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A strategic cycle of slop: Understanding the commodification of AI feculence and its place in the attention economy

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Abstract

While Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) is a goal yet to be achieved, Artificial Intelligence (AI), in general, *is* a part of daily modern life. AI-generated content is everywhere: in social media content and conversations, in books and other published media, even in academic research material. However, the more this steady stream of AI content is examined, the less useful and wanted it is becoming. A term has been used more and more to describe it, Slop. Slop defines the generation of low quality, often bizarre content is increasingly created as a means toward an end; the end being the commodification of the process itself. This process can be framed and better understood by using a strategic end-ways-means model as its reference, defining a Strategic Cycle of Slop. This paper defines that strategic cycle, describes its elements and examines ways that it might be influenced in the future.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Slop, SNARF, Commodification, Strategy, Attention Economy

Introduction

If you were scrolling through news articles early in 2024, you might have come across a report about a scientific research paper which had been recently published about rat reproduction. Normally, this story would not have been of any note nor promoted for widespread distribution, but the technical illustrations associated with the paper were probably included and would likely have caught one's attention. The illustrations included one of a rat penis and testes which were dimensionally larger than the animal itself, visually dissected with descriptions of the various functions and parts. While the illustration of the rat physicality was shocking in and of itself, on closer examination, other associated illustrations of cellular functions made no sense nor were grammatically correct. (Guo, Dong & Hao, 2024; Pearson, 2024)

Around the same time, stories from Scotland of a bait and switch scam circulated, describing a children's extravaganza event called "Willy's Chocolate Experience" which ended up being a miserable failure. Apart from disappointing children and parents by providing no experience (not even any chocolate!) all aspects of the event, from the advertisements used, the nonsensical scripts for the characters and decorations created for the space were clearly AI-generated and poorly executed. (Watson, Mckinnon & Bonar, 2024) Later that year, Meta, the parent company for Facebook, revealed that they had been creating and using AI conversation personas to converse with the public. These personas were given identities, backstories, and included posts of their activities. They were originally supposed to become interactive agents to communicate more easily with the human patrons, however their mere existence and some of their

conversations were so controversial that the personas were quickly removed after their background development was revealed. Nearly everyone was struck by the hubris of Meta which was striking in its unsolicited push to overtly manipulate their users' trust. (Keegan, 2025)

In fact, the more one looked, the more examples of the steady stream of meaningless AI content were found. Examples ranged from Facebook's "Shrimp Jesus" AI-generated WTF pictures (Di Placido, 2024b; DiResta & Goldstein, 2024) to a seemingly unending parade of Amazon AI-generated books and summaries of questionable content (Maiber, 2025d; Read, 2024), to politically sponsored photos and videos quickly flooding all social media content in service of both political parties before the upcoming U.S. presidential election. (Khan, 2025; Koebler, 2024d) Figure 1 provides some examples of the AI-generated content described.

Unwanted, junk media content is nothing new. Content, created for disposable consumption, is *supposed* to grab one's attention, however the addition of AI into the design and creation of such content is the recent change. AI-generation technology has gotten much better at fooling the eye and substituting itself for meaningful consideration. Part of the reason it is more prevalent around us is that it is easier and cheaper to create. That content is more easily distributed through increasingly more and different distribution venues with a support mechanism of financial gain for the creators.



Figure 1: Examples of AI-generated "Slop"

Generation of this disposable AI content has gone by many names: junk, crap, garbage and such. However, the term "Slop" has been the general term used lately to describe the phenomenon (Hoffman, 2024). The term Slop is "akin to spam, [which describes] low-rent, scammy garbage generated by artificial intelligence and increasingly prevalent across the internet—and beyond" (Read, 2024, p.30). As Slop is unwanted waste, it could also be described as feculent (Vocabulary.com, n.d.) Slop, being the product, has to have a destination and an end goal. It also needs a mechanism for distribution which catches and holds the attention of the consumer. These three elements – creation, distribution and reward – suggest an overarching strategy to the process. This paper describes that process and those elements as they relate to Artificial Intelligence generated content.

Literature Review

AI – AGI – ASI

When society refers to "AI," what exactly does it mean? While Turing (1950) and Samuel (1959) pioneered concepts related to machine learning and gameplay, AI currently encompasses a broad range of meanings and possibilities. Depending on the context and audience, AI can run the gamut from the simplicity of an Amazon product suggestion to the all-powerful AI-villain Ultron from Iron Man Marvel films. Since the AI Slop phenomenon is the focus, we will start our definition of AI with current boundaries.

Lee (2018) found a way of categorizing the recent development of AI, by classifying its effects into four AI “waves”: Internet AI, Business AI, Perception AI and Autonomous AI (Lee, 2018, p. 105). “Internet AI is largely about using AI algorithms as recommendation engines: systems that learn our *personal preferences* and then serve up content hand-picked for us” (Lee, 2018, p. 107, emphasis in original). In 2025, there are numerous types of programs which do this on a daily in-the-background basis: Google, Amazon, Yelp, etc. We don’t think of them as “AI” but really, they are, in that the suggestions are not immediately provided by humans, but by programs and algorithms. Business AI takes advantage of the fact that for decades, companies have been collecting enormous quantities of data on us and by using that, correlations are uncovered that escape our perception. The third wave, Perception AI, uses algorithms, like facial recognition software to recognize patterns of pixels from a photo or recording and recognizes objects similarly to how humans do. Finally, “Autonomous AI represents the integration and culmination of the three preceding waves, fusing machines’ ability to optimize from extremely complex data sets with their newfound sensory posers” (Lee, 2018, p. 128). Autonomous AI is generally thought of in the service of Autonomous Vehicles, like self-driving, self-navigating cars and objects. This is the AI that we, in 2025, are familiar with, and in various states of development and utility, might seem like an anthropomorphized being, but are in fact, just very fast compilers, users and presenters of data which is already around us.

These four waves of AI development still leave us short of the concept generally known as Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) which is what most people think of when they think of AI in the abstract. AGI is the “hypothetical ability of an intelligent agent to understand or learn any intellectual task that a human being can perform” (Abonamah, Tariq & Shilbayeh, 2021, p. 2). Current AI systems are nowhere near capable of understanding the nuances of human communication tasks, let alone making complex ethical choices about their content. (Braga & Logan, 2017) “Sarcasm, cultural context and subtle forms of hate speech often slip through the cracks of even the most sophisticated algorithms” (Dinika, 2024, p.1). Society in 2025 is not yet at the point of having achieved true AGI. “Everyone now seems to be admitting you can’t just use more compute and more data while pretraining [sic] large language models and expect them to turn into some sort of all-knowing digital god” (Zeff, 2024, p.1). Studies have also shown that AI modeled on large language models (LLM) do not reason, but “attempt to replicate the reasoning steps observed in their training data” (Landymore, 2025a). In fact, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella recently admitted that AGI was a false goal and “an unnecessary distraction when the industry needs to get practical and just try and make money before investors get impatient” (Maxwell, 2025b, p.1). Still, there are many who say that AGI research, often done outside the spotlight of public scrutiny, is going to be achieved quite soon, depending on how it is defined and used. (Roose, 2025)

Artificial General Intelligence should not be confused with Generative Artificial Intelligence; they are two completely different concepts. *Generative* AI is very good at producing complex content and mimicking patterns which will occasionally fool users into thinking there is true intelligence involved. “Generative AI isn’t actually AI per se. It’s more of a set of branching ‘if then’ statements that allow a model trained on set of data to accurately use human language to produce the most likely tangible outcome base on a decision tree” (Ikura-Gross, 2024, p.1). Artificial *General* Intelligence is the leap beyond that, where AI understands, innovates and adapts on a human-equivalent level. (Marr, 2024)

The concept beyond Artificial General Intelligence – Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI) – is what many believe, and science fiction describes, as the *existential threat to humanity*. ASI is the “hypothetical ability of an intelligent agent to possess intelligence substantially exceeding that of the brightest and most gifted human minds” (Abonamah, et al., 2021, p. 2). Hypothetical is the key word *presently*. Thus, with AI having been defined as what is currently available, i.e., the first four waves of AI development, the question

remains. What is happening to AI *today*? That question must be addressed before considering what development might occur in the near or distant future.

Slop – SNARF – Commodification

As previously introduced, Slop refers to a specific negative trait of the current state of communicative affairs via the Internet and beyond. Slop, “the spiritual successor to email spam [is low-quality] content—such as trashy viral images or regurgitated news articles—created by artificial intelligence [filling] up social media, search results and anywhere else you might look” (Ball, 2024, p.1). Slop can be viewed as a means to affect some goal, or end. The end can be viewed in a variety of ways; the greatest reason would be for profit. Profit can be monetary in terms of fees paid for generating material for dissemination or through more intangible concepts such as power (political, social, influence), attention (prestige, the lulz) or for some unknown agenda. Numerous social media sites are geared to reward participants for boosting increased traffic at their websites. (Dellinger, 2025; Liu, 2024; Read, 2024; Thomas, 2025) Commodification is a term which describes the situation where the consumer counts for less and less over time.

Surpluses are first directed to users; then, once they're locked in, surpluses go to suppliers; then once they're locked in, the surplus is handed to shareholders, and the platform becomes a useless pile of shit. From mobile app stores to Steam, from Facebook to Twitter, this is the [commodification] lifecycle. (Doctorow, 2023b, p.1)

Commodification is a baked-in concept precisely because capitalism is the predominant social philosophy utilized. (Fox, 2024) The way Slop is used for commodification is through SNARF - an acronym which stands for “Stakes/Novelty/Anger/Retention/Fear” (Peretti, 2025, p.1). SNARF Slop content is easily understood and promoted by AI and social media – the more it’s used by the algorithms, the more it’s created and perpetuated, and so on, an endless cycling loop.

Content creators **exaggerate stakes** to make their content urgent and existential. They **manufacture novelty** and spin their content as unprecedented and unique. They **manipulate anger** to drive engagement via outrage. They **hack retention** by withholding information and promising a payoff at the end of a video. And they **provoke fear** to make people focus with urgency on their content. Every piece of content faces ruthless Darwinian competition so only SNARF has the ability to be successful, even if it is inaccurate, hateful, fake, ethically dubious, and intellectually suspect. (Peretti, 2025, p.1, emphasis in original)

SNARF is so powerful because the websites that promote it are participants in the Attention Economy. “[The Attention Economy] describes the supply and demand of a person's attention, which is the commodity traded on the internet. The business model is simple: The more attention a platform can pull, the more effective its advertising space becomes, allowing it to charge advertisers more” (Morgans, 2017, p. 1). The attention of users, investing their screen time into time spent on a specific platform is the commodity. (Joseph, 2025; Perez, 2023) Actions like scrolling through repeated clips or pages, multiplies a variability effect, “creating a focused state, which suppresses the areas of the brain associated with judgment and reason while activating the parts associated with wanting and desire” (Eyal, 2014, pp. 8-9).

The Strategic Cycle of Slop

AI precipitates the production of cheap, plentiful Slop, distributes it through the attraction of SNARF in order to meet a goal of commodification. Those three steps: a course of action (Slop), an instrument for that action (SNARF) and an objective end state (Commodification) constitute the classic definition of a strategy. Lykke (1989) concisely defined a strategic equation for military and political use which can be

used in this context for AI. “Strategy equals ends (objectives toward which one strives) plus ways (courses of action) plus means (instruments by which some end can be achieved)” (Lykke, 1989, p.183). This cyclical relationship can be demonstrated in the Strategic Cycle of Slop as shown in Figure 2. Elements of this strategic cycle not only move from one sphere to the next, but they expand. Each iteration of the cycle needs to grow larger and more extreme in content, shock and attention-grabbing pull to outdo the previous one. Each cycle also has to overcome the inherent background noise of the Attention Economy consumer environment and other related and unrelated cycles in motion. The cycles grow and expand; in doing so, the cycle perpetuates itself. When the economic tipping points veers from the user and providing the best service for the lowest cost, to the provider - who can commodify anything and provide more of it for better profit and gain - the spigot gets turned wide open and the cheapest “crap” comes out; a flood of Slop. Slop no one wants, and no one regulates. This is the AI environment for research as defines the methodology used for data collection and analysis.

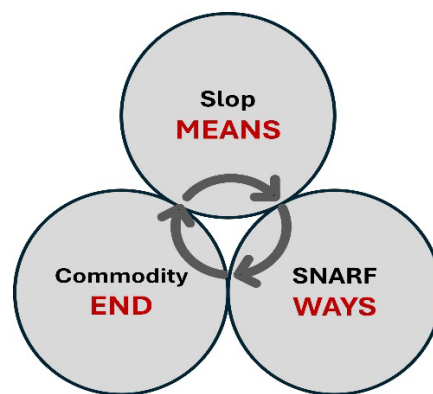


Figure 2: The Strategic Cycle of Slop

Methodology

Examining modern AI social experiences across a variety of sources requires sifting through an enormous amount of current and evolving data. The amount of diverse material and sources involved with the subject matter points towards a qualitative analysis structure with a broad range of potential source elements. The qualitative methodology ultimately chosen was that of a Case Study. Yin (2009) described Case Study analysis as preferred “when (a) ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p.2). The review of multiple data sources across widely different platforms and over a period of time matched those qualifying descriptives. Yin defined his core principles of Case Study data collection: 1) collect multiple, different sources of evidence, 2) create a database of that collected material, and 3) maintain a chain of evidence. (Yin, 2009) One example Yin highlighted was the 1929 Middletown research.

Lynd and Lynd (1929) defined a number of unique descriptives in *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* so that a large amount of diverse data elements taken from various sources within a small anonymous Midwestern U.S. city could be summarized to create a general idea of an “average” U.S. city’s characteristics. The Middletown study’s evidence was maintained within custody chains and descriptive analysis bins of similar material for a fully holistic analysis in search of trends of like and dissimilar material. That core procedural structure served to organize the AI elements for binning and analysis. Sources of data collection were identified. This began with word searches on AI slop, commodification, enshitification, and other like-terms. This material was collected and sorted into like bins of material. Trends were observed which helped to glean themes of structure. The acronym SNARF was found using

these analysis techniques. From that, trends of cause and effect were observed which drew comparisons to more general strategic structures of ends, ways and means. This helped to define the Slop Loop structure which in turn created a broader understanding of the strategic goals of those participating in this Attention Economy. Other ends players, those who wanted more than a monetary result, were identified and seen as political and clout seekers. Researchers who flooded the market with material for prestige and ultimately monetary reward were identified in research production lines along the same lines as book summarizers who created titles and AI-generated content as well. All these trends and analysis gave the researchers a better understanding of the AI slop environment in order to define and describe the phenomenon and its elements.

Discussion

SLOP – The Means

Slop can be classified into many different categories and further defined within those categories. Is the Slop related to research papers and publication? Are the publications more for public, non-research related consumption (i.e., for bookstores, online booksellers, e-books, etc.)? Is the material electronic (for social media sites, news outlets, political consumption)? All categories of Slop are valid for this analysis as long as they are created by, or with, artificial intelligence for distribution towards a goal. The following categories have been selected for validation of Slop's prevalence.

Research

The 2024 research paper in the news featuring the AI-generated diagrams of a giant dissected rat penis and testes, while titillating to the general public, represented a greater troubling issue to academics and researchers.

It wasn't just the images... The abstract really didn't say anything. There [were] vaguely defined terms, restating the same thing repeatedly in different phrasings, and platitudes about the importance of the perspective. That it wasn't identified immediately as a problem says something concerning about the literacy of the review process as well. (Kaplan, 2024)

This paper, presumably having been through a peer review, was approved and published before being withdrawn after receiving the glaring attention of worldwide attention. The paper showed the complete breakdown of academic review processes for quality control and validity – worse, it pulled the covers back on a research paper-publication and citation treadmill. “You buy a paper on a topic of your choice, and you buy a set of 500 citations. Then you go to your faculty, and you say, ‘Look, I’m a genius, and I deserve this position as a full professor’” (Read, 2024, p.83).

The problem of faulty publicly available data is so great that it has polluted search engines, research source material and possible data sources themselves which leads to faulty AI feedback loops generating more and more garbage research. (Bevendorff, Wiegmann, Potthast & Stein, 2024; Tangermann, 2024a) “‘Model Autophagy Disorder’, as this theoretical pathology is called, is mad cow disease for AI. Where herds of cattle were felled by malformed proteins, AI models may be felled by malformed information” (Houston, 2024, p.1). The research aid website Wordfreq recently announced it was shutting down because they no longer believe “anyone has reliable information about post-2021 language usage by humans” (Koebler, 2024c). Google Books is also indexing low quality, AI-generated books that will turn up in researcher's search results. These results could clearly affect the quality and accuracy of research, especially for historical language studies. (Maiberg, 2024) Additionally, news-sharing and reissuing websites have frequently shared and published material which is faulty so that conducting research on the Internet risks

sourcing “incorrect AI-generated articles or [using] phony images and biographies for ‘authors’” (Read, 2024, p. 31). News sites have even been hijacked into posting false AI Slop articles. (Knibbs, 2024b) Lawyers have even been caught citing fictional case law Slop when using AI to write documents for court. (Cole, 2025a; Cole, 2025b)

Personas

In 2024, it was revealed that Meta, the parent company of social media sites Facebook and Instagram, had created and was using AI-generated personas on their websites which would interact with human users, had backstories about their “families” and interests and updates about their “lives” to make them more approachable and relatable. (Iovine, 2025) “There’s ‘Jane Austen,’ a ‘cynical novelist and storyteller’; ‘Liv,’ whose bio claims she is a ‘proud Black queer momma of 2 & truth-teller’; and ‘Carter,’ who promises to give users relationship advice” (Sato, 2025, p.1). While Meta did not try to disguise that the “personas” were in fact utilizing AI and were very specifically developed and opinionated, their detailed backstories went back to 2023 and once discovered, they were all eliminated from their pages. (Hughes, 2025, Sherry, 2025) People found it creepy that this AI content had been introduced in websites that they frequently used with their true families and friends. “This might be what pushes me off of @instagram entirely. A fake person patting itself on its fake back with a fake story about a fake coat drive for a fake charity” (Keegan, 2025, p.1). The fake accounts not only limited themselves to Meta; other sites such as LinkedIn promote profiles of AI “Co-Workers” looking for jobs. (Koebler, 2024a) “An AI LinkedIn profile was “open to work,” boasting it’s a better worker than a human” (Maiberg, 2025a, p.1).

No one wants this. No one needs this. Meta, with its incredible power over what billions of people around the world see, is willing to do nearly anything to keep us addicted to its platforms — even if that means flooding the zone with digital slop that doesn’t work very well. And worse, it’s digital slop that can cause serious harm by reinforcing cultural biases and stereotypes. (Attiah, 2025, p.1)

Publications

Public and private libraries will often use publication catalogs services to update their collections with recent and relevant material. Sometimes these services will require bulk buys of material to provide a better price. The problem is that in this bulk buy, there is increasing content which has been generated by AI. This content, which might include material created by AI from scratch or summaries of existing material are junk Slop which librarians have to go through meticulously to determine if there is value in the publications. (Palmer, 2025) Librarians, who have been dealing with this type of problem for years, even before AI-generated Slop have a different term for it: “vendor slurry” (Maiberg, 2025b, p.1). One example is a “recipe book by a nonexistent author that featured ‘a meal plan that told you to eat straight marinara sauce for lunch’” (Read, 2024, p.30). Another book was titled “*Fatty Liver Diet Cookbook: 2000 Days of Simple and Flavorful Recipes for a Revitalized Liver*.” The book was authored by Magda Tangy, who has no online footprint, and who has an AI-generated profile picture on Amazon, where her books are also for sale” (Maiberg, 2025b, p.1). Yet others included consequential titles on “living with fibromyalgia or raising children with ADHD” (Read, 2024, p.30).

In the worst version of the slop future, your overwhelmed and underfunded local library is half-filled with these unchecked, unreviewed, unedited AI-generated artifacts, dispensing hallucinated facts and inhuman advice and distinguishable from their human-authored competition only through ceaseless effort” (Read, 2024, p.30).

Amazon is markedly worse now than in previous years; it has had AI-generated books on its Bestsellers’ List for years. (Hermann, 2023; Herrera, 2022; Knibbs, 2024a; Roscoe, 2023) The problem has become so

prevalent that the Author's Guild has created a "Human Authored" certification for book covers to distinguish them from AI-generated Slop. (Prada, 2025) In fact, studies have shown that since the introduction of ChaptGPT in 2022, nearly all genres of written communication have shown an increase in AI use. (Landymore, 2025b; Liang, Zhang, Codreanu, Wang, Cao & Zou, 2025)

Social

In early 2024, the AI-produced social event titled the "Willy's Chocolate Experience" was notable, primarily because of its strangeness. Apparently, the event tailored for children to participate in a Willy Wonka-type candy-land experience, complete with actors portraying the characters and decorations leading the participants through a chocolate fairytale event was a complete sham – with no chocolate. The magnitude of the scam, coupled with the clearly AI-generated material (advertisements, decorations, costumes, scripts) was the draw to news organizations around the world. It also introduced other Wonka-like elements – clearly AI-sponsored – like new characters that made no logical sense such as, The Unknown. He was supposed to be a sinister villain, described in the AI-generated script. "There is a man we don't know his name. We know him as the Unknown. This Unknown is an evil chocolate maker who lives in the walls" (Di Placido, 2025a, p.1). This AI-gibberish, produced and read and acted, showed the inadequacy of AI-generated concept, unable to describe the subtleties and nuance of the story. Plus, the fact that this character was wholly made up; it never appeared in the original book.

But the Experience event was just a touchstone which helped to open a lot of people's eyes to the AI Slop already around them. There were and are, Facebook posts screaming for Likes, Pinterest, Instagram and TikTok content that is clearly AI-produced, Reddits and subreddits full of material that has to be examined and reexamined to determine if it is real or AI-produced. (Ball, 2024; DiResta & Goldstein, 2024; Dupre, 2025; Rowe, 2024) "What began as riffs on already viral images have evolved into bizarre, sui generis dreamscapes through which inexplicable and unrelated themes and topics emerge: multiheaded, enormously breasted 'farmer girls'; stewardesses wading in muddy rivers; amputee beggars carrying signs reading today is my birthday" (Read, 2024, p.31). There is also TikTok content, which is so close to reality, it's difficult to determine whether to believe it or not. (Weedston, 2025) The infiltration of AI-induced unreality through social media into social interactions has only intensified. (Tangermann, 2024b) Unrealistic expectations from TikTok image filters (Pendergrass, 2023), AI-generated beauty standards (Tiku & Chen, 2024) or AI "inspo" – short for inspiration - images of fanciful hairstyles, structurally unrealistic wedding gowns or insanely high-priced wedding reception designs. (Hunter, 2025) AI Slop is even generated in job searches; LinkedIn résumé and job searches include AI content throughout. (Dupre, 2023; Telford, 2025) The Slop is everywhere – welcome to the world of AI today.

SNARF – The Ways

Slop does not exist in a vacuum; it needs a mechanism for action. The acronym SNARF describes that mechanism. Since its inception - and finely tuned over the years through better and more powerful algorithms - social media has perfected this Slop feeding cycle using SNARF.

Stakes – Exaggerated stakes to make content urgent and existential.

- In February of 2025, over "400 videos from about two dozen accounts dedicated to posting AI-generated audio of Trump and Musk making quasi-motivational statements have gained more than 700 million views [on TikTok] between them" (Maiberg, 2025c, p.1).
- Facebook and Instagram regularly include posts urging users to send "Likes" or share posts with clearly AI-generated Slop. Urgency is implied or requested for responses for a birthday or an event or some other reason. (Dupre, 2024)

- AI-generated content is being used to promote one side's candidate or platform over another's. This is happening in elections around the world using easily generated content creation. (Swenson & Chan, 2024)

Novelty – *Manufactured novelty to promote content as unprecedented and unique.*

- Facebook and Instagram pages with posts of an underwater Jesus statue made of shrimp or pictures of disabled Veterans and children holding up signs asking for Likes. “For the majority of these pages, there is no obvious scam at play, no ads or external links—no business model at all, just eerily contextless [sic] pages publishing demented nonsense into a void” (Read, 2024, p. 32). But the point is to generate the “stop and look” reaction to content.
- “The magnificent surrealism of Shrimp Jesus—or, relatedly, Crab Jesus, Watermelon Jesus, Fanta Jesus, and Spaghetti Jesus—is captivating. What is that? Why does that exist? You perhaps feel motivated to share it with your friends, so that they can share in your WTF moment” (DiResta & Goldstein, 2024, p.1).

Anger – *Manipulated anger to push engagement through outrage.*

- Politically motivated AI Slop is generated and distributed with little regard for fact-checking or sanity. After Hurricane Helene, the same AI-generated image of a little girl and her puppy escaping flood waters could be used by those wanting to prove the inadequacy of the Biden Administration's response, or those soliciting donations which would never be used for relief. (Koebler, 2024d) That it was not a real photograph wasn't the point, only the reaction was.
- Hurricane Milton in Florida and the LA Fires were used by Slop scammers to push fake stories and conspiracy theories to unsuspecting users on Facebook, TikTok and X and solicit donations from unsuspecting individuals. (Mauran, 2024; Thomas, 2025)

Retention – *Retention held by withholding information until the end.*

- “The TikTok model had already infiltrated many consumer apps — Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest and several more (even Netflix and Amazon!). Now you can add a handful of other high-profile apps to the list. Most notably, Spotify and Reddit [just] announced their own takes on the TikTok feed with significant changes to their respective app's designs. SoundCloud also introduced video feeds for music as a test” (Perez, 2023, p.1).
- Both X and BlueSky introduced copies of TikTok's popular and addictive vertical video feed scrolling methodology, just as TikTok was about to be shut down by the US government in 2025. (Joseph, 2025)

Fear – *Provoked fear to bring focus with urgency to content.*

- Since Elon Musk acquired Twitter in 2022 (and renamed it X in 2023), he has reshaped the platform to be more welcoming to racism, misogyny and anti-immigrant and anti-trans sentiment than even the old freewheeling Twitter. (Shirky, 2024)
- Studies have found that AI-generated government propaganda effectively influences the public's perceptions of events. (Goldstein, Chao, Grossman, Stamos & Tomz, 2024)

Commodification – The End

AI Slop, propelled by SNARF, has at its core purpose - a goal. The goal can be any number of specific achievements: monetary gain; the draw of attention for attention's sake; for “the lulz”; power, be it political or socially influential; or for reasons unknown. Some are promoting how-to videos showing how to create and distribute content so that YouTube creators can earn “between \$3 and \$10 per 1,000 likes” (Tangermann, 2024c) TikTok will pay creators between 2 and 4 cents per 1,000 “qualified” views (at least 5 seconds in length) (Barnhart, 2024, p.1).

While content creators have traditionally been human, like YouTube's Mr. Beast, who would typically spend hundreds of hours crafting videos costing thousands of dollars to be seen by millions of fans (Poonia, 2022), AI Slop has begun to replace quality with bizarre, forced quantity. All websites are being bombarded with repeated assaults of AI Slop – snippets of videos showing bizarre transformations and repugnant

visuals – all to brute force test the systems’ algorithms for weaknesses and clues as to which material would pull the most attention and repeated reactions. (Koebler, 2025) This thirst for near-continuous content flow is fed from “the astonishingly adequate, inexhaustible output of generative-AI apps like ChatGPT, Midjourney, or Microsoft’s Image Creator, heavily subsidized by investors and provided to consumers at low or no cost” (Read, 2024, p.31). Only too happy to help fill that need is “a thriving, global gray-market economy of spammers and entrepreneurs, searching out and selling get-rich-quick schemes and arbitrage opportunities, supercharged by generative AI” (Read, 2024, p.31).

There are some who are pushing against the trend. Bluesky CEO Jay Graber has promised to not “enshittify” the platform with ads and AI content while still funding its explosive growth. (Peters, 2024; Rogers, 2024) But the force that helps to propel the Slop cycle loop is strong and getting stronger: cheap availability pushed by those hoping to benefit from the spin. Not only get-rich-quick middlemen, but the entire AI-hype promoters as well.

Meta, Snap, Instagram—name a platform NOT gearing up the publicity on their AI features? With user trust hanging by a thread—thanks to years of data mining, eerily accurate algorithms, and endless profit-chasing—these platforms have somehow decided that what we need now is more AI fanfare. To the savvy, every new “enhancement” feels less like a gift and more like another layer of surveillance wrapped in buzzwords. (Liu, 2024, p.1)

Facebook, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) all offer types of bonus payments for creating content that draws attention. This content creation is a global enterprise reaching countries like India, Vietnam, the Philippines and beyond, to create not only content, but traps to lure users to dead-end pages where they attempt to divulge personal information and/or credit card data. (DiResta & Goldstein, 2024; Koebler, 2024b) There is even competition between platforms to draw content creators and influencers. “Instagram is offering creators monthly bonuses ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000 for posting their videos on Instagram Reels before posting them on other platforms, including TikTok” (Silva, 2025). The draw of the commodification is great, because the rewards are greater. (Tang & Wikstrom, 2024) As long as there is money to be made or power to be consolidated, the end will always be a destination for those willing to spin the loop.

Conclusions

The Slop Cycle is undeniably a factor in today’s AI-influenced Attention Economy. Can that factor be influenced? *Should* it be influenced? Is it detrimental to anyone, and if so, who specifically? For most, the proliferation of unrequested AI-generated Slop is merely a nuisance, not an issue; but for some, especially those who might suffer from economic hardships due to fraud, or theft or worse, there is a definite negative effect. At best, it is a question of degrees: how badly and how extensively does the Slop Cycle affect you and your interests personally? Are you suffering because your intellectual content has been hijacked? Did a university hire or promote a professor who padded their CV with Slop references and junk publications over someone else? Did someone vote for a different candidate because of that *one* Facebook post that really tugged at their heart and pushed them over their decision tipping point, even though it was clearly AI-generated Slop? How much is *too* much? How little is *too* little? While many of these hypothetical questions about hypothetical situations will never be answered by this paper, there are some realistic considerations which might be made to help affect the falsehoods and diminish the rising flood of AI Slop.

Having defined the AI Strategic Cycle of Slop and entertained the possibility of trying to influence it, we need to understand each element's strengths and weaknesses to change. The Ends, the commodification of the Attention Economy, is probably the hardest to disrupt. Each of the economic incentives (money, power, fame, lulz, etc.) is a powerful piston driving the cycle's engine. Economic needs exist: and the engine to feed them is firmly in place and operating well. There might be economic means to affect but they will never outweigh the relentless global incentive. The Ways – the SNARF elements which help to keep the Ends fed – Stakes/Novelty/Anger/Retention/Fear – are firmly rooted in human nature and thus harder to influence from the outside. Self-regulation of the elements would be the greatest manner in which they could be affected but that drive has to propagate from within the individual and are not as effective, being pushed externally. That leaves the Means, the Slop elements themselves, as being the most likely place to influence the Slop cycle.

Research and related publishing efforts must ensure that author information and content as well as peer review procedures are maintained at the highest level. Research publishers need to ensure that publications are not being generated in bulk, with no guardrails. If they are, other sites, competing sites, need to identify those who are not adhering to academic standards of excellence. Once the public was made aware of the manufactured AI personas being openly used, Meta quickly pulled them from the platforms. This validated the public's revulsion as to why they were being used in the first place. If AI persona are going to be used, in any manner, their true identity needs to be more clearly made to the users of the service. Books which have been written without AI can now receive a new "Human Authored" certification. (Maxwell, 2025a) E-book library support companies like Hoopla have started to trim their own lists of questionable books and content before they reach the databases of libraries across the country. (Maiberg, 2025d) Libraries and sellers must limit the amount of junk content is being accepted and distributed. A concerted effort by all needs to occur to keep information repositories as free as possible of junk Slop content. Social media sites can stop paying for bulk content, stop incentivizing the generation of bizarre nonsensical posts and material. While the "law" of diminishing social media validity will cause "older" sites to eventually fall into oblivion, new and still-relevant ones, must jealously guard against the trend of Slop distribution. As more and more social media and social experience users tune out the novelty of the background junk and search for "more human" locations, the market will begin to correct itself. Finally, Slop, for Slop's sake, might be a welcome novelty for a short while, the economics of its long-term existence and usefulness will not support it. The Strategic Cycle of Slop, thus defined, will eventually slow to obscurity.

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