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COGNITIVE PROCESSES AND EMOTIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF USER-GENERATED RESPONSES TO POLITICAL DISINFORMATION

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Purpose: The aim of this paper is to explore how user-generated content (UGC) can serve as a valuable source of data for understanding cognitive and emotional processes in online public discourse. By applying a cognitive-discursive approach to social media commentary, the study investigates how individuals construct meaning, express emotions, and attribute intentions in response to sociopolitical events.

Design/methodology/approach: The study applies a socio-cognitive framework combining discourse analysis and cognitive psychology to examine user reactions to disinformation on social media. Using a purposive sample of four viral posts about the alleged introduction of Ukrainian as a school language in Poland, and 180 highly engaged comments, the study analyzes cognitive mechanisms and emotional responses, as well as user-generated micro-narratives that reveal patterns of polarization and identity construction.

Findings: The study showed that user-generated content (UGC) reacting to political disinformation often contained clear signs of emotional and cognitive patterns linked to polarization and group identity. Most comments used strong emotional language, especially anger, fear, and contempt, and highlighted a sharp divide between "us" and "them". Comments often relied on historical schemata and availability heuristics, using familiar events and vivid examples to interpret current narratives. UGC is not merely a space for expressing opinions; it also serves as an active arena where collective biases and emotions develop, further dividing society even when factual corrections are provided.

Research limitations/implications: This study is based on a qualitative case study focused on a specific political event and a limited number of social media posts and user comments. While the in-depth analysis provides valuable insights into the cognitive and emotional mechanisms shaping online discourse, the findings cannot be generalized to all digital interactions or sociopolitical contexts.

Practical implications: Combining automated data collection with qualitative discourse analysis provides a replicable model for identifying patterns of emotional framing, polarization, and collective sense-making in user-generated content.

Social implications: This research demonstrates social relevance, particularly in the context of increasing polarization and migration-related tensions in Europe. By uncovering how citizens construct meaning, attribute intentions, and express emotions in response to policy proposals – such as the introduction of Ukrainian as a foreign language in school – the study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of public opinion formation.

Originality/value: The novelty of this study lies in its integration of cognitive and discourse-analytical perspectives to examine user-generated content (UGC) in social media not only as expressions of opinion, but as reflections of underlying cognitive mechanisms. This approach considers user-generated content as a data source of how users attribute intentions, categorize social actors, and emotionally frame public debates. Drawing on discourse analysis and processes of social cognition this study reveals how digital language use shapes collective meaning-making.
Keywords: user-generated content, social media, discourse analysis, social cognition, online communication.
Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

In today's networked society, social media platforms function not only as channels for sharing information but also as arenas where collective cognitive processes unfold. Users do not merely comment on current events—they co-construct narratives, attribute intentions to social actors, and express emotions, thereby shaping the discursive landscape of public life. A shift in research interests from the analysis of official media narratives to social micro-narratives present in comments, memes, and online reactions is accompanied by the growing importance of user-generated content (UGC) as a source of knowledge about social and cognitive processes in the digital age. UGC content is not only an object of observation, but an active carrier of cognitive processes such as schemas, heuristics or attribution.

Based on this assumption, this paper adopts a cognitive and discursive framework to explore these dynamics, considering UGC as a data through which patterns of social thinking can be observed. The theoretical and methodological approach is enriched by a case study focusing on online reactions to a proposal by the Polish Ministry of Education to introduce Ukrainian as a foreign language in schools. This example reveals how social media users engage in processes of polarization, emotionalization, and mobilization, illustrating the broader mechanisms of meaning-making and collective response in digital communication.

The objective of this paper is to explore how UGC can serve as a valuable source of data for understanding cognitive and emotional processes in online public discourse. The research seeks to demonstrate that UGC is not merely a reflection of opinion, but a dynamic site where collective sense-making, polarization, and identity construction may unfold in real time.

2. Methods

Presented study is part of the socio-cognitive analysis of online content, integrating the perspective of cognitive psychology with discourse analysis tools (van Dijk, 2001). The aim is defined as identification of cognitive and emotional mechanisms (such as schemas, heuristics, attribution of intentions, and emotional frames) that emerge in users' reactions that reveal themselves in users' reception of political issues presented in social media. The starting point was the widely commented decision by the Ministry of Education and Science to introduce Ukrainian as a foreign language in Polish system of education as well as include this language to curriculum of eights' grade exam. Facebook posts and the website X reported that Minister Barbara Nowacka had decided to introduce Ukrainian into Polish schools. It was supposed to replace Spanish, German, or French (Demagog, 16.06.2025). Despite official denials by the Ministry (PAP, 16.06.2025), this disinformation spread intensively on social media platforms, generating high user engagement.

The dataset was constructed through purposive sampling to capture online reactions to a specific disinformation episode. Four Facebook posts were selected because they met three criteria: (1) they explicitly presented or suggested the false claim that Ukrainian would be introduced as a compulsory foreign language in Polish schools; (2) they generated substantial user engagement, each exceeding 100 comments; and (3) they served as points of further dissemination within online networks. The disinformation was amplified primarily by right-wing profiles, which deliberately framed the narrative in a manipulative way to influence public opinion. For this reason, the selected posts represent a relevant and ideologically significant sample for analysis. From these posts, a total of 180 highly engaged comments were collected for analysis. To ensure analytical relevance, purely *ad personam* attacks, comments consisting only of vulgar language, and those expressing emotion without substantive content were excluded. The selected comments were those that contained identifiable cognitive and discursive elements, such as attribution of intentions, heuristic reasoning, or emotional framing. This strategy allowed the analysis to focus on content that reveals how users cognitively process and emotionally respond to contested political information. The total number of comments collected for the purpose of this study was 180. The posts and comments were archived in accordance with digital research ethics: nicknames were anonymized and data enabling identification of individuals was removed.

The analysis involved: 1) Analysis of cognitive mechanisms: identification of categorization patterns, heuristics (e.g., availability, representativeness), mechanisms of intention attribution (e.g., the Ministry of Education acts "to the detriment of Poles") and emotional reactions (e.g., anger, fear, contempt); 2) Analysis of micro-narratives: examination of how users construct their own narratives and justifications – both through references to

personal experiences and through references to symbolic oppositions ("us–them," "authorities–citizens," "Poles–Ukrainians").

The coding procedure was conducted manually by the author as part of an exploratory case study. Each comment served as the basic unit of analysis and was carefully reviewed for the presence of cognitive and emotional mechanisms. Comments could be assigned to one or more categories simultaneously, as the coding scheme was not mutually exclusive; for instance, a single comment could contain both a historical schema and an emotional frame. The coding categories were developed inductively after an initial exploratory reading of the dataset and then refined in dialogue with theoretical concepts from cognitive psychology and discourse analysis. Coding categories included: cognitive schemas (stereotypes, historical analogies, culturally shared narratives), attribution of intentions (explicit or implicit assignment of motives of Ukrainian refugees or Polish government, often portrayed as pursuing hidden political or ideological objectives), heuristics (use of cognitive shortcuts such as availability heuristics), emotional framing (expressions primarily structured around fear, outrage, or collective pride), micro-narratives (short personal stories or anecdotal accounts that served to illustrate or justify broader claims, effectively embedding individual experiences into collective interpretations).

Given the relatively small research sample and the aim to capture linguistic and emotional nuances that automated natural language processing tools might overlook, a qualitative manual approach was chosen over algorithmic text mining. While this strategy allowed for in-depth interpretation of micro-narratives and implicit attributions, it also entails certain limitations. The coding was conducted by the author only, without a second coder, which means that intercoder reliability was not calculated. This reflects the exploratory nature of the study. At the same time, attention was paid to maintaining internal consistency in applying the categories. Future research could extend this procedure by introducing multiple coders and calculating inter-coder agreement (e.g., Cohen's κ), thereby strengthening the reliability of the coding scheme.

3. Results

3.1. User-generated content as a data source

User-generated content (UGC) is undoubtedly one of the most important phenomena shaping the communication landscape of digital culture – both social and political. Oxford University Press defines UGC as "media content that is produced by users of the medium rather than professionals. (…) the term is mainly associated with the new electronic media and embraces such phenomena as blogs, wikis, and digital video" (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

The presence of UGC changes the relations between senders and recipients, decentralizes the flow of information and transforms the very nature of civic participation and social engagement. Although the production of socially meaningful content by non-professional users is not a recent phenomenon, the growing prominence of the term UGC is largely driven by the development of digital technologies – in particular by the norms and practices associated with Web 2.0 and social media – which encourage everyday users to publish and engage within accessible, user-friendly platforms (Santos, 2022).

UGC is also perceived in a a broader context as a manifestation of the culture of participation. This is the position presented by Rafal Cieniek: the author analyses the content produced by Internet users as a key element of the modern culture of participation, referring to the concepts of authors such as Henry Jenkins, Axel Bruns and Alvin Toffler, emphasizing that users become co-creators of media content, which changes classical models of communication (Cieniek, 2018). Useful framework for analyzing UGC is David Foulger's ecological model of communication (2004), which conceptualizes communication as a dynamic interaction between creators, consumers, messages, media, and languages; Foulger's approach captures the fluidity of roles in contemporary digital environments, where users seamlessly switch between producing and interpreting content (Cieniek, 2018). UGC is a valuable data source in the context of socio-cognitive analysis, due to its susceptibility to the expression of emotion – both in the form of solidarity and hate, that makes it a key source of data for researchers analyzing the emotional dimension of public debate (Del Vicario et al., 2016).

3.2. Research results

The claim about the alleged introduction of Ukrainian as a foreign language in Polish schools was quickly amplified by profiles with nationalistic and conservative affiliations, including Polish MP members, which framed the issue in an alarmist and mobilizing tone. For the purposes of this study, four posts were selected for analysis based on their high user engagement and their representativeness of different communication styles and emotionalization strategies within the debate. The research sample consists of four posts published on Facebook according to the following criteria: 1) the issue was presented or suggested to be a fact; 2) published content received a wide response from users (min. 100 comments each; 3) published content was a source for further disinformation.

The table below presents user engagement levels on four Facebook posts published in June 2025 across various ideologically oriented profiles: *Ruch Narodowy*, *Sławomir Skwarek* (MP, Law and Justice party), *Udostępnij.pl* (a viral/popular content profile), *Stowarzyszenie "Wspólnota i Pamięć"*. Engagement indicators include the number of comments, shares, and reactions (likes and emojis), with total engagement shown in the respective column. The data were collected on June 23, 2025; engagement values may change over time due to continued user activity.

Table 1.
Comparative engagement statistics for selected Facebook posts

Facebook profiles	INDICATORS OF ENGAGEMENT			
	comments	shares	reactions	total engagement
Ruch Narodowy https://www.facebook.com/RuchNarodowy	3619	1500	9063	14182
Sławomir Skwarek Poseł na Sejm RP https://www.facebook.com/SlawomirSkwarek	2404	1500	7633	11537
Udostępnij.pl https://www.facebook.com/udostepnijpl	516	75	528	1119
Stowarzyszenie Wspólnota i Pamięć https://www.facebook.com/WspolnotaiPamiec	120	102	273	495

Note: The data presented in the table were collected on June 23, 2025. Please note that the number of reactions, comments, and shares may change over time as user engagement continues.

Source: Author's compilation based on Facebook data.

The posts selected for this case study were published between June 11 and June 18, 2025, across a variety of Facebook profiles representing different ideological and communicative styles. Despite their diversity, they all centered on a false claim regarding the alleged introduction of Ukrainian as a second foreign language in Polish schools. The posts varied in format – from videos and graphic memes to lengthy, quasi-official statements – and were distributed by actors ranging from political figures (e.g., MP Sławomir Skwarek) to nationalist organizations (*Ruch Narodowy*), populist news aggregators (*Udostępnij.pl*), and historically driven NGOs (*Stowarzyszenie „Wspólnota i Pamięć"*). Each post employed distinct discursive strategies, emotional framings, and narrative tropes, but all contributed to the viral spread of disinformation and the polarization of public discourse around national identity and education. The high engagement levels – mainly in the posts by *Ruch Narodowy* and MP *Sławomir Skwarek* – demonstrate that disinformation can function as a highly effective trigger for emotional and political mobilization. Despite the information was officially denied by the Ministry of Education and labeled as false by the independent fact-checking organization Demagog, the posts garnered significant user engagement on Facebook. Engagement levels also differed by profile type. Posts from high-reach, politically aligned accounts (e.g., *Ruch Narodowy, Sławomir Skwarek*) triggered mass emotional reactions and calls to action. In contrast, the post *by Udostępnij.pl*, although more moderate in tone, still provoked substantial discussion. The fact that the information was debunked by official sources (the Ministry of Education and Demagog) did not significantly reduce user engagement. This highlights two key phenomena:

- Confirmation bias – users tend to select and engage with narratives that align with their pre-existing beliefs.
- Emotions over facts – users respond more strongly to emotionally charged frames than to rational corrections.

Empirical studies indicate that factual corrections may paradoxically reinforce existing misperceptions, particularly among individuals with strong ideological predispositions (Nyhan, Reifler, 2010). The small-scale case study presented here confirms these findings,

demonstrating that official debunking had little effect on reducing user engagement with disinformation-laden content.

Comments selection criteria: in order to address the study objectives, 180 comments in total were collected. The analysis excluded comments of a purely *ad personam* nature, mainly personal attacks directed at the Minister of Education, Barbara Nowacka, as well as those containing only vulgar language or expressing emotion without substantive content. The selection focused on comments that featured identifiable cognitive and discursive elements, such as attribution of intentions, framing of reality, use of heuristics, narratives of resistance, emotional mobilization, or argumentative strategies. The number of 60 comments were collected from the post of *Sławomir Skwarek* profile, accordingly the sample of 60 comments was gathered from the post published by *Ruch Narodowy*, 35 posts were selected from UGC shared under Udostępnij.pl content, and 25 comes from the *Stowarzyszenie "Wspólnota i Pamięć"* profile. The aim of the comments analysis was to recognize how users construct social meanings and cognitively respond to media messages.

Initial socio-cognitive analysis of the comments led to identify several cognitive mechanisms present in user generated content: 1) group identity – "us – them" categorization: ingroup bias defined as "the tendency to favor one's own group, its members, its characteristics, and its products, particularly in reference to other groups" (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018); 2) hostile attribution bias – "a general tendency to ascribe harmful or otherwise adverse intent to the ambiguous behavior of others" (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018); 3) historical schema – "cognitive schemas constitute a point of reference for the interpretation of perceptual information: in the recognition process, a person compares perceptual information with schemas "(Maruszewski, 2011, p. 207). A historical schema relates to the organization of knowledge about the past, establishes a framework through which people receive and understand new data about history; 4) availability heuristics – events that are more cognitively accessible are assessed as more probable or as occurring more often; this heuristic plays a large role in extracting information from memory (Maruszewski, 2011, p. 392-393); 5) emotional framing – it is a way of presenting information that intentionally uses emotional content – positive or negative – to influence the perception, interpretation and behavior of an audience (Kahneman, Tversky, 1984). Knowledge about emotional framing allows to exemplify comments according to their emotional-persuasive charge: whether they aim to evoke fear, solidarity, or arousal; 6) micro-narratives – they are short, concise stories, often individual and personal, that reflect the experiences, emotions or perspectives of an individual in a compressed form (Venditti, Piredda, Mattana, 2017). "Small stories as sites of identity work" (Bamberg, Georgakopoulou, 2008): micro-narratives function as a space in which identities of groups and individuals are built and revealed. The following section provides examples of collected UGC together with an analysis of the cognitive mechanism they display:

1) “Us – them” categorization. Collected comments reveal strongly activated group schemas with clear opposition “Poles” (us) vs. “Ukrainians (them). Cognitive schema of this type can be identified in phrases as followed: “We are Poles and we speak Polish, not Ukrainian”, “This is our homeland, and if Ukrainians want to live here, let them learn Polish”, “We are at home, this is OUR COUNTRY, and they are guests here”. The mechanism of “us – them” categorization strengthen the sense of boundaries and make use of simple dichotomies in accordance with the cognitive mechanism of social categorization (ingroup vs outgroup).
2) Attribution of intent. UGC analysis disclose that Facebook users often attribute hidden intentions both to Polish politicians and Ukrainians. Attribution of intent is often accompanied by conspiratorial tendency to search for the concealed causes, often with a negative collocation (hostile attribution bias): “That's why they need Trzaskowski to sign off on all these absurd projects like Ukrainization, LGBT, the influx of engineers and the sale of everything Polish”, “Let's not allow it, because soon Ukrainian will be the official language and we will be a minority in our own country”.
3) Heuristics of simplified reasoning. The comments show simplified reasoning based on individual experiences or stories: “I come from a time when we were learning Russian... I went to Russia and couldn't communicate”, “In Ukraine, they were closing Polish schools, and our children are supposed to learn their language?”. Interpretation of the situation is often based on examples easily accessible in memory and often emotional.
4) Emotional frames. Most comments are strongly emotionally charged – anger, contempt, and fear dominate: „Stop!! I don’t agree to learn Ukrainian!! This is Poland…”, “This is an insult to Poles”, “Why the hell should I learn this Ukrainian crap” “Treason”. Keywords such as “traitors”, “Banderites”, “genocide in Volhynia” introduce emotional frames that fuel hostility and mobilize resistance.
5) Micro-narratives. Micro-narratives often involve parental perspectives, past schooling, or embodied emotional reactions. Examples include statements like “If my child brings home textbooks to learn this Banderite language, I will personally go to the school and smash this filth on the teacher who gave it to my child”, or “I already had to learn Russian by force, maybe that’s enough”. By invoking family roles or historical memories, these micro-narratives transform abstract policy debates into emotionally charged personal concerns.

The table below presents specific linguistic examples illustrating the application of each cognitive mechanism.

Table 2.
Typology of cognitive mechanisms in UGC with linguistic examples

Type of cognitive mechanism	Cognitive mechanisms in user-generated content		
	Definition	**Language indicators**	**UGC example**
Group identity bias	Emphasis on the division into 'us' and 'them', reference to the national, cultural or local community	Poles, our children, this is Poland, we are at home	'This is Poland, and they are guests', 'Let Ukrainians learn our language'
Hostile attribution bias	Ascribing the intention to harm Poland, Poles, families by authorities or foreign groups	traitors, they want to denationalize us, Bandera supporters in the government, this is plan	'She must hate Poland and Poles very much!!!', 'The government acts like Ukraine's little dog'
Historical schema	Referring to well-known historical events (Volhynia, Russification) that evoke emotions and fear	Volhynia, Bandera, Russian language at school in the Polish People's Republic, genocide	'We already had Russian in schools once', 'Teaching Bandera language after Volhynia? It's meanness'
Availability heuristics	Users base their judgments and emotional reactions on examples that are easily recalled from memory - often because they are media-publicized, emotionally charged, or recently experienced	And later it will be: Afghan, Venezuelan, Syrian...; what is this language for?, at least you can communicate in Russian, children should learn western languages	'Russian is better, at least you'll get by somewhere', 'Ukrainian is gibberish that no one needs'
Emotional framing	Emotionally charged language: vulgarisms, contempt, sarcasm, dramatization	morons, this is a scandal, stupid woman, get out disgrace, betrayal	'Get out of here with this minister!!!', 'enough of this shit', stop this Ukropolis'
Micro-narrative	Recalling one's own experiences or family history as an argument	forced to learn Russian, our children's computers were taken away, we were given nothing abroad	'I was forced to learn Russian at school', 'In Germany we had to learn their language'

Source: Author's compilation based on Facebook data.

The analyzed sample of UGC vary considerably in length, style, and rhetorical strategy, reflecting a diverse range of ways in which cognitive mechanisms manifest in everyday online discourse. At one extreme, a high-impact expressions such as the single-word comment "Treason". Even though it is brief, it carries multiple mental operations at once pointing to an enemy, stirring emotions, and drawing a clear line between "us" and "them" through a strong moral judgment. At the opposite end, longer statements, such as a 100-word polemical comment enumerating political demands (e.g., "Poland should be for Poles, not Ukrainians..."), deploy an elaborate argumentative structure that combines historical schemata, emotional appeals, and in-group/out-group constructions. Additionally, comments that simultaneously engage multiple cognitive mechanisms, including micro-narratives (for instance, parental exhortations to "show children how to fight for what is theirs"), illustrate how personal storytelling merges with collective identity-building and symbolic historical references (such as the metaphor of the Trojan horse). This diversity underscores how online commentary serves as a rich site for observing how individuals cognitively process and communicate sociopolitical issues through varying discursive forms.

An examination of the manually coded dataset reveals notable quantitative patterns in how different cognitive mechanisms appear in UGC. Group identity markers were the most common, showing that many users focused on who belongs to "us" versus "them". Emotional framing was also very frequent, adding strong feelings to the discussion. Many comments used historical references or made negative attributions about the intentions of others, suggesting that people often see current issues through past conflicts and distrust. Less often, but still notable, were examples of availability heuristics, where vivid or familiar cases were used as proof, and personal micro-narratives, where users shared short personal stories. Overall, this shows that identity and emotion drive much of the conversation, but personal examples and mental shortcuts also shape how people discuss these issues. The frequency of cognitive mechanisms in the analyzed sample of comments is presented in Figure 1.

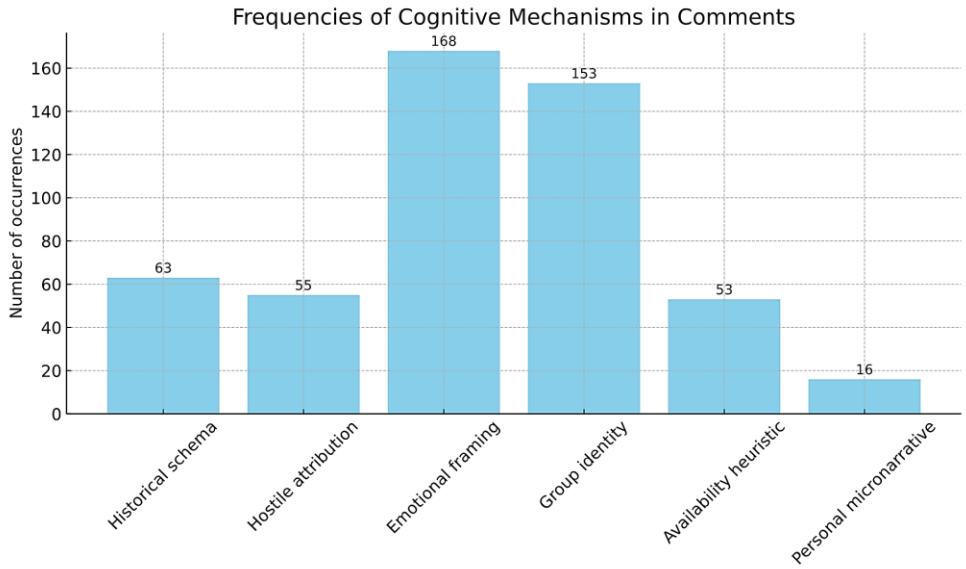

Figure 1. Frequencies of cognitive mechanisms in analyzed comments.

Source: Author's own study.

The quantitative distribution of cognitive mechanisms in user comments—most notably the prevalence of emotional framing and group identity markers—closely aligns with the nature of the posts that prompted these reactions. The analyzed posts, though varied in form and originating from diverse actors, uniformly centered on a polarizing, false claim about Ukrainian language education, which directly tapped into concerns over national sovereignty and cultural integrity. Commenters frequently engaged through affect-laden expressions of anger or fear (emotional framing) and by drawing sharp distinctions between in-groups ("Poles") and out-groups ("Ukrainians," or broadly, "others"). The high frequency of these mechanisms in the comments thus reflects not only general tendencies in online discourse but also the specific communicative strategies of the posts themselves, which leveraged emotionally resonant and identity-focused frames to amplify engagement. UGC analysis illustrates how disinformation content, especially when linked to national identity and historical sensitivities, activates cognitive patterns that reinforce polarization and social division.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study align with existing literature on the cognitive and emotional underpinnings of online public discourse. For instance, the dominance of emotional framing in user comments aligns with studies by Brady et al. (2017), who found that moral-emotional language significantly increases the diffusion of political messages on social media. As highlighted by Del Vicario et al. (2016), emotionally charged content and identity-based narratives are key drivers of user engagement.

The predominance of emotional framing and group identity markers recognized in the analyzed comments emphasizes how user-generated content becomes a site for reinforcing in-group cohesion and mobilizing affective responses to perceived threats. The use of historical schemata and availability heuristics illustrates how individuals rely on familiar cognitive shortcuts to make sense of complex sociopolitical information. These mechanisms contribute to the persistence of polarized views, even in the face of official corrections (Nyhan, Reifler, 2010).

The analysis was limited to a single political controversy within the Polish sociopolitical context – namely, the disinformation surrounding the alleged introduction of Ukrainian as a second foreign language in schools. As such, the cognitive and emotional patterns observed in user comments are closely tied to this specific cultural and historical context. Additionally, the study was conducted on a purposive sample of 180 highly engaged Facebook comments, selected from posts that differed both in ideological orientation and rhetorical approach. The analysis focused exclusively on UGC in response to a specific set of posts in terms of explicit of cognitive processes – no additional contextual data such as user demographics or network diffusion patterns was added. Future research could extend this approach to comparative analyses across different countries or policy issues to deepen understanding of how cognitive processes shape digital public spheres.

Present findings provide empirical support for theoretical frameworks that emphasize the interconnection of cognition, emotion, and identity in online discourse. They demonstrate the importance of recognizing UGC not just as a mirror of opinions but as a dynamic platform where emotional framing, and identity narratives actively shape public meaning-making; often in ways that sustain social polarization.

This study offers several practical implications. It shows that communication strategies must go beyond factual corrections, which alone are insufficient to stop the spread of disinformation. The findings also inform media literacy programs by illustrating how heuristics, historical schemata, and emotional frames shape public responses to political content. Integrating these insights into education may strengthen resilience against manipulation and foster more reflective engagement. Finally, real-time monitoring of user-generated content can serve as an early warning system for polarizing narratives, supporting more effective responses and inclusive public debate.

5. Conclusion

This paper was intended to illustrate how user-generated content (UGC) can be a rich source of insight into the cognitive and emotional processes shaping online public debates. It argues that UGC is more than just a record of individual opinions; it is an active space where people collectively interpret events, build group identities, and contribute to polarization as these dynamics emerge in real time.

This study was conducted using a socio-cognitive framework that combined tools from discourse analysis and cognitive psychology. Integration of these perspectives led to uncover processes such as heuristic reasoning, historical schemata framing, and micro-narratives that would be difficult to be recognize in broader studies of quantitative type.

A purposive sample of four Facebook posts spreading disinformation about the alleged introduction of Ukrainian as a school language in Poland, served as the initial focus. From these posts, 180 comments were carefully selected and manually coded to identify key cognitive and emotional mechanisms. By focusing on explicit linguistic indicators and personal micro-narratives within these comments, the research was able to reveal how users construct meaning, express emotions, and reinforce social divisions in response to contested political information online.

Socio-cognitive analysis of UGC on migration issues represents an important point of reference and a valuable data source for understanding how public attitudes and collective emotions evolve in digital environments. For further research a cross-platform approach is recommended: by comparing narratives and cognitive patterns across different social media platforms, researchers can capture the diverse ways in which migration is framed, contested, or emotionally charged; a cross-platform UGC analysis would be essential for building a more comprehensive picture of how digital publics negotiate complex social issues. Further work could also integrate network analysis or sentiment tracking to capture how such cognitive and emotional dynamics diffuse through online environments.

Presented paper demonstrates how UGC analysis bring insights on social tensions – often unarticulated social anxieties and collective expectations that traditional survey might not record. Within the Web 2.0 environment, where users not only absorb but also actively contribute to shaping public discourse, analyzing this content provides a distinctive lens through which is convenient to observe deeper currents of social mood and collective feeling.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study also indicates that effective responses to disinformation require strategies that combine factual accuracy with attention to emotional and identity-based dynamics, offering practical insights for media literacy education and communication policy.

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