

Decoding Political Narratives: Artificial Art and the Crafting of Symbolic Realities

Communication Analysis

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Background Information

- Artificial image trend (Warzel, 2023)
- Eliot Higgins- founder of Bellingcat (Cleland, 2023)
- Midjourney- cutting-edge AI tool (Devlin & Cheetham, 2023)



Review of Artifact:



Figure 1
AI generated photo of Donald Trump being arrested
Created by Eliot Higgins 2023
Retrieved from: X (Formerly Twitter)



Figure 2
AI generated photo of Donald Trump crying in court
Created by Eliot Higgins 2023
Retrieved from: X (Formerly Twitter)



Figure 3
AI generated photo of Donald Trump in jail
Created by Eliot Higgins 2023
Retrieved from: X (Formerly Twitter)



Figure 4
AI generated photo of Donald Trump escaping jail
Created by Eliot Higgins 2023
Retrieved from: X (Formerly Twitter)



Figure 5
AI generated photo of Donald Trump crying in McDonalds
Created by Eliot Higgins 2023
Retrieved from: X (Formerly Twitter)



Review of Artifact:



Figure 6

AI generated photo of Donald Trump kneeling in prayer

Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mattnovak/2023/03/23/donald-trump-shares-fake-ai-created-image-of-himself-on-truth-social/?sh=687cc16771f6>



Research Question:
“How do fake AI-generated narratives, such as realistic images of political figures, impact public opinion?”



Roadmap

1. Synthesize Ernest Borman's Symbolic Convergence Theory
2. Apply theory to fake AI-generated photos of Donald Trump
3. Develop new implication theories



Significance

- The growth of artificial media overshadows our access to truth (Pew Research Center, 2023).



Methodology

- Qualitative Content Analysis- comprehensive review of artifact and literature
 - Developed Coding scheme to understand the artifact's impact
 - Three categories: “Accepting Image as Authentic”, “Frustrated with Fake News”, and “Viral Reposting”
- Synthesized theoretical framework of Symbolic Convergence Theory
- Applied artifact to Symbolic Convergence Theory



Methodology: Coding Scheme

Figure 7
Coding Chart
Created by Lindsay Anton 2024

Category- Impact on Public Opinion (Repeated Themes)	Description	Codes
"Accepting Image as Authentic"	This theme explores the phenomenon of individuals accepting the artificial images as genuine representations of reality.	"He gets what he deserves" (@Pk24506, 2023). "Finally, it's going down" (Suzuki98, 2023). "Why is he being arrested?" (@Harsha5103, 2023). "It's so real" (@FilipKristek, 2023). "It's poetic justice that Trump goes down for this crime. Let it be the beginning to the end" (@yinz yoga, 2023). "I legit think these are real" (@CJlewiz, 2023).
"Frustrated at Fake News"	This theme focuses on the emotional response of individuals who are frustrated by the proliferation of fake news and misinformation created by these images.	"Mr. Higgins, your failure to not make it clear that these are AI has done a disservice to journalism" (@wa2706129, 2023). "Even if a joke you've lost your credibility as an independent verifier of truth, how disappointing" (@lizbilney, 2023). "Why would you post Ai generated images? Is it fair if I post your picture with some AI imagination?" (@MangrerP, 2023). "This kind of content needs AI watermarks lol, I can legit see things like this causing riots" (@grankryto, 2023). "Pretty soon we aren't going to be able to tell which photos are legit and which photos are fake" (@MeUncensored, 2023).
"Viral Reposting"	This theme of viral sharing encompasses the widespread reposting of images within the public sphere.	"Your pictures are currently on the frontpage of Europe's biggest tabloid" (@jphilipp, 2023). "WATCH HERE For More On Trump's Hush Money Crimes" (@cliffschechter, 2023). "I am seeing these photos everywhere" (@Kate5674, 2023).

Synthesis of Theory:

Ernest Borman's Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT)

Three Tenants:

1. A particular mode of communication creates a narrative
2. That narrative gains widespread adoption
3. By using that narrative, the group conscience creates their own symbolic reality

(Borman, 1985)



Apply Tenants of SCT to Artifact

-Reviewing Literature

1. Fake AI images formulated a narrative (Nnamdi, Oniyinde, & Abegunde, 2023)
2. The images have permeated the digital landscape, being copied and propagated as authentic (Kochi, 2023)
3. The art became a symbolic reality (Mourão et al., 2023)



Return to Question:
“How do fake AI-generated narratives, such as realistic images of political figures, impact public opinion?”



Develop New Implication Theories

1. The threat of algorithm bias (Nazer et al., 2023)
2. An easily deceived culture (Gupta et al., 2023)



Limitations:

1. Insufficient empirical research is available
2. Artificial art has emerged as a recent phenomenon
3. Political narratives are influenced by a multitude of complex factors



Conclusion Overview

1. Comprehensive review of artifact through a content analysis methodology
2. Synthesized communication theory: Symbolic Convergence
3. Synthesized artifact: Fake AI-generated photos of Donald Trump
4. Developed new implication theories



Questions?



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