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SOCIOLINGUISTIC PECULIARITIES AND TECHNOLOGICAL CAPABILITIES OF VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE GENERATION OF LANGUAGE, BEHAVIOR, AND DIGITAL IDENTITIES

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the conditions under which AI-generated influencers attain social legitimacy within platform environments, with a specific focus on the empirical TikTok project called “Dundarev Family.” Drawing on the concept of simulacra, the research analyzes how synthetic characters establish credibility through language, humor, and culturally embedded communication, with particular attention to the role of platform-specific affordances in shaping audience perception. The research utilizes a mixed-methods design, incorporating the creation of five virtual personas representing the Dundarev family, experimental comparisons between human-authored and AI-generated texts, qualitative linguistic analysis of 951 user comments, and assessment of platform-based engagement metrics.

The findings identify a central paradox: while AI exhibits limited ability to replicate culturally specific humor and dialectal nuance, the virtual characters nonetheless achieve high levels of user engagement, emotional response, and perceived closeness. Audience interaction is primarily affective and reactive, marked by predominantly emoji-based communication and minimal explicit recognition of the characters’ artificial nature. The study contends that social legitimacy in digital environments is not contingent upon linguistic authenticity, but rather emerges from the interplay of cultural recognizability, platform-specific communication practices, and affective engagement. AI influencers operate as hybrid entities rather than purely artificial ones, pointing to the increasing significance of human-AI collaboration in producing culturally resonant content and to a broader shift in how authenticity is constructed in algorithmically mediated environments.

KEYWORDS: Virtual influencers, LLMs, AI-generated text, sociolinguistics, parasocial interaction, TikTok

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of AI-generated influencers represents a fundamental transformation in digital communication, as visibility and social presence are no longer restricted to human actors. These synthetic figures serve as simulacra, as defined by Jean Baudrillard (1981), functioning as representations that not only imitate reality but also construct new forms of social meaning and presence.

Within platform environments, authenticity is increasingly conceptualized as a negotiated effect shaped by interaction, visibility, and perception, rather than as an inherent property of content. José van Dijck (2013) contends that social media platforms operate through specific logics that structure communication, participation, and recognition. Tarleton Gillespie (2014) further emphasizes the influence of algorithmic curation in determining what becomes visible and socially relevant. In this context, the credibility of AI-generated characters relies not only on visual realism but also on their capacity to reproduce culturally meaningful communicative patterns, such as humor, dialect, and everyday conversational dynamics.

Although academic interest in virtual influencers is increasing, most existing research has concentrated on their marketing effectiveness and persuasive potential (e.g., Moustakas et al., 2020; Li et al., 2023). The role of language as a central mechanism in constructing perceived authenticity and social legitimacy remains underexplored. This research gap is especially significant in low-resource linguistic contexts, where cultural identity is closely tied to language use, and generative models encounter structural limitations due to uneven training data (Pava et al., 2025).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language serves as both a medium of communication and a marker of belonging, shared experience, and cultural memory. Local dialects and humor, in particular, depend on implicit knowledge, contextual cues, and social positioning that are challenging to formalize and reproduce algorithmically. Recent studies indicate that large language models frequently struggle with culturally embedded humor, generating outputs that are structurally correct but semantically shallow (Quan et al., 2025; Kim & Chilton, 2025).

Simultaneously, user engagement with digital personas is influenced by parasocial dynamics, wherein audiences form one-sided emotional connections with media figures. J. Patrick Stein et al. (2024) demonstrate that such relationships can develop not only with human influencers but also with virtual influencers, provided that figures display sufficient cues of relatability and human likeness.

A central premise of this study is that AI-generated influencers seldom operate as fully autonomous systems. Rather, they emerge as hybrid socio-technical constructs that integrate human-authored cultural content with algorithmically generated forms. This hybridity allows synthetic characters to

address the limitations of generative models in culturally specific communication, particularly in areas such as dialect and humor.

Building on this context, the present study examines how sociolinguistic features and technological affordances interact to shape audience perceptions of AI influencers. Focusing on our team's experimental TikTok project "*Dundarev Family*," the study investigates whether synthetic characters can achieve social legitimacy despite their limited capacity to reproduce culturally embedded linguistic nuance.

The Dundarev family brings together five virtual figures across three generations – a small social universe in which different versions of Bulgarian everyday life are reflected. Each embodies a recognizable archetype. **Bai Trendyo**, the patriarch, is a man shaped by socialism and the turbulent years of the post-communist transition, whose accumulated disillusionment has turned him into a skeptical and often uncompromising commentator on the present. Beside him stands **auntie Ghena**, his long-time partner and anchor, who inhabits a world of folk wisdom, omens, and that quiet trust in the supernatural characteristic of Bulgarian tradition. **Zhuzha**, their daughter, is a modern, emancipated young woman, suspended between inherited norms and new digital forms of self-expression. **Tsontcho**, her husband, embodies the pragmatism of the small entrepreneur, formed in the economic uncertainty of the 1990s and accustomed to navigating challenges on the go. **Leonardo (Leo)**, their sixteen-year-old son, gives voice to Generation Alpha – deeply immersed in technology, rebellious in spirit, yet still searching for his place between the real and the digital, between belonging and uncertainty.

The multilayered structure of kinship relations, combined with the aim of maximizing character anthropomorphization and broadening audience accessibility, determines the choice to develop the content not around a single influencer but within a comedic sitcom format. The project thus functions as a micro-model of Bulgarian national psychology, in which similarities and contradictions coexist in a stable interdependent relationship.

This study proposes that the success of AI influencers depends not on the precise imitation of human communication, but on their ability to function within recognizable cultural and platform-specific communicative frameworks.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method research design was employed, integrating several complementary approaches. The methodology combines a case study of the "Dundarev Family" project[1] with a comparative experimental component that

1 The research focuses on the "Dundarev's Family" project, which features five virtual characters developed using HeyGen, Midjourney, Suno AI, Veo 3, ChatGPT, and Affogato AI. These tools determined the characters' appearance, language, and behavior. The avatars performed humorous scripts in a digital sitcom format, a genre recognized for sustaining viewer interest. Between June 13 and September 1, 2025, the research team

evaluates human-authored and AI-generated texts on dialect accuracy, humor, and perceived authenticity.

The content production process utilizes a hybrid model. Human-authored texts ensure cultural and linguistic authenticity, while generative tools contribute to visual representation, voice synthesis, and experimental content generation. This approach enables controlled comparison between human and AI-generated outputs and establishes a basis for evaluating their respective effectiveness.

The research also includes a qualitative linguistic analysis of 951 user comments, structured across semantic, discursive, syntactic, metapragmatic, and pragmatic levels. Additionally, the study incorporates platform-based analysis of engagement metrics, including Engagement Rate, Viral Index, and Average Watch Rate.

Analytical reliability was ensured by manually reviewing a sample of automated classifications generated through GPT-assisted processing, followed by iterative refinement of the coding scheme. The research team's dual role as both content creators and analysts is recognized as a potential limitation.

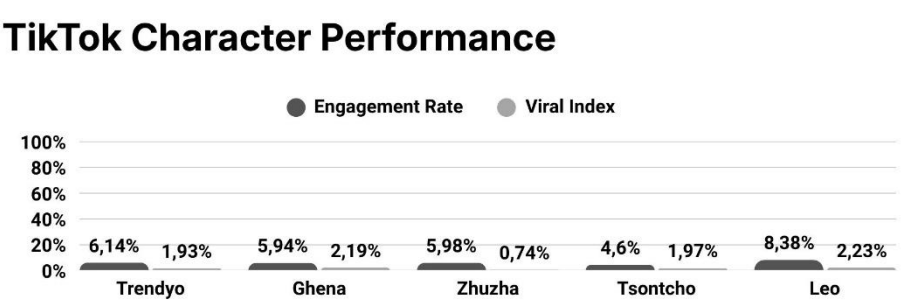
ANALYSIS OF METRICS FOR AI INFLUENCERS IN A TIKTOK SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

During a two-and-a-half-month period, the Dundarev family's TikTok profile generated over **790,000 views** and attracted **673,000 unique viewers**, **54% of whom were new**. This proportion of new viewers suggests that the account is reaching a dynamic, expanding audience rather than remaining in a static "echo chamber." Additionally, of the **3,425 profile views**, nearly half led to new followers, **totaling 1,601**.

Analysis of **58 videos** from the Dundarev family's profile indicates an **average engagement rate of 5.58%**. This rate indicates that approximately 5 out of every 100 viewers interacted with the content by liking, sharing, saving, or commenting. These metrics are derived from aggregated data, including approximately **26,000 likes**, **950 comments**, **13,000 shares**, and **3,330 saves** across **793,000 views**.

Metrics were analyzed by individual character and through inter-character interactions, such as duets. Quantitative analysis of the five Dundarev family members (Trendyo, Ghena, Zhuzha, Tsontcho, and Leo) demonstrates distinct differences in their impact and modes of audience engagement. For each video, metrics including views, new followers, likes, comments, and shares were calculated. For the entire content set, aggregated metrics included total views, unique viewers, new viewers, total comments, likes, shares, followers, and traffic sources (*Fig. 1*).

published 58 videos featuring comedic monologues and dialogues depicting everyday Bulgarian life.



Character	Videos	Views	Likes	Comments	Shares	Saves	New Fowollers
Trendyo	18	362903	11167	430	5655	1447	890
Ghena	11	289086	8614	285	4916	1176	781
Zhuzha	8	87518	3226	122	736	453	200
Tsontcho	4	56246	1157	79	868	145	56
Leo	3	71901	3614	130	1313	428	387

Fig. 1. Average Metrics by Character

A more detailed analysis of the overall trends requires consideration of several content performance metrics: **Engagement Rate (ER)**, **Average Watch Time (AWT)**, **Average Completion Rate (ACR)**, **Average Watch Ratio (AWR)**, and **Viral Index (VI)**. Dundarevs' performance was evaluated using five key criteria that provide insights into both audience size and the depth of engagement with the characters (*Table 1*).

METRICS	AVERAGE VALUE	EXPLANATION
Engagement rate (ER)	**5.58%**	Shows the level of audience interaction with the content.
Average Watch Time (AWT)	**6.87 sec.**	Reflex the average time users spend watching a single video.
Percentage of viewers who watched until the end (Average Completion Rate – ACR)	**38.52%**	Indicates the percentage of viewers who watch a video to the end.

Percentage of content viewed (Average Watch Ratio – AWR)	**54.29%**	Shows what portion of the video content is watched on average by users.
Organic content sharing rate (Viral Index – VI)	**1.64 %**	Shows how often users share a video compared to its total number of views.

Table 1. Content Engagement and Performance Metrics

Trendafil Dundarev (bai Trendyo) emerges as the most active participant, producing **18 videos**. His engagement rate (ER) of **6.14%** is notable, and his high viral index (VI) of **1.93%** suggests strong viral emotion. Additionally, his average completion rate (ACR) of **43%** surpasses the overall family metric of 38.5%.

Ghenoveva Dundareva ranks second in activity, with **11** standalone posts and performance metrics closely aligning with those of Trendafil Dundarev. Her engagement rate (ER) of **5.94%** remains at the upper end of global standards. Although her average completion rate (ACR) is lower at **36.7%**, her viral index (VI) of **2.19%** is among the highest within the family.

Rosalina Dundareva (Zhuzha) is the third-most-successful participant. Despite producing only eight videos, she demonstrates higher viewer engagement (**ER = 5.98%**) than her mother. She also achieves the highest average completion rate (**ACR = 43.47%**) among the group, although her viral index (**VI = 0.74%**) is the lowest, indicating limited shareability.

Tsontcho Tsongkin has **only 4 solo clips**, which explains his lower ER (**4.6%**), but his ACR (**40.52%**) and AWT (**5.86 sec**.) are close to the group averages, even surpassing Trendyo's levels for viral (**VI = 1.97%**).

Leonardo Tsongkin (Leo)[2] represents a notable deviation from standard parameters for average video length, which is typically around 12 seconds, and the common TikTok format of up to 60 seconds. Leo has produced **only three clips**, each averaging **84.42 seconds**. This extended duration is attributable to the genre-specific nature of his content, as musical performances require a longer narrative and a more elaborate audiovisual format. Consequently, Leo's average

2 The name 'Leonardo Tsongkin' exemplifies a deliberate anthroponymic strategy for image construction and social positioning. The given name "Leonardo" carries strong international connotations, reflecting the social dynamics of post-communist Bulgarian trend toward "globalized" naming associated with prestige, cultural capital, and symbolic distance from the local. In contrast, the surname "Tsongkin" is firmly rooted in the Northwestern region, reinforced by the father's name " Tsontcho" – an archaic, regionally marked name often perceived as "rural." This tension between global and local, modern and traditional, produces a deliberate effect: a hybrid identity that both provokes and ironizes, while making visible the social dynamics of post-socialist Bulgarian society. Anthroponymy here is thus not neutral, but a key resource in constructing a recognizable and layered digital persona.

completion rate (ACR) is relatively modest at **3.77%**. However, his engagement rate (ER) of **8.38%** and viral index (VI) of **2.23%** are the highest among the AI family, suggesting that his content elicits the strongest audience reactions and likely appeals to the younger demographic (18–25 years old).

CONSTRUCTING CHARACTER COMMUNICATION ARCHITECTURE WITH HUMAN AND AI-GENERATED TEXTS

During the development of the storylines and communication style for the " Dundarev Family," preliminary research was conducted among members of the target group: residents of Northwestern Bulgaria. The objective was to obtain a realistic, independent assessment of the extent to which large language models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, can reproduce humor using dialectal expressions from the Western Miziya (Vratsa) and the Northwestern Bulgarian dialect. Because the social legitimacy of the characters depends not only on their plausible outward appearance but also on their language, this pilot test is crucial to ensuring appropriate, realistic digital character behavior (Мицова/Mitsova, 2014; Мицова/Mitsova, 2017). For a convincing algorithmic representation, speech must be both conversational and imbued with local, everyday connotations.

Thus, the primary empirical analysis serves, on the one hand, as the basis for methodological decisions in constructing Dundarev's monologues and dialogues, but is also motivated by the intensifying academic debates in which LLMs are described as "poor comedians" who lack emotional empathy and more often reproduce "flat jokes" devoid of cultural meaning and depth (Quan et al., 2025; Sakabe et al., 2025; Avetisyan et al., 2024; OpenAI, 2025).

The initial stage of the test involves providing contextual guidance and training to the generative tool using selected samples of regional language. Notably, this approach does not entail technical fine-tuning of the model; rather, it employs "in-context learning," in which the system learns to perform new tasks through examples provided directly in the prompt. Sources include texts by Stoyan Nikolov-Torlaka (Николов-Торлака, 2014/Nikolov-Torlaka, 2014), whose fiction offers a valuable resource for transitional dialects, local social issues, and culturally rich humor, often characterized by irony and self-irony.

The second corpus of materials is drawn from popular social media groups dedicated to the culture of Northwestern Bulgaria. The most liked and widely shared short phrases were selected, as their effectiveness has been demonstrated through organic user dissemination. This additional training data is necessary because, although the project is based on established literary and ethnographic archetypes, the content must remain relevant to contemporary digital culture, where jokes are often condensed to suit platform-specific communication. In an environment saturated with memes, meta-humor, and easily digestible narratives, there is a risk that the characters may appear overly archaic. Therefore, stylistic complexity is required to preserve authenticity while accommodating the consumption habits of online audiences.

GPT was tasked with conducting an in-depth analysis of expressive devices, style, and dialect in the provided materials, followed by the generation of **three short lines (monologues and dialogues)** for individual characters on specific topics. The prompts required not merely the reproduction of dialect, but the creation of lines that are conversational and situationally humorous, thereby avoiding unnatural overuse of dialect words that detract from the message.

Although the model initially demonstrates a reasonable grasp of the dialect and generates stylistically adequate texts, it fails to maintain the comedic thread, resulting in jokes that are superficial and predictable (OpenAI, 2025) (*Fig. 2*).

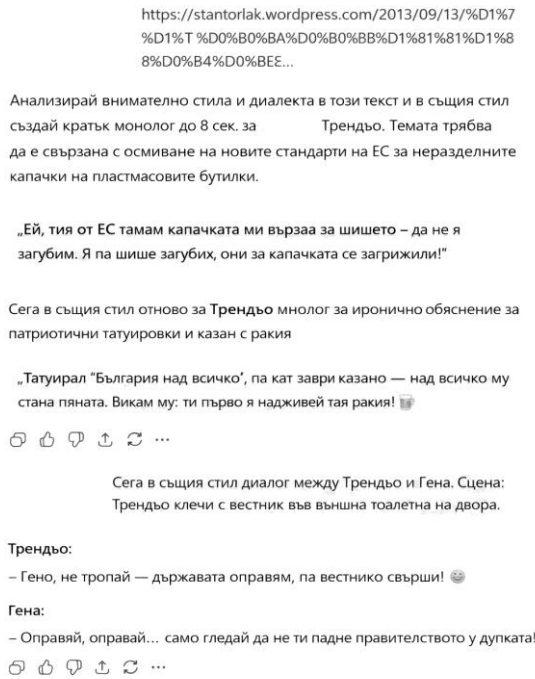


Fig. 2. An example of AI generating humorous texts in regional dialects

These findings indicate a fundamental limitation of generative models. Although they can replicate language patterns, they often struggle to produce culturally relevant meaning, particularly in humor and dialect.

To verify the accuracy of the research interpretation, an online survey was distributed among 74 respondents from Northwestern Bulgaria (the regions of Vratsa, Montana, and Vidin). Participants evaluated the AI-generated texts alongside three human-authored texts on the same topic, without being informed which texts were synthetic or authentic to avoid bias. Respondents rated the texts on a five-point scale (from 1, very low, to 5, very high) for **dialect accuracy**, **humor**, and **authenticity of spoken language**.

The survey data confirm the initial findings: residents of Northwestern Bulgaria intuitively identified the artificially generated lines, ranking them lower than the authentic ones across all metrics. The AI dialect received a score of **3.08 compared to 4.04 for the human dialect. AI humor was rated 2.76 versus 3.72, and the authenticity of GPT's spoken language was rated 2.97 versus 3.93 for the human version** (*Fig. 3*).

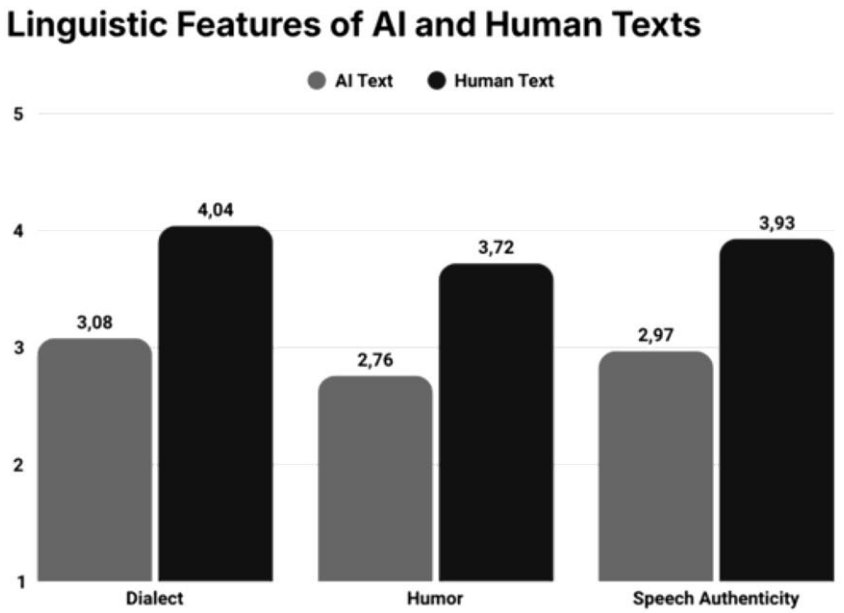


Fig. 3. Respondents' average ratings for dialect, humor, and spoken authenticity of AI-generated versus human-authored texts

These results indicate that artificial intelligence functions as a moderate imitator, capable of handling regional accents satisfactorily and constructing stylistically accurate humorous pieces, occasionally including a punchline. However, its impact remains insufficiently convincing, as local humor encompasses more than linguistic form; it reflects shared life experiences and a sense of inner belonging. Respondents recognized elements of humor but did not identify them as reflective of their own lived experience. Local humor extends beyond linguistic form; it encodes shared experience, cultural memory, and a sense of social belonging that remains only partially accessible to generative systems.

This assessment aligns with the conclusions of experts in the AI industry, who characterize local humor as the "most fragile" cognitive element and the first to deteriorate during algorithmic reproduction (Bussey, 2026). Steven Bussey of Andovar, a company specializing in language data for intelligent systems,

observes that true humor often relies on extremes such as hyperbole, taboos, and contradictions. These elements are typically filtered out of training data, leading models to favor more neutral and safe interpretations (Bussey, 2026).

Despite the continuous provision of sample materials in the target language, GPT fails to develop sufficient cultural depth in its jokes. This limitation arises from both the inherently sterile environment of machine learning and the absence of genuine cognitive and social skills (Kim & Chilton, 2025). The findings underscore a fundamental limitation of generative systems. Although these systems can replicate surface-level linguistic features, they often fail to produce culturally embedded meaning. Consequently, human-authored content remains essential in domains where authenticity relies on shared experience and implicit cultural knowledge.

Multilingual limitations also contribute to this issue, as most publicly available generative tools are trained primarily on widely spoken languages, while those with fewer resources, such as Bulgarian, are often neglected (Pava et al., 2025). This creates a significant barrier to achieving a deep understanding of local vernaculars, which involve a complex interplay of rhythm, economy of expression, and expressiveness. While artificial intelligence can capture linguistic structure, it often fails to produce a holistic sound that resonates with members of the relevant speech community.

This is further evidenced by the rating of spoken-language authenticity in AI-generated texts (2.97), which contrasts sharply with that of human speech (3.93). This disparity indicates that the issue extends beyond superficial humor and artificial local speech to include the robotic quality of the lines. When text is perceived as unrealistic and unnatural, the inclusion of dialect markers and formal humor is insufficient to produce a strong comic effect. Naturalness serves as a key mediator between dialectal plausibility and effective humor; when the speaker appears foreign to the audience, parasocial closeness cannot be established.

The low ratings assigned by the target group to the artificially generated monologues and dialogues of the Dundarevs, combined with the project's objective of maximizing realistic behavioral traits in digital influencers, motivate the decision to base most of the family’s content on authentic and contemporary aphorisms, jokes, and short phrases circulating on social media.

Another factor influencing this decision is the significant deviations observed in voice cloning and synthesis systems (HeyGen, ElevenLabs) when reproducing the phonetic structure of lines. For example, in the Northwest accent, stresses are often misplaced, and intonation is distorted. These challenges are well documented; the difficulties AI encounters in capturing the expressiveness, rhythm, and emotion of local dialects have been extensively studied in the academic literature (Perez, 2025; Bhushan et al., 2025) and are confirmed in the Bulgarian context in this study.

Text-to-Speech (TTS) systems tend to standardize expressive style and may develop linguistic bias, leading the model to fail to comprehend meaning and creating a new form of digital inequality (Michel et al., 2025). This occurs

primarily because there are insufficient training recordings with linguistic variation. Consequently, all character voices are pre-cloned from real speakers using Speech-to-Speech (STS) systems, and the written lines submitted for synthesis are repeatedly tested and edited to achieve naturalness. This process remains the most challenging task for the team, as the tools frequently fail to reproduce prosody, even when standard graphic symbols for stress and pauses are present (e.g., an ellipsis indicates an extended pause, a dash indicates a dramatic pause, etc.).

Despite the lower ratings for AI-generated texts in the pilot study and the labor-intensive nature of pronunciation training, the project incorporates a separate experimental component. This component tests whether ChatGPT, although it may not effectively handle Northwestern dialect humor, can succeed with measured speech. The syllabic-tonal organization of Bulgarian verse is complex, further complicated by the language's free-floating stress, and requires careful selection of expressive means to maintain both rhythm and authenticity. These factors pose significant challenges for large language models, making the song-poetic form particularly well-suited for evaluating their linguistic and creative capabilities.

As part of the repertoire of the youngest Dundarev, Leo Tsongkin, whose background includes local musical performances, two songs have been created using generative technologies. In addition to musical accompaniment and vocals produced with the Suno AI platform and a music video generated with Veo 3, the lyrics were also composed by ChatGPT.

The language model was provided with two prompts for generating verse: **traditional home remedies** and **childhood in the village**. The theme of folk medicine is both highly personal for Leo, as it is associated with the image and influence of his grandmother Ghena, and communal, as it reconstructs enduring traditions transmitted across generations. Childhood in the village is a prominent leitmotif in Bulgarian culture and literature, evoking nostalgia for carefree days and a sense of reconnection with one’s origins. The selection of these specific themes enables an assessment not only of the language model’s ability to compose poetry in Bulgarian, but also of its capacity to convey the spirit of emotional cultural memory.

The AI-generated texts presented below are provided in their original form to preserve their phonetic and rhythmic qualities, accompanied by a literal English translation in accordance with international linguistic conventions (MLA style) (Modern Language Association, 2018). Linguistic analysis is conducted on the original Bulgarian versions. The translation serves an explanatory purpose, following established practices in the analysis of non-English poetry, as it cannot fully convey the original prosody (Soumia & Kebir, 2025).

Домашен лек	***Детството на село***
<u>*Куплет 1:*</u> *От Враца до Средна Бела Речка* *здравна грижа без аптечка.* *Баба Гена ма лекува* *с билкова ракия и точилка.* *А майка ми прави лунен масаж,* *върху челото ми рисува звезден пейзаж.* <u>*Припев :*</u> *На кашлица щом дойде ред* *не Мария Мед, а оцет и лед!* *И газ, и мас, и чесън във носа* *у наше село т'ва са си природни чудеса!* <u>*Куплет 2:*</u> *Отгледан съм с туршия,* *вместо хапчета – литрова магия.* *Сърбах попара, носех цимент!* *И пак станах човек – горе-доле,* *процент по процент!*	<u>*Куплет 1:*</u> *В училище пишех с огризан молив,* *а лятото джапах в реката – див и щастлив!* *Банята беше понятие, а не помещение,* *но бяхме хора, не просто население!* <u>*Припев:*</u> *На село на никой не му пукаше* *за калта под ноктите!* *Светът ни бе дворът с кокошките.* *Не бяхме богати, но имахме смисъл* *да живеем живота си истински* *със смях и със писък!* <u>*Куплет 2:*</u> *Вратата ни зееше – нямаше катинар,* *но в двора си аз бях и цар, и господар.* *Закуската беше липов чай и филия с мас,* *но беше по-вкусно от мастър шеф,* *ловя ви на бас!*

Homemade Remedy	***A Village Childhood***
<u>*Verse 1:*</u> *From Vratsa to Sredna Bela Rechka* *healthy care without a pharmacy.* *Grandma Ghena cures me* *with herbal rakia and a rolling pin.* *And my mother gives me a moon massage,* *painting a starry landscape on my forehead.* <u>*Chorus:*</u> *When it's time for a cough,* *not „Maria Med,", but vinegar and ice!* *And gas, and lard, and garlic in the nose –* *in our village these are natural wonders!* <u>*Verse 2:*</u> *I was raised on pickles,* *instead of pills – liter-sized magic.* *I sipped popara, carried cement!* *And I became human again – more or less,* *percent by percent!*	<u>*Verse 1:*</u> *At school I wrote with a chewed-up pencil,* *and in summer I splashed in the river – wild and happy!* *The bathroom was an idea, not a room,* *yet we were people, not just a population!* <u>*Chorus:*</u> *In the village no one cared* *about the mud under your nails!* *Our world was the yard with chickens.* *We weren't rich, but we had a reason* *to live our lives for real,* *with laughter and with screams!* <u>*Verse 2:*</u> *Our door gaped open – there was no lock,* *yet in my yard I was both king and master.* *Breakfast was linden tea and bread with butter,* *but it tasted better than a master chef's –* *I bet you!*

In both verse texts, the artificial intelligence exhibits notably greater writing proficiency in Bulgarian. The model selects appropriate vocabulary to evoke the atmosphere of rural life, such as "*pickles*," "*herbal brandy*," and "*popara*,"[3] and integrates these elements into effective rhymes. As a result, the text resonates with the familiarity of colloquial folk speech. Furthermore, the model does not adhere rigidly to rhyme schemes; alongside full and partial rhymes, it also employs free verse, as seen in the chorus of "Childhood in the Village." This approach prioritizes semantic content over strict adherence to form while maintaining rhythmic coherence.

Particularly interesting is the way GPT interprets and incorporates cultural and ethnographic elements into the lyrics. For example, the phrase "*a lunar landscape is drawn on my forehead*" is an allegorical representation of the incantation custom, an ancient healing ritual involving symbolic actions.

There are also examples of self-irony presented in an original way through hyperbole – "*I supped popara – I carried cement*," in which disciplinary methods are deliberately exaggerated and presented with a humorous touch, in Ran Bosilek's artistic style, to emphasize the resilience of character and the psychological effect of "toughening up." Hyperbole is also evident in the expressions "*in my yard I was both king and master*" and "*Our world was the yard with the chickens*," in which the confines of home are the whole world, illustrating a sense of security, tranquility, and sufficiency.

A particularly notable aspect is ChatGPT's approach to drawing a parallel between conventional pharmaceutical products and folk remedies, presenting them as two distinct concepts of care: institutional and familial/clan-based. Within the song, folk remedies are imbued with cultural significance rather than medical utility, serving as a tribute to tradition and ancestral wisdom.

These observations indicate that ChatGPT does not yet perform convincingly as a comedian, particularly when tasked with generating jokes that rely on specific local expressions and pronounced cultural nuances. However, when assuming the role of a copywriter, the model demonstrates significantly greater creative potential. It is noteworthy that artificial intelligence is already receiving recognition for original poetry (Караманев/Karamanev, 2024) and is increasingly utilized by established artists and musicians for lyric generation and song composition (Wittaker, 2024).

The model's strong performance in generating poetic texts prompted their inclusion in Leo's content. This decision aimed to assess, within a real online environment and among a broader audience, whether such an approach would

3 *Popara* is a traditional Bulgarian dish made of bread softened with hot liquid (such as milk, tea, or water), often combined with cheese, butter, or sugar. Beyond its nutritional function, it serves as a cultural marker of childhood, modest living, and intergenerational continuity, embedding layers of social memory related to rural upbringing, scarcity, and everyday resilience, and frequently associated with narratives of endurance and "toughening" in Bulgarian cultural experience.

enhance the character's impact or, conversely, whether its entirely synthetic nature – including image, voice, and speech – would elicit the "Uncanny Valley" effect.

The results are particularly significant, as Leo appears in only three videos yet receives the strongest audience response among related characters. This outcome is unexpected; Leo's music content achieved viral status **(Viral Index: 2.23%),** surpassing typical TikTok (What is…, 2024) benchmarks. The engagement rate, which includes all **likes, comments, shares, and saves relative to total views**, is **8.38%** (*See Fig. 1*).

User engagement with Leo surpasses both the average values for nano-influencers reported by Socialinsider **(ER – 4.2%)** (2025 TikTok…, 2025) and the typical level for the creators' niche genre, as indicated by ThatRandomAgency's reports **(ER – 4.9%)** (Brandon, 2024). These findings demonstrate that the AI-generated songs, encompassing both lyrics and music, have attracted twice as much interest as universal benchmarks and significantly outperform the results of the other Dundarevs. This outcome confirms ChatGPT's creative capabilities in producing culturally relevant Bulgarian lyrics, as well as the effectiveness of generative tools such as Suno AI and Veo 3 in shaping the overall audio-visual structure.

The organic share coefficient (Viral Index), also known as 'shareability' in scientific and analytical contexts, is another key metric by which TikTok's algorithms, as well as those of other social networks, reward content creators. Ranking in the 'For You' feed is determined by the level of spontaneous sharing; greater organic reach beyond regular followers results in wider distribution. According to this criterion, Leo is a top performer with a **Viral Index of 2.23%.** Notably, this result was achieved with only three videos, challenging the assumption of a linear relationship between posting frequency and engagement. The youngest Dundarev positions himself as an influencer who prioritizes sensationalism over quantity, with each appearance resulting in a peak in engagement[4].

The strongest performance is observed in fully AI-generated song content, indicating that generative models may be more effective in structured, rhythmic forms, where meaning is conveyed through pattern, repetition, and atmosphere rather than through immediate conversational authenticity. This contrast underscores the need to distinguish between different modes of linguistic production when evaluating AI capabilities. The contrast between limited linguistic authenticity and high audience engagement represents a central paradox in this study. Although AI encounters challenges with dialogic humor and dialectal performance exhibits notably better results in structured and rhythmic

4 Although the number of videos produced by each figure varies significantly, the results are fully comparable and accurate because the formulas for Engagement Rate and Viral Index are normalized by views rather than posts. The calculations employ an aggregated approach, dividing the sum of reactions by the sum of views, ensuring that each video is weighted by its actual visibility and preventing skewed results.

formats, such as song lyrics, where cultural meaning relies less on immediate conversational authenticity.

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCE COMMENTS

An in-depth qualitative analysis was conducted to assess audience acceptance of AI influencers and to evaluate the extent to which the Dundarevs have established social legitimacy within an authentic online environment. All 951 comments on their profile were individually examined. The analysis used Google Sheets, incorporating a built-in language model (GPT) via Apps Script integration, along with customized formulas and scripts tailored to the project's requirements.

All comments were exported into a separate column, with only minimal corrections to punctuation and spelling to facilitate accurate interpretation by the GPT extension. Emojis, which serve as a primary mode of expression on TikTok, were preserved. The program received additional instructions to ensure the correct interpretation of emojis. The algorithm was designed to account for the meanings of major emoji types, both in emoji-only comments and in those combining text and emojis. Consequently, when determining the tone of a message (positive, negative, or neutral), GPT considered both lexical and visual elements. This approach is essential for methodological accuracy and comprehensiveness, as meaning in social media communication frequently resides in nonverbal cues, often referred to as “digital body language.”

The objective is to identify the linguistic characteristics through which the audience constructs communication with the Dundarevs. Accordingly, the analysis of user comments is structured as a multi-level linguistic model (*Fig. 4*), comprising five principal levels:

1. **Semantic**: Examines the general moods and emotional tone present in the discussions (positive, neutral, or negative);
2. **Discursive**: Involves the contextual meaning of nonverbal signs (emojis), which actively contribute to constructing and interpreting message meaning in digital communication;
3. **Syntactic**: Examines the structural organization of comments, classifying them by form (sentence, short phrase, or fragment);
4. **Metapragmatic**: Refers to users’ reflections within their interactions with the characters, including signals that indicate whether and to what extent they express awareness of the characters’ artificial nature (AI awareness);
5. **Pragmatic**: Interprets the text as a reflection of the perceptions underlying the utterance (such as the level of perceived closeness to the digital characters) and its communicative function (reaction, evaluation/opinion, question, or address).

The semantic analysis incorporates indicators of comment tone, which are essential for identifying general perceptions of the Dundarevs within synthetic formats. The data indicate a strong **positive response** to the AI family: 951

comments are classified as positive **(93%)**, neutral **(6%)**, and negative **(2%)**. Linguistically, the high approval rate and positive tone are attributed to the frequent use of paralinguistic symbols expressing sympathy and amusement (such as emojis for "heart," "kiss," "hug," and "laugh"), which function as efficient means for rapid reactions, as well as exclamatory words and punctuation (e.g., „Браво"/"Bravo!", „Точно така!"/"Exactly!", „Много вярно!"/"So true!").

The generative tool categorizes neutral comments as feedback, typically consisting of short interjections and single emojis that lack a clear emotional orientation. Negative comments, although a small proportion, primarily exhibit humorous or ironic elements rather than explicit disapproval.

The results demonstrate that, despite a brief interaction period of only 2.5 months, TikTok users have developed strong parasocial bonds with the characters. Achieving such engagement is challenging even for established real-life influencers.

Beyond *what people actually say and think*, it is essential to analyze *the context and manner of participation*. At the **discourse** level, the form of written engagement is examined in detail, distinguishing between reactive (emoji-only) and discursive (text with or without emojis) responses. The results indicate that **82%** of user comments consist entirely of emojis, while only **18%** include text. This distribution aligns with TikTok's platform logic, which favors brief yet affective reactions through emojis. Emojis function not only as virtual gestures that add emotional nuance to messages but also as semiotic units that perform linguistic functions in computer-mediated communication (Дерменджиева/Dermendjieva, 2001; Yus, 2025). Thus, emojis alone can play a discursive role by framing the meaning and context of messages.

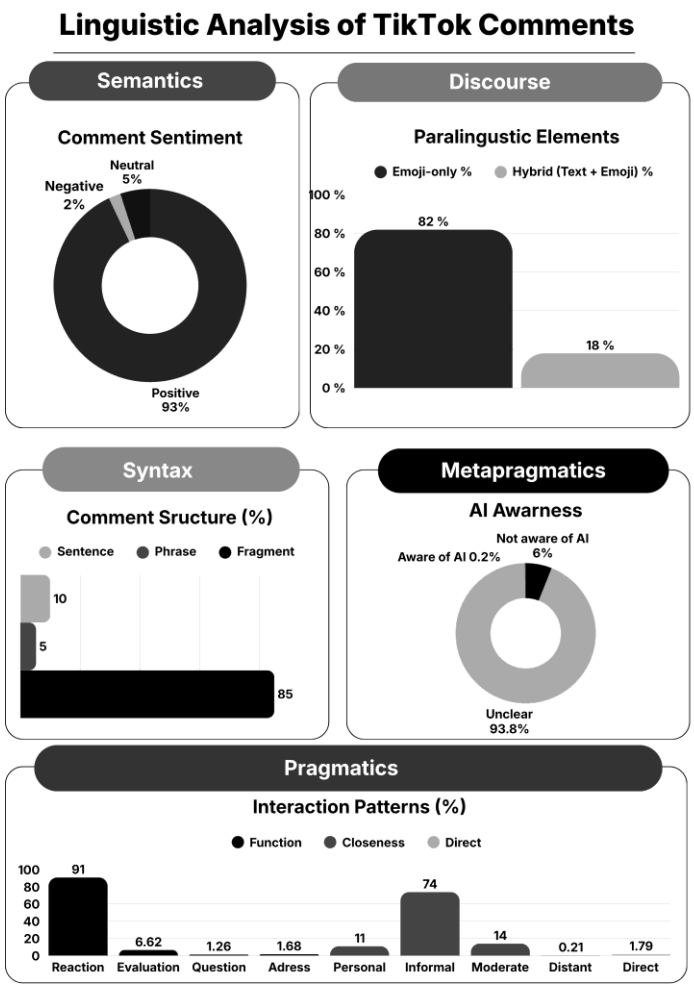


Fig. 4. Linguistic analysis of user comments on the TikTok profile of the "Dundarev family."

The syntactic structure of the comments reveals the distribution among **complete sentences**, **short phrases**, and **single fragments** (including emojis, interjections, and single words). Data from the GPT extension confirm the predominance of emoji-only messages: **85%** of user comments are classified as fragments, **5%** as short phrases (e.g., „Супер сте“/“You're awesome,” „Добро е“/“It's good”), and **10%** as semantically complete sentences. This pronounced "linguistic economy" facilitates the humanization of online interactions (Kjose & Bekar, 2024; Grishechko, 2023), as the TikTok audience often relies on brief exclamations or visual symbols for self-expression and mutual understanding.

Within the "Dundarev Family" project, **metapragmatics** refers to the audience's awareness of the content's origin. The analysis focuses on **whether users discuss the sender** rather than **the message content**. To assess this, the "AI

awareness indicator" metric has been introduced to measure the extent to which users understand that the characters are AI-generated. A script enables the generative tool to search for keywords and phrases such as "artificial intelligence," "AI," "bot," "generated," and "fake." The program also conducts morphosyntactic analysis to determine whether personal pronouns in direct address (e.g., "you," "you all"), imperative moods (e.g., "say," "do"), and other indicators of interpersonal communication and anthropomorphism are present, or whether commenters use third-person and impersonal expressions (e.g., "the video is nice," "this is AI"), which signal a more distanced perception and recognition of the synthetic nature of the characters.

The results indicate that **only 0.2% of users demonstrate full awareness of the synthetic origin** of the Dundarev family members, while **6.4% are categorically unaware**, referring to them as human beings. The model classified **93.8% of responses as "unclear."** This high percentage of uncertainty is attributable not to a programming error or analytical limitation of GPT, but to the narrative context. As previously established, most comments consist of various combinations of emojis, brief interjections such as "Ha-ha" or "Oh," and neutral expressions that do not provide sufficient linguistic information to determine whether users recognize they are interacting with AI. Among all 951 comments, only two included the abbreviation "AI" (Artificial Intelligence): "*This is AI, old man*" and "*This is AI*."

These measured values and findings from the generative tool – specifically, the negligible 0.2% clear awareness of AI, the 6.4% rate of anthropomorphism, and the predominant neutral expression at 93.4% – demonstrate a high degree of simulation credibility. The audience either does not recognize or does not consider that these are virtual avatars rather than real individuals. Explicit recognition of the artificial nature of the characters is rarely evident in observable linguistic behavior.

The pragmatic stage of linguistic analysis is essential for studying user attitudes. While semantic analysis reveals *the tone of discussions*, syntactic analysis addresses *the form of expression*, and discourse analysis uncovers *the communicative context*, the pragmatic stage examines *users' actions through their comments*, such as expressing emotion, making evaluations, asking questions, or addressing others. It also assesses *how these actions are performed*, whether in a personal or distant manner, as measured by the "Level of closeness" metric.

The level of closeness is determined by analyzing the socio-emotional tone of messages. GPT evaluates whether the relationship between the audience and the virtual characters is characterized as friendly or distant. A higher frequency of direct address, use of second-person verb forms, playful and familiar tone, and constructions resembling communication with real individuals correspond to higher scores for personal engagement and parasocial interaction. In this analysis, emojis are classified on a four-point scale, ranging from very low closeness (1/distant) to very high closeness (4/personal), as illustrated in *Figure 5*.

CLASSIFICATION OF EMOJIS BY LEVEL OF CLOSENESS

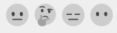
CATEGORY	MEANING	LEVEL OF CLOSENESS
	Expression of warmth, approval, affection, sympathy;	4 – Very High Closeness (Personal/Close)
	Informality, joking, friendly tone;	3 – High Closeness (Informal)
	Lack of emotion or hesitation;	2 – Moderate
	Disapproval, sarcasm, distance;	1 – Low (Distant)

Fig. 5. Classification of emojis on a four-point scale for level of closeness

Among the 951 comments analyzed on the Dundarevs TikTok profile, **74.3% employed an informal tone** (Level 3: humor, friendly sentiments), **14.1% demonstrated moderate closeness** (Level 2: lack of clear emotion or hesitation), **11.4% exhibited the highest degree of linguistic closeness** (Level 4), and only **0.2% indicated distance** (Level 1). The predominance of Levels 4 and 3, which together represent **85.7%** of all written reactions, suggests that the audience perceives the characters as relatable and identifies with their narrative.

Analysis of comment forms reveals that **91% are reactions** (emotional responses), **6.62% express positions**, **opinions**, or **evaluations** (e.g., „Абсолютно вярно е“/“Absolutely true,” „Това е самата истина“/“That’s the absolute truth,” „Голямо попадение“/“Spot on”), **1.26% are questions**, and **1.68% are direct messages**. This distribution indicates that user interactions with virtual influencers on TikTok are predominantly characterized by immediate emotional responses rather than substantive conversations, inquiries, or critical analysis.

The third pragmatic metric concerns the presence of **direct addresses** to the AI characters. Such addresses may occur by name, in the second person, through the vocative case, or via other forms of personal address. Unlike general addressing, which considers whether the audience engages in dialogue with each other or with the characters, direct address specifically refers to interactions directed at the five Dundarevs, reflecting whether users personalize their communication.

The findings indicate that direct addresses to the digital characters occur in only **1.79%** of written reactions. Although this may initially appear inconsistent

with the high levels of perceived closeness, it aligns with the concept of parasocial relationships, which are characterized by one-way emotional connections without reciprocal interaction. Additionally, these indicators corroborate previous research suggesting that audience closeness to influencers is based on emotional support and social or cultural recognition rather than on dialogue (Peng, 2025).

A lexical analysis was performed by instructing the language model to identify **the five most frequently used keywords** in the comments. After normalization to account for grammatical variations, but without merging synonyms, the analysis identified: **„точно“/“exactly” (13 instances)**, **„браво“/“well done” (10 instances)**, **„истина“/“truth” (10 instances)**, **„така е“/“that’s right” (10 instances)**, and **„вярно“/“true” (9 instances)**. This frequency ranking functions as a lexical marker of agreement, approval, and identification with the messages of the 'family.' The audience not only expresses amusement and approval but also affirms the narrative's social and cultural validity.

The linguistic analysis of user comments on the Dundarev family’s TikTok profile reveals a positive attitude, deep emotional engagement with the characters, and a sense of attachment. The audience exhibits no signs of alienation or aversion typically associated with the 'Uncanny Valley' phenomenon, nor evidence of technophobia regarding the synthetic nature of the influencers. Despite explicit labeling of altered or generated content in accordance with platform authenticity policies and research ethics, user reactions mirror real-life social interactions, using an informal, friendly tone.

CONCLUSION

High levels of user engagement with the Dundarev family’s digital presence (ER: 5.58%, AWR: 54.29%, and VI: 1.64%) indicate the avatars’ social legitimacy. Their appearance, intentionally designed as a composite of widely recognized archetypes rather than idealized figures, facilitates user identification and reduces the distance between the characters and the audience. Each Dundarev evokes associations with familiar figures from real life or literature. As a result, 74.3% of interactions with these avatars are friendly and playful.

Comedy, as a key element in digital self-presentation, mitigates user skepticism. Research demonstrates that “affiliative humor” reduces perceived threat, elicits sympathy, and fosters shared experience (Martin et al., 2003; McGraw & Warren, 2010). This effect is confirmed in the experiment: 92.7% of all 951 comments on the AI family’s profile are positive and express approval. A detailed linguistic analysis of user comments reveals that the Dundarevs are warmly received on TikTok (Hern, 2022), a platform recognized as supportive for emerging influencers. Their content largely avoids critical or debate-driven scrutiny. Users do not question the avatars’ technological origins and instead express strong approval. Collective affirmations such as “exactly,” “true,” and “truth” indicate that the audience embraces these synthetic characters,

incorporating them into their communication through cultural relatability and humor.

The youngest member of the family, Leonardo Tsongkin, has achieved viral popularity. Although initially conceived as a minor character with only three videos, including two songs exceeding the typical TikTok duration of one minute, his success demonstrates that strong audience response is not solely driven by short-form content. LLMs continue to struggle to capture the nuances of local humor, particularly in regions with limited linguistic resources, because they are trained primarily on English-language data. Even with extensive in-context learning, ChatGPT does not achieve an authentic human tone or convincing dialectal expression from the Northwestern Province of Bulgaria. In measured speech, however, the model demonstrates improved performance, as evidenced by the character Leo's success. This outcome indicates that artificial intelligence can now write poetry, compose song lyrics, and create music, which explains the increasing use of generative tools for creative production.

In summary, the results of the “Dundarev Family” project indicate that when scripts are carefully constructed using genre techniques such as satire, self-irony, and aphorisms, alongside AI-generated content that explores the creative potential of new technologies, virtual influencers can achieve high levels of trust, sympathy, and perceived closeness, even among local audiences. This combination of authentic and synthetic elements makes the experiment methodologically significant.

The project examines not only whether AI can mimic human communication and animate CGI, but also the specific conditions under which this occurs. The findings suggest that the audience’s parasocial bonds with the Dundarevs are not formed solely by the humanization of characters or the use of culturally recognizable humor, nor exclusively by fully generated content. Instead, these bonds result from a precise balance between familiarity, humor, and innovation. The findings demonstrate a clear separation between linguistic authenticity and perceived social legitimacy. Despite measurable limitations in reproducing dialectal nuance and culturally embedded humor, the AI-generated characters achieve high levels of engagement, emotional response, and perceived closeness. This suggests that social legitimacy in digital environments is not determined by the accuracy of linguistic imitation, but by the ability to operate within recognizable cultural and communicative frameworks. Humor, narrative familiarity, and platform-specific interaction patterns play a more decisive role than linguistic precision. The case of the Dundarevs illustrates that AI-generated influencers do not need to convincingly replicate human communication to achieve social acceptance. Instead, legitimacy emerges as a relational effect produced through the interaction between cultural codes, algorithmic visibility, and affective engagement.

The findings further suggest that AI influencers should not be understood as fully autonomous artificial agents, but as hybrid socio-technical constructs. Their effectiveness results from a carefully calibrated interaction between human

cultural input and machine-generated output, rather than independent algorithmic performance. In this sense, the success of the Dundarev characters illustrates a broader dynamic. Social legitimacy in AI-mediated environments emerges not from technological perfection, but from the strategic integration of familiarity, cultural resonance, and algorithmic affordances. Ultimately, the study contributes to broader debates on digital authenticity by demonstrating that authenticity in platform environments is not an inherent property of content, but a context-dependent outcome shaped by user interaction.

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