a plot to comments does not create a storyworld that can sustain extension. The model is the minimum set of concepts needed to keep these responses distinct and related.

Its internal relations can now be stated directly. IP linkage provides the narrative economy, connecting prototype, extension, and cultural reactivation. Niche cultivation provides the principle of specification, replacing interchangeable demographic address with knowledge of a social world. Interactive narrative provides the principle of distributed but constrained authorship, including both consequential choice and second-text steering. Together they describe content innovation as a change in relations—between formats, between text and community, and between producers and audiences—rather than as a change in subject matter alone. The examples used above clarify those relations. They do not verify them. Claims about risk reduction, inevitable community crossover, or the automatic conversion of traffic into cultural value are not entailed by the framework and should not be presented as its findings.

The framework also has operational conditions. IP linkage requires cooperation across production organizations that are used to treating short and long formats as separate markets. Niche cultivation requires domain knowledge and a willingness to accept audiences that may be small before they are broad. Interactive narrative requires systems that can distinguish useful signals from noise, together with editorial authority strong enough to refuse some signals. These conditions limit implementation. They do not weaken the conceptual distinction.

A final boundary concerns transfer beyond China. The Chinese setting shapes several devices discussed here. The close connection between short-video platforms and a developing micro-drama industry gives IP testing its present infrastructure (Kaye, Chen, & Zeng, 2021). Bullet comments are a mature second-text form, and dialect and regional identity are widely available narrative resources. The policy demand for quality also gives the industry an unusually explicit reason to seek an alternative to traffic-led production. These are context-specific conditions, not universal features of short serial narrative.

The underlying principles are more transferable. A short serial can serve as a limited prototype for a longer storyworld wherever production cycles differ in cost and reversibility. Segmentation by lived identity and cultural competence can counter formulaic address in other markets. Audience traces can inform narrative revision wherever platforms make those traces visible.

The devices through which the principles operate should not be copied unchanged. Cao et al. (2026), drawing on interviews with Chinese micro-drama writers, document how audience feedback through comments, bullet comments, reposts, and memes shapes iterative narrative decisions in the Chinese platform context. Such platform-specific practices (particularly danmaku-centered co-creation) may travel less readily than the broader principle of consequential audience action. Transferring the framework therefore means preserving its three relations while re-specifying their local mechanisms.

This article presents the framework as a conceptual clarification. Empirical research can later examine whether particular productions realize one or more of the paths, how producers interpret audience signals, and how audiences understand specificity and agency. Those are different questions. The claim defended here is narrower and, within its scope, prior: content innovation in micro-short drama becomes intelligible when truncation, generic address, and one-way authorship are treated as distinct problems and answered together.

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The use of artificial intelligence when working with first-semester students

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Abstract

The use of artificial intelligence when working with first-semester students

This article examines the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into the higher education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The author analyzes the specifics of Kazakhstani higher education, including statutory regulations, standard curricula, and challenges associated with the lag of educational programs behind labor market demands. Drawing on practical experience in teaching "Political Science" at Caspian University, the paper presents a methodology for developing foundational AI application skills among first-year students. A step-by-step algorithm for executing practical assignments — specifically compiling a systematized bibliography and automating grading using neural networks (Gemini, ChatGPT) — is outlined. Special emphasis is placed on fostering analytical thinking, information verification skills, and the critical role of human agency when collaborating with AI tools.

Keywords: artificial intelligence in education, higher education in Kazakhstan, teaching methodology, Gemini, ChatGPT, general education disciplines, student independent work

Currently, artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming increasingly integrated into all areas of human activity. The issue of its integration into the educational process is particularly pressing. In this article, the author outlines an approach to the development of skills for working with AI among students in their first semester of study. Since the system of higher education in the Republic of Kazakhstan has distinctive characteristics, a substantial part of this paper describes these characteristics.

It is widely acknowledged that the education system lags behind the demands of employers. This is understandable: an employer, typically identifies an immediate problem and demands the preparation of personnel capable of solving this specific problem. The education system responds, but to implement new courses, it is necessary to develop new curricula, as well as methodological and practical content for the new course, which undoubtedly takes time.

Furthermore, courses rarely reach the desired standard in their first iteration. As a rule, bringing a course to the required standard requires two to three academic years. During this time, the problem for which the employer required specific competencies from graduates has either transformed or

been superseded by new problems. The implementation of AI has significantly accelerated this process. Now, personnel with new competencies are needed "urgently."

Research objective

To substantiate and present the practical experience of methodological integration of neural networks (Gemini, ChatGPT) into the educational process for first-semester students, using the discipline "Political Science" at Caspian University as an example, while directing AI-assisted work toward developing basic skills in data systematization, self-verification, and critical analysis, while preserving the leading role of humans.

There is a significant gap between the necessity of integrating artificial intelligence into higher education in Kazakhstan and the actual practice of its application. In particular, instructors often avoid introducing neural networks into pedagogical practice due to the lack of ready-made instructions. Meanwhile, students perceive AI primarily as an entertainment tool. Rigid regulation of the educational process by the Ministry also contributes to this challenge.

It is also important to highlight the lack of analytical thinking skills among first-year students. According to recent PISA studies, only 36% of learners achieved at least Level 2 in reading literacy (OECD average: 69%) (OECD, 2025). Less than 40% of high school graduates are capable of identifying the main idea of a medium-length text, finding information based on explicitly stated, though sometimes complex criteria, or reflecting on the purpose and form of a text when explicitly directed to do so! Yet this forms the foundation not only of higher education but also of subsequent professional activity.

There are numerous proposals on how to solve this problem. On August 15, 2025, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, instructed authorities to accelerate the introduction of AI into the educational process (Tengrinews, 2025) and signed a decree on this subject.

Many conferences, discussions, rallies, and symposia were held. Significant progress was noted in the process of implementing AI into higher education (Postupi.kz, 2025). A number of articles were published on this topic describing empirical studies (Aderikhin, 2025; Erzatova et al., 2025; Pshikhacheva,

2023; Toktarova & Popova, 2023; Toktarova et al., 2024). Doctoral dissertations were defended (Sakhipov, 2025), and monographs were published (Buzaubakova et al., 2025).

However, apparently, the situation is more complex, given that exactly one year later (on August 26, 2026), the President delivered a new message titled "'A Major Oversight' — President on Non-Compliance with the Decree on the Implementation of AI in Education" (Tengrinews, 2026).

The attitude of university instructors toward using neural networks in the educational process has attracted research attention (Prokhorova et al., 2024). Researchers note that instructors not only understand the importance of using AI in education and have an idea of where and how to apply neural networks, but rarely use neural networks in their own practical teaching activities.

In the author's opinion, the solution to this problem will be feasible only if every instructor independently determines their own stance on using neural networks in teaching without waiting for instructions from higher authorities.

Research also shows that students do not fully understand how neural networks can be used in the learning process (Aleshkovski et al., 2024).

Regarding the university-employer connection, the author believes the most acceptable approach is to strengthen the theoretical foundation within higher education institutions, teach disciplines aimed at enhancing creative thinking (primarily humanities disciplines), and teach the fundamentals of the student's future specialty. Additionally, the student must learn how to work with neural networks. Equipped with this foundation, the student goes to an enterprise where, under the guidance of mentors, they apply theoretical knowledge in practical activities. Subsequently, the student returns to the university to study specialized disciplines in greater depth. Throughout the training process, practical training should occur more than once.

Of course, major difficulties are evident here as well, extending to potential changes in the entire structure of higher education and increasing employers' interest in direct ties with universities, which, in the realities of the Republic of Kazakhstan, is extremely difficult to accomplish in practice.

In this article, we will not analyze the entire spectrum of AI integration into the educational system; the author will share the experience of introducing first-year, first-semester students to the skills of using AI.

Research methodology

The study employed the following methods:

- **Practice-oriented method:** Developing special methodological guidelines and criteria-based 100-point rating scales for executing sequential assignments (compiling bibliographies, website catalogs, structural tables, and essays).
- **Pedagogical experiment:** Applying neural network tools (primarily the Gemini platform) for automated primary verification of technical parameters in student assignments.
- **Public verbal defense and peer review:** Conducting evaluations and discussions openly, asking clarifying questions to verify academic integrity, detect AI "hallucinations" or fake sources, and eliminate plagiarism.
- **Corrective expert control:** Establishing a system in which AI acts solely as an assistant offering advisory evaluations, while the final verdict is rendered by the instructor based on an analysis of the root causes of student errors.

Specifics of the Kazakhstani higher education system

Because readers are unlikely to be familiar with the system of higher education in Kazakhstan, this context requires explanation. Otherwise, much of the described experience will remain incomprehensible.

The academic year is divided into two semesters of 15 weeks each. Within a semester, there are two midterm controls — at weeks 7 and 15. In some universities, special weeks are allocated for midterm controls (weeks 8 and 16, respectively), while in others, they are conducted during regular academic weeks during scheduled classes. After the 15th week, a 2- to 3-week examination session is provided.

Enrolling applicants pay special attention to the accreditation of the educational institution and the chosen specialty (the presence of authorization from the Ministry of Education and Science to issue state-standard diplomas). Diplomas that do not hold such authorization carry virtually no standing.

Consequently, the Ministry regulates the entire educational process through circulars, standard programs, and similar instruments.

At times, these regulations reflect the discretion of individual officials. For example, a circular was sent ordering that midterm controls be conducted exclusively in test format; shortly thereafter, it was revoked. Over 35 years of independence, Kazakhstan has had 19 different ministers of higher education, and some began their tenure by abolishing the initiatives of their predecessor.

Although attempts to practically implement greater autonomy for instructors in choosing educational tools are declared, the control mechanism itself significantly complicates the implementation of innovative methods.

Teaching is carried out in accordance with the Standard Curriculum (TUP), which defines the names of mandatory disciplines and the hours allocated to mandatory and elective disciplines. For mandatory disciplines, Standard Course Syllabi specify required topics, hourly loads, and seminar topics. This severely limits not only the creative component in teaching but also the application of innovative learning methods.

The Standard Curriculum is divided into several blocks. We will examine the General Education Disciplines (OOD) module, which includes mandatory courses: "History of Kazakhstan" (followed by a State Examination) and "Philosophy," alongside "Political Science," "Cultural Studies," "Sociology," "Psychology," "Russian/Kazakh Language," "Foreign Language," and "Information and Communication Technologies."

At Caspian University, instruction is provided across various degree programs. Consequently, a single lecture stream may include students enrolled in engineering specialties, psychology, jurisprudence, translation studies, and economics.

For the "Political Science" discipline, 7–8 hours of lectures and 14–16 hours of practical classes are allocated. Teaching is conducted either on a modular system or continuously throughout the entire semester.

First-semester students have not yet adapted to higher education, and group social hierarchies are just forming. First-year students often lack analytical skills; while they perform well on multiple-choice tests, they struggle to explain their reasoning. Technical formatting skills (e.g., page orientation shifts) also frequently require foundational instruction.

Assignments are evaluated on a 100-point scale (below 50 is unsatisfactory). Grades are entered into the inter-university "Study Spies" system. A cumulative grading system is applied. Maintaining high academic standards while supporting first-semester students requires a balanced evaluation

approach. The moral and educational role of the instructor is equally paramount (Leontiev et al., 2018).

Practical methodology for integrating AI in teaching

To develop sustainable professional skills, four sequential assignments were introduced:

- Compiling a bibliography;
- Writing an abstract/annotation of a read book (or article);
- Creating a website directory;
- Formatting a table of the political system of a selected country.

In Assignment #1 (Compiling a bibliography), students organize sources into a structured table. Evaluation criteria for an "Excellent" grade (90–100 points) require over 10 correctly formatted, alphabetically sorted sources across multiple media types, with foreign and Kazakh sources placed above Russian ones, accompanied by valid URLs or library call numbers.

Assignment verification is conducted using AI (Gemini). The rubric and student submission are uploaded into Gemini. While initial AI outputs require prompt tuning, the program quickly adapts to identifying technical formatting errors (punctuation, spacing, alignment), allowing the instructor to focus on semantic quality.

Evaluations are conducted publicly using a projector. The instructor conducts root-cause analysis on flagged errors, ensuring academic transparency and integrity. The instructor retains full responsibility for the final grade.

Students also discover that AI source generation must be approached cautiously, as neural networks frequently generate non-existent citations ("hallucinations"), reinforcing the necessity of human verification.

Subsequent assignments reinforce these competencies. In Assignment #4 (Writing an essay/term paper for "History of Kazakhstan"), students frequently utilize ChatGPT. Identical prompts yield duplicate outputs, prompting students to learn proper prompt engineering (specifying styles, chapter-by-chapter generation). The essay must be publicly defended through peer questioning to ensure authentic learning.

Conclusions

Integrating artificial intelligence tools into higher education is an objective necessity that bridges academic preparation and labor market demands. Transitioning from viewing AI as an entertainment service to using it as a technical assistant significantly enhances student independent work.

However, AI integration does not diminish the active role of the instructor; rather, it elevates the instructor's role in developing students' analytical thinking — a capacity that no neural network can replace.

Learning remains possible at any stage; although students arrive from secondary school with low levels of functional literacy — and addressing this is not strictly the role of higher education — the reality is that university instructors are compelled to deal with it.

The author is firmly convinced that any instructor who truly wishes to achieve results must personally make every effort to do so, rather than waiting for instructions from the administration. I hope my experience proves useful to others and serves as a foundation for developing more comprehensive and multifaceted methodological guidelines and practices.

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Analysis of Donald Trump's political communication on social media regarding the Iran conflict: A comparative analysis with George W. Bush's narrative during the Iraq war

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Abstract

Analysis of Donald Trump's political communication on social media regarding the Iran conflict: A comparative analysis with George W. Bush's narrative during the Iraq war

This article examines Donald Trump's political communication on social media concerning the war in Iran during the first month of the conflict. The study outlines the principal elements and features of the narrative-building strategy employed by the 47th President of the United States in shaping public perceptions of the war. The research material consists of 538 posts published on Trump's Truth Social profile between February 28 and March 28, 2026, of which 64 were directly related to the topic of Iran and 8 indirectly so. Furthermore, this communication was compared with George W. Bush's narrative accompanying the Iraq War in 2003, using a coding key of fifteen narrative frames drawn from Bush's war on terror and Iraq War addresses. The analysis identifies the most significant similarities and differences between the narratives advanced by the two presidents. Both presidents were found to emphasize the morally evil nature of the enemy, the global character of the conflict, and the necessity of depriving the enemy of weapons of mass destruction. However, Trump's narrative largely abandons Bush's civilizational and humanitarian framing of the war, and in several respects advances a narrative contrary to it, most notably by favoring the destruction of the enemy state and the glorification of military action over Bush's rhetoric of reluctant war and post-war reconstruction.

Keywords: political communication, Donald Trump, George W. Bush, Truth Social, Iran conflict, social media

In the early morning hours, local time, of February 28, 2026, the United States, together with Israel, launched an invasion of Iran. President Donald Trump identified the Iranian regime as a sponsor of terrorism and a source of danger to the American people. The military operation was intended to neutralize this threat. The stated primary objective was to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. (Trump, 2026) This war is the first armed conflict to begin during Donald Trump's presidency.

This research paper analyzes Donald Trump's political communication concerning the war in Iran during its first month. The research material consists of posts published on the president's Truth Social profile during the first month of the conflict. Trump entered the political scene during the 2016 presidential

campaign, at which point social media already played a distinctive role in his political style. Trump's communication style was distinctive within contemporary political communication. It was undoubtedly one of the reasons why the 45th and currently 47th President of the United States became one of the most influential and controversial figures of the twenty-first century.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 2001, the United States has been engaged in a series of armed conflicts in the Arab world. These were waged within the framework of the so-called War on Terror, initiated by then-President George W. Bush. It was meant to be a large-scale, coordinated struggle against the new threat of terrorism. As part of it, the United States entered into war with the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003. This war exhibits a number of similarities to theconflict with the Ayatollah's regime. In both wars, the enemy is identified as a sponsor of terror. Both conflicts were aimed at depriving the enemy regime of weapons of mass destruction. For this reason, a comparative analysis of the two conflicts was considered justified. This work identifies the fundamental differences and shared features between the war-related communication of the two Republican presidents.

Donald Trump's communication style is characterized by directness and a break with the traditional decorum of political communication. This raises concerns about the degradation of the quality of public discourse (Değirmenci & Terzioğlu, 2022).

There already exist multiple in depth analyses of Donald Trump communication on social media. This study aims to widen this sphere of research by examining how does the president's style adapt to waging war in middle East. The comparison with Bush's communication from the war on terror adds an aspect of how current leader's narrative diverges from the tropes used by previous republican president in talking about conflict in Middle East.

Framing in political communication

Political communication oriented toward achieving specific goals is often based on the strategic selection and presentation of facts. This process is called framing. Framing occurs when a message indirectly creates and presents to its audience an interpretation of reality. In doing so, it emphasizes certain aspects of it while diminishing or entirely omitting others. The description of the phenomenon of framing is attributed to Erving Goffman

(Goffman, 1974). Earlier foundations for this concept can be found in Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's work *The social construction of reality* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). It describes "how groups classify their collective experiences derived from reality and then develop them over time to assign meaning to both new information and experiences" (Zaklama, 2025). Every event significant to a given community undergoes a process of narrativization, of categorization. This narrative is most often constructed in accordance with the beliefs already held by the group in question.

Goffman developed the concept of framing and laid the groundwork for the scholarly analysis of this phenomenon. According to him, individuals use frames in their everyday lives as a tool for interpreting reality. Institutions that shape public opinion, particularly the media, use frames to construct narratives consistent with their preferred perspective. Frames also serve to confer importance on particular events. In the classic approach to public opinion research, framing was most often associated with the news media (Zaklama, 2025). However, it can be found in practically every sphere in which public opinion is formed. In the contemporary media ecosystem, social media play a particularly significant role in this regard.

George W. Bush and the Iraq war

Following the unprecedented terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, the Bush administration undertook retaliatory action. On October 7, the first bombing raids on Afghanistan began as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. Ground forces joined the conflict shortly thereafter. The war in Afghanistan ultimately lasted twenty years. The withdrawal of American forces on August 30, 2021, is considered the moment marking its end (Laub & Maizland, 2022).

On March 20, 2003, the United States launched an attack on Iraq. Its aim was to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein. George Bush justified the necessity of the intervention by citing irrefutable evidence that the state had access to weapons of mass destruction and posed a genuine threat to the United States and its allies. As in the case of Afghanistan, the overthrow of the government occurred fairly quickly — on April 9. However, groups loyal to Hussein continued to fight even after the regime's collapse. Despite the country's ongoing instability, President Bush declared victory, doing so from aboard the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (Laub et al., 2022).

The image of the president against a banner reading "Mission Accomplished" became a symbol of the shortsightedness of the administration at the time. Victory was declared in the second month of a conflict that would go on to last eight more years (The Guardian, 2013).

The Iraq conflict became an arena of humanitarian crises and sectarian violence between the Shia majority and radical Sunnis (Laub et al., 2022). Furthermore, the American side was accused of abuses and human rights violations.

In the days following the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, President Bush launched a campaign aimed at channeling intense emotions into support for retaliatory action. To this end, he employed the narrative of the so-called war on terror.

On September 21, ten days after the terrorist attack, President Bush addressed the United States Congress. This address presented the ideological and political foundations of the American strategy in the war on terror. He emphasized that the attack on the World Trade Center was not merely an act of terrorism but a declaration of war.

The war on terror was not meant to end with the neutralization of the Taliban. It was intended only as the first step in a broader campaign aimed at destroying every terrorist group with global reach. This undertaking was expected to require many years and considerable resources. Bush also stated the necessity of international involvement, since the events of September 11 were framed as an attack not merely on the United States, but on the entire civilized world. Firm and decisive action was meant to prevent the terrorists from escalating their capabilities and to forestall future, far more serious attacks.

Stephen D. Cooper and his research team, in George W. Bush, the American Press, and the Initial Framing of the War on Terror after 9/11 (Cooper et al., 2012), describe a number of narrative frames present in George Bush's statements following September 11. They identify five main motifs recurring in the president's statements:

— civilization versus barbarism — in Bush's framing, the civilized world is represented by values such as recognition of the dignity of human life, democracy, the rule of law, and progress; in contrast, barbarism is characteristic of groups that seek to destroy societies built on these values through methods of coercive force, displaying particular cruelty and employing especially inhumane means; war, in this framing, is an act of protecting civilization from an existential threat (Bush, 2001b);

- good versus evil — the perpetrators of particular evil and cruelty must be stopped and cannot be left to their own devices; the post-World War II international order (in this specific statement, the UN itself) was established in response to the Second World War, and the contemporary enemy represents an evil analogous to the crimes of that era;
- the morally evil, implacable, and murderous nature of the enemy — the adversary is characterized by a morally evil stance and conduct, is antagonistically disposed toward the speaker's side and seeks domination, intentionally inflicts suffering and benefits from it, and is described, for example, as a murderer or terrorist;
- the domestic-global, enduring nature of the war — the war is an undertaking shared by the international community; the threat is global in nature, and the response to it must therefore be a coordinated reaction by many states; furthermore, the war is not confined to a single location but encompasses actions across the entire world and affects the lives of citizens of countries worldwide; nor is it a singular conflict, but a years-long campaign aimed at defeating terrorism;
- the distinctiveness of the current war compared to previous ones — the present war differs from wars of the past and requires a different course of action (Bush, 2001b).

The above five frames were identified in the analysis of the president's address before the UN General Assembly on November 10, 2001. They form the narrative framework for the war on terror, which the Iraq War, begun in 2003, would continue. For a more complete analysis of the communication concerning this particular conflict statements made by George Bush directly related to this war — the announcement of the war on March 19, 2003, and the address delivered aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003, of that same year were also examined. This qualitative analysis made it possible to supplement the list of motifs with several narrative frames directly related to this conflict.

In the addresses analyzed, the following motifs were identified:

- the necessity of depriving the enemy of weapons of mass destruction — the conviction that the adversary has access to weapons posing a potential threat to the United States and other states, or is capable of acquiring them in the foreseeable future, and that war is necessary in order to deprive them of such weapons: "The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw

regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass destruction" (Bush, 2003a); "No terrorist network will gain weapons of mass destruction from the Iraqi regime, because the regime is no more" (Bush, 2003b);

— acting for the good of the citizens of the state against which the war is being waged — the war is conducted for the good and liberation of a nation persecuted by a hostile regime; the war is meant to result in an improvement of their living conditions: "Helping Iraqis achieve a united, stable and free country will require our sustained commitment" (Bush, 2003a); "Today, we have greater power to free a nation by breaking a dangerous and aggressive regime" (Bush, 2003b);

— separating the enemy from Islam as a whole, reference to the good of the Arab world — emphasizing that the criminal actions of the enemy are not representative of the Islamic religion or of Arab culture as a whole, condemning Islamophobia; improving the situation in the Middle East is presented as one of the goals of the military action: "We come to Iraq with respect for its citizens, for their great civilization, and for the faiths they practice" (Bush, 2003a); "We are committed to freedom in Afghanistan, Iraq and in a peaceful Palestine" (Bush, 2003b);

— a declared commitment to post-war reconstruction — the United States and its allies will be involved in rebuilding the state after the conclusion of the conflict, or during it, encompassing both assistance in rebuilding destroyed infrastructure and efforts toward democratization and the improvement of living standards: "We are helping to rebuild Iraq, where a dictator built palaces for himself instead of hospitals and schools" (Bush, 2003b); "And we will stand with the new leaders of Iraq as they establish a government of, by and for the Iraqi people" (Bush, 2003b);

— praise for US soldiers — paying respect to American soldiers taking part in the war, emphasizing their virtues and sacrifice: "The people you liberate will witness the honorable and decent spirit of the American military" (Bush, 2003a); "When I look at the members of the United States military, I see the best of our country and I am honored to be your commander in chief" (Bush, 2003b);

— the difficult necessity of war, absence of occupation — the war is necessary for the good of the United States and the whole world; it is waged

more out of duty than ambition or desire for gain; a declared intention to leave the defeated state once operations conclude: "Our nation enters this conflict reluctantly — yet our purpose is sure" (Bush, 2003a); "The use of force has always been, and remains, our last resort" (Bush, 2003b); "Other nations in history have fought in foreign lands and remained to occupy and exploit. Americans, following a battle, want nothing more than to return home" (Bush, 2003b);

— protection of civilians — military operations are conducted with the intention of causing the least possible harm to civilians: "I want Americans and all the world to know that coalition forces will make every effort to spare innocent civilians from harm" (Bush, 2003a); "With new tactics and precision weapons, we can achieve military objectives without directing violence against civilians" (Bush, 2003b); "No device of man can remove the tragedy from war, yet it is a great advance when the guilty have far more to fear from war than the innocent" (Bush, 2003b).

The concept of the War on Terror and Bush's rhetoric met with criticism from some intellectuals as well as sections of the public.Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida wrote about the contradictions inherent to waging a war in the name of helping the citizens of the enemy state: "The precautionary mustering of relief workers, relief services, and relief goods dressed itself in the rash rhetoric of alleviation of suffering yet to be inflicted; the planned reconstruction of cities and administrations yet to be ruined" (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). In her 2005 book, Chantal Mouffe criticizes the Bush administration's politics and narratives for serving the United States' hegemonic position while being presented as righteous action undertaken for the benefit of the democratic world. The United States monopolizes and uses the abstract ideas of "humanity" and "civilization" to frame any action against them as anti-human. Mouffe also highlights the unilateral nature of U. S. actions during the war on terror. In a unipolar world where the US is the sole global hegemon, multilateralism is just an illusion maintained by the greatest power which has the freedom to act regardless of the opinion of other nations (Mouffe, 2005).

Mouffe also criticizes Bush's moralization of politics. She presents it as a way of manufacturing one's own moral superiority as well as delegitimizing the enemy. "When opponents are defined not in political but in moral terms, they cannot be envisaged as an 'adversary' but only as an 'enemy'. With the

'evil them' no agonistic debate is possible; they must be eradicated. Moreover, as they are often considered as the expression of some kind of 'moral disease', one should not even try to provide an explanation for their emergence and success" (Mouffe, 2005).

Donald Trump and social media

The proliferation of social media over the past decade has caused much of daily life, as well as the public sphere, to shift into the digital dimension. New media have made digital communication dynamic, interactive, and participatory (Alaghbary, 2021). The same is true of political communication and diplomacy. Platforms operating on the principle of participatory culture have opened up a new space for political discourse. Diplomacy and politics are no longer a monologue, but a structure in which interaction with non-governmental actors is integrated. New media communication is instantaneous. It allows every user to interact with politicians (Değirmenci & Terzioğlu, 2022). The methods of traditional politics and diplomacy are becoming ineffective in the new, dynamic space of the internet. The pace of change is accelerated within the digital space.

Social media have been recognized by politicians as a valuable tool for conducting politics. Online communication strategies can determine the success or failure of candidates and parties. One of the first instances of large-scale use of new media in political communication was Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. He used Facebook and Twitter to reach American youth. This allowed him to build a group of active online supporters promoting his candidacy. Obama's success demonstrated the potential of social media in campaign activities and permanently introduced politics onto digital platforms (Alaghbary, 2021).

The open, concise, and direct character of communication on social media has caused political communication to largely abandon its traditional decorum. Politicians no longer need to organize official appearances in traditional media in order to reach audiences. They can publish a post on social media at any moment, and it will instantly reach a mass of users (Kuś, 2020). Emblematic of this phenomenon is Donald Trump's communication. During the 2016 presidential campaign, it stood out as remarkably spontaneous and informal. This represented a certain novelty against the backdrop of Barack

Obama's professional, diplomatic tone of communication. Some of Trump's posts could even be considered vulgar or lacking in decorum. These traits did not deter potential voters — quite the opposite: they were regarded as an expression of sincerity and transparency rarely found in the world of politics. Additionally, their controversial character helped them spread more effectively online (Posada, 2025).

Research methodology

The empirical section of this article analyzes Donald Trump's political communication on social media from the first month of the war in Iran. It juxtaposes the posts under discussion with George Bush's communication concerning the war on terror. It identifies the respects in which these two war narratives converge, as well as the most significant points of divergence between them. The analysis of Bush's narrative draws on both his statements made shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks — which outline the program of the broadly conceived war on terror — and statements directly related to the Iraq War (Bush, 2003a; 2003b). The coding key is based on the set of narrative frames identified by S. D. Cooper's research team (Cooper et al., 2012), as well as a number of frames developed through the author's own independent analysis of the president's statements.

The following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

- Donald Trump's manner of communicating about the war in Iran differs significantly from George Bush's manner of communicating about the Iraq War and the war on terror in relation to invoking universal values to justify the war actions;
- Donald Trump puts less emphais than Bush on international cooperation, rather choosing to signify USA's power and independence in the war;
- Donald Trump's communication about the war is inconsistent and breaks with traditional diplomatic norms.

Research questions posed in the study:

- What characterizes Donald Trump's manner of speaking and constructing the narrative about the war in Iran?
- What are the main shared features and differences between Donald Trump's and George Bush's communication about war?

The object of this analysis is Donald Trump's posts published during the first four weeks of the war (February 28–March 28, 2026) on the Truth Social platform. The initial research design also envisaged analyzing publications from the X profile. However, no content was published there during the period under study. The archived collection of Trump's posts on the Roll Call website was used as the source of research material (Roll Call, n.d.-a). Where publications with identical content were repeated, they were counted as separate units within the analysis. Posts marked as deleted were not taken into account, as they generally corresponded to publications with identical or minimally altered content.

In order to analyze the content of Donald Trump's communication and answer the research questions posed, a coding key was developed. It is divided into three parts:

— Questions 1–3: Subject matter and formal properties of the material;
— Questions 4–26: Comparative analysis of Trump's and Bush's communication.

The first question of the coding key concerns whether the topic of Iran appears in the post under discussion. It determines whether the post concerns the war in Iran or not, and the degree to which its content is related to the topic. This relationship may be indirect or direct. An indirect relationship is exhibited by content that addresses matters related to Iran without explicit reference to the war, as well as publications that do not refer to the war itself but whose subject matter implies a certain degree of connection to it.

The second question in the key concerns the presence of supplementary material attached to a post — links or audiovisual material. If a publication was accompanied by such material, that material itself was not subject to analysis. Posts to which links were attached were excluded from the analysis for the questions in sections 2, 4, and 5. An exception was made when the text of the post commented on or expanded upon the attached material. Shared material may be a source of additional knowledge about Trump's political communication style. However, for the purposes of this study, a decision was made to focus exclusively on the president's own words.

The final section of the study juxtaposes Trump's posts with the typical narrative frames identified in the theoretical section regarding George Bush's war-related communication. The posts are analyzed for the presence of the motifs described there. Publications that do not replicate the previous Republican president's narrative occur in two forms. The first is the simple absence

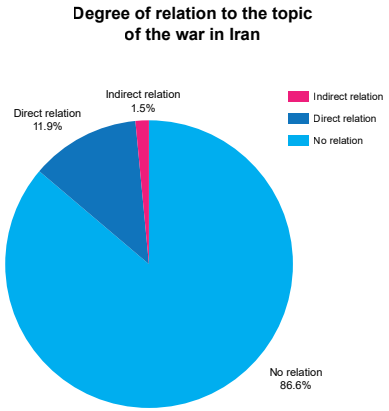
of a given motif. The second is based on the presence of a narrative contrary to the one presented. In this case, Trump does not merely fail to draw on a given way of talking about the war, but explicitly creates a new approach that contradicts it. For each of the frames in the fifth section of the coding key, a corresponding opposing frame of negation has been assigned:

- civilization versus barbarism ≠ affirmation of the enemy's cruelty;
- good versus evil ≠ pointing to the amoral character of the war;
- the morally evil, implacable, and murderous nature of the enemy ≠ portraying the enemy as morally neutral or good;
- the domestic-global, enduring nature of the war ≠ pointing to the absence of a need for international cooperation;
- the distinctiveness of the current war compared to previous ones ≠ portraying the war as lacking any distinctiveness;
- the necessity of depriving the enemy of weapons of mass destruction ≠ acceptance of the enemy's possession of such weapons;
- acting for the good of the citizens of the state against which the war is being waged ≠ acting to the detriment of the citizens of the state against which the war is being waged;
- separating the enemy from Islam as a whole, reference to the good of the Arab world ≠ equating the enemy with the whole of Islam, promotion of Islamophobia;
- a declared commitment to post-war reconstruction ≠ declarations of the destruction of the state or its infrastructure;
- praise for soldiers ≠ criticism of one's own soldiers;
- the difficult necessity of war, absence of occupation ≠ glorifying military action, taking pleasure in it;
- protection of civilians ≠ aggression against civilians.

Research results

During the period analyzed, Donald Trump's Truth Social profile published 538 posts, of which 64 posts were directly related to the topic of Iran, and 8 indirectly so. Fewer than one-fifth of the published posts concerned the war in Iran. This suggests that the topic of the ongoing war does not stand out as a particularly prominent issue in the president's political communication. It is interspersed among other topics, mainly relating to domestic politics.

Figure 1. Degree of relation of Donald Trump's Truth Social posts to the topic of the war in Iran (N = 538): no relation = 86.6%; direct relation = 11.9%; indirect relation = 1.5%. Own elaboration.

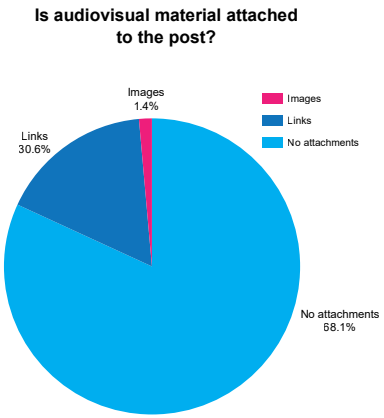


Posts indirectly related to the war in Iran addressed, for example, the situation of the Iranian women's football team, which faced the threat of reprisals after failing to sing their national anthem during a match in Australia. Trump appealed to the authorities to grant them asylum, since their lives could be endangered upon returning to their homeland (Shalala, 2026). The remaining indirect connections to the topic of Iran consisted of publications concerning operations to evacuate civilians from endangered areas of the Middle East or mentions of the war in posts on the defense industry and domestic security.

In successive weeks of the first month of the war, 261, 93, 77, and 107 posts were published, respectively. The largest share of content on the topic of Iran occurred in the third week — 25.9% — and the smallest in the fourth week — 8%. The considerably higher number of posts in the first week is largely due to the primary elections held in a number of states during that period (Chughtai et al., 2026). A large portion of the posts was devoted to the Republican Party campaign and the announcement of politicians who had been elected.

In the remainder of the study, when presenting percentage results, only the proportions within content related to the war in Iran are presented, omitting all posts unrelated to this topic.

Figure 2. Audiovisual material accompanying posts related to the war in Iran: no material = 68.1%; link = 30.6%; image = 1.4%. Own elaboration.

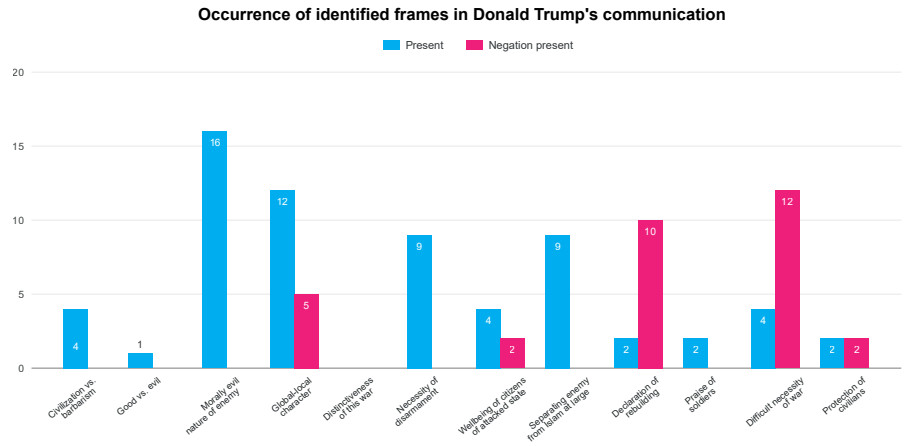


Among the posts concerning Iran, the majority (49) were not accompanied by any additional audiovisual content. 22 posts were accompanied by links. Beyond the link itself, the content of these posts most often consisted of a restatement of the linked article's title or abrief comment on it. The only post with a graphic was a screenshot from Drew Pavlou's X account, concerning the case of the Iranian women's football team in Australia. As a comment, Trump attached to it the single-word appeal "ASYLUM!".

The chart above presents the frequency with which motifs analogous to the identified elements of George Bush's narrative appear in Donald Trump's communication, as well as the aspects in which the current president advances a narrative antithetical to that of his predecessor. On this basis, these frames can be divided into three groups: motifs shared by both presidents, motifs that Trump does not replicate, and elements in which a narrative contrary to Bush's rhetoric predominates.

Within this typology, the second category consists of those frames that appeared in fewer than 10% of the research material — that is, in seven or fewer posts. The third category includes all elements in which frames of negation predominated. One particular case also occurred — protection of civilians — in which the occurrence of the base frame and its negation was equal. This will be considered separately.

Figure 3. Frequency of George W. Bush-era narrative frames — and their negations — identified in Donald Trump's communication about the war in Iran (number of posts). Own elaboration.



Motifs shared by both presidents:

— the morally evil nature of the enemy (16 posts, 0 negations);
— the domestic-global, enduring character of the war (12 posts, 5 negations);
— the necessity of depriving the enemy of weapons (9 posts, 0 negations);
— separating the enemy from Islam as a whole, reference to the good of the Arab world (9 posts, 0 negations).

Motifs not replicated by Trump:

— acting for the good of the citizens of the attacked state (4 posts, 2 negations),
— civilization versus barbarism (4 posts, 0 negations);
— praise for soldiers (2 posts, 0 negations);
— good versus evil (1 post, 0 negations);
— the distinctiveness of this war compared to previous ones (0 posts, 0 negations).

Motifs in which frames of negation predominate:

— the difficult necessity of war (4 posts, 12 negations);
— a declared commitment to post-war reconstruction (2 posts, 10 negations).

Donald Trump repeatedly emphasizes the moral evil of the Iranian regime. This is the most frequently occurring motif among the posts examined.

Crimes — both those already committed and those anticipated in the future — serve as the justification for declaring war on the regime. The enemy is portrayed as willing to commit crimes against its own citizens as well as to employ violence abroad. In a post concerning the death of Iran's leader, Trump writes: "This is not only Justice for the people of Iran, but for all Great Americans, and those people from many Countries throughout the World, that have been killed or mutilated by Khamenei and his gang of bloodthirsty THUGS" (Trump, 2026a). Terrorism is identified as a particular threat. In the president's idiolect, the phrase "Iran's Terrorist Regime" functions as a fixed collocation. This manner of speaking about the enemy in the Middle East is a legacy of the war on terror narrative. The Ayatollah's rule is described in a manner similar to the way the Taliban or the Hussein regime were described in Bush's addresses: "In Afghanistan we see al Qaeda's vision for the world. Afghanistan's people have been brutalized, many are starving and many have fled" (Bush, 2001a).

Also significant is the description of the scale of the enemy's evil. Iran is not simply one of many wicked regimes. It is presented as a key, exceptionally evil actor, surpassing others both in the scale of the crimes it commits and in the threat it poses to the world. In a post from March 12, Trump even calls Iran an "evil empire." The phrase "evil empire" evokes a clear association with antagonistic forces known from popular culture, such as Star Wars. The main attributes associated with these fictional groups are military might and an unambiguous, total orientation toward doing evil. Their destruction is, as a rule, something unequivocally positive.

Another significant motif preserved from the War on Terror is the global character of the conflict. The war is not merely an isolated confrontation between two states, but has a wide-reaching impact on the entire world — its economy, stability, and balance of power. By entering the war, the United States acts for the benefit of the entire world, protecting it from the threat.

A significant divergence from Bush's narrative occurs here, however, concerning the approach to international cooperation. The previous Republican president strongly emphasized the need for international cooperation, with particular emphasis on NATO. Trump also speaks of cooperation on several occasions, yet frequently points to the self-sufficiency of the United States. He states that he is capable of winning the war alone (indeed, that he has already won it), and that allied support is not necessary to achieve this. These posts also containexpressions of contempt toward allied states and NATO,

pointing to their uselessness. This constitutes a fundamental difference from Bush's rhetoric. The current conflict has significant global repercussions, yet the United States will win it on its own. This is not, however, a uniform or consistent presentation of the situation, since Trump also criticizes other states for their unwillingness to help and to engage in the conflict.

Depriving the enemy of weapons of mass destruction was one of the main arguments George Bush used in favor of the attack on Iraq. In his address aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln, he stated: "Any outlaw regime that has ties to terrorist groups and seeks or possesses weapons of mass destruction is a grave danger to the civilized world and will be confronted" (Bush, 2003b). In the case of Trump's narrative, the goal is to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. When combined with the described moral evil of the adversary, this reinforces the sense of urgency surrounding this war — the longer the invasion is postponed, the closer the immoral regime comes to realizing its destructive potential.

In his posts about the war in Iran, Trump refers to the good of the Arab world. This, however, takes a different, more limited form compared to Bush's addresses. In describing the war in Iran, Trump usually speaks of prosperity and peace in the Middle East only in slogan-like terms. Most often, he mentions it as a general goal of waging the war. He frequently places it in direct juxtaposition with peace in the world: "Iran will NEVER have a nuclear weapon, nor will it have the ability to threaten the United States of America, the Middle East or, for that matter, the World!" (Trump, 2026f). This stands in contrast to Bush's rhetoric, which devoted entire segments of his addresses to warning against Islamophobia. He emphasized that the enemies constitute a marginal group within Islam and do not represent the religion as a whole. The Ayatollah, whom Trump described as one of the worst people in history (Trump, 2026a), was, in addition to being the head of state, also a religious leader. Such statements may contribute to anti-Islamic sentiment, particularly in the absence of the distinctions between the Iranian regime and Islam more broadly that characterized Bush's rhetoric.

One of the significant differences between George Bush's and Donald Trump's communication is the degree to which they speak of striving to improve the situation in the attacked country. Both Iraq and Iran were totalitarian regimes that violated human rights. In Bush's addresses, U. S. intervention is beneficial for the population — it is a moment of liberation: "We have no ambition in Iraq, except to remove a threat and restore control of that

country to its own people" (Bush, 2003a). Trump appeals to a similar rhetoric on several occasions — a post-war Iran is meant to have a freer society and a stronger economy. However, this is not nearly as emphasized. Years of American involvement in the Middle East that failed to bring the anticipated benefits have compromised, in the public consciousness, the image of the United States as a promoter of democracy.

The same holds true for the two frames that describe the war as a clash of values — civilization versus barbarism, and good versus evil. Trump emphasizes the significant threat posed by Iran and states that he is waging war for the sake of peace. Rarely, however, does he situate this struggle within the broader axiological context, as George Bush did. Iran is presented as a serious threat. In Trump's narrative, however, it is not an existential danger to civilization as such. Nor does he situate this war within a broader historical context, unlike Bush, who sought in the war on terror a struggle for peace and the world order established after the Second World War: "This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight" (Bush, 2001a). The war in Iran does not replicate this narrative. It is, rather, a clash between two powers, of which one — the United States — surpasses the other in both strength and morality.

Bush, in his addresses, frequently pays tribute to American soldiers, praising them for their sacrifice, devotion to the nation, and nobility. Donald Trump, in his posts, rarely reaches for similar words of approval. This may reflect the different emphases of his wartime communication. Trump instead tends to emphasize technical and tactical dominance of American forces: "(...) [Khamenei] was unable to avoid our Intelligence and Highly Sophisticated Tracking Systems (...)" (Trump, 2026a). He rarely speaks of soldiers as individuals, instead describing the military collectively. It is presented as acting on behalf of the entire nation, or even of Trump himself. This can be inferred from his tendency to use first-person pronouns — "we," "I" — when describing military operations.

The only motif from Bush's statements that finds no counterpart in Donald Trump's communication is the distinctiveness of this war compared to previous ones. The attacks of September 11, 2001, were an unprecedented event. They are often cited as marking the end of an era of peace and optimism following the end of the Cold War. Al-Qaeda's terrorism was also a new threat, one that required the adoption of new methods of combat. Nor was

it known whether it would be only the first of a wave of attacks. All these factors combined to make the war on terror, declared soon after the attack, exceptional in both scale and manner of conduct. Two and a half decades after these events, the American nation has grown accustomed to the new reality and has become convinced of the ineffectiveness of the broader project of the fight against terrorism. Wars in the Middle East that lasted longer than anticipated, along with numerous errors and controversies, have compromised this concept in the eyes of the public. Trump may avoid speaking of the war as a distinctive new kind of conflict, since such narratives may be met with public distrust. This may also be related to an emphasis on the efficiency and effectiveness of military operations, along with frequent assertions that the war has already been won. This may serve to counter fears of another long and costly war in the Middle East.

One of the frames analyzed appeared in the research material exactly as often as its corresponding frame of negation. This was the frame of protection of civilians. Combining both categories yields a total of 4 posts. This is fewer than 10% of all posts examined. Civilian safety was therefore not a prominent theme in Trump's communication. Concern for civilians manifests in Trump's communication when he speaks of halting particular military actions that could harm the civilian population, whether through direct harm or damage to critical infrastructure. The decision is framed as an ethical choice: "(...) for reasons of decency, I have chosen NOT to wipe out the Oil Infrastructure on the Island" (Trump, 2026f). In one of his posts, Trump issues an ultimatum threatening attacks on such a scale that the subsequent reconstruction of the state would be impossible: "(...) Death, Fire, and Fury will reign upon them — But I hope, and pray, that it does not happen!" (Trump, 2026e).

One of the two motifs displaying a clear predominance of the frame of negation was the declared commitment to post-war reconstruction. Its opposite was identified as declarations of destroying the enemy state. Alongside actions typical of wartime conditions — namely, the elimination ofthe adversary's military capability — Trump also speaks of the destruction of civilian infrastructure and even of the elimination of the state as such. "We are totally destroying the terrorist regime of Iran, militarily, economically, and otherwise (...)" (Trump, 2026g). "Today, Iran will be hit very hard! We are seriously considering complete destruction and certain death, because of Iran's bad behavior, for areas and groups not previously considered targets" (Trump, 2026d). This stands in contrast to humanitarian assurances

of rebuilding a democratic state after the overthrow of the regime. It also differs from the rhetoric of occupation, in which the goal is to subjugate the enemy state. Bush presented himself as the leader of the democratic world, overthrowing totalitarian governments and spreading liberal values. Trump, by contrast, positions himself as a strong and resolute hegemon, capable of utterly annihilating his enemies. Although the vision of Iran's destruction predominates, the material analyzed also included isolated posts that spoke of rebuilding the country after the war.

Another frame that finds its negation in Trump's communication is the difficult necessity of war. The president's narrative repeatedly does not present the conflict as an unfortunate necessity required nonetheless to maintain global order. Some of his posts even glorify the act of war and the destruction of the enemy. The president uses affective, highly emotive language to describe military operations. American forces do not merely achieve their operational objectives in Iran — they decimate and annihilate the enemy. In describing dominance over the enemy, Trump does not shy away from brutality. He states that Iran is being "beat to HELL" (Trump, 2026d). He also speaks of "finishing off" what remains of it (Trump, 2026l). In his descriptions, the president on several occasions portrays the war against Iran as an act of merciless justice. A particularly vivid example of this is a post from March 13, in which the pathos-laden language of describing the war reaches its peak. Its language approaches a literary register and evokes apocalyptic imagery of judgment:

> The Iranian navy is gone. Their Air Force no longer exists, missiles, drones, and everything else are being decimated, and their leaders have been wiped off the face of the earth. We have unmatched firepower, unlimited ammunition, and plenty of time — Watch what happens today to these deranged bastards. They have been killing innocent people all over the world for 47 years, and now I, the 47th President of the United States of America, am killing them. What a great honor it is to do so! (Trump, 2026g).

Conclusions

The analysis of Donald Trump's social media posts from the first month of the war in Iran, supported the research hypotheses. The president's manner of communicating about the war in Iran differs significantly from the manner

of communicating about the Iraq War and the war on terror used by George Bush. Certain points of convergence exist between the two. Both presidents emphasize the global significance of the war and clearly stress the morally evil character of the adversary. The goal of both wars was identified as depriving the enemy of weapons of mass destruction and neutralizing the threat that the hostile regime poses to the rest of the world. Even where certain motifs are shared by both leaders, Trump often presents a different approach to them. The 47th President emphasizes the global character of the war, yet, unlike Bush, stresses the self-sufficiency of the United States in conducting the conflict. He also devotes less attention to the welfare of the Middle East, referring to it only in slogan-like terms.

Trump's wartime communication presents many points of divergence from Bush's narrative. The latter speaks of war on an axiological plane. It is a struggle of good against evil, a battle for the future of civilization. Bush's narrative positions the United States as a liberator, bringing democratic values to a state dominated by a totalitarian regime, while emphasizing the honorable and noble character of the American soldiers who bring about this change. Trump rarely speaks of war in analogous terms. The invasion of Iran is described as necessary for the preservation of world order. However, the president more often appeals to interests than to universal values. He expresses appreciation for the military more in terms of its effectiveness than of its moral formation. More than a quarter-century after the declaration of the war on terror, claims about the democratization of totalitarian regimes and the conduct of an entirely new kind of war against terrorism have lost public credibility. This is why Trump does not replicate them in his communication.

Trump's communication also exhibits aspects in which it diametrically departs from the rhetoric presented by Bush. Bush emphasized the difficult necessity of war and ultimately emphasized the reconstruction of Iraq. Trump, by contrast, writes of the utter destruction of Iran and glorifies military action.

The war on terror, initially presented as a noble campaign to protect civilization, ultimately became a deeply controversial episode for the United States. The Iraq War, waged within its framework, brought with it numerous errors and controversies. It has been linked in scholarly and public debate to a range of subsequent regional and international problems. The war in Iran, still ongoing at the time of writing this article, raises legitimate concerns about further destabilization of the situation in the Middle East and the

world. These concerns are reinforced by Donald Trump's inconsistent, affective political communication, characterized by polarizing and conflict-oriented rhetoric on both the domestic and international stage.

Appendix: Coding key

1. Publication date
2. Degree of connection to the topic of the war in Iran:
   a) 0 — no connection
   b) 1 — direct connection
   c) 2 — indirect connection
3. Is audiovisual material attached to the post?
   a) 0 — no
   b) 1 — yes, link
   c) 2 — yes, image
   d) 3 — yes, video
4. Civilization versus barbarism frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation
5. Good versus evil frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation
6. Morally evil nature of the enemy frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation
7. Global-local character of the war frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation
8. Distinctiveness of the current war compared to previous ones frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation

9. Deprivation of the enemy's weapons frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation
10. Acting for the good of the attacked state's citizens frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation
11. Separation of the enemy from Islam as a whole frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation
12. Declared commitment to post-war reconstruction frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation
13. Praise for soldiers frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation
14. Difficult necessity of war frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation
15. Protection of civilians frame:
   a) 0 — absent
   b) 1 — present
   c) 2 — frame of negation

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Social Communication Ethics volume 2 • issue 3 • 2026 • pages 81–90 REVIEW

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AI for humanity, not humanity for AI: Pope Leo XIV's concern for the human person and the environment in the age of Artificial Intelligence

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The 135th anniversary of the promulgation of Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical „Rerum novarum"

At the end of the nineteenth century, Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903) had to confront the challenges associated with the Industrial Revolution, the problems arising from the condition of workers, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, and the progressive disintegration of social bonds. Leo XIII firmly advocated a Christian social policy, rejecting Marxist socialism while also challenging short-sighted capitalism. He called society to cooperation. The encyclical Rerum novarum, promulgated on 15 May 1891, critically addressed the unrestrained pursuit of profit at the expense of others, as well as all manifestations of economic imperialism.

Rapacious usury, which, although more than once condemned by the Church, is nevertheless, under a different guise, but with the like injustice, still practiced by covetous and grasping men. To this must be added that the hiring of labor and the conduct of trade are concentrated in the hands of comparatively few; so that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the laboring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery (no. 2),

Leo XIII wrote:

> He warned against attempts to form a new human being without reference to moral renewal. He also reaffirmed the principle of the universal destination of goods without denying the right to private property (no. 4 ff.).

Just as Pope Leo XIII stood on the side of human beings 135 years ago, Pope Leo XIV, faced with the new challenges of the "algorithmic revolution" and the digital economy, likewise defends the human person by recalling the principles of Catholic social teaching. The Holy Father responds to the threat associated with the so-called "technocratic paradigm" and to other problems of the contemporary world.

"Magnifica humanitas"

The social encyclical Magnifica humanitas of Pope Leo XIV, "On Care for the Human Person in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," was promulgated on 15

May 2026, in the second year of his pontificate. The title Magnifica humanitas may be rendered as "magnificent humanity." It is not accidental. The very first sentence of the encyclical points to "humanity created by God" and to the need to protect it in an age of technological transformation. It directs attention toward admiration for the human person, especially against the background of contemporary fascination with technical and technological innovation. The title therefore constitutes a kind of synthesis of the document, which is centred on the value of the dignity of the human person. It would be mistaken, or at least reductive, to claim that the document concerns merely the individual use of artificial intelligence or serves as a kind of instruction manual. The human person is the subject and criterion of AI development, not the reverse. This is confirmed by the analyses and conclusions drawn from the social teaching of the Church's Magisterium. Human activity is concerned with the realization of the good within the multidimensional contexts of justice, fraternity, work, family, education, authority, governance, the economy, social relations, and other spheres.

In the document, Leo XIV refers directly to the teaching of eight popes. Beginning with Leo XIII, whom he cites six times, and continuing with Pius XI (twice), Pius XII (once), John XXIII (once), Paul VI (five times), John Paul II (nineteen times), Benedict XVI (three times), and Francis (seventeen times), he demonstrates the close relationship between Catholic social teaching and its essential role in diagnosing contemporary reality.

The Pope does not focus exclusively on documents concerning technology. Rather, he demonstrates its present significance by drawing on teaching concerning inalienable dignity, human rights, work, authority, ecology, technology, and economics. These are important issues, particularly when artificial intelligence is considered as a historical phenomenon subject to evaluation in the light of Catholic social teaching.

In addition to papal documents, Magnifica humanitas refers to homilies, speeches, messages, audiences, statements by laypeople, and institutional documents. Beyond the popes themselves, the figures cited include the philosopher of religion Romano Guardini (1885–1968); the Austrian philosopher, psychiatrist, and psychotherapist Viktor Frankl (1905–1997); the philosopher and public intellectual Hannah Arendt (1906–1975); the mayor of Florence, politician, and professor Giorgio La Pira (1904–1977); the French cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629); and the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, including St Augustine (354–430) and St Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). Particularly

noteworthy is the document's reference to the British writer and philologist John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892–1973), professor of English language and literature and specialist in Germanic languages and literatures, and author of The Lord of the Rings. More precisely, the reference is to The Return of the King, the third part of the work. As an aside, it may be noted that in 1978 J. R. R. Tolkien received the Locus Award for Best Fantasy Novel for The Silmarillion.

Among the institutional sources, particular attention should be paid to the International Theological Commission document Quo vadis, humanitas (approved by Leo XIV on 9 February 2026 and published on 4 March 2026); the Note Antiqua et nova of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education (28 January 2025); and the document of the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (26 October 2024), cited in connection with the experience of synodality. The text also refers to speeches delivered at the United Nations and to the Charter of the United Nations.

Magnifica humanitas has a coherent and logical structure. The philosophical, ethical, and Catholic social teaching materials employed contribute to a substantive argument. The document consists of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion: Introduction; I. Dynamic Thought Faithful to the Gospel; II. Foundations and Principles of the Church's Social Teaching; III. Technology and Dominion: The Greatness of the Human Person in the Face of the Promises of Artificial Intelligence; IV. Safeguarding Humanity amid Transformation: Truth, Work, Freedom; V. A Culture of Power and a Civilization of Love; Conclusion.

"Building on the foundation of the good": How to avoid chaos in the age of AI

The central issue concerns the human person in relation to the use of AI as one of the res novae, the "new things" of our time. Civilizational transformation confronts the Church with the need to interpret new phenomena, apply criteria for their evaluation, and explain the relationship between the human person, technology, and the power associated with it. Another overriding concern is transparency regarding technology's impact on truth, freedom, responsibility, changes in the labour sector, and models of interpersonal

relations shaped by the use of new technologies. The starting point of the argument is anchored in two biblical images: the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9) and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2–6). Their use is intended to show that, by observing God's law, human beings can construct the authentic common good. It also answers the question of to whom technological development should be subordinated. A code governing the use of AI should be constructed with norms that exclude evil. Authentic humanism requires a subject-centred and personalist approach in which the human person remains the subject and criterion of technological development, particularly in the governance and design of various services (human-centred design, a term drawn from the language of technology design). "When a city is built on pride and on the claim to self-sufficiency, communication breaks down, languages become confused, and people cease to understand one another. The result is not unity but dispersion" (no. 7).

The encyclical presents AI as an issue embedded in the broader realities of industrialization, markets and labour, globalization, wars, and the ecological crisis. It therefore becomes necessary to recall fundamental questions concerning the common good, the universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, solidarity, and justice. Only by taking this axiological framework into account can AI be properly evaluated. The problem is not limited to users' use of artificial intelligence or to the possibilities of acting through it; it also concerns control, decision-making, and the capacity to exercise real influence over the lives of others. Therefore, as we experience how "rapidly and profoundly digitalization, artificial intelligence (AI), and robotics are transforming our world" (no. 4), decision-making processes must be approached responsibly. What is required is a holistic view of AI as an element that shapes real social relations and exerts a tangible influence on structures of power. Artificial intelligence has become permanently embedded in the environment that now shapes personal relationships, the economy, politics, institutions, and other spheres.

It is impossible to overlook the significance and influence of AI on human beings and their environment. "Every technology educates the person who uses it" (no. 140). Questions must therefore be asked about individual autonomy and agency, mechanisms of control, the dissemination of information, family relationships, and the formation of friendships. In this respect, the encyclical examines three analytical categories: truth, freedom, and work.

The concluding synthesis is an appeal to the norm of love as the central point of reference for individual conduct.

"Develop technology without allowing the heart to regress": On the threats outlined in the Encyclical „Magnifica humanitas"

The principal challenges and threats identified by Leo XIV include the problem of dehumanization within a technocratic environment (nos. 1, 10, 15, 169), that is, the reduction of the human being to numbers, results, data, commodities, or functions (no. 180), as well as the treatment of the person as a project to be optimized (nos. 112–114). No less significant are the technocratic paradigm (nos. 93–94), the absolutization of efficiency (nos. 112–114), and the dominance of "having" over "being" (no. 94). The risk of new threats arises particularly in the private sector, where data, computing power, and infrastructure are concentrated in the hands of a small number of actors whose activities are not fully transparent and are difficult to control (nos. 95–96). In a broader context, this concerns abuses of truth, particularly in the interpretation of facts (no. 102), and the amplification of particular content and narratives in ways that make falsehood more difficult to distinguish from truth (nos. 134–137, 191–192).

Another alarming problem associated with the use of AI is the lack of a holistic view of reality, accompanied by a weakening of recipients' critical thinking (no. 146). This is connected with excessive delegation of tasks to artificial intelligence or dependence on ready-made answers (no. 100), the shortening of the process of human reflection (no. 146), and the relinquishment of decision-making and responsibility (nos. 102–105). Leo XIV also identifies as a challenge the intensification of subjectivization in assessments of reality and the orientation and subordination of classification criteria to ideological positions (nos. 100–104).

From the perspective of interpersonal relations, one cannot ignore the danger of losing face-to-face encounters with other human beings (no. 100), especially since many platforms are designed to absorb users' time and attention. This is the "digital attention economy" (no. 170). Problems associated with artificial intelligence also appear in the weakening of family and social bonds. Another danger lies in classifying people according to categories of

usefulness (nos. 115–117). The problem must therefore also be considered from the perspectives of economic inequality (no. 164), social control (no. 171), new forms of exclusion (no. 102), the degradation of human effort and work, and reductions in employment resulting from automation (nos. 150–151). These are significant concerns, particularly insofar as they affect the creation of an environment conducive to human flourishing.

Leo XIV devotes particular attention to the use of AI in warfare. He points to cyberattacks, information manipulation, influence campaigns, the automation of strategic decision-making, and the risk of lowering the threshold for the use of force (nos. 182–183, 198–200). Drawing on the thought of Giorgio La Pira, he outlines a path toward a culture of negotiation in La Pira's words: "the method of war must be replaced by the method of peace" (no. 221), that is, by cooperation.

It should be noted that the threats associated with AI identified by Pope Leo XIV cannot be reduced to the technological level alone. They must be considered across multiple dimensions, especially the social and cultural, philosophical, ethical, legal and regulatory, economic, psychological, geopolitical, and military dimensions.

"Neither demonize tools nor idolize them, but guide them": AI in the service of the common good

Pope Leo XIV continues the approach of his predecessors, who also recognized in technology the potential for beneficial applications, improvements to everyday life (no. 4), and communication between persons (no. 9). He recalls that Christian humanism does not reject science and technology but receives them "with gratitude and realism" (no. 129). He also observes that technology is not evil "in itself." "It is not neutral, however, because it takes on the features of those who design, finance, regulate, and use it" (no. 9). Thus, he does not treat technology as a reality inherently opposed to the human person; instead, he emphasizes its ambivalent character and the need to orient it toward the good.

Among the undoubted benefits of AI is "intelligent support" for human activity and improvements in task automation (nos. 150, 152), as well as the potential to increase safety and creativity at work and to serve the common good (no. 129). Leo XIV also recognizes the benefits of AI in education,

particularly in fact-checking and in fostering users' critical engagement with information (no. 137). Artificial intelligence can also make positive contributions to the development of science and knowledge (no. 4), for example in medicine, treatment, the alleviation of suffering, and healthcare (nos. 9, 129). AI can support connections among different fields of knowledge and help people understand complex realities. It can contribute to improved living conditions, personal development, and the acquisition of new professional qualifications (no. 156). Each of these dimensions should remain subordinate to the principles of the common good, social justice, and concern for the vulnerable—that is, the "preferential option for the poor," an essential category of Catholic social teaching.

In Leo XIV's understanding, artificial intelligence should connect, educate, protect, support, and foster the development of individuals. In Magnifica humanitas, the Pope outlines a kind of catalogue of positive applications of AI, particularly in the humanitarian sphere, with due regard for the dignity of the human person and, consequently, for development oriented toward the common good (no. 129). A further dimension is communication: AI can strengthen social competencies and bring people closer together (no. 132). The Holy Father sees another important benefit of AI in education, particularly in the verification of facts and the strengthening of critical thinking among young people (nos. 9, 137). This is complemented by positive applications of artificial intelligence in the economic sphere, where it can help make work more creative and safer (nos. 150, 152).

"Non nova, sed noviter": Truth and the logic of love as requirements in the age of AI

In the encyclical Magnifica humanitas, Leo XIV emphasizes the continuing relevance of Catholic social teaching in the age of artificial intelligence. "What we today call the 'social doctrine of the Church' did not suddenly emerge in modern times; rather, it gathers and orders a long tradition of ecclesial reflection on social life, rooted in Sacred Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and the theological and juridical works of the Middle Ages and the modern period" (no. 29), the Holy Father writes. The guidance of Benedict XV in the encyclical Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum of 1 November 1914 should likewise be taken into account. There he warned against the influence of the modernist

spirit, in which everything bearing the mark of antiquity is rejected with disdain while novelty is eagerly sought everywhere and in everything. Following the principle Nihil innovetur, nisi quod traditum est ("Let nothing new be introduced except what has been handed down"), matters of faith and morals should preserve what has been received according to the rule Non nova, sed noviter ("Not new things, but in a new way").

Pope Leo XIV addresses problems common to all humanity in a new way, framing them as care for our common home together with a preferential option for the poor (no. 43). He recalls the universal destination of goods, critiques the technocratic paradigm, defends human work, and reaffirms the requirements of justice and dialogue. He stresses that "justice requires that new forms of exclusion and deprivation of freedom be prevented: persons and peoples who are denied or have limited access to basic technologies; communities exposed to invasive surveillance; and social groups harmed by opaque algorithms that reproduce prejudice and discrimination" (no. 80). He identifies the building of a civilization of love grounded in truth as an elementary necessity. The primacy of the dignity of the person and personal freedom are continually being put to the test. Hence the importance of Hannah Arendt's observation that "the ideal subject is not so much the ideologically convinced person as the person for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (that is, the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (that is, the standards of thought) no longer exist" (no. 134).

The social encyclical Magnifica humanitas of Pope Leo XIV, "On Care for the Human Person in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," is an important and timely document that should be read from the perspective of the Church's concern for what is human. It offers a critical response to those aspects of the digital revolution and the development of AI that may lead to the normalization of an anti-human vision. It is a document that seeks a more just social order while also recalling the fundamental values that provide the foundation for building our common security.



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