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# Beyond the Screen: Media Ethics and the Risks of AI-Generated Political Content

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**ABSTRACT :**

Generative artificial intelligence allows for cheap and fast production of political texts, images, audio, and videos. Although technologies like this can provide more public access to information, translation services, awareness raising and artistic expression, synthetic political media presents substantial ethical dangers when the materials generated by AI are used as factual proof. This research paper will discuss the ethical implications of AI-driven political content considering such essential values of media ethics as honesty, transparency, non-maleficence, accountability, impartiality, and respect for audience autonomy. Utilizing consequentialist ethics, deontology, and media ethics, it will examine the ethical duties of the content creators, political campaigns, digital platforms, journalists, and audiences. Artificial intelligence is not unethical per se. What matters from the ethical perspective are creator intentions, adequate content labeling, truthfulness and foreseeability of consequences. This research calls for mandatory labeling of realistic AI-generated political content, verifications of facts before publishing them, transparent error correction systems, appropriate platform regulations, and multilingual media literacy campaigns. Political communication should protect legitimate satire and creativity but reject any impersonation and fake evidence.

**Keywords: artificial intelligence; political communication; media ethics; synthetic media; deepfake; misinformation; transparency**

## 1. Introduction

Political communication influences how citizens perceive public matters, their attitudes toward politicians, and even democratic participation. In the course of campaigns, political communication may consist of various messages, such as speeches, posters, interviews, short films, slogans, and social media posts. Technologies make political communication faster and allow distribution through more channels. The emergence of generative artificial intelligence provides another change in the field because any picture, voice recording, or video can be created or manipulated without expensive production costs. At the same time, it could be used to educate citizens or mislead them by creating a false impression regarding some political event.

The point is not about the use of computers in the process of production of materials. Illustration, satire, editing, and persuasion are long-standing traditions in political communication. But ethical political communication does not imply the fact that a citizen will believe that the cartoon illustrates a certain housing policy but rather hiding the fact that the picture, video, or audio was actually artificially created. Ethics in this situation lies in deception, disclosure, misleading, impersonation, and compatibility of potential effects with acceptable public communication.

This research paper deals with three problems concerning artificial intelligence use in creating political messages. These problems are, first, which ethical problems could arise in this context; second, which media ethics theories should be used to analyze these problems; and third, what steps should be taken by the communicator. The central claim of this research paper is that ethical evaluation of such communication should be contextual rather than technical. Synthetic media is acceptable in case when the context is clear, but impersonation and deception are not.

## 2. Scope and approach

For this essay, the concept/literature review methodology is utilized. The essay uses ethical theories to current politics to analyze and makes reference to guidelines regarding the dangers of AI, digital platforms, and fact-checking. This essay does not claim that all AI messages are lies, damaging, or persuasive. On the contrary, it distinguishes between messages that are creative and messages that might be considered real recordings.

## 3. AI-generated political content in contemporary media

The AI generators have the ability to generate text, pictures, sound, and videos by learning from patterns during the training process. In the political arena, such use cases would include translations, captions creation, manifestos proposals summarization, animations generation, and creation of visual campaign materials. Such an approach will be helpful in reducing the cost of these campaigns and provision of information in various languages. Furthermore, such an approach would help teachers to visualize complicated processes which are hard to capture using a camera.

The same technology could be used to mimic the candidate's voice, fake endorsements, speeches, and other events which have not happened. This could be accomplished through distribution of the content through social media channels, messenger groups, video sharing sites, and even advertisements online. In situations where the material generated is emotional or urgent in nature, the people might spread the content without knowing the source of such information.

Four distinct groups should be included in the ethical framework. Firstly, there is synthetic educational content that makes use of the application of AI technology in the description and demonstration of an issue and marking it as synthetic. Secondly, satire and parody, which is revealed through imitation and provides cues for viewers to realize that it is not factual. Thirdly, altered content that comprises authentic footage and synthetic footage. This type of content has to be provided in context because viewers can misunderstand the footage provided. Lastly, deceptive synthetic content that is produced or distributed in such a manner as to make viewers believe in the occurrence of something untrue.

## 4. Major ethical issues

### *4.1 Truthfulness and deception*

Truthfulness is among the values of both journalism and effective communication. Synthesized video is unethical, if it is creating a false impression about the speech or behavior of an individual. In particular, one may resort to lying, misleading subtitles, impersonation of another person and, most importantly, not providing disclaimers where they were needed by a reasonable observer in order to understand the content of the video. This problem becomes even more serious, when the information is provided as the proof of something rather than just being an example of fiction.

Truthfulness does not necessarily mean that the messages of all campaigns have to be unbiased. Activists have a right to be passionate and use selective arguments in favor of their perspective. However, the difference between selective advocacy and fabricated evidence is significant. While a campaign may present its arguments as to why the policies of opponents are too costly, it may not fabricate an artificial video, where the opponent confessed about his hidden agenda.

The process of ethical authentication would entail evaluating the source, original posting, time, context, documentation, and technical evaluation. Visual errors are not always an indication that something is fake; at the same time, high quality images are not proof of authenticity either. Communicators should not make any conclusions without enough evidence.

### *4.2 Manipulation and audience autonomy*

Democratic communication presupposes that there must be a proper opportunity for the citizens to reflect upon the arguments and decide. Persuasion is not a threat to autonomy, when it offers reasons, data and interpretations that can be critically analyzed by the people. The problem of manipulation becomes more severe, when it includes the concealment of the essential data, capitalizing on the weaknesses or misrepresentation in order to escape judgment.

AI-generated communication can be made in order to address various audiences. It seems quite reasonable to translate or expound the message to a certain audience because the informational requirements of the audiences may differ. However, it will be unethical to provide different messages for different audiences, take advantage of the vulnerabilities or conceal the message of a certain campaign from public examination.

A vital criterion for the assessment of the ethicality of such an approach is the willingness of the communicator to feel confident about being able to disclose the method and data used in the message to the public. As long as it is based on the persuasion of people through the belief in the happening of an imaginary event, the fact that their autonomy is under threat is evident.

### *4.3 Harm, reputation, and dignity*

False political content may damage the reputation of an individual, lead to harassment, distract the attention of the public and put pressure on the individual who was impersonated. While celebrities need to be ready for criticism and surveillance, the mere fact of publicness does not make the false attribution of content any ethically acceptable. For private individuals, it might be even harder to contest the synthesized content, which uses the voice or face of the person.

The evaluation of the possible harm must be realistic and not assumed. Small parody marked as a parody won’t represent any kind of danger, while

realistic and widespread false confession during an election period may present serious dangers. The communicator needs to take into account the probability and gravity of the harm, the size of the vulnerable audience, possibility of corrections and existence of other ways to satisfy the public interest.

### *4.4 Public trust and the 'liar's dividend'*

The use of synthetic media can lead to the loss of trustworthiness of genuine sources of information. After realizing that the videos can be manipulated, viewers become prone to doubt the genuineness of the materials being presented. This effect is referred to as a 'liar's dividend', which means that the mere existence of deepfakes serves as an excuse to deny the fact that something wrong was actually done. Consequently, the problem here is not just the lack of trust in the specific piece of information but rather distrust towards the media, authorities, and standards of proving.

It turns out to be pretty challenging to restore trust once it was broken by a scandal. Not everyone who watched the video will know about the mistake that has occurred, and he or she will remember only the emotion caused by the manipulation. Thus, to avoid such problems in the future, communicators should ensure that they take a certain set of steps.

### *4.5 Transparency and accountability*

Transparency means provision of proper information on how and under which conditions the content is produced. Regarding realistic synthetic media, the best way of disclosing the fact of manipulation would be within the video, because it is more convenient than a disclosure through the caption of the video. The label shall be written in clear language and visible, if it is possible. Even though the use of provenance and watermarking technologies helps reach this goal, they cannot be considered as foolproof, as the metadata can be removed and mistakes could be made.

Accountability depends on the individuals who play the role in the process. For instance, the creator decides what content to produce, the editor modifies the content, the campaign decides whether to distribute the content, the platform chooses the manner of distribution and the user decides to redistribute the content. Each of them possesses different amount of knowledge and authority regarding this issue.

### *4.6 Fairness, bias, and unequal impact*

The bias inherent in data can be replicated by AI and will be different in terms of language, accent, and community. Within the context of multilingual society, the imperfect reproduction of someone's voice or its translation will result in the distorted image of the speaker or the loss of access to a political message. Likewise, the system may incorrectly interpret political satire or speech in one language while failing to recognize threatening content in another.

The question of fairness involves the consideration of the groups affected by risk and capable of challenging the lie. The big companies have their legal experts and technology specialists, but individual citizens do not have the chance to counteract the lie. An effective way to report and dispute should be provided by the platform as well as consistency in application of the policy. It is important not to abuse protection from deception.

## 5. Application of media ethics theories

### *5.1 Consequentialism*

Consequentialism evaluates actions by considering their probable outcomes. In connection with political AI, consequentialism evaluates whether there is more good in the shape of the benefit for the public from the message than the likely bad in the shape of the harmful effects. The message concerning the complex education policy in the form of an animated series of pictures will probably be of great use and will not likely have any harmful effects. The artificial video showing the politician taking the bribe will definitely cause great harm and will not bring any benefits at all.

The analysis must not be limited to the direct impact but must consider both the direct and indirect impact as well as the short-term and long-term impact and the distribution of pros and cons. Political participation and success in elections must not be the only criteria of the impact. It is necessary to evaluate the probability of misunderstanding, possible harassment, cynicism, and the complexity of undoing the viral information.

Consequentialism does not imply that in order to achieve a desirable outcome, any method will be considered justified even within politics. In case when media manipulation is quite common practice, the cost of not being able to tell what actually happened by all the participants might be too much to pay for the gain that comes from one specific campaign.

### *5.2 Deontological ethics*

The deontological ethics, however, focuses on duties and principles rather than the consequences. Duties in this case involve duty of honesty, respect for persons, and not using people as a means of obtaining political gain. One lies to the audience about the contents of the tape, which means that such a

person is doing something against the principle of honesty and using the audience as means of obtaining political gains. The action, though effective, may not be ethical since the citizens lack proper knowledge.

The duties-based ethics also considers the consent and dignity of the people. Parody may be considered acceptable when it is disclosed while fabrication of confession or endorsement using someone's image is harder to justify. Disclosing the content is important since it provides opportunities for the audiences to analyze the material presented to them as some sort of parody.

### *5.3 Journalism ethics and public interest*

Ethics of journalists are defined in terms of the principles of accuracy, verification, independence, non-harmfulness, and accountability. They are all important for news organizations, however, political campaigns and social media creators can also use them as standards to influence public perception of information. It is important for a communicator to check his/her statements, to distinguish between facts and opinions, put them into context, and to admit mistakes.

The idea of public interest is not synonymous with the interesting. While an online video clip can become very popular, it will do nothing to make people better informed about a serious problem. The concept of public interest includes such issues as the opportunity to participate in the discussion and whether there is any other way to achieve the same goal with less risk.

## 6. Responsibilities of key stakeholders

### *6.1 Political campaigns and content creators*

Guidelines must be developed regarding the use of AI-created content. Such guidelines should include accuracy of information, proper labeling of any realistic synthetic content, the individual's consent to using his or her image or voice, and an individual responsible for the approval or correction of content. The campaign must have enough information about the creation of content to check possible claims. The campaign should never spread any false information or endorsements.

### *6.2 Digital platforms*

Platform control of reach is exercised through recommendation algorithms, search, advertising, labeling, and moderation. Duties of platforms entail having clear policies, easy-to-use complaint systems, an appeal system, and proper responses to very dangerous misleading content. Automation may come into play but is not enough by itself. Manual checking is needed due to the similarities between satire, criticism, and misleading impersonation.

### *6.3 Journalists and fact-checkers*

It should be understood that a journalist must not provide any additional coverage to a false news item because it happens to go viral. A journalist needs to verify the source, find independent verification, perhaps consult an expert to give his or her opinion about this decision. No additional repetition of such a harmful information is needed.

### *6.4 Audiences and educators*

The audience can reduce its risks through verification, comparative analysis of the reports, and restraint when dealing with highly emotional information. It would definitely be too much to expect individuals to recognize every example of advanced synthetic media visually. In this regard, it is important to complement media literacy practices with certain institutional mechanisms. The process of education should also guarantee that no cynicism is bred towards video and audio altogether.

## 7. Recommendations

- Disclosure: provide transparency through clear labeling of real-life AI-created or heavily edited political content.
- Verification: fact-check, source materials and the context before publishing or sharing information.
- Non-deception: prohibit the usage of misleading and fabricated evidence and endorsements within the political discourse.
- Corrections: maintain corrections and records of the original claims.
- Proportionate platform governance: integrate automated detection systems with human intervention and an appeals process.
- Fairness: evaluate the moderation and communications' efficiency in different languages and communities.
- Media literacy: inform people on how to check sources and interpret disclosure without the assumption that all artificially generated media is fake.

• Legal protection of free speech: distinguish between deceptive impersonation and satire, parody, and illustrations.

## 8. Conclusion

The political speech generated by artificial intelligence is neither unethical nor ethical per se. The problem of the ethics of AI political speech will be defined by its purpose, presentation, disclosure, implications for facts, and potential consequences. Consequentialism will prompt us to think about the problems of social harm and social benefit, deontological ethics will bring into consideration our obligations to honesty and respect, while journalistic ethics will supply us with standards of fact checking and corrections. All these perspectives can help us develop an approach that leaves enough room for creativity in politics but cannot accept deception and fabrication of facts.

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