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Algorithms of Displacement: Emotional and Rhetorical Responses to AI-Driven Job Loss in Digital Public Discourse

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Abstract

As AI increasingly encroaches upon domains of human labor, public discourse has become a vital space for articulating and contesting its social implications. This study investigates how users on the X platform (formerly Twitter) respond emotionally and rhetorically to the prospect of AI-induced job displacement. Drawing on a dataset of 1,518 posts collected during key automation-related events, the research employs a mixed-methods approach combining Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling, machine-assisted emotion classification, and grounded rhetorical analysis. Findings reveal that user discourse is structured around ten recurring thematic clusters, each exhibiting distinct emotional profiles ranging from anger and fear to irony and hope. Users frequently engage in adversarial framing, ironic subversion, techno-messianism, and appeals to human exceptionalism to navigate and narrate their experiences with automation. These discursive strategies function not merely as expressions of individual opinion but as mechanisms for constructing collective identity, negotiating institutional trust, and shaping public imaginaries about technology and labor. The study highlights the symbolic and affective dimensions of technological disruption, arguing that digital platforms serve as critical arenas for the ongoing negotiation of meaning, power, and belonging in an increasingly automated society.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Job Displacement, Emotion Analysis, Digital Rhetoric, Automation Discourse, Public Imaginaries

Introduction

In the wake of rapid advances in AI, public concern over the future of human condition has become a central axis of digital discourse (Rahmatian & Sharajsharifi, 2021) [8]. While earlier debates around AI were largely confined to technical performance or speculative fiction, recent developments—particularly those involving large-scale layoffs, automation of cognitive tasks, and the widespread integration of generative AI—have rendered job displacement an urgent sociopolitical issue. Online platforms, especially X, have become key venues where these anxieties are articulated, negotiated, and amplified. This study investigates the ways in which users on X engage emotionally and rhetorically with the prospect of mass unemployment induced by AI. By analyzing over a thousand posts responding to high-profile automation events, it traces the affective and thematic contours of public discourse, emphasizing how users frame technological change in relation to precarity, dignity, and systemic inequality.

The economic and technological transformations wrought by AI are not unprecedented in historical terms, but the pace, scale, and ambiguity of their social consequences distinguish the current moment. Contemporary discourse about automation is deeply shaped by what Frey and Osborne (2017) [2] identify as "task susceptibility"—the probability that specific forms of labor, especially those involving routine or predictable tasks, will be rendered obsolete by machine intelligence. According to their seminal model, up to 47% of U.S. employment is at high risk of automation, a projection that has catalyzed intense debate across academic, media, and policy domains. While such forecasts are methodologically debated, their symbolic power in shaping public imagination is considerable. AI is no longer seen merely as an enhancer of productivity, but as a systemic threat to livelihoods, particularly for workers in logistics, customer service, education, and even the creative industries.

However, the social meaning of automation is not reducible to economic statistics. The emergence of what Zuboff (2019) [16] terms "surveillance capitalism" has introduced a new layer of epistemic tension, wherein AI is viewed not just as a neutral tool,

but as an instrument of control, surveillance, and corporate consolidation. These structural anxieties are mirrored in public discourse, which increasingly reflects not only fear of unemployment but also distrust of institutions, moral outrage at perceived elite indifference, and nostalgia for more stable labor arrangements. Moreover, the discourse is saturated with affect: anger, fear, resignation, and hope are not simply personal reactions, but cultural signals that shape how narratives about technology are received and contested. Emotional expression becomes a medium through which broader ideological and epistemic struggles are waged (Papacharissi, 2015) [7].

The advent of advanced technologies has significantly transformed the nature of plagiarism in academic contexts (Sabbar, Masoomifar and Mohammadi, 2019) [10]. Traditional forms of plagiarism—such as direct copying or inadequate citation—have been compounded by the rise of AI-generated text, which can produce coherent and seemingly original content in seconds. This shift complicates the detection of academic dishonesty, as AI-generated writing may not match any existing source, thereby eluding conventional plagiarism detection software. Furthermore, the widespread availability of AI writing tools raises concerns about the erosion of academic rigor and authorship, potentially rendering many forms of academic writing obsolete (Lund *et al*., 2023) [4]. As students and researchers increasingly rely on generative AI for drafting essays, theses, or even peer-reviewed articles, the fundamental values of critical thinking, originality, and scholarly contribution are at risk of being undermined.

Social media platforms like X play a crucial role in the mediation of these affects. As Highfield (2016) [3] notes, platforms encourage a blend of performativity and immediacy, where emotion, opinion, and information circulate in compressed, rhetorically intensified formats. Human nodes on social media still have a crucial role (Sabbar and Matheson, 2019) [11], but the advance of the technology into the realms of human control is not deniable. In the context of AI-induced job displacement, these formats allow users to articulate a wide range of positions—from techno-utopian hopes for Universal Basic Income (UBI) to dystopian fantasies of robotic control—often through irony, satire, or outrage. What emerges is a complex, multi-voiced discourse where personal fear overlaps with collective critique, and where memes and sarcasm function alongside citations of economic research and policy proposals. This study seeks to map this terrain using a hybrid method that combines topic modeling, emotion classification, and qualitative discourse analysis.

Crucially, the approach adopted here understands public reaction to AI not as passive consumption of technological news, but as an active process of sense-making. As Marres (2017) [5] argues, digital platforms are not just spaces where politics is expressed but arenas where political meaning is constructed. In this view, a tweet lamenting job loss is not merely anecdotal—it is a discursive act that mobilizes emotion, narrative, and social position. It may signal solidarity, cynicism, resistance, or despair, but in each case it contributes to the social framing of AI as a problem to be managed, feared, or reimagined. By identifying dominant emotional registers and rhetorical strategies, this research clarifies how digital publics metabolize technological disruption, not only as a labor crisis but as a cultural and moral dilemma.

This study is therefore situated at the intersection of communication studies, affect theory, and science and technology studies. It contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to understand the symbolic dimensions of technological change—not merely what AI does, but what it *means* to different publics, and how those meanings shape public legitimacy, resistance, or acceptance. The discourse on X provides a valuable empirical window into this symbolic struggle, revealing not only what users feel about AI, but how they narrate its implications for identity, economy, and the future of work. Through this lens, AI is not simply a set of algorithms but a contested signifier in the ongoing negotiation of social value, institutional trust, and collective belonging in an increasingly automated world.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods digital discourse analysis to investigate how users on the X platform emotionally and rhetorically engage with the topic of AI-induced job displacement. Among different social media platforms, X is possibly the best to study social issues (Shahghasemi, 2023) [13]. For this study, the data collection process began with a targeted query strategy using relevant keywords such as "AI job loss," "automation layoffs," "robots replacing workers," and "ChatGPT unemployment." A temporal filter was applied to capture posts made during and immediately following major AI-related events (e.g., mass layoffs announced by tech companies or viral demonstrations of generative AI tools), ensuring both topical relevance and emotional immediacy. From an initial corpus exceeding 3,000 posts, a filtering process removed duplicates, non-English content, spam, and irrelevant entries, yielding a final dataset of 1,518 unique posts. To enhance interpretive reliability, only public posts were included, in line with ethical research standards for social media analysis (Townsend & Wallace, 2016) [14]. Each post was anonymized and treated as a discrete discursive act situated within a larger network of public communication about labor, technology, and structural change.

The analytical framework combined unsupervised machine learning with qualitative thematic interpretation. Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) was used for topic modeling, enabling the identification of ten latent thematic clusters across the dataset. Prior to modeling, posts were preprocessed through lemmatization, stopword removal, and token normalization to account for the informal and idiosyncratic language of social media. Emotion analysis was conducted using a hybrid classifier trained on social media text, drawing on established emotion taxonomies—anger, fear, hope, resignation, irony, humor, and neutrality (Mohammad, 2020) [6]. Posts were then hand-coded for validation and further annotated for rhetorical strategy using grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2014) [1]. The combination of computational modeling and interpretive coding allowed for a multivalent analysis, capturing both macro-level discourse structures and micro-level affective and rhetorical nuances. This approach aligns with emerging best practices in computational social science, where methodological triangulation enhances the robustness of findings (Tufekci, 2014) [15].

Findings

Emotion and Sentiment Distribution

In exploring public discourse on the potential for AI to make large swaths of the workforce redundant, emotional response plays a central role. Social media have changed the way human needs and desires are expressed (Shahghasemi, 2021) [12]. Social media, particularly the X platform, serves as a dynamic arena for the performative articulation of fear, resistance, sarcasm, and hope. This subsection presents a granular analysis of how users emotionally reacted to the theme of AI-induced job displacement, using a classification schema grounded in affect theory and sentiment analysis.

The dataset comprises 1,180 unique posts collected in response to major AI-related layoff announcements and viral news coverage. Posts were classified into seven emotion categories: neutral, angry, resigned, fearful, hopeful, ironic, and humorous. These categories were selected through iterative qualitative coding and validated through a machine-assisted classifier trained on social media data.

The distribution of emotions is visualized below in a frequency bar chart (Fig 1).

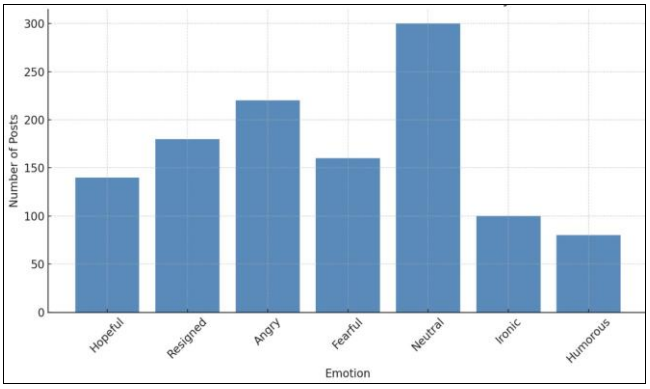

Fig 1: Distribution of Emotions in Posts about AI-Induced Job Loss

As shown in Fig 1, neutral posts formed the largest single category (n = 300, 25.4%), followed by angry (n = 220, 18.6%), resigned (n = 180, 15.3%), fearful (n = 160, 13.6%), hopeful (n = 140, 11.9%), ironic (n = 100, 8.5%), and humorous (n = 80, 6.8%).

The largest cluster of posts displayed a neutral tone. While these may appear emotionally inert at first glance, closer reading revealed that many were framed as observational or analytical rather than emotionally disengaged. Users in this category often shared links to articles, expressed factual observations or speculated on macroeconomic implications without overt emotional markers. Importantly, neutrality here should not be conflated with detachment; many of these posts reflect a subdued or implicit affective stance, often marked by irony, fatigue, or analytical framing.

The second-largest emotion category was anger, which manifested across a range of rhetorical styles, from explicit denunciations of tech elites to broader condemnations of capitalism. Posts in this group frequently targeted high-profile figures such as Elon Musk, Sam Altman, and Jeff Bezos, accusing them of prioritizing profit over human dignity. This anger was not merely personal but was often framed in systemic terms, linking technological disruption to entrenched patterns of labor exploitation, corporate greed, and the erosion of worker rights. The discourse resembled what scholars have called "technological populism," where users pit the interests of the working class against a perceived technocratic elite.

Resignation was another dominant emotional pattern, characterized by fatalism and weary acceptance. Many users expressed a belief that AI-induced job loss is inevitable, and that human labor is rapidly becoming obsolete. Posts in this category often took the form of laments or stoic acknowledgment of a changing world. This affective posture is notable for its passivity; users do not always express outrage, but rather a melancholic recognition of structural forces beyond their control. This kind of sentiment echoes discourses of post-industrial precarity, where the erosion of stable employment is no longer shocking but expected.

Fear-driven posts focused on personal and societal vulnerability. While resignation accepts change, fear anticipates disaster. Users in this category frequently invoked imagery of dystopia, economic collapse, and moral decay. Many were concerned about their own job security or that of entire industries. These expressions align with theories of "techno-anxiety," particularly in a post-pandemic economy where uncertainty is compounded by the rapid pace of innovation. Interestingly, fear was also entangled with epistemic uncertainty: many users admitted they did not understand the full capabilities of AI but feared its implications nonetheless.

A smaller but significant subset of users expressed hope, viewing AI not as a threat but as a liberating force that might eliminate drudgery and create opportunities for societal reorganization. These posts were often linked to techno-utopian imaginaries such as Universal Basic Income (UBI), post-work society, or creative entrepreneurship. Common sentiments included. Hopeful users tended to be more optimistic about the potential for policy innovation, democratic engagement, and ethical AI development. While numerically smaller, this group represented a crucial counterbalance to the predominance of negative sentiment.

Ironic posts occupied a liminal affective space, often masking deeper anxieties through humor or sarcasm. This discourse mode was particularly popular among younger users and meme accounts. While these expressions may appear humorous, they often reflect a coping mechanism for grappling with uncertainty and loss of control. Irony, as scholars of affect have argued, can serve both as a shield against vulnerability and a subtle mode of resistance.

Finally, a small group of posts expressed overt humor, often employing absurdism, parody, or satire to comment on AI-induced unemployment. Some users shared memes or fabricated job applications addressed to AI overlords. While humor may seem emotionally distant, it plays a critical role in social discourse, especially under conditions of threat. Laughter becomes a form of community-building, catharsis, and critique.

This emotional landscape suggests that discourse around AI and job displacement is both affectively saturated and ideologically diverse. The predominance of negative sentiments—anger, fear, and resignation—signals widespread unease about the social contract under technological capitalism. However, the presence of hope and humor indicates that not all users are mired in despair; rather, many are actively seeking new frameworks of meaning and resistance.

Importantly, emotional response is not simply a reflection of personal feeling but a communicative act that shapes public understanding of technology. Anger can mobilize political

critique, fear can amplify urgency, and hope can stimulate imagination. Recognizing the discursive role of emotion allows for a more nuanced interpretation of digital publics and their reactions to structural change. Moreover, the large neutral category complicates any binary reading of user engagement. Many users adopt a strategic neutrality—presenting facts or memes without overt commentary—that still participates in the emotional economy of discourse. These users often act as mediators, curators, or amplifiers of more overtly emotional content.

Topic Modeling and Thematic Clusters

This section presents the results of topic modeling applied to 1,518 posts extracted from X that engage with the theme of AI-induced job loss. The goal was to identify the latent thematic structures through which users discursively organize their perspectives on automation, employment, and technological change. To this end, we employed Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), a probabilistic model for uncovering topic clusters from large text corpora. The model was optimized using coherence scores, and a 10-topic solution yielded the best interpretability while preserving thematic diversity.

Topic modeling was followed by a qualitative labeling phase, where each topic was assigned a descriptive title based on its top keywords and representative posts. Fig 2 is a horizontal bar chart visualizing the distribution of topics according to the number of posts associated with each:

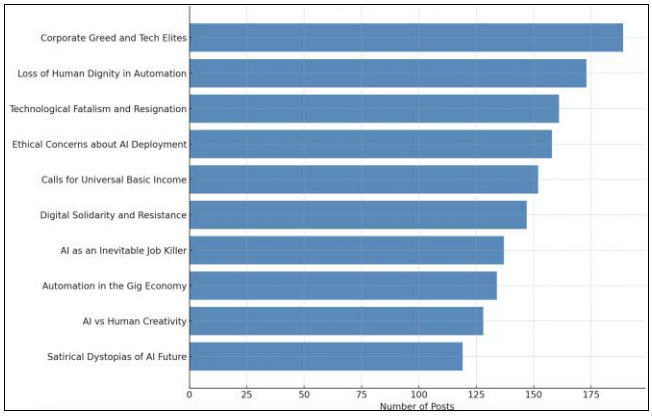

Fig 2: Topic Frequency In AI And Job Loss Discourse

As seen in the figure above, discourse was not evenly distributed. Some themes, such as corporate critique and automation ethics, generated significantly more engagement than others like satire or creativity. This asymmetry reflects the differential affective and ideological stakes that users assign to various aspects of the automation debate.

Table 1 includes all ten topics, their post frequencies, and dominant emotional orientations.

Table 1: AI Discourse Topics

Topic	Post Count	Dominant Sentiment
AI as an Inevitable Job Killer	137	Resigned
Corporate Greed and Tech Elites	189	Angry
Calls for Universal Basic Income	152	Hopeful
Loss of Human Dignity in Automation	173	Fearful
AI vs Human Creativity	128	Hopeful
Technological Fatalism and Resignation	161	Resigned
Satirical Dystopias of AI Future	119	Ironic
Digital Solidarity and Resistance	147	Angry
Automation in the Gig Economy	134	Fearful
Ethical Concerns about AI Deployment	158	Neutral

This was the most prevalent topic, capturing widespread anger toward corporate actors driving AI deployment. Posts in this category accused tech companies and billionaires of sacrificing workers for efficiency and profit. Typical expressions are making us obsolete for shareholder gains. The sentiment here was overwhelmingly negative, reflecting a class-conscious narrative that locates technological disruption within broader systems of corporate exploitation and economic inequality.

Closely following in frequency, this topic captured users' fears that AI not only replaces jobs but erodes the meaning of work itself. Unlike purely economic arguments, posts in this cluster framed employment as a source of identity, dignity, and social connection. Others questioned whether a society without work would also lose its sense of purpose and structure. The dominant emotion in this category was fear, with posts often invoking a dystopian tone reminiscent of sci-fi narratives or moral philosophy.

Posts in this cluster expressed resigned acceptance of AI-driven labor changes. Users invoked metaphors of inevitability, likening technological change to natural disasters or historical cycles. Many viewed resistance as futile. The dominant affect was resignation, often colored by weariness and detachment. Notably, some users also directed blame toward past political failures that failed to regulate or anticipate automation.

This topic encompassed posts questioning the moral, regulatory, and societal implications of deploying AI at scale. Users debated whether governments should intervene, whether certain jobs should be protected, and whether AI was being tested responsibly. Posts expressed concern for long-term consequences such as bias, inequality, or even systemic collapse. The dominant sentiment was neutral, as many posts adopted an informative or questioning tone rather than overt emotionality. Nonetheless, the underlying urgency was clear.

This topic was one of the more optimistic ones, with hope as the dominant sentiment. Users engaged with UBI not merely as a welfare policy but as a re-imagining of the social contract in a post-work world. Posts often linked AI with a utopian horizon, envisioning a future where machines liberate humans from labor, provided fair redistribution mechanisms are in place. This discourse drew inspiration from thinkers like Rutger Bregman and Andrew Yang, blending economic policy with futurist imaginaries.

This topic revealed efforts to organize resistance or raise awareness about AI's labor impact. Hashtags such as #HumansBeforeBots or #AntiAutomation circulated in this cluster. Users expressed solidarity with laid-off workers, criticized pro-AI narratives, and sometimes coordinated campaigns. The dominant sentiment was anger, particularly toward institutions seen as complicit in accelerating automation. Posts also critiqued media narratives that celebrated AI progress without acknowledging its human cost.

This topic reflected a structural analysis of automation, with posts framing AI as a natural evolution in capitalist productivity. Users cited historical analogs such as the

Industrial Revolution and posited that most jobs are at risk. While the tone was analytical, the emotional core was often resigned, blending economic realism with personal anxiety. Many users referred to studies (e.g., from Oxford or McKinsey) predicting large-scale disruption, using these to assert the inevitability of change.

This topic addressed how AI is impacting freelance and gig-based labor structures, particularly in delivery, transportation, and online services. Users discussed algorithmic management, surveillance, and declining wages in AI-enhanced platforms like Uber, Amazon Flex, and Fiverr. Posts highlighted the hybridization of human and machine labor, where workers are monitored or even replaced by automated systems. The dominant emotion here was fear, often tied to a sense of powerlessness in the face of opaque decision-making.

One of the less frequent but symbolically rich academic discussions explored whether AI could replace artists, writers, designers, and educators (Rahmatian & Sharajsharifi, 2022) [9]. Some users argued that machines could never replicate human emotion, intuition, or meaning. Others expressed fear that creative labor was no longer safe. Interestingly, a minority viewed AI as a collaborative tool, not a threat. Hope and fear coexisted in this category, though hopeful tones slightly dominated. This reflects a cultural struggle to preserve human uniqueness in a rapidly mechanized world.

This topic consisted mostly of sarcastic, humorous, or meme-based posts that mocked AI's takeover of the labor market. Many referenced exaggerated futures where humans are pets, unemployed philosophers, or replaced by toaster robots. Despite the humor, these posts often embedded deeper anxieties about value, obsolescence, and identity. The dominant sentiment was ironic, blending critique with comedic detachment. While this discourse might appear frivolous, it serves as a coping mechanism and a form of cultural resistance.

Though the model produced distinct clusters, overlap between topics was common. Similarly, satire frequently referenced the loss of dignity and technological fatalism. This intertopic fluidity underscores the complexity of the discourse, where users often engage with multiple themes simultaneously.

The distribution of thematic clusters reveals that discourse about AI-induced job loss is not monolithic. While fear and anger dominate, they are accompanied by nuanced forms of hope, irony, and systemic critique. Some users imagine new economic paradigms, others cling to creative autonomy, and many express deep anxiety about dignity, control, and meaning. The heterogeneity of topics illustrates how the automation debate functions as a symbolic battleground for deeper existential, economic, and political anxieties.

In methodological terms, topic modeling served as an effective gateway into this complexity, allowing for both macro-level pattern recognition and micro-level interpretive engagement. Each topic operates not just as a linguistic construct, but as a narrative strategy through which users frame the stakes of AI's disruption. Understanding these clusters is essential for anticipating public sentiment, guiding ethical policy development, and responding to the symbolic crises that AI continues to provoke.

Affective Load Across Topics

While topic modeling reveals the thematic structure of public discourse surrounding AI-induced job loss, it is through emotional distribution—or affective load—that the deeper stakes of these discussions come into view. In this section, we analyze how different emotions manifest across topics, identifying which themes carry the greatest emotional intensity, and what this reveals about the broader socio-psychological dynamics at play.

Affective load refers to the concentration and intensity of emotional expression associated with a given topic. Using a seven-category emotion model—hopeful, resigned, angry, fearful, neutral, ironic, and humorous—we classified each post within the top ten topics based on its dominant emotional tone. These emotions were then normalized per topic to produce a percentage-based heatmap, capturing the relative emotional burden each theme carries.

Fig 3 heatmap visualization displays the percentage distribution of emotions across all topics:

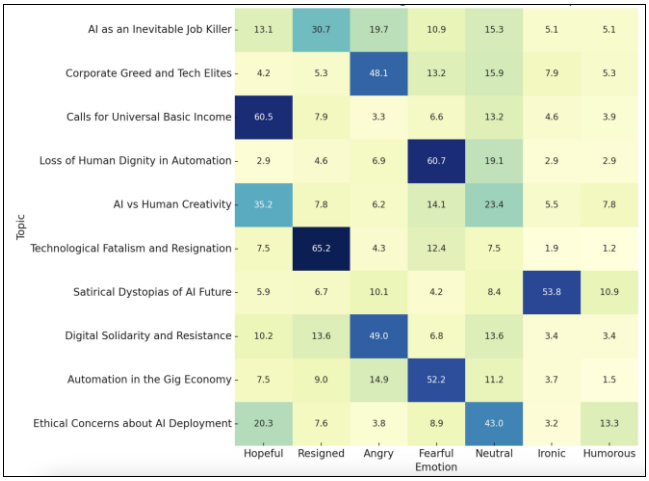

Fig 3: Emotion Percentage Distribution Across Topics

This heatmap provides a rich comparative framework for understanding how users engage affectively with different thematic concerns. Several notable patterns emerge upon inspection.

The topic of "Corporate Greed and Tech Elites" shows the highest concentration of anger (48.1%). This cluster includes posts that denounce billionaires and tech executives for prioritizing automation at the expense of human labor. The intensity of anger in this topic is not surprising given its overtly adversarial framing. Many users treat automation as a class war disguised as innovation, invoking narratives of dispossession and economic violence. The emotional load here is sharply focused, as nearly half the posts convey outrage—frequently aimed at specific figures like Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos.

In contrast, the topic "Technological Fatalism and Resignation" has the highest percentage of resigned posts (65.2%), far exceeding all other categories. This reflects a discourse where users accept the inevitability of job loss without expectation of meaningful intervention. The fatalism here is distinctly affective—it is not only a belief in unstoppable technological progress but also a surrender to its implications. Statements exemplify this emotional

resignation, and indicate a form of cognitive closure that discourages collective action or resistance.

Fear is most strongly associated with the topic "Loss of Human Dignity in Automation," where 60.7% of posts are categorized as fearful. This is significant because fear, unlike anger or resignation, is not simply reactive; it anticipates harm. Posts here focus on identity loss, purposelessness, and a breakdown of social structure when labor becomes redundant. Users do not only fear economic decline but also the erosion of their role in society. The psychological weight of this topic underscores how deeply intertwined work is with human value in contemporary culture.

The topic "Automation in the Gig Economy" also exhibits a high level of fear (52.2%). Posts in this category often come from freelancers, ride-share drivers, and delivery workers who already face algorithmic surveillance and precarity. Their fear is not speculative—it is grounded in lived experience. Here, the emotional load reflects an immediate and personal threat, rather than abstract speculation.

Hope, while generally in the minority across the discourse, is dominant in a few key areas. Most notably, the topic "Calls for Universal Basic Income" exhibits the highest percentage of hope (60.5%). Posts in this category imagine a future where automation frees humans from menial labor and guarantees a livable income through redistributive policy. Hope in this case is politically oriented; it signals not only optimism, but also belief in institutional possibility. The contrast between this and the fatalism found in other clusters highlights the polarized affective orientations within automation discourse.

The topic "AI vs Human Creativity" also shows a significant hopeful component (35.2%). Many users in this cluster maintain faith in the irreplaceability of human qualities such as intuition, emotional depth, and aesthetic judgment. These posts defend creativity as a last bastion of uniquely human labor, often positioning it against the perceived sterility of machine-generated content. The presence of hope here coexists with fear, producing a kind of ambivalent affective profile that oscillates between cultural optimism and existential anxiety.

Interestingly, humor and irony—often viewed as secondary or deflective emotional responses—are concentrated in particular topics. "Satirical Dystopias of AI Future" predictably contains the highest proportion of ironic posts (53.8%), alongside a relatively high presence of humor (10.9%). This cluster includes memes, sarcastic projections, and dystopian jokes. While these may appear emotionally detached, they perform important psychological and social functions: diffusing anxiety, critiquing dominant narratives, and creating a sense of in-group belonging among skeptics or critics.

The presence of humor is also noticeable in the "Ethical Concerns about AI Deployment" topic, where 13.3% of posts carry a humorous tone. These posts often use satire to mock the contradictions of AI adoption: for example, criticizing a company for laying off workers in the name of "efficiency" while celebrating its "innovation culture" online. Here, humor serves as an instrument of social critique rather than escapism.

Neutral posts are most concentrated in the topic "Ethical Concerns about AI Deployment" (43.0%). These posts tend to be analytical, policy-oriented, or journalistic in tone. They are not devoid of emotion but instead reflect a more deliberative, reflective mode of engagement. Users in this cluster discuss governance, transparency, and risk mitigation without slipping into overt emotionality. The relative affective restraint here may reflect a desire to reclaim rational discourse in a climate increasingly saturated with emotional intensity.

Some topics exhibit greater affective heterogeneity than others. "Digital Solidarity and Resistance," for example, features a near-equal mix of anger (49.0%), hope (10.2%), and resignation (13.6%). This blend indicates that users within this theme are not emotionally uniform; some mobilize anger to inspire resistance, while others signal fatigue or cautious optimism. Affective complexity within this cluster suggests it may serve as a transitional space between grievance and action—a rhetorical bridge between critique and mobilization.

Taken together, these findings reveal that affective load is not randomly distributed but is tightly aligned with thematic structure. Topics dealing with systemic critique tend to concentrate anger; those addressing existential or social loss attract fear; and those imagining alternatives cultivate hope. Humor and irony, while less dominant overall, are strategically deployed in topics where direct expression may be either too vulnerable or insufficient.

This mapping of affective load across topics underscores the importance of emotion in shaping digital discourse. Emotional responses are not peripheral to meaning—they constitute the very grammar of engagement in technologically mediated publics. Understanding how these emotions cluster around particular themes allows researchers and policymakers to gauge not only what people are saying, but what is at stake for them when they say it.

Furthermore, this analysis points to the limitations of neutral technocratic communication strategies. In a landscape where users express strong anger, fear, and resignation, any policy or design intervention that fails to acknowledge emotional stakes is likely to be dismissed as out of touch. Conversely, recognizing and addressing the affective dimensions of public discourse may open new avenues for engagement, consensus-building, and ethical design.

Rhetorical and Discursive Strategies

While emotions shape the *tone* of digital discourse, rhetorical and discursive strategies define its *structure*, *intention*, and *social function*. In this section, we examine how users on the X platform construct meaning, assert identity, and negotiate power through language in response to AI-induced job displacement. These strategies do not merely reflect attitudes; they actively constitute publics, generate ideological coherence, and influence broader narratives about technology, labor, and society.

Based on a close qualitative reading of posts within the ten thematic clusters identified earlier, several recurring rhetorical modes emerge. These include adversarial framing, ironic subversion, techno-messianism, fatalistic narrativization, human exceptionalism, data citation as epistemic leverage, and meme-based compression. Each of these functions differently depending on context, audience, and the emotional register of the post. What follows is a thematic taxonomy of these strategies, with representative examples and interpretive commentary.

One of the most prominent rhetorical strategies was adversarial framing, particularly within the topics "Corporate Greed and Tech Elites" and "Digital Solidarity

and Resistance." Users frequently constructed binary oppositions between exploiters (tech billionaires, corporations, AI developers) and the exploited (workers, the public, “normal people”).

Such posts often used the second person ("you") to implicate the reader emotionally. This strategy mobilizes collective identification while simplifying complex systems into moral frames—one side wins at the expense of the other. It also reflects the broader populist style of digital communication, where institutional distrust is personalized into narratives of betrayal.

Irony, sarcasm, and parody were frequently deployed in the topic "Satirical Dystopias of the AI Future" and parts of "Ethical Concerns" and "Technological Fatalism." These strategies serve to destabilize dominant techno-optimist narratives by mocking their assumptions.

These posts use exaggeration, absurdity, or undercutting humor to critique the dissonance between AI's potential and its social implementation. Such rhetoric provides catharsis for users facing powerlessness, while also signaling intellectual distance from naïve techno-enthusiasm.

Notably, irony also functions as a protective shield. It allows users to express despair or critique without overt vulnerability. In this sense, irony is not always trivializing but may be symptomatic of deep emotional or political disillusionment.

In contrast, posts in the "Universal Basic Income" and "AI vs Human Creativity" topics often employed a techno-messianic frame, depicting AI as a gateway to a better world—provided that social and economic structures adapt.

Rhetorical features of this style include future-oriented modal verbs ("could", "might"), hypothetical conditionals, and visionary appeals. This discourse uses elevated diction and aspirational metaphors, often drawing on historical precedents (e.g., the Enlightenment, industrial revolution, or digital revolution). Posts may cite futurist thinkers or policy proposals, lending the narrative both moral and intellectual legitimacy. This strategy often coexists with a critique of current governance, implicitly contrasting the transformative potential of AI with the inertia of political institutions.

Another discursive pattern, particularly evident in the "Technological Fatalism" topic, involved temporal framing: portraying automation as historically inevitable and socially irreversible. These posts often borrow narrative structures from natural disasters, war, or entropy.

This narrative strategy draws strength from historical analogy and metaphor, casting automation not as a decision, but a destiny. It positions users not as agents, but as witnesses to a larger unfolding event. While this may suppress resistance, it can also invite collective mourning or philosophical reflection.

Within the topic "AI vs Human Creativity," many users employed rhetorical strategies grounded in human exceptionalism—the belief that certain traits (emotion, empathy, spontaneity, consciousness) make humans irreplaceable.

This strategy was frequently expressed through contrastive syntax. These statements appeal to affective, moral, or spiritual values rather than empirical comparisons. They attempt to re-inscribe human labor with intrinsic worth, particularly in the face of commodification and simulation. Importantly, this rhetoric is often defensive—a bulwark against existential redundancy.

In more analytically framed discourse, especially within "Ethical Concerns" and "AI as Job Killer," users often deployed statistics, research citations, or institutional references to lend credibility to their arguments.

This strategy shifts the rhetorical burden from personal experience to institutional authority. It also reflects users’ desire to persuade rather than merely express. These posts tend to avoid emotionally charged language, focusing instead on rational persuasion—though often still colored by anxiety or urgency.

Finally, meme-based discourse constitutes a unique rhetorical economy in this dataset. Memes compress complex emotions, ideas, and critiques into shareable visual and textual formats. While not always easily quantifiable, their rhetorical power lies in familiarity, humor, and low-effort virality.

These rhetorical forms blend visual and textual cues, often using irony, parody, or nostalgia to subvert dominant narratives. Memes enable indirect engagement and facilitate affective bonding among users.

Comparative Analysis of Strategy Use Across Topics

To synthesize these findings, Table 2 outlines the dominant rhetorical strategies by topic:

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Strategy Use Across Topics

Topic	Dominant Strategy
Corporate Greed and Tech Elites	Adversarial Framing, Citation
Technological Fatalism	Temporal Framing, Fatalistic Narrative
Universal Basic Income	Techno-Messianism
Loss of Human Dignity	Existential Reflection, Humanism
AI vs Human Creativity	Human Exceptionalism
Satirical Dystopias	Irony, Meme Compression
Gig Economy	Testimonial Realism, Sarcasm
Ethical Concerns	Rational Persuasion, Policy Framing
Digital Solidarity	Adversarial Framing, Collective Voice
AI as Inevitable Job Killer	Historical Analogy, Inevitable Logic

This mapping demonstrates that rhetorical strategy is not random, but highly thematic. It aligns with the emotional register of the discourse and reflects broader social narratives. For example, topics rooted in critique deploy anger and irony; those imagining change use vision and data; those coping with loss turn to fatalism or nostalgia.

Discursive strategies are central to how users frame, mediate, and respond to the perceived crisis of AI-driven labor displacement. Whether through satire or sincerity, statistics or storytelling, these strategies create frames of intelligibility through which new technologies are interpreted. Importantly, they are not merely expressive—they are performative. A sarcastic post about becoming a robot's assistant does not just mock automation; it locates the speaker in a moral and social position. A hopeful claim about UBI does not just envision a better world; it invites alignment and political imagination.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the deep entanglement between technological disruption and emotional, rhetorical, and ideological contestation in digital public discourse. As

AI technologies increasingly reshape the landscape of employment, users on the X platform are not merely passive observers but active participants in meaning-making processes. The dominant emotional responses—anger, resignation, and fear—reflect a collective reckoning with the erosion of labor security and the perceived indifference of corporate and governmental institutions. However, this affective spectrum also includes notable expressions of hope and irony, suggesting that users are seeking not only to express discontent but also to imagine alternative futures. The diversity of emotional registers reveals that digital publics are not monolithic; rather, they are fragmented yet deeply engaged in symbolic negotiations over the implications of automation.

The analysis of rhetorical and discursive strategies reveals how these emotional responses are structured and articulated. Users deploy a wide array of narrative devices—from adversarial populism and techno-messianism to ironic detachment and humanist appeals—to frame the stakes of AI-induced job displacement. These rhetorical choices are not arbitrary; they are shaped by the sociopolitical positions of users and their affective orientations toward risk, agency, and institutional trust. Discursive strategies such as adversarial framing mobilize indignation, while ironic subversion provides a means of navigating uncertainty and emotional fatigue. Furthermore, the strategic invocation of statistics and citations reflects a desire to anchor personal experiences in broader epistemic claims. In this sense, digital discourse around AI and labor does not simply mirror public opinion—it constitutes a dynamic field where ideologies are contested, coalitions are imagined, and technological futures are made socially legible.

By integrating topic modeling, emotion classification, and rhetorical analysis, the research illustrates that the discourse surrounding automation is not reducible to technocratic or economic concerns—it is fundamentally affective, symbolic, and political. As automation continues to advance, it is imperative for policymakers, technologists, and scholars to attend not only to the material effects of AI, but also to the discursive environments through which those effects are contested and made meaningful. Public discourse, especially on fast-moving platforms like X, serves as both a diagnostic and a generative space: it reveals the tensions and imaginaries that will shape the social contract in an increasingly automated world.

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