

Redacted Student Name

Kylee Wheeler

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Generative AI's Facilitation of Misinformation and Fake News

AI has quickly become one of the largest industries in the world, but it is not just perfected helpers and positive impacts, as some may believe. In 2022, ChatGPT debuted, immediately exploding in popularity and marking the fastest growth of a tech product ever witnessed. This incited a race among investors and companies to further build and integrate generative AI into daily life. The GenAI industry grew 100 times larger in just two years and began to be utilized by a wider range of people and companies. Throughout this growth, however, AI has led to numerous negative effects, most notably with its impact on misinformation and fake news. While generative AI is occasionally useful, it has grown increasingly correlated with fake news due to the lack of nationwide regulations, improved believability and confidence of AI, and the ubiquity of AI-generated content.

One of the main reasons AI can run so rampant is the government's lack of solid content regulations across the country and ignorance of private abuse, whether purposefully or not. Even Congress has discussed on its website that the federal government has noticeably neglected the regulation of AI use in the USA. According to Congress.gov, "No federal legislation establishing broad regulatory authorities for the development or use of AI or prohibitions on AI has been enacted" (Harris). Further, Congress.gov also states, "...the U.S. federal government as a whole appears to be cautious in regard to regulating AI in the private sector and more focused on oversight of federal government uses of AI.such a patchwork of AI laws creates challenges

for companies..." (Harris). This evidence shows how the federal government is lacking in a consistent set of regulations for AI and avoids focusing on the "private" AI use that can create and spread misinformation. This leaves a "patchwork" of regulations across states, creating both challenges and loopholes for outlets such as news stations, fake or not. If widespread regulations were created for private AI use as opposed to just federal cases, it could help positive companies have a consistent ruleset while inhibiting sources of fake news and preventing them from causing damage. Evidently, fake news created by generative AI has festered largely due to the government focusing on federal implications, instead of use cases that would apply to these outlets. However, AI also "boosts" misinformation due to its believability and confidence.

Over time, generative AI has developed superior visual quality in images alongside more believable information from LLMs, but it still confidently creates misinformation that can power fake news even further. Sources have reported various AI incidents in official settings, alongside the problem of AI becoming too confident or believable with made-up or fake data. According to Stateline, "...there have been 518 documented cases in which generative AI produced hallucinated content used in U.S. courts..." (Fitzgerald). On the topic of image generation, Virginia Tech News includes: "Even watermarking and disclosures may not be enough because they can be altered and removed" (Allen). The excessive cases of hallucinations by AI in courts clearly display the confident inaccuracies of generative AI in even official settings, which powers confusion and misinformation by giving people made-up information that they may spread to others if they believe it to be true. Also, VT's comment on image generation emphasizes that, eventually, AI imagery will not be easy to declare fake just from an initial impression, and that the small watermarks typically added by AI image generators can easily be removed by a fake news outlet in hopes of spreading disinformation. Overall, AI is becoming

increasingly detailed and confident, generating realistic, fake images and false “facts” in LLMs, which continues to allow fake news or misinformation to spread. While quality is a problem, quantity has recently proved to be an issue as well.

AI has become well-known and widely seen, whether through AI content or the tools themselves. Sources have noted high portions of media being AI-generated and how mass production of the material occurs. As referenced by the Reuters Institute of Oxford, there was “...a recent Guardian investigation suggesting that nearly one in ten of the fastest-growing YouTube channels globally only show AI-generated video[s]” (Newman). Also, on PBS News Hour, William Brangham speaks about how “...with the advent of free or low-cost A.I. generating tools, it has become possible to mass-produce this material with very little effort” (Brangham and Buhre). The massive influx of AI content mentioned by these sources displays a major reason fake news has become so prevalent in relation to AI recently. The content is easily generated, usually for little to no cost, which allows an extremely high quantity of fake content to be created and disseminated across the world, noticeably influencing normal media pools. This is especially emphasized right after certain world events, since people can quickly generate AI visuals of news before real footage gets a chance to be released, and the possible false news will be shown to anyone searching for footage that was not actually there yet. When the media is diluted with fake content so quickly, it both causes more people to fall for fake news and pushes already skeptical people to be significantly less trusting of everything they see online. While the ubiquity of AI content notably contributes to fake news, confidence and regulations are also contributing factors, as explained previously.

All in all, while applicable in some situations, generative AI and the content it creates can generally be harmful, especially in relation to misinformation or fake news. This is mostly

caused by the absence of regulation, AI that is too confident and detailed, and easy dissemination with most AI tools. The government has clearly displayed and even noted a hesitation to create regulations for more private uses of AI, instead focusing on federal use cases. As a result, laws surrounding AI applications or usage become inconsistent, creating confusion as well as loopholes for people or companies using AI "privately," including producers of misinformation or fake news. AI has also become noticeably more detailed and confident, but has not become much more correct alongside its newfound confidence. These details and mannerisms cause people to more hastily believe AI content, such as images or even made-up information in LLMs, since the AI presents it as a reality despite it never actually existing or occurring. Finally, AI content is extremely prevalent in daily life due to how easily anyone can access and utilize it with just the internet and negligible costs. When platforms become flooded with this quick, cheap, AI-generated content, it can accelerate the spread of incorrect information, while the real, credible information gets pushed back. If these problems persist, basic credibility for any online media will rapidly deteriorate due to how difficult it is becoming to quickly recognize AI errors or artifacts at a glance. Once AI becomes even more believable or realistic, people will harbour doubt and distrust for nearly all media they consume, or even give up on trying to differentiate reality from fiction. This can, and will, cause devastating changes and impacts to the way people consume and learn information, leaving confusion, doubt, and false information to spread like wildfire before reality even has a chance to get out.

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