The Rashomon Effect in the Algorithmic Age: AI-Driven Perceptions of Truth in Social Media

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Abstract

This study analyzes the “Rashomon Effect” in the digital age, focusing on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) mechanisms in social media platforms on users’ perceptions of “truth.” The main objective is to understand the structure of algorithmic systems, the patterns of user perception under algorithmically curated content, and the resulting socio-cultural impacts. This research employs qualitative content analysis, conducted during January–April 2025, using purposive sampling of content from Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (X) relating to two notable events: the 2024 controversy involving South Korean actor Kim Soo-hyun, and the political and social movements led by Thailand’s “Free Youth” protest group. The content types included public posts, video clips, comments, and shared articles. Units of analysis were individual posts and their engagement patterns. The findings reveal that AI plays a significant role in filtering and ranking information based on users’ behavior and interests. This process reinforces selective exposure, fosters the creation of echo chambers and filter bubbles, and leads users to adopt personalized versions of truth without questioning the underlying algorithmic logic.

Consequently, the Rashomon Effect is amplified at a structural level, resulting in a diminished diversity of perspectives, difficulty in achieving social consensus, and increased vulnerability to misinformation. The study emphasizes the urgent need to promote both media literacy and AI literacy, enabling users to critically engage with content in an era where truth is algorithmically constructed.

Keywords : Rashomon Effect, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Social Media, Perception of Truth

Introduction

In contemporary communication, there is no longer a singular, definitive notion of "truth." What each person perceives and communicates is often a complex outcome of interpretation shaped by individual contexts, beliefs, experiences, and perspectives. This idea is vividly illustrated through the "Rashomon Effect," named after the iconic 1950 Japanese film "Rashomon" by Akira Kurosawa. The film narrates a murder case from multiple characters' perspectives, each of which is drastically different and contradictory—despite all of them claiming to tell the truth. This ambiguity became a model for philosophical and communication discourse. Scholars such as Karl G. Heider (1988) defined the Rashomon Effect as the emergence of multiple truths arising from subjective perception. It has been employed in ethnographic field studies to understand why individuals interpret the same event differently.

The Rashomon Effect is not confined to film; it has been adapted across literature, theater, and cinema in various cultural contexts, emphasizing the universal nature of plural truths. Examples include the Broadway adaptation "Rashomon" (Kanin & Kanin) and other films inspired by its core structure of multi-perspective storytelling, even if they do not bear the same name.

In today's world, where massive volumes of information are readily accessible, the diversity of perception has not diminished—it has grown more complex. Most information we now consume is pre-filtered by algorithmic systems operated by artificial intelligence (AI). Digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Google use AI to curate content based on individual user behavior and interests. This process is commonly referred to as "personalized content curation" or "algorithmic filtering."

While such systems help users access content more aligned with their preferences, concerns have been raised about the implications of this personalization. Eli Pariser (2011) introduced the concept of the "filter bubble," while Cass Sunstein (2017) described the "echo chamber." Both refer to environments in which users are repeatedly exposed to content that reinforces their pre-existing beliefs, limiting exposure to divergent viewpoints. As a result, users may perceive only a fragment of a broader, more complex reality—one tailored specifically by AI, often without users' awareness. The issue becomes even more pressing given that AI not only filters but also generates and manipulates content, potentially leading to novel forms of truth distortion.

From this backdrop, the present article raises critical questions in communication studies: If AI becomes the primary information gatekeeper, can we still access a plurality of truths? Or are we seeing the world through a single algorithmic lens selected for us? How does AI amplify or constrain the Rashomon Effect in the digital age? Understanding this phenomenon is vital as it affects public discourse, social consensus, and the possibility of intergroup communication in democratic societies.

Objectives

1) To investigate the structure and functioning of algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) in managing and presenting news and information.

2) To analyze patterns of user perception under algorithmically curated content.

3) To explain the Rashomon Effect in the digital age where information is controlled and distributed through algorithmic systems.

Methodology

This study applies qualitative content analysis, a structured interpretive method within a socio-cultural context, to address how AI affects users' perception of truth under the Rashomon Effect. The analysis includes examining data structures, platform presentation styles, and user engagement with content. The methodological framework follows Schreier's (2012) guidelines for qualitative content analysis. The research process included three main stages: (1) Data Collection – data were collected between January and April 2025, with purposive sampling of digital content from Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter; (2) Coding – all posts and articles were categorized by tone, emotional framing, and ideological stance; coders were trained, and intercoder reliability was ensured through pilot coding; (3) Analysis – themes were synthesized to compare narrative divergence and identify patterns of algorithmic influence.

Content Sampling and Analysis Procedure

The analysis involves three main stages:

• **Sampling**: Selecting content on the same topic and time frame but from diverse sources and viewpoints, including mainstream media, bloggers, activists, and regular users. The analysis examines how this content is recommended or surfaced in users' feeds by AI algorithms.

• **Content Analysis**: Assessing content structures such as language use, visual sequencing, headline framing, keyword deployment, and viewer engagement (likes, shares, comments). This is combined with the concept of "Algorithmic Visibility" (Bucher, 2018) to explore how AI impacts content visibility among different user groups.

• **Comparative Perspective Analysis**: Evaluating how the same content is perceived by users with differing stances, reflecting the Rashomon Effect within digital media environments.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the assumption that truth in the digital age is not absolute but a product of complex interactions between individual perception and data mediation technologies, particularly AI. The framework consists of the following concepts:

• **Rashomon Effect**: Originating from Kurosawa's 1950 film, this concept describes how multiple conflicting truths arise from subjective interpretations. It has been widely used in communication, anthropology, and social science research (Heider, 1988).

• **Selective Exposure and Filter Bubble**: People tend to seek information aligning with their existing beliefs while avoiding conflicting content (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2008). Algorithms intensify this effect by filtering out alternative viewpoints, creating isolated informational environments (Pariser, 2011).

• **Algorithmic Mediation**: Bucher (2018) argues that algorithms are not neutral tools but act with structural power, shaping what users see, believe, or prioritize. This includes what Tufekci (2015) calls "algorithmic harms"—unintended consequences of AI design driven by platform engagement and profit motives.

• **Constructivist Media Theory**: This theory holds that truth is constructed through users' interaction with media in a social context (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). As AI now mediates such interaction, users' understanding becomes shaped by opaque and uncontrollable technological frameworks.

Overview of the Conceptual Framework

1) **The Rashomon effect** serves as the starting point and primary conceptual framework of this study. It illustrates that "truth" is not fixed but rather interpreted and perceived differently based on each individual's perspective. In the realm of social media, truth is fluid and shaped by the subjective standpoint of each user.

2) **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and algorithms** play a crucial role as intermediaries that filter and present information on social media platforms.

3) **Algorithmic mediation** refers to the idea that AI is not merely a neutral tool, but one that holds the power to mediate, determine, and direct the information users encounter. Algorithms filter what users see and reinforce pre-existing beliefs by selecting content that aligns with their preferences (Selective Exposure, Filter Bubble).

4) **Selective Exposure & Filter Bubbles**: The operation of AI amplifies users' tendency to consume information consistent with their existing beliefs, while simultaneously restricting their exposure to diverse perspectives. This results in "filter bubbles" that limit users to information they already agree with, thereby narrowing their perception of reality and increasing divergence between individuals.

5) Constructivist Media Theory supports the notion that perception of truth is not simply about receiving information, but about constructing understanding through interactions with media and sociocultural contexts. In today's world, AI has become an integral part of this context. Information visibility and the construction of truth are now shaped by underlying structures of technological power (i.e., Algorithmic Mediation and Constructivist Perspectives).

6) User perception of truth: Ultimately, each user ends up with a version of reality that is individually tailored—potentially vastly different from that of others, even when responding to the same event.

Together, these concepts demonstrate that AI not only reflects the diversity of perspectives but also actively shapes and constrains that diversity.

Conceptual Framework Diagram of the Study

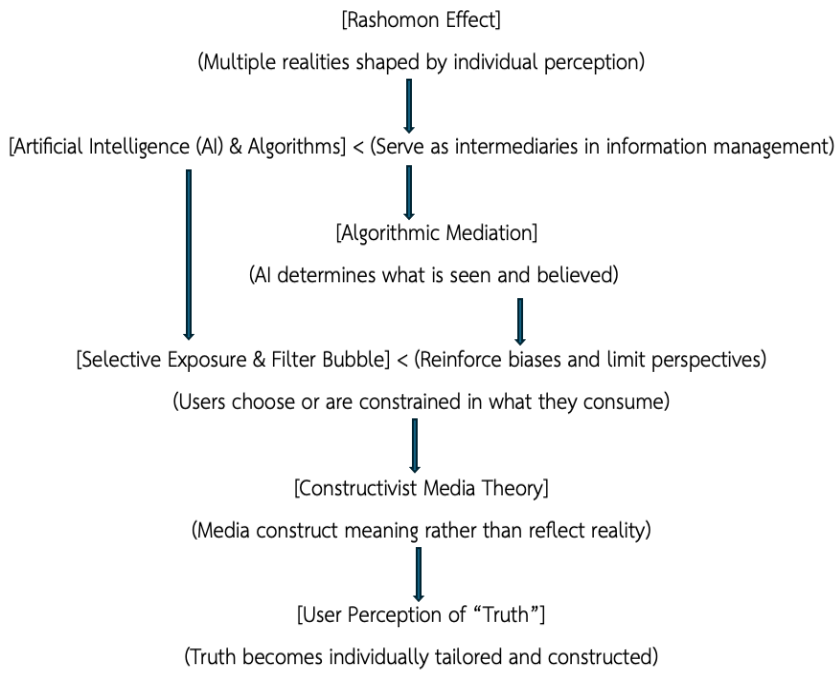


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework Diagram of the Study
Note : Crated by the authors

In applying these concepts to the research design, the Rashomon Effect served as a lens to identify varying narratives presented on the same event. Selective Exposure and Filter Bubble were operationalized through coding the ideological tone of content shown to different user groups. Algorithmic Mediation was traced through content ranking and visibility mechanisms. Constructivist Media Theory was reflected in interpreting how meaning was co-created through user interaction and algorithmic shaping.

Findings

This study aims to analyze the Rashomon Effect in an era where human perception is increasingly mediated by artificial intelligence (AI)–driven platforms. Drawing from key concepts in social psychology—Constructive Memory (Schacter, 1995), Selective Exposure (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009), Echo Chamber (Sunstein, 2017), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and Emotional Framing—the research investigates the mechanisms through which truth is perceived and constructed in digital media. Through purposive sampling of content from Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, the study reveals that the visibility of posts supporting each ideological stance significantly differed between user groups. For instance, fan-based users were shown 4 times more positive posts about Kim Soo-hyun compared to general users (based on visibility metrics such as likes, comments, and shares). The analysis is grounded in two case studies: the extensive online discourse in Thailand regarding South Korean actor Kim Soo-hyun in 2024, and the political and social demonstrations led by the Free Youth Movement in Thailand.

1) Algorithmic Structure and the Role of AI in News Information Management

The study reveals that algorithms on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok do not merely present content chronologically. Rather, they play an active role in filtering, ranking, and curating content for individual users in a personalized manner. This aligns with the concept of Algorithmic Mediation (Bucher, 2018; Tufekci, 2015). AI systems analyze users' past behaviors—including likes, shares, comments, followed pages, and watch time—to create predictive models of user interests and preferences.

• **Content Filtering and Ranking** Algorithms prioritize content predicted to engage the user based on relevance, popularity among peers, and historical interaction patterns. The result is a highly curated news feed in which each user is exposed to a unique set of information—even when reacting to the same event.

• **Bias Reinforcement** The algorithmic design that prioritizes engagement tends to deliver content that aligns with users' pre-existing beliefs. This reduces cognitive dissonance and reinforces selective exposure (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2008), leading users to repeatedly encounter content that affirms their own views. Such patterns contribute to Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles (Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2017), where diverse sources are filtered out.

• Linking Psychological Theories to Algorithmic Operations

Table 1 Correspondence Between Psychological Concepts and Algorithmic Mechanisms

Psychological Concept	Theoretical Principle	Application in AI Context
Constructive Memory	Memory is not an exact retrieval of past data but a reconstruction shaped by experience and interpretation (Schacter, 1995).	News feeds are curated to highlight content that aligns with users' beliefs, enhancing engagement. Users recall "truth" as it is framed by algorithms, reinforcing perceived accuracy.
Selective Exposure	Individuals prefer information consistent with their beliefs and avoid conflicting views (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2008).	AI recommends content based on repeated engagement, limiting exposure to opposing views and reinforcing cognitive bias. This constrains users' perception of reality within familiar narratives.
Echo Chamber	A closed system where individuals receive only reinforcing perspectives, reducing exposure to differing opinions (Sunstein, 2017).	Following like-minded pages or influencers leads AI to amplify similar content, enclosing users within their own "echo chambers" and exacerbating the Rashomon Effect across groups.
Social Identity Theory	Individuals define themselves through social group membership, shaping their attitudes and interactions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).	Users engage with content that reflects group identity—e.g., political colors or fandoms. AI promotes such content, reinforcing in-group narratives and intensifying group affiliation.
Emotional Framing	Messages framed to trigger emotions influence perception and response, either positively or negatively (Gillespie, 2014).	Content is emotionally charged—e.g., anger, sympathy—to attract attention and drive interaction. Algorithms favor emotionally provocative content, increasing user engagement while potentially distorting facts.

This framework reveals that AI does not merely reflect the diversity of perspectives but actively constructs and limits such diversity. The Rashomon Effect, therefore, is no longer just a matter of subjective perception—it is also systematically shaped by algorithmic logic and psychological mechanisms working in tandem.

2) Patterns of User Perception under the Context of Algorithmically Tailored Information

Based on content analysis, it was found that users' perceptions of "truth" have significantly shifted under the influence of AI. This shift has contributed to the amplification of the Rashomon Effect in the digital world.

2.1) Case Study: The Online Discourse on Kim Soo-hyun in Thailand (2024)

Nature of the Event and Media Representation: Rumors surrounding Kim Soo-hyun's alleged relationship with a female actress spread rapidly across social media. Media outlets and users presented drastically different interpretations. One side criticized the issue as a publicity stunt for promoting a TV series, while the other side defended the actor, praising his professionalism and talent. The incident became a trending topic, vividly reflecting the diverse interpretations among users across various platforms.

Content Discrepancies and the Role of Selective Exposure: Users who followed Korean entertainment pages or identified as part of Kim Soo-hyun's fanbase (fandom culture) were more likely to encounter supportive content, such as praise for his work or protection of his privacy. In contrast, those following general entertainment pages or scandal-focused content were exposed to negative narratives—questioning motives or resurfacing past controversies. These differences in perception stem from algorithms learning users' preferences and delivering content aligned with their prior expectations.

Echo Chambers and Social Identity Theory in Action: Users tended to consume information from groups or pages that reflected their existing beliefs or emotions, resulting in the formation of echo chambers in which each side reinforced its own viewpoint while excluding or discrediting opposing perspectives. When exposed to conflicting information, users were quick to question its credibility. Observations showed that fan groups repeatedly shared supportive posts and created discussion spaces that actively excluded dissenting views—thereby preserving their constructed version of "truth."

Identity and Emotion-Driven Discourse: Users expressed their identities through posts, hashtags, and acts of defending the actor—for example, using hashtags such as #Protect-KimSooHyun or #CelebritiesHaveFeelingsToo (#ดาราก็มีหัวใจ). These expressions emphasized emotional themes such as love, loyalty, or anger toward perceived injustice. This behavior illustrates the influence of Emotional Framing and Social Identity Theory. Consequently, the algorithm learned to deliver more emotionally resonant content, fueling a cycle of emotionally and identity-driven information consumption.



Figure 2 Media Coverage and Interpretations of Kim Soo-hyun in Various Platforms MISS_K_DRAMA (2024)

2.2) Case Study: A Major Political and Social Event in Thailand — The "Free Youth" Movement (2020–2021)

This event reflects a highly polarized political climate (BBC News Thai, 2020; iLaw, 2021; Thairath Plus, 2020). Supporters of the protests were more likely to encounter news coverage that promoted the movement and criticized the government, while opponents were more exposed to content highlighting disorder or legal violations. The analysis revealed that Facebook and Twitter (now X) played a crucial role in shaping personalized information feeds for different groups by delivering content that aligned with users' pre-existing beliefs—thereby maximizing engagement and platform retention.

Adherence to "Personal Truth" and Lack of Critical Awareness: Users on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (X) generally believed the content they consumed to be factual, without questioning its sources or the algorithmic filtering behind it. Some users expressed distrust toward information from sources that contradicted what they saw in their own feeds. This highlights the extent to which AI facilitates the formation of deeply personalized and rigid truths, limiting openness to opposing views and contributing to ideological division.



Figure 3 Thai youth's struggle for democracy may fizzle but political contention continues. East Asia Forum (2021)

3) Explaining the Rashomon Phenomenon in the Digital Age of Algorithmic Information Control

The algorithmic shaping of reality profoundly impacts social and cultural dynamics—especially by undermining consensus-building and cross-group communication.

3.1) The Expansion of the Rashomon Phenomenon and Social Fragmentation

AI acts as an amplifier of the Rashomon Phenomenon, extending it from human perception alone to the algorithmic construction of "personalized realities" backed by structural systems (Bucher, 2018). When individuals are confined within their own filter bubbles and echo chambers, cross-group communication becomes increasingly difficult.

As each side clings tightly to its version of the truth without critical examination or engagement with alternative perspectives, social misunderstanding, mistrust, and conflict grow. Reaching a shared consensus on public issues becomes increasingly complex and challenging in democratic societies.

3.2) Impact on Decision-Making and Political Participation

AI-filtered information affects user decisions across domains—from product choices to political engagement. If users only receive one-sided information that reinforces their existing beliefs, decisions may lack nuance or balance, leading to the uncritical endorsement of ideologies or political parties without exposure to counterarguments.

3.3) Challenges to Media Literacy and AI Literacy

Many users remain unaware of how algorithms filter content. This poses a major challenge to improving media literacy and AI literacy. A lack of understanding makes users more vulnerable to misinformation and fake news. The study highlights the urgent need for public education about how AI curates information, as well as critical thinking skills to assess source credibility.

3.4) Reduction of Cognitive Diversity

Although AI is designed to deliver personally relevant content, this comes at the cost of reducing exposure to differing viewpoints or content that challenges existing beliefs. This reduction in cognitive diversity may limit the dynamism of public discourse and weaken society's capacity to generate solutions to complex problems.

Conclusion and Discussion

The study clearly demonstrates the structural and psychological influence of algorithms on users' perception of truth in the digital age. What was once a human perceptual phenomenon—the Rashomon Effect—is now amplified and reinforced by AI systems embedded in social media platforms.

AI and the Transformation of Truth Perception.

AI serves not merely as a neutral intermediary but as a powerful agent guiding what users see and believe. Through content filtering based on users' past behaviors and emotions, AI produces personalized realities that are far from objective or shared across users. This aligns with the concepts of Constructive Memory (Schacter, 1995) and Algorithmic Mediation (Bucher, 2018). Algorithms are not neutral tools; they are active actors that shape public perception. When different users are exposed to different realities regarding the same event, the notion of a unified truth dissolves—posing significant challenges to shared understanding in society.

Rashomon Phenomenon and the Construction of Group-Specific Realities.

When users perceive and interpret the same event differently, it exemplifies the Rashomon Phenomenon. AI further intensifies this divergence by selectively presenting information that aligns with users' perspectives, leading to echo chambers (Sunstein, 2017)

and filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011) on a structural level. Thus, the Rashomon framework is especially appropriate for explaining the complexity of truth perception in the AI era. AI is not always neutral—it is designed to maximize engagement and profits, often at the cost of limiting user perspectives.

User–Algorithm Interaction.

While some users actively engage and reinforce algorithmic selection through interaction, others may consume content more passively (as seen in phenomena such as "doomscrolling"). Thus, user–algorithm interaction is a spectrum, not a binary dynamic. This corresponds with Constructivist Media Theory (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), which posits that reality is co-produced through interaction between individuals, media, and social structures. This interaction creates a feedback loop that makes AI increasingly accurate in tailoring content, but also reinforces users' existing biases.

Implications for Future Communication and Society

This study highlights how AI-driven algorithms shape personalized realities, reinforcing selective exposure, echo chambers, and emotional framing. These mechanisms deepen social fragmentation and hinder democratic dialogue. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated response across education, technology, and policy. First, educational institutions should embed algorithmic literacy and critical media analysis into curricula, especially in communication and digital studies. Public workshops and accessible online modules can further expand awareness across age groups and communities. Second, social media platforms should improve transparency by showing users how content is selected and offering tools to diversify their feeds. User-controlled settings can reduce algorithmic bias and encourage broader perspective exposure. Finally, governments and civic organizations should lead awareness campaigns that explain algorithmic influence and promote respectful engagement with diverse views. Policies developed in consultation with interdisciplinary experts can help ensure ethical and inclusive digital communication environments. These measures aim to empower users, enhance critical thinking, and rebuild conditions for shared understanding in an AI-mediated society.

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