

LGBTI+ and PRIDE Festival in the Information Space

What are the prevalent topics circulating across the Slovak internet when we exclude politicians from the discussion?

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Introduction

Three and a half years after parliamentary elections and 10 months following a tragic terrorist attack on Zámocká Street, the rights of LGBTI+ people continue to be a focal point of a political struggle that numerous politicians exploit to polarize society in Slovakia. During the critical phase leading to early elections in September 2023, it is significant to consider not just how political figures communicate topics regarding LGBTI+ people, but also the narrative embraced by civil society and the media. This is crucial because voting behavior is molded not solely by political campaigning and the topics endorsed by the political parties and their representatives, but also by the information that circulates within the information bubbles in which voters engage daily and from which they derive their information. The popularity and framing of the topic are significant in this respect.

The objective of this monitoring is to illustrate how the conversation about LGBTI+ people transforms when we eliminate the statements and contributions from political figures and, instead, concentrate on the narratives presented by prodemocratic actors, media outlets, and problematic sources. The findings emphasize that the information landscape concerning LGBTI+ rights is primarily shaped by prodemocratic actors, spearheaded by NGOs and mainstream media, rather than problematic sources, which received notably lower reach in terms of interactions.

This case study observes 117 of posts concerning LGBTI+ people and related themes, which amassed minimum 500 interactions during the period from June 1st to August 1st, 2023. The analysis is being carried out using Gerulata Technologies' monitoring tool on social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube, all in the Slovak language. This time frame aligns with the period when the discourse surrounding LGBTI+ people's rights gained more prominent attention corresponding to the organization and the reactions to the Dúhový PRIDE v Bratislave (Rainbow PRIDE in Bratislava) that occurred on July 22nd, 2023.

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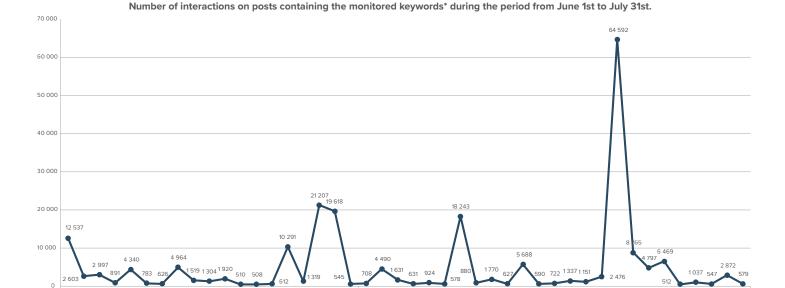


Reach, sentiment, and popular social media

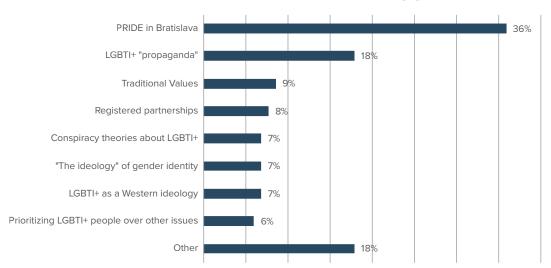
Due to objective factors, the topic's impact during the observed period was most pronounced on July 22, 2023, coinciding with the day of the PRIDE festival in Bratislava. During this day, the narrative was primarily communicated by media outlets and prodemocratic actors. The most widely acclaimed post of the day originates from Startitup's Instagram account and is directly related to the event itself. Other notable shifts in reach within monitored period were attributed to a single highly popular post rather than a specific event. On June 27th, a post by the Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia garnered attention. In this post, influencer František Košarišťan, recognized by the pseudonym Fero Joke, satirically highlights the absurdity of certain misinformation, including that related to LGBTI+ people. On June 28th, the Refresher Instagram account extended the topic's reach by covering American actor Noah Schnapp and his participation in his first PRIDE march in New York City after openly coming out. Similarly,

news about the first transgender woman to win the Miss 2023 pageant in the Netherlands, shared via Startitup's Instagram account, contributed to increased reach on July 10th.

The PRIDE remained the most prominent topic throughout the monitoring period, being featured in as many as 36% of the posts. The theme of LGBTI+ "propaganda" accounted for an 18% share of the sample, primarily emerging in posts from problematic sources that consistently employ this term or its alternatives (such as ideology or agenda) to portray LGBTI+ people in a negative light. In 9% of the posts, the theme of protection or advocacy for "traditional values" was present, and in 8%, the topic of registered partnerships received equal attention from both problematic sources and mainstream media. 7% of the posts were focused on spreading various conspiracy theories about LGBTI+ people, with an equal share addressing the themes of "LGBTI+ as a Western ideology" and "Politicians prioritizing the LGBTI+ topic over other more important issues."



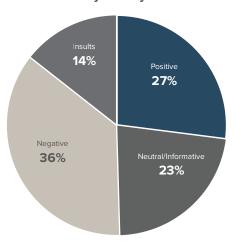




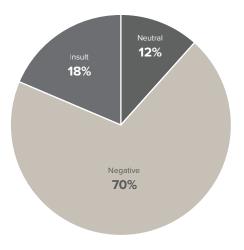
Roughly a third of the sample's posts - accounting for 36% - bore a negative sentiment in their content. 14% of the entries, largely those propagating conspiracy theories, employed an even harsher tone that included insults or invectives directed at specific individuals or the LGBTI+ community as a whole. On the other hand, 50% of the posts exhibited a neutral (23%) or positive (27%) tone. Neutral and informative sentiment was predominantly observed in the case of media outlets sharing content from the PRIDE festival. A positive sentiment was noted among prodemocratic actors as well as media sources. Despite the fact that the number of posts reflecting negative sentiment (36%) exceeded those with a positive tone (27%), the positive sentiment demonstrated significantly greater engagement in terms of interactions, resonating more deeply within the media landscape and society. Sentiment towards LGBTI+-related topics significantly varied across different social networks.

On Telegram, predominantly negative sentiment posts were prevalent. Out of a total of 35 Telegram posts with over 500 interactions, 70% were negative, 18% contained insults, 12% were neutral, and none were positive. Conversely, Instagram primarily featured positive mentions. Among 32 posts related to LGBTI+ people and associated themes, 75% were expressed positively, 15% neutrally, and none negatively. Facebook falls between these two opposite poles. Out of a combined 31 posts, 17% were positive, 36% neutral, 33% negative, and 14% included insults. The distribution of positive, neutral, and negative mentions could be influenced by the level of regulation of each particular social network and the demographic characteristics of their users.

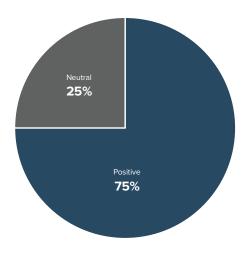
Sentiment of posts containing the analyzed keywords*



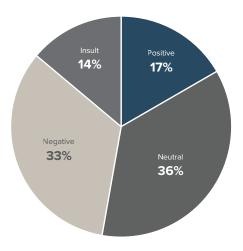
Sentiment of posts on telegram



Sentiment of posts on Instagram



Sentiment of posts on Facebook

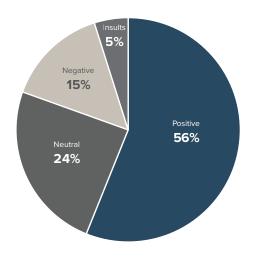


Popular topics and narratives

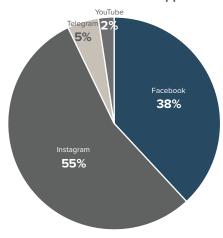
Dúhový PRIDE v Bratislave (Rainbow PRIDE in Bratislava)

The PRIDE festival was a central theme during the monitored period, appearing in 36% of the posts, which aligns with the chosen monitoring timeframe. If we extract political actors from the discourse, the theme therefore bears predominantly positive connotations. A remarkable 56% of posts that garnered over 500 interactions held a positive sentiment and/or expressed support for the event. Around 24% of posts, primarily shared by influential media outlets, discussed the Rainbow PRIDE event neutrally or in an informative manner. From the vantage point of social media platforms, Instagram held prominence, accounting for 55% of posts related to the festival. On this platform, among the considerable number of posts, we also encounter those that garnered the most interactions. In terms of the sheer quantity of posts, Facebook follows suit with 38 percentage points, followed by Telegram at 5%, and YouTube at the trailing end with 2%.

Sentiment of posts about the PRIDE march



Social media platfroms on which the PRIDE festival theme appeared



While the most popular post on the topic of PRIDE focused on the event in New York, the informational landscape was dominated by mostly positive and informative contributions or videos from media outlets detailing the course of the Bratislava PRIDE. Among these, there were, for instance, photos and videos featuring well-known figures, journalists, or politicians from youth-focused media Startitup (and Refresher as well) along with an open declaration of support from the Refresher editorial team. Support was also extended by influencer Milan Bez Mapy, who himself is a member of the community, urging individuals to bring back more than just souvenirs from their vacations this summer – to also bring back more tolerance. Within the monitored sample of the most popular posts, support for the event was also conveyed by the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, which displayed a rainbowthemed poster reading "Love Will Triumph" at its headquarters in Bratislava also expressed its support by hoisting the rainbow flag.

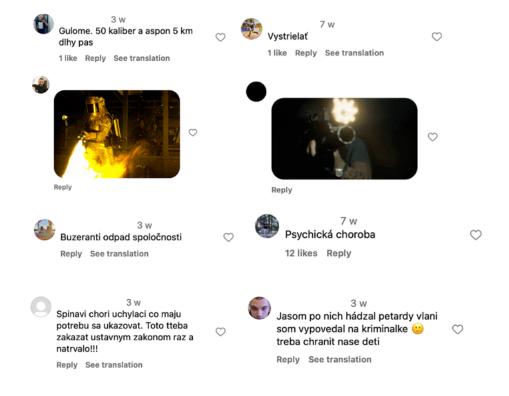


Among the 42 posts dedicated to the PRIDE festival, 12 were attributed to the organizer of Bratislava's PRIDE, establishing them as a prominent player in this discourse. A substantial portion of their contributions revolved around the slogan "Proud and Indestructible" encapsulating this year's event ethos (Instagram, Instagram, Instagram, Iniciatíva Inakosť). The slogan is a reaction to the terrorist attack on LGBTI+ bar Tepláreň in October 2022, during which two young men died. The organizer adeptly documented the entirety of the event in a buoyant, yet realistically grounded manner across their social media platforms (Instagram, Instagram, Facebook), This, combined with the objectively informative approach of mainstream media outlets (Denník N, SITA Webnoviny, SME), effectively filled the information space with relevant information. The active communication approach of numerous prodemocratic actors and media outlets, precisely, ensured the prevalence of positive discourse over negative. Bratislava City Museum also expressed its support by hoisting the rainbow flag.

PRIDE also emerged in connection with the Hrdí na rodinu (Proud of Family) march, which took place on the same day. While mainstream media and tabloids reported on its organization sparingly (Startitup,

Startitup, Topky), the Slovenský dohovor za rodinu (Slovak Family Alliance) invited attendees to the gathering by targeting the LGBTI+ community. It called on Slovaks to come and showcase the "values they uphold" and to reject the "gender ideology" as well as all that comes with the "culture of death", ending text with a rainbow flag emoji (Facebook, Facebook).

Problematic sources also gained traction. A page named Matovičov cirkus (Matovič's Circus) criticized the state for supporting PRIDE, while asserting that "there's no money for Matica slovenská", the oldest Slovak national, cultural and scientific organization. ZEM&VEK (Earth&Age) focused on the participation of the American embassy, which "stepped outside its embassy's tall fence to support LGBT causes," and the Facebook page Eduard Chmelár referred to PRIDE festivals as "street circus of rainbow marches." However, the most extreme narratives emerged from a YouTube video by Martin Jakubec, who claims that PRIDE is "deliberately scheduled on the same day" as the Hrdí na rodinu march. It's noteworthy that PRIDE marches have had a presence in Slovakia since 2010, whereas the Hrdí na rodinu march was only first organized in 2013 as a response to PRIDE. In a derogatory manner, Jakubec discusses LGBTI+



individuals and the police officer Púchovský, who he vulgarly says began "pouring out, ... gushing, and essentially practice onanism about his sexual orientation" during his public coming-out at PRIDE. He then self-identifies as a tolerant individual and assures the audience that he is not homophobic. He accuses LGBTI+ people of what he describes as "oxidizing and parasitizing the system" and urges the community not to "burden the majority of society with emotional outbursts, ... effeminacy, and exaggerated affections."

Despite the extreme statements from problematic sources, the coverage of the event remained relatively positive or neutral. However, the information landscape is not limited solely to the content of the posts; it also encompasses the discussions that unfold beneath them. Among the multitude of posts, particularly those from media outlets, the discussions under the posts accumulated derogatory comments and death threats directed at LGBTI+ people. In such cases, it becomes essential for discussions under posts to be moderated and filtered, a task that can be facilitated not only through manual work but also various tools. For example, the initiative #bezhejtu (#withouthate) with the tool TrollWall which automatically filters discussions under posts. In instances where a page detects recurring comments with hateful expressions from the same individuals, legal avenues can be pursued through initiatives like Zastavme nenávisť, ("Stop Hate") which offers these services free of charge.

LGBTI+ as "ideology" and "propaganda"

In addition to the PRIDE and Hrdí na rodinu marches, the examined posts often homed in on the so-called LGBTI+ ideology and propaganda. These were mentioned in 18% of all posts that garnered over 500 interactions. By using terms like "LGBTI+ ideology" or "propaganda", the posts characterized the struggle for LGBTI+ rights as something foreign, unnatural, artificially contrived, and forcefully imposed. In their interpretation, it wasn't a call for equality across society but rather deemed

as "cultural wars" and moral decline emanating from the "decadent West," whether that be the European Union, the United States, or individual Western nations. From this perspective, the concept of LGBTI+ "ideology"/"propaganda" often became intertwined with liberalism, positioning it as one of its "agendas". Such a portrayal of the fight for LGBTI+ rights subsequently contributes to societal polarization, fostering an "us versus them" division by exploiting the fear of the unknown and fabricating non-existent adversaries. The mistrust and animosity toward LGBTI+ individuals, however, do not remain confined to the online realm in Slovakia. As highlited by the GLOBSEC Trends 2023 findings, narratives depicting LGBTI+ rights as an immoral and decadent "agenda" are gradually permeating deeper into society. In Slovakia, 55% of people already subscribe to this interpretation, despite the terrorist attack on the LGBTI+ bar Tepláreň.

From the analyzed sample of posts, Telegram featured the most frequent engagement with this topic (10 out of 21 posts in total). Among these, the problematic platform Infovojna (InfoWar) shared the five most popular contributions. The subject of LGBTI+ "ideology" or "propaganda" was not dissected in isolation but rather as part of a broader "agenda of liberals and progressives", against which the authors of these posts critically position themselves. Conversely, they place themselves in the role of victims of this "agenda." Along this line, they construct barricades within the posts, further dividing society and amplifying the sense of fear and threat through the perceived imposition of the LGBTI+ "ideology" and the chastisement of its opponents. In one of the videos, for instance, the founder of Infovojna, Norbert Lichtner, engaged in a conversation with Danny Kollár, for whom an international arrest warrant for extremism had been issued. They discussed the need for alternative media that counterbalances the "brainwashing by the current regime." According to Lichtner, this "brainwashing" is orchestrated by several liberal policies, among which he cites the "promotion of an extremist LGBT agenda." A similar viewpoint was also echoed by the deputy chairman of Direction -

Slovak Social Democracy (Smer-SSD), Erik Kaliňák, whose video was shared in another Infovojna post. Kaliňák highlights the "danger of a twisted LGBT agenda, "which he claims" progressives seek to enforce by criminalizing its opponents". Similarly, the discourse around the "dangerous and fanatical LGBT agenda" is echoed in a video shared by Infovojna, featuring the leader of Kaliňák's party, Robert Fico. Additionally, Fico directly attributes the promotion of this "agenda" to the party Progresívne Slovensko (Progressive Slovakia). The post's authors go on to suggest that "the fanaticism of Progresívne Slovensko's representatives infecting, poisoning, and dividing society with the LGBT agenda and criminalizing its opponents should serve as a red flag, prompting caution toward Progresívne Slovensko's experts." The stances of Progresívne Slovensko party, they claim, should be the "red line," and people should "stand in opposition" to them. Similar attacks on liberalism and the Progresívne Slovensko were already characteristic during the previous pre-election period in 2020.

Out of the total of 21 posts that contained key phrases such as LGBTI+ "ideology" or "propaganda," only two were aimed at debunking this manipulative narrative. In both instances, videos were produced in collaboration between the Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia and Slovak influencer Fero Joke. The Representation shared the video on its Facebook profile, garnering 13,292 interactions, as well as on Instagram, where it received 5,885 interactions. The video satirically depicts a middle-aged woman complaining about the television's continuous promotion of LGBTI+ related topics. She tells her friend that "people advocating for LGBTI+ rights don't want equality, only benefits," and that "this entire fight for equality is a fabrication of the modern decaying society" and "Westerners." The video concludes by cautioning against misinformation and urging people to verify their sources of information. As highlighted by the GLOBSEC Analysis of Strategic Communication in the context of Slovakia, employing humor to communicate key public issues is a best practice for making such content engaging and increasing its reach.



LGBTI+ as "Western ideology"

In addition to Progresívne Slovensko party and liberals, the analyzed posts accused the European Union, the United States, and the West as a whole of spreading the LGBTI+ "ideology." The article that garnered the highest number of interactions within this group of posts was shared by the Telegram profile of Infovojna. They informed about a new Russian law limiting LGBTI+ rights. However, the authors of Infovojna interpreted the adoption of the law differently. According to them, "In an effort to protect traditional values, Putin signed a law banning gender and sex change, which the West's LGBTQ+ ideology massively promotes".

Apart from the West, the United States and the European Union were also accused of supporting the "LGBTI+ agenda". The Telegram profile ZEM&VEK, as mentioned above, commented on the participation of U.S. embassy staff in the Bratislava PRIDE. A post from the Refresher portal shared a statement from the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Boris Kollár, regarding registered partnerships. In his statement, Kollár noted, "If this does not imply that the European Union will force us into marriages, I have no problem with it." His commentary echoes manipulative narratives about the "dictate of Brussels" and the "liberal EU agenda" allegedly imposed on individual member states.

LGBTI+ as a threat to traditional values

In the analyzed sample of posts, appeals to protect traditional values endangered by the "LGBTI+ agenda" emerged as a counterpoint to the advocacy for LGBTI+ rights. This theme was addressed in a total of 9% of the posts.

In comparison to the narrative about LGBTI+ "ideology" or "propaganda," discussions on traditional values resonated more on Facebook than on Telegram. Out of a total of 10 posts, 6 appeared on Facebook. In one of the most popular posts within this category (with 1,881 interactions), the aforementioned Danny Kollár associated the fight for LGBTI+ rights with the "normalization of pedophilia" and the killing of children. As indicated by monitoring efforts from the European Digital Media Observatory, such distorted interpretations of the equality struggle are regularly exploited by problematic actors across Europe. By emphasizing traditional values and the upbringing of children, they infuse their manipulations with emotional weight, thereby increasing their potential reach and resonance among their target audience.

Protection of children and families was positioned in opposition to the advocacy for LGBTI+ rights in posts from Facebook groups like Naskoč s nami (Hop in with us) and the Slovenský dohovor za rodinu. The group Naskoč s nami shared a case involving parents of children from Saticoy Elementary School in Los Angeles who attacked the school to halt the teaching of "LGBTI+ propaganda." The post added heart emojis and a comment that parents are protecting their children from becoming targets of ideology. Similarly, Slovenský dohovor za rodinu warned against the spread of the "LGBTI+ ideology" in Slovakia, including the event of the PRIDE march in Bardejov. In their posts, they invoked collective prayer as a means to help Slovak families overcome the "power of evil that is seeping into our lives." The Slovenský dohovor za rodinu mainly dominated the posts advocating traditional values, sharing 5 out of 10 posts on this topic. In addition to their calls against the PRIDE march in Bardejov, posts from this group also supported the Hrdí na rodinu march. They emphasized that

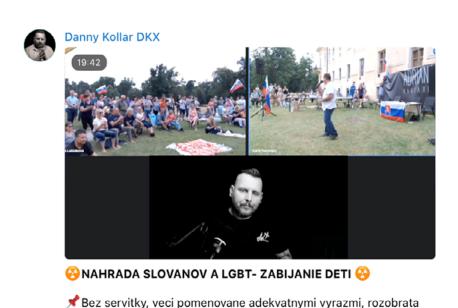
a family consists of a father, mother, and children, denouncing the promotion of gender equality and LGBTI+ rights as part of the "culture of death." One post even equated intellectuals and media with messengers of the devil, who manipulate people and contribute to the spread of sins and homosexuality. It asserted that "Devils attack people through their intelligence. They control and manipulate people through media. They hinder their thinking and turn people into slaves. And that's why there is so much sin, disease, homosexuality, people without love, people with empty hearts."

Conspiracy theories about LGBTI+

Among posts garnering over 500 interactions, some have disseminated conspiracy theories and misinformation about LGBTI+ individuals. Such narratives were primarily present on Telegram (6 out of 9 posts), with the prominent figure being the Telegram account Danny Kollar DKX (4 out of 9 posts). Repetitively, these posts propagate a conspiracy theory suggesting that the LGBTI+ movement harbors an "agenda for the genocide of European nations", "genocide of the original white population", "replacement of Slavs" or

"normalization of pedophilia". The post asserts that "owners of social media platforms and promoters of the LGBT agenda are ultimately the same group, an identical family," or that "by the time children reach puberty, they won't be heterosexual due to the imposition of the LGBTI+ agenda." Similar narratives, along with derogatory remarks aimed at various publicly known transgender individuals, are also shared by the Telegram account DK/bleskovky, linked to Danny Kollar (Telegram, Telegram).

Joining the ranks of conspiracy theory spreaders is the Facebook page Slovenský dohovor za rodinu, which asserts that homosexuality is the result of devils who "attack people through their intelligence". Adding to this, conspiracy theories are also found in the video of Martin Jakubec. who shares contemplations about the sexual orientation of the President Zuzana Čaputová, based on her open support for the PRIDE festival. Moreover, Jakubec advances a manipulative and deceptive narrative about a terrorist attack on Zámocká Street, wondering "whether it might not have been planted to the extent that someone placed the bait and also the victim, whether it wasn't all staged."



agenda Kalergiho planu a LGBT / normalizacia pedofilie...

📌 Moj prejav na stretnuti v Malackach, prilis silne pre Youtube..

Methodology

The monitoring was conducted in the time frame from June 1st to August 1st, 2023, using the monitoring tool Gerulata Technologies across social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube in the Slovak language. This period corresponds to the time when the topic of LGBTI+ rights gained more prominent exposure in connection with the organization, as well as responses to the Dúhový PRIDE v Bratislave (Rainbow PRIDE in Bratislava), which took place on July 22nd, 2023. The monitoring during this period was executed based on specific query: LGBT* OR queer OR dúhov* OR Pride OR gender OR transrodov* OR transexuál* OR lesb* OR gej* OR gay OR bisexuál* OR homosexuál* OR "manželstvá párov rovnakého pohlavia" OR "páry rovnakého pohlavia" OR "registrované partnerstvá" OR rodov*. The sample of monitored actors on social media platforms was not initially restricted in any way and corresponds to all monitored actors within the Gerulata platform.

The aim of the monitoring is to highlight how the discourse on LGBTI+ rights and related topics changes during the pre-election period without the influence of political actors or political parties. Given this objective, the sample from the specified period was filtered of posts by politicians and political parties who currently hold positions in the National Council of the Slovak Republic or are candidates in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The sample was similarly filtered of posts unrelated to LGBTI+ people, rights, and relevant topics, even if they contained the specified keywords. In terms of the relevance of shared content in the information space, only posts that received 500 or more interactions (a combination of reactions, comments, and shares) were analyzed. Although interactions do not directly equate to a post's virality, they provide an objective measure for comparing the reach of posts across different monitored social media platforms.

As a result, 117 posts were subject to discursive analysis, which helped delineate the most frequently occurring narratives and sentiments. The following narratives were identified:

- Traditional values,
- Terrorist attack in Tepláreň,
- LGBTI+ individuals "being too visible" in public,
- LGBTI+ "propaganda",
- Politicians prioritizing LGBTI+ individuals over other more important issues,
- LGBTI+ as a Western ideology,
- Registered partnerships,
- Rainbow PRIDE in Bratislava.
- Hrdí na rodnu (Proud of Family) march,
- LGBTI+ "agenda" in schools and among children,
- Conspiracy theories about LGBTI+,
- Debunking disinformation and counterdisinformation narratives about LGBTI+,
- Adoptions by same-sex couples,
- "Ideology" of gender identity.

From the sentiments expressed, it was possible to identify the following:

- Positive portrayal/support of LGBTI+,
- Negative portrayal,
- Neutral/Informative portrayal,
- Derogatory labeling/Insult.

The sentiment of each post was determined through qualitative content analysis based on the presence or absence of emotionally charged language and evaluative positions. If emotionally charged language was absent and the post was purely informative without evaluative positions, it was categorized as having a neutral sentiment. Posts that contained negative evaluations of

the topics related to LGBTI+ individuals or used negatively emotionally charged words (condemning attitudes, expressions of resistance towards PRIDE events and LGBTI+ rights, etc.) were assigned a negative sentiment. However, if negative attitudes included derogatory labels, insults, or dehumanization of LGBTI+ individuals, the posts were categorized as having a Derogatory Label/ Insult sentiment. Posts with positive evaluations and positively emotionally charged words (support for LGBTI+ rights, emphasis on humanity, commendatory words, etc.) were categorized as having a positive sentiment.

For each post, it was possible to attribute more than one (or none) narrative, but only one (or none) sentiment. The goal of the analysis is to provide both a qualitative and quantitative insight into the topics and narratives that circulated in the information space regarding LGBTI+ individuals, as well as a perspective on popular actors and the prevalence of different platforms, abstracted from political discourse.