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Media Ethics And AI-Generated Political Content In Digital Political Communication

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Abstract : This paper studies the problems of media ethics in AI-generated political content for digital communication. As artificial intelligence tools enable the generation of realistic images, videos, speech and other campaign materials more easily, political information can be presented in a way that is difficult to distinguish from genuine persuasion. The main issue this paper investigates is the absence of clear ethical responsibility for misleading audiences with AI-generated content, reducing transparency, and influencing public opinion without disclosure. In line with media ethics, the theory of social responsibility and responsible digital communication has been applied to conduct a qualitative ethical analysis of the risks of AI-generated political content in this paper. Thus, this hidden AI content may erode the public's trust, spread falsehoods, and lead to uninformed choices by the populace. Strengthen disclosure requirements, enhance platform responsibility, implement fact-checking mechanisms, and promote media literacy to promote ethical political communication on the Internet.

IndexTerms **- Media ethics,AI-generated political content,political communication,misinformation,platform accountability, digital media.**

I. Introduction

Artificial intelligence is now being used to promote the development of digital political communication. Recently, AI tools have been released that can generate realistic pictures, videos, speech and social media posts for campaigns in a short amount of time. The above tools can assist politicians in reaching the public more effectively, but they also raise serious ethical issues for the media regarding the use of synthetic content without disclosure. At the same time, citizens need to be able to get the relevant data of public affairs in a timely and accurate manner. If the AI generates politically incorrect, false or misleading content that is otherwise realistic, people will no longer be able to tell the difference between true political information and fake communication. Jungherr (2023) has pointed out that artificial intelligence is being incorporated into democratic discourse to a certain extent, and thus, the people's ways of learning about politics, forming political opinions and participating in public affairs will change.

The first is not the application of AI; rather, it is the irresponsible spread of AI-generated works in politics. Political persuasion is required in a democracy, but it will be ineffective if the people are misled by undisclosed synthetic images, fake speeches, deepfake videos and AI-generated claims. Political messages have already spread rapidly in the digital public sphere via social media, online communities and recommendation systems. AI has made the environment more complicated by producing convincing political messages that appear to be made by people (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2023). It thus poses a risk to the truth, openness and trust of the people, as people may no longer be able to distinguish genuine political information from fake news.

Recently, AI-generated political content has emerged and is no longer just a problem for the future. Reports on the world's elections show that AI has been used to create fake political pictures, synthetic audio, and misleading campaign materials in various political environments (Swenson & Chan, 2024). Research has also shown that large language models can create high-quality election disinformation, and it is now easier to produce and harder to detect (Williams et al., 2024). Therefore, this paper will study the media ethics problems of AI-generated political content in digital political communication. False information, manipulation, transparency and platform responsibility. With truth and accuracy, social responsibility theory and responsible digital communication suggest that political actors, digital platforms, and users are all ethically obliged to reduce the harm caused by deceptive or undisclosed AI-generated political content.

II. Literature and Conceptual Background

A. AI-Generated Political Content in Digital Communication

AI-generated political content refers to political messages, images, videos, speeches, audio clips and social media posts that have been created or altered by artificial intelligence tools. The above contents can be used to promote the campaign, engage voters, explain policy problems, and tell political stories in digital political communication. It will be employed to disseminate fake or deceptive political information. The problem of ethics is not whether AI technology exists, but how this technology will be used and disseminated by the public. Jungherr (2023) thinks that artificial intelligence has started to affect the political will and fairness of elections, and thus is being integrated into democracy. Therefore, artificial intelligence-generated political materials

should be regarded as new technical achievements and at the same time as forms of communication bearing ethical and democratic responsibilities.

AI is changing the form of the digital public sphere at the same time. Now, the parties to political communication are no longer just journalists, campaign offices and ordinary people. Now, it can be formed by automated systems, generative tools, recommendation algorithms and platform infrastructure. Jungherr and Schroeder (2023) believe that AI has altered the modes of production, dissemination and consumption for the public. Public Trust is required for political communication; thus, it is necessary. If the audience cannot distinguish whether a political message is made by humans, AI, or has been altered, they will be unable to evaluate the political information correctly.

B. Information Disorder and Misinformation

The problem of AI-generated political content is closely related to the problem of information disorder. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) have distinguished among misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. Misinformation is false information that has not been spread maliciously, whereas disinformation is intentionally false information that is spread to mislead. Malinformation is true information that is used to harm others. This division can help us study AI-generated political materials, as the three categories may all involve AI tools. For instance, a user may unintentionally spread an AI-generated false picture as fake news, or an official of the Communist Party could intentionally create a deepfake video for disinformation.

Recently, some studies have found that AI makes it more difficult to detect and curb political disinformation. Dmonte et al. (2024) have studied human-generated and AI-generated election claims on social media and found that it is difficult to distinguish between the two. This poses a problem for the platform, fact-checkers and the public as AI-generated messages can be very convincing. Williams et al. (2024) have also shown that large language models can produce high-quality materials for election disinformation. Therefore, it is expected that AI will reduce the cost of producing fake political information and increase both the speed and scope of spread.

C. Media Ethics and Public Responsibility

Problems of truthfulness, transparency, accountability and public responsibility in the context of media ethics related to AI-generated political content. Political persuasion is not inherently unethical; however, it may be considered so if the audience has been misled about the origin, genuineness or aims of the message. Walker, Schiff and Schiff (2024) link political deepfakes with research on political misinformation and indicate that synthetic media are now part of the broader information disorder in political communication. Deepfake images, videos and audio can be created to show that politicians or other events and public opinion are false. Even if the content is corrected later, the damage to trust and public opinion caused by the original exposure will remain.

Therefore, the ethics and technology of AI-generated political content need to be addressed simultaneously. Truthfulness and accuracy demand that the political message be honest and truthful. Transparency should be added to disclose when and how AI has been used in the production or alteration of political materials. Responsibility theory for media and communication institutions also holds that, in addition to freedom of publication and persuasion, they should consider the impact on the public. Therefore, political figures and platforms, content creators, users, etc., should all take responsibility for reducing the harm caused by false AI-generated political information.

III. Ethical Issues of AI-Generated Political Content

A. Truth, Accuracy, and Transparency

The first ethical problem of AI-generated political content is that it may not be true, accurate and transparent. The people need to know about the candidates, policies, social problems and election choices in their political communication. When AI-generated images, videos, audio clips or written messages are presented as real, the audience may be deceived into believing that something has actually happened, who said what, or whether a political event is genuine. Therefore, in speech, there is an ethical demand for persuasiveness and truthfulness, as well as a corresponding responsibility for political communication. Jungherr, Rauchfleisch and Wuttke (2024) believe that deceptive applications of AI in elections are particularly worrying because they can mobilize stronger public support for restrictions on AI. Therefore, the problem of ethical risk is not in AI itself but in how it is used to conceal artificial origins.

Transparency is required so that people know whether the political content has been altered by artificial intelligence in any way. If the campaign uses AI-generated pictures to make the candidate appear more popular or employs synthetic audio technology to imitate the voice of an opponent, the public will form their political views based on falsehoods. Reduce informed choice. Even if the AI-generated political content is not entirely false, the failure to disclose it may still be unethical because important information has been withheld from the public. Thus, to a certain extent, openness is near the truth. Political figures should not spread lies and should not present forged works as genuine.

B. Manipulation, Misinformation, and Public Trust

Second, AI-generated political materials may be employed to mislead the public and spread disinformation. Political persuasion is allowed in a democracy; manipulation, however, uses covert means to deceive or mislead the public illegally. AI has increased the scale of the risk by producing a large volume of persuasive content at a low cost. Williams et al. (2024) propose that large language models can be used to create high-quality materials for election disinformation. Therefore, large-scale production of false or misleading political information is more likely to occur, and it will be harder for ordinary users, journalists and fact-checkers to identify such fake or deceptive content.

AI-generated political content will also erode public trust. Repeatedly showing voters fake pictures, synthetic videos and other misleading AI-generated content will cause them to lose all trust in political information. This may lead to the problem of a

greater scope for the spread of falsehoods and a lack of trust in truth. Walker, Schiff and Schiff (2024) have linked political deepfakes with the study of political misinformation and found that synthetic political media are now part of a larger misinformation ecosystem. If public trust has fallen, then the correction will not be effective. Although the false AI-generated video will be taken down later, it has already been seen by the public.

This problem is relatively more severe at the time of an election or political crisis. A deceptive AI-generated message released shortly before the election will spread rapidly before journalists, platforms or public authorities can address it. Even if the content is corrected later, the revised information will not reach the original audience. Therefore, AI-generated political misinformation is not only a problem of false content but also one of speed, reach and impact on the public.

C. Platform Accountability and Detection Challenges

The third is the problem of platform liability. The public may rely on platform recommendation systems as one of the main ways to access political information. Design recommendation systems, set content moderation rules, introduce advertising tools and adjust the display visibility for users. When AI-generated political content spreads widely on the platform, that platform bears the ethical responsibility to mitigate harm, especially if the content is deceptive or undisclosed. Dmonte et al. (2024) have shown that it is difficult to distinguish between human-generated and AI-generated election claims on social media. Therefore, it will be difficult to identify and handle the harmful AI content promptly and accurately on the platform.

However, a failure to identify does not negate moral culpability. Platforms have gained the attention of the public and advertisers; therefore, they are now responsible for dealing with the problems their systems have created. If the platform widely spreads deceptive AI-generated political content without labelling, fact-checking or moderation, it will cause confusion among the public. Ranka et al. (2024) believe that deepfakes will be employed to disrupt elections, and thus need to be identified and regulated. Therefore, the platform should not be expected to have users recognise the altered content. Build a more transparent AI labelling system, strengthen the reporting mechanism, and respond to harmful synthetic media promptly.

Bias and Fairness are also problems. AI systems may contain political biases, training data deficiencies or concealed preferences. Haman and Školník (2024) studied political preferences in ChatGPT and Gemini during the 2024 European Union election, and found that AI systems have also raised concerns about political bias. AI-generated political communications may not be neutral, even if they appear to be so. If the audience is unaware of the defects in AI-generated works, such works may be biased. Therefore, the ethical problems of AI-generated political content include not only misinformation and manipulation but also a lack of transparency in how AI systems produce, frame and spread political messages.

IV. Application of Media Ethics Theory

A. Truth and Accuracy

The first two are truthfulness and accuracy. Given that the public uses political information to judge candidates, policies and other public affairs, the above rules are particularly relevant in political communication. AI-generated political content violates these rules by presenting synthetic images, videos, audio, or written claims as genuine. It is no longer enough to be untrue in fact; at the same time, it should not be misleading. For example, an AI-generated image of a political event may not contain an explicit falsehood in words, but if it implies that something took place when it did not, it can still mislead the public.

This is related to the problem of information disorder. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) have identified several kinds of false or misleading information that fall under the categories of misinformation and disinformation. AI-generated political content can intensify both forms by producing false claims and synthetic evidence rapidly and convincingly. Williams et al. (2024) have shown that large language models can create realistic election disinformation, and therefore the demand for accuracy is rising rapidly. Therefore, in light of the above, political figures and content creators should refrain from spreading outright falsehoods and also avoid producing artificial political materials that deceive the public through a false sense of reality.

B. Social Responsibility Theory

Theories of social responsibility can be applied to evaluate the content of AI-generated politics. Freedom of the press should be used responsibly by the people in a democratic country (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956). Although this theory was first put forward in the context of the press, it can also be applied to digital platforms and political communication today. Social media platforms, campaign teams, influencers and AI content creators are all in the public information environment. Therefore, they should consider the social consequences of what they post, spread or permit to be spread.

AI-generated political content is ethically questionable if the focus is solely on attention, persuasion or campaign success, and public harm is neglected. Deceptive AI content may deny people the right to vote freely and undermine public trust in the system. Jungherr, Rauchfleisch and Wuttke (2024) have shown that deceptive use of AI in elections increases public support for a ban on such behaviour; thus, the public is aware of the harm caused by irresponsible AI communication. Therefore, the theory of social responsibility supports raising the ethical bar for undisclosed or misleading AI-generated political content.

C. Responsible Digital Communication

Responsible digital communication refers to clear, open, and accountable political messages online. AI is changing both the contents and the speed and scope of dissemination in the new public sphere of the digital age. Jungherr and Schroeder (2023) believe that AI is altering the process of production and dissemination for public opinion. Therefore, the blame will not be borne by the individual user. Platforms and political organisations also bear moral responsibility for regulating the distribution paths of AI-generated political content to the public.

Responsibly, disclose and label the facts; correct them promptly and hold the platform accountable. Reuters (2024) reports that election officials have been discussing rules for disclosing AI in political ads, and thus transparency is now a practical

problem in political communication. Disclose whether the political content has been created or modified by artificial intelligence to the public. No disclosure; thus, voters may believe the synthetic content is authentic. Thus, based on the theory of media ethics, one can see that ethical communication in AI-generated political content also includes legal compliance. Political actors, platforms and users are expected to be truthful, socially responsible and accountable.

V. Responsible Communication Practices

A. Clear Disclosure and AI Labelling

The first kind of responsible behaviour is full disclosure. Political actors should inform the public that campaign advertisements, images, videos, speeches and social media posts have been created or substantially altered by AI. Audiences of political communication need to know whether the content they are watching has been genuinely recorded or altered through editing and artificial means. Without explicit labelling, AI-generated works may be mistaken for real ones by the public. For example, an AI-generated image of a large political crowd can create a false sense of public support, and synthetic audio can make the audience believe that a politician said something that never happened. Therefore, the voters may be misled by the falsified materials in their judgment. Reuters (2024) has indicated that the rules for AI disclosure in political advertisements are now in an applied stage for election communication. Therefore, AI labelling should be regarded as a form of ethical political communication rather than just an added-on technical function.

B. Platform Accountability and Fact-Checking

The second is increased accountability for the platform. Social media platforms are not neutral; their algorithms and recommendation systems will affect which political content people see. Given that AI-generated misinformation is spreading widely through these systems, the platforms need to reduce harm. It may include AI-generated content labels, faster reporting paths, independent fact-checking, and explicit moderation policies. Dmonte et al. (2024) show that it is difficult to distinguish between AI-generated and human-generated election claims on social media. Therefore, the platforms need to use more than just the general public for identification. There must be technology and people for detection. Ranka et al. (2024) believe that deepfakes can be used to undermine the fairness of elections, and therefore, they believe that the problem should be handled by the platform. Modulation should also be transparent; that is to say, users need to know why some political content has been flagged, restricted or deleted.

C. Ethical Duties of Political Actors and Content Creators

The third kind of responsible behaviour is the moral responsibility of political figures, campaign staff and content creators. AI should not be used to generate speeches, imitate opponents, create fake endorsements or produce false evidence of public support. Political talk is permitted in a democracy; lies are not. Jungherr, Rauchfleisch and Wuttke (2024) think that AI has been used deceptively to influence elections and as a result, public demand for regulation has risen. Therefore, the application of AI in politics should be done responsibly to maintain public trust. Therefore, the campaign team will set up internal rules for the use of AI to verify the source and disclose the application. Do not use AI to disseminate fear, anger or division among the public through fake political news. Ethical political communication should use reasoning, policies and evidence to persuade; it should not be artificial synthetic works.

D. Media Literacy and Public Awareness

The fourth responsible practice is improved media literacy. The public can get information from various places, verify whether it is true, compare the political statements with those issued by the authorities, and then share it. It can be used to create high-quality, emotional and realistic political materials. Swenson and Chan (2024) report that AI has been employed to mislead the public in election-related circumstances around the world, and this problem is not confined to any particular country or platform. Do not make the user solely responsible for this problem. Jungherr and Schroeder (2023) believe that AI has altered all of public space for the creation and spread of information. Therefore, the ethical solutions need to cover public awareness, platform responsibility, political accountability and clear disclosure rules. Only when these practices are in harmony will the digital political communication be open, honest and socially responsible.

VI. Conclusion

AI-generated political content is now a significant problem of media ethics in the era of digital political communication. Although AI can be used to support the communication and public participation of a campaign, it may also be employed to mislead the public or influence political judgment improperly if such uses are not disclosed. The main ethical problems are the truthfulness and openness of information, the spread of fake news, platform responsibility and social responsibility.

This paper has put forward the view that the ethical risk stems not from the AI technology itself, but from irresponsible and deceptive applications of AI in politics. If synthetic images, videos, audio or written claims are presented as authentic, the public will be unable to choose freely and rationally. With truthfulness and accuracy, the theory of social responsibility and responsible digital communication suggest that political actors, platforms, content creators and users all have ethical duties to reduce harm.

Therefore, ethical political communication in the AI era needs to be more transparent, have stronger platform regulation, include fact-checking, implement responsible campaigning practices, and enhance media literacy. The above measures will help protect the public's trust and promote an open digital political system.

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