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Using artificial intelligence (AI) to spread misinformation and fake content within social media posts

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used to generate and automate social media content for spreading misinformation and fake content. While prior research has examined the ethical and societal impact of misinformation, few studies have tested the real-world effectiveness of fully automated AI generated posts compared to those reviewed with human oversight. To address this gap, two experimental models were developed: Model 1 used a fully automated AI workflow, while Model 2 combined AI generated content with human interaction. Data was collected from Instagram and Meta between February 12th, 2025, and ending April 20th, 2025. Both models posted inspirational content with images, but Model 2, which featured human refinement and engagement, saw significantly higher user interaction, including friend requests, messages, and promotional offers. In contrast, Model 1 experienced low engagement and technical issues. The results highlight the importance of human oversight in boosting credibility and interaction with AI generated content. This study contributes to the understanding of misinformation by demonstrating how different levels of automation influence the content reach, user behavior, and potential ethical risks, emphasizing the need for platform regulation, and responsible AI usage.

Keywords: artificial intelligence (AI), misinformation, disinformation, fake content, propaganda, digital manipulation

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the landscape of spreading information, influencing how information is produced, consumed, and used to create profit and growth for companies. Combating fake content presents significant challenges across various domains, including detection, mitigation, and understanding its societal impact. The intentional spread of misinformation, often referred to as disinformation, has been the subject of extensive scholarly research. Misinformation and fake content have become a global phenomenon due to its rapid growth, especially on social media. The widespread dissemination of disinformation and fake content can have harmful effects on society.

Fake content surfaced as a significant global issue during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. To effectively address this challenge, there is a need to develop methods to detect fake content in real time and implement

strategies to mitigate its potentially harmful impacts on individuals, communities, and societies. This issue requires a deeper understanding of how the internet disseminates content, and how individuals process content.

The goal of social media platforms is to keep the user engaged and spend more time on the platform. The more time the user spends on the platform the easier the user is manipulated based on their preferences. Users are lured into something so attractive to use without knowing what the possible outcome could be. Increasing user engagement algorithms to reach that goal can promote hate and polarization. Propaganda on social media can lead to steering ethnic conflicts and political, religious, gender, and others by promoting certain content. The algorithm can automatically promote conspiracy theories to accomplish its goal setting to keep user engagement.

Literature Review

Germani and Biller-Andorno (2024) examined AI's role in spreading information and its implications for public health. They discussed strategies to mitigate disinformation, such as creating transparent datasets for training AI models, regulating content outputs, and promoting information literacy. They concluded that developing an information literacy tool and implementing critical thinking skills into society to help individuals distinguish between what is real and what is fake content would be useful in preventing the spread of misinformation. They also suggested another solution which would be to integrate ethics into AI-driven information generation and dissemination to safeguard the integrity of societies information ecosystems and strengthen societal resilience.

Xifeng and Han (2022) explored how AI transforms information dissemination patterns from the viewpoints of disseminators, media, and audiences. They used a software tool called CiteSpace, to analyze literature to help them in identifying trends in AI-driven information dissemination. They found that AI technology is being used for information dissemination on different platforms targeting users' individual needs and delivering filtered messages with greater accuracy and precision. Their research suggested that the greatest advantage of AI in information dissemination is its ability to analyze and assess users' habits through data sharing, creating personalized content for individuals interested in viewing and reading.

Intentional Spread of Misinformation and Fake Content

Ardèvol-Abreu et al. (2020) explored the motivations behind individuals sharing fake content on social media. They investigated the factors driving the deliberate spread of false information and highlighted the importance of fact-checking before sharing content. They found that some of their participants expressed distrust toward fact-checkers and lacked understanding of how the fact-checking process worked. Ardèvol-Abreu et al. (2020) results suggested that sharing fake content is a two-dimensional phenomenon regarding that there was both intentional and unintentional behaviors regarding the sharing of fake content.

Del Vicario et al. (2016) investigated the dynamics of misinformation propagation in online social networks. They explored mechanisms that drove the spread of false information by analyzing behaviors on different social media platforms. They used a large-scale quantitative analysis on Meta which revealed that different narratives, such as conspiracy theories and scientific content, caused the spread of misinformation within similar information consumption patterns. Based on these findings, Del Vicario et al. (2016) developed a data-driven model of rumor spreading, showing that misinformation, such as conspiracy theories and scientific content, is a key factor in information consumption.

Challenges with Misinformation and Fake Content

Shu et al. (2020) researched different types of information disorder on social media, the challenges in detecting misinformation, and emerging strategies to address it, including characterization, detection, and attribution. They discussed how a weak supervision approach for detecting disinformation with limited labeled data can be one problem for detecting misinformation. Shu et al. (2020) concluded how user engagement can lead to the spread of misinformation, what techniques can be used for detecting misinformation, and how ethics and clickbait is being used in getting individuals to view and share fake content. Lazer et al. (2018) explored multidisciplinary efforts to define, detect, and mitigate fake content. They highlighted the importance of understanding how the internet spreads content and how people process content, to better address the challenges posed by spreading misinformation and fake content. By exploring these dynamics, they developed effective strategies to combat misinformation, ensuring that people can better navigate the digital landscape and distinguish between accurate and misleading information. Lazer et al. (2018) reviewed the current state of knowledge in these areas and explored two primary strategies: empowering individuals to identify fake content and implementing interventions within platforms to limit the spread of fake content. They concluded that their research suggested the need for more collaboration between social media platforms to create potential solutions to combat the spread of misinformation and fake content.

Ethical Concerns Related to Misinformation and Fake Content

Chauhan et al. (2022) examined the impact of social media as a tool for information dissemination related to an individual's ethical decision-making. Their study investigated two online media dissemination formats where the first one was an online content article, and the second one was a social media discussion thread. Both formats were on related topics that could impact an individual's ethical perceptions and decisions. Chauhan et al. (2022) results indicated that social media could influence an individual's problem recognition, and ethical reasoning. Overall, they suggested that social media tends to hinder ethical decision-making.

Collins et al. (2021) explored various methodologies that are employed to detect and mitigate the spread of fake content on social media platforms. They found that combining machine learning algorithms with human expertise could enhance the accuracy of detecting fake content. The results from Collins et al. (2021) survey suggested that using a strategy that involved different techniques such as a mix between algorithms and human knowledge would potentially help combat fake content on social media. Hangloo et al. (2022) provided an extensive overview of different strategies to detect and mitigate fake content across various modalities on social media platforms. They discussed the growing challenge of fake content from multiple content forms such as text, images, and videos. They believe that there is a critical need for a sophisticated approach to effectively combat the rapid increase of fake content on social media. Hangloo et al. (2022) results indicated that by leveraging advanced detection techniques, developing rich datasets, and addressing existing challenges, the research community could possibly contribute to a more trustworthy digital information landscape.

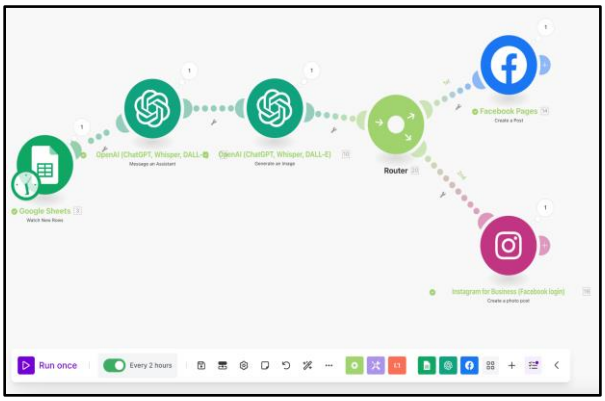
Social Media and Content Creation Software Tools

Many new and popular social media tools assist users in creating, organizing, scheduling, and evaluating content across social media and digital platforms. These tools are crucial for businesses, marketers, influencers, and content creators to optimize their workflow and strengthen their online visibility. They can help enhance their content, engage audiences, and grow their online presence efficiently. Content creators can use these tools to optimize their workflow, enhance their digital presence, and effectively reach their target audience in an increasingly competitive online landscape. Social media platforms such as Meta (Facebook), Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube are the current social media channels for content distribution. These platforms offer built-in tools like Meta Creator Studio, YouTube Studio, and

Instagram Insights to help users manage their content and track engagement metrics. The algorithm-driven nature of these platforms means that content must be optimized for visibility, making the right software tools crucial for success. The landscape of social media content creation is constantly evolving.

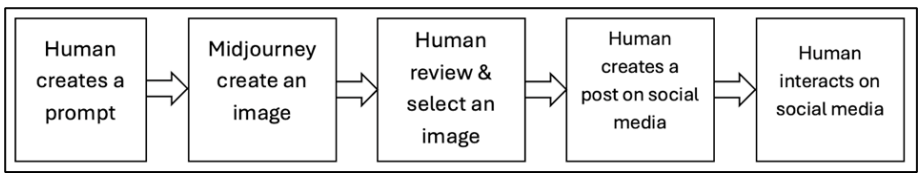
Methodology

Two models were created. The content for both models included a text quote and an AI generated image. Model 1 included a completely automated approach for posting content created by AI using the Make framework. An automated workflow was developed in Make to get a text quote, generate a ChatGPT prompt, create an image based on the prompt using DALL-E, and post it on Meta and Instagram. The content consisted of a quote and a picture. Over 1000 quotes were entered into a Google spreadsheet database. A listener initiated the flow using a Google Sheet, watching for new rows every hour. Next, the OpenAI component receives the quote text and uses an OpenAI agent to create a prompt text. The prompt text is piped to DALL-E to create an image. The image is sent to a router to create a post on an Instagram and Meta page. The model was entirely automated and didn't require any human intervention. The workflow was set to run initially every hour and later every two hours. A tokenized paid subscription for the OpenAI API was used for Model 1. The total amount spent on the Model 1 experiment was less than $20 on the OpenAI tokens.



Model 1. Complete automation of AI-generated content distribution.

Model 2 included AI generated content from Midjourney. Images were manually generated and curated by a human constantly tuning the prompt text. The content underwent a selection of images to be used, which were manually posted on Instagram and Meta. Additionally, a human logged in once daily to both platforms and engaged users by liking random Meta content and adding new friends. On Instagram, the engagement was in the form of following random people and liking random content. A paid monthly subscription was used for Midjourney AI. The total amount spent on the Model 2 experiment was less than $20 on the Modjourney subscription.



Model 2. Human involvement in AI-generated content distribution.

Both models used only AI generated content. Model 1 was completely automated, while Model 2 required human interaction. The performance of both approaches was observed starting February 12th, 2025, and

ending April 20th, 2025. The goal was to observe engagement performance (interactions with other accounts) and possible monetization on Meta and Instagram.

Results

Model 1 did not get a single friend on Meta, although the content was inspirational, and the images were very artistic. Model 1 did not get any followers on Instagram, possibly due to the lack of human engagement. Below is a breakdown of a summary of events that occurred between week 1 and week 10:

Weeks 1-2:
- Day 3: Instagram was suspended but successfully reset.
- Meta Experienced a glitch preventing image posts; we reset the automated flow.
- Instagram was blocked for two weeks.

Weeks 3-4:
- Google Spreadsheet started generating errors.
- Meta posted multiple duplicate posts, often missing images.
- We now receive an average of 20 Meta's friend requests per day.
  The automated flow stopped multiple times daily, requiring frequent restarts and resets.

Weeks 5-6:
- Model became increasingly glitchy.
- Automation stopped functioning properly and no longer ran automatically.

Weeks 7-8:
- The free trial for Make expired, making automation more difficult.
- More empty images and errors appeared on Meta.
- Misspelled text on the images.

Weeks 9-10:
- The Instagram module stopped working, but images were posted.
- More empty images and errors appeared on Meta.
- The Google Spreadsheet module did not pick up the correct data.

Model 2, which maintained human interaction, performed much better. By the end of the experiment, the Meta page had reached a maximum of 5000 friends. Additionally, there was a deluge of direct messages, containing compliments, initiations for private conversations, multiple calls on the platform, voicemails, private pictures (including pictures of private body parts and sexual content), several marriage proposals, and requests for additional contact information. Along with that, there were several attempts to be bookmarked in different marketing products to be advertised on the Model 2 page, several scams offer crypto investment, and other types of offers. A lot of online social media marketers tried to tag the Model 2 profile to promote their products on the page, counting on users' ignorance to understand the profile settings. Potentially, users could end up with many tags promoting varieties of scams.
On Instagram, Model 2 performed moderately. Model 2 increased its followers by following similar profiles. By the end of the experiment, Model 2 had 32 posts and a moderate success of 375 followers, a few messages, fewer than 50 likes, and three requests.

The prompts used to generate the images for Model 1 were generated by a ChatGPT agent based on given instructions, compared to the prompts for Model 2, where a human being constantly modified and refined the prompts to get better photorealistic images. Next, during the experiment, Model 1 encountered several clinched and technical errors and had to reset the data flow multiple times. For example, the Google spreadsheet module used one quote for several days. One important note worth mentioning is that the

content for Model 2 was manually selected. The prompts for Midjourney were repeated several times until a satisfactory result was achieved. All images had to be photorealistic and resemble the female model we produced the first time. Table 1 summarizes the results for both models.

Table 1. Model 1 and Model 2 based on their performance from Week 1 to Week 10

Category	Model 1 (Automated)	Model 2 (Human-Enhanced)
Meta Engagement	0 friends, despite inspirational content and artistic images	Reached 5,000 friends; high engagement with DMs, voice calls, proposals, and contact requests
Instagram Engagement	0 followers; limited interaction; suspended account issues	375 followers; 32 posts; some likes (<50), 3 contact requests, moderate messaging
Automation Reliability	Frequent breakdowns, glitches, and resets; errors in Google Sheet; duplicated/missing posts/images	N/A – manually curated and posted
Content Creation Method	Fully automated via ChatGPT prompts	Human-curated prompts with iterative refinement; Midjourney images fine-tuned to match a consistent persona
Image Quality	Artistic but lacked realism; many posts with empty or glitchy images	All images photorealistic and closely resembled the original model
Platform Errors (Weeks 1–10)	Multiple: suspension, blocked modules, expired tools, incorrect data parsing, flow interruptions	Few to none – manual posting prevented system breakdowns
Marketing/Scam Interactions	None	High volume: scam offers, crypto pitches, tagging attempts, and other manipulative marketing tactics
Instagram Growth Tactics	None	Grew followers by interacting with similar profiles
Content Consistency	Inconsistent; repeated prompts and reused content	Carefully curated and diverse content; repeated image generation for optimal results
Notable Challenges	System instability, data feed issues, low engagement, lack of human touch	High exposure brought in both engagement and unwanted interactions (e.g., explicit DMs, scams)

Discussion

Social networking plays a major role in today's online dynamics and is one of the most influential digital applications. Among these platforms, Meta remains the largest, with one billion active users as of October 2012, 81% of whom were located outside the U.S. and Canada (Kihl, 2014). Online social networks have become a key space for social interaction, serving as one of the primary platforms for connection, communication, identity-building, and self-expression. For adolescents, they are a favorite activity, often complementing face-to-face interactions with peers (Eleuteri et al., 2017).

AI Involvement

AI is transforming advertising by enhancing four key areas: targeting, personalization, content creation, and ad optimization. During personalization, AI helps generate engaging advertising content tailored to individual preferences. Ad optimization involves continuously adjusting ad displays to maximize return on investment (Gao, et al., 2023). Nishad (2025) found that over 40% of long-form posts on Meta are likely generated by AI, raising serious concerns about misinformation, authenticity, and the evolving nature of social media interactions. Nishad (2025) research analyzed 8,885 long-form posts from 2018 to 2024 and uncovered a dramatic shift. Before 2023, only 5.34% of content was AI-generated. However, following the

launch of OpenAI's ChatGPT in late 2022, AI-generated content surged, reaching 41.18% by November 2024 which was a 4.3 increase in just two years. While earlier tools like Jasper.ai and Copy.ai saw gradual adoption, the widespread accessibility of ChatGPT triggered a sharp rise in AI-generated content, with an average of 24.05% of posts being AI-crafted between 2023 and late 2024 (Nishad, 2025).

The Path Forward

AI content generation capabilities continue to advance, both technological and social responses will need to be considered. There is a deluge of tutorials online containing training of how to "get-rich-fast" with AI automated content creation on platforms such as Meta and YouTube, and Instagram, similar approach as Model 1 (Nicole, 2025 & ActionSprout, 2025).

What Could Go Wrong?

While Meta does label AI-generated content on its platforms, critics argue that concerns remain about the unchecked spread of AI users and synthetic content on social media. Experts warn that Meta's push to retain users on Meta and Instagram has led it to increasingly rely on AI, raising the risk of low-quality content flooding the platforms. Unlike human creators, AI personas lack lived experiences, emotions, and the ability to connect with audiences on a relatable level, potentially weakening the authenticity and appeal of the platforms (Wheatley, 2025). This also supports the results from Model 1. Avoiding AI-generated content online has become nearly impossible (Sahota, 2024). The flood of AI-created material, including search results, images, articles, and music, reflects the Dead Internet Theory (Di Placido, 2024), which claims that a lot of the content seen online is produced by AI, not humans (Sahota, 2024).

Monetization of a Social Media Platform

Different Meta monetization methods use videos, including product promotion, fan subscriptions, in-stream ads, and live streaming. For example, to monetize your Meta page with subscriptions, you must meet one of the following criteria: have at least 10,000 followers or 250+ returning viewers, along with either 50,000 post engagements or 180,000 watch minutes within the past 60 days. Subscription fees typically range from $4.99 to $29.99 monthly (Nicole, 2025). Others suggest that Meta Pays for views, content creators can expect to earn between $8.75 and $10 per 1,000 views (ActionSprout, 2025). According to Meta Business Help Center, to be eligible to earn money through MetaStars, you must comply with Meta's Community Standards, Partner Monetization Policies, and Content Monetization Policies. Your account must have at least 500 followers for at least 30 consecutive days, and you must reside in a country where the Stars program is available. Additionally, you must be at least 18 years old and agree to the Stars Terms and Conditions. It's important to note that accounts primarily focused on content for children are not eligible to receive or earn from Stars.

Platform Responsibility

Major social media platforms have started using AI-driven content labeling systems, but critics say these measures are still inadequate. Meta's latest content policies require disclosure of digitally created or altered content, but enforcement is challenging (Downes, 2025).

Regulatory Approaches

Governments worldwide are considering legislation requiring the disclosure of AI-generated content. The European Union's Digital Services Act now includes provisions specifically addressing synthetic media and its potential for manipulation (Downes, 2025). Meta's decision to end its third-party fact-checking program has sparked widespread concern among fact-checkers, media outlets, and researchers (Arya & Kanozia, 2025). On January 7, 2025, CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that fact-checking on Meta, Instagram, and Threads would be replaced with a community notes system (Kaplan, 2025). Five categories of content are technically allowed on Meta but may not be eligible for recommendations. Content that

makes it harder for Meta to maintain a safe community, for example, posts that talk about self-harm, suicide, or eating disorders; are sexually explicit; or promote regulated products.

Meta's decision to end third-party fact-checking in the U.S. has sparked global debate. While welcomed by some conservatives and pro-Trump supporters, it has faced strong criticism from liberals, fact-checkers, and misinformation researchers. Although the change is currently limited to the U.S., its global implications are significant. Meta, once a pioneer in adopting third-party fact-checking in 2016 after facing backlash for enabling misinformation during the U.S. elections, ended these partnerships in early 2025. Studies have consistently shown that Meta and Instagram are major sources of misinformation, including during elections, on health topics, and in spreading hate speech globally (Arya & Kanozia, 2025).

Education and Awareness

Perhaps the most important topic is widespread education about AI capabilities and limitations. Understanding how to critically evaluate digital content is becoming as essential as traditional literacy (Downes, 2025). Social media can significantly influence teenagers' decision-making by facilitating constant connection with their peers. This peer influence can be particularly impactful when it comes to engaging in health-risk behaviors, such as alcohol and tobacco use (Halpern-Felsher et al., 2016). Teenagers now have round-the-clock access to social media, exposing them continuously to curated profiles that present idealized versions of others. This constant exposure has been linked to increased anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression among teens (Woods & Scott, 2016). As a result, many especially adolescents feel pressured to carefully manage and maintain their online image (Riccardelli et al, 2020). According to Riccardelli et al. (2020), approximately 76% of students currently are obtaining their daily news information through social media.

The internet and social media offer adolescents' easy access to explore sexuality outside traditional norms, often without parental oversight. Many teens engage in online sexual activities (OSA), such as cybersex, using the internet to seek sexual content and discussions (Griffiths, 2000 & 2012). While OSA can be a healthy part of sexual development, it may also involve risky behaviors due to adolescents' tendency toward sensation-seeking and limited ability to distinguish between healthy and harmful use (Munno, et all, 2017).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolving landscape of social media, driven by technological advancements like AI, presents a double-edged sword. Platforms such as Meta have become central to social interaction, identity-building, and content monetization, especially for younger users. The integration of AI in content creation and advertising offers immense possibilities for personalization and efficiency, yet it also raises concerns about misinformation, authenticity, and ethical implications. As AI-generated content becomes more prevalent, challenges around regulation, transparency, and human oversight intensify. Meta's recent decisions such as including the removal of third-party fact-checking and reliance on community notes have sparked global debate, highlighting the urgent need for responsible platform governance. Among these developments, education on digital literacy and AI awareness becomes essential to help users navigate the digital world critically. Ultimately, while AI can enhance user engagement and monetization strategies, maintaining authenticity, safety, and trust in online spaces requires a balanced approach that includes human intervention and clear regulatory frameworks.

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