

A Study on Implications of AI Driven Identity Forgery and Growth of AI Generated Digital Personas in Social Media

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Abstract:

Artificial intelligence is one of the most spoken topics today. The AI has seen a rapid growth of 30% in the year 2025 & is expected to grow further (Fortune business insights). The use of AI can be evidently seen on social media in form of persons created by ai or manipulated image of a popular figure. In this article we will analyze case studies and examine its ethical and regulatory implications.

Introduction:

In a world with politics, varied cultures and commerce, social media & Ai have evolved into an integral component for growth. Any individual who has built a substantial number of followers on social media becomes a central figure online and is considered an influencer who shapes trends and consumer behavior. However, the authenticity of social media is under scrutiny with the rise of ai generated images and persons. Ai tools generate images, videos, voices that are challenging to differentiate from reality.

Artificial intelligence is concerning the society when it is maliciously used as a tool to spread political misinformation, and identity theft. (Chesney & Citron 2019). Ai Technologies like Generative Adversarial Networks lead to creation of realistic persons that may be entirely or partially fictional personas that influences humans. The illegitimate or deepfake profiles surprisingly even have followers, collaborate with brands and generate opinions that feel real. They have even evolved into influencers on social media. It is evident with the success of digitally created personas like Lil Miquela, Imma etc.

This poses as a threat to verify the authenticity of social media (Westerlund 2019) especially in Instagram and Facebook which are image based online mediums. According to Maras and Alexandrou (2019) with growth of ai induced misinformation through fake images, there is a possibility of losing public's trust on media. (Kietzmann et al., 2020)

Fake influencers are appealing because of their adaptability and power. They are attractive to marketers and content producers because, in contrast to human influencers, they are not ageing, demand payment,

or run the risk of scandal. But the societal and ethical costs are growing. The ramifications are significant, ranging from deceiving audiences to stealing identities and swaying opinions.

With power and adaptability, Ai generated fake influencers seem more appealing. They look more attractive to creators and brands as contrast to human influencers, they do not age or face any self-identity risks (Kietzmann et al., 2020). However, the concerns over ethical and societal value is growing.

In this paper we seek to critically examine the technological environment in contrast to reality that gives spaces for fake influencers and to understand the risks they pose on society and its ethical constraints.

Case Studies and Forgery Implications

1. Lil Miquela - The AI Avatar with Real Influence

Overview:

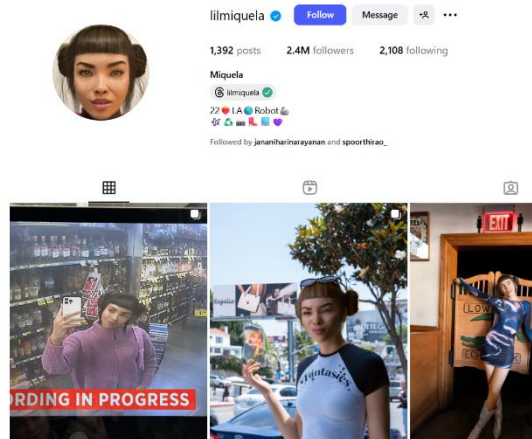
Lil Miquela is a computer-generated influencer designed and created by a startup Brud in the year 2016. It was designed using 3D and AI narratives. The Instagram profile with over 2 million followers from all over the world has realistic pictures and videos that promote several brands and initiatives. Surprisingly the ai generated persona even reacts to comments.

Forgery Implications:

- **Deception of Authenticity:** According to Burnz (2019) Fictional characters may be mistaken to be genuine human actors as often digital avatars blur the lines between representation and reality. Although Miquela was not created to look like any specific individual, her posts are difficult to differentiate between a fictional character and reality. It may be misleading for the audience to believe it to be a real person.
- **Synthetic Identity as a Marketing Tool:** It is evident through her account that many brands collaborate with her and treat her like a real influencer. There is a question of informed consent, it might lead to a false impression among audience to believe her as a real human.
- **Emotional Manipulation:** There is a possibility of exploiting human empathy under false presentation when AI personas evoke emotional responses (Wolf & Hermann, 2021, p. 979). There is a challenge to the ethical norms of influence on social media when ai generated influencers like Miquela's post about various social topics like trauma and justice provoking empathy from users.

Implication: While technically this may not be identity forgery, Miquela represents an AI generated synthetic face put forward as genuine avatar exploiting the trust system of influencer marketing without any informed non-human origin until public controversy emerged.

Figure 1: Lil Miquela Instagram with 2.4 million followers



Shudu Gram – An AI super models racial identity forgery:

Overview:

In 2017, Shudu Gram one of the world's first digital supermodel was created by photographer Cameron James. The ai generated character has over two lakh followers and features brands like Fenty Beauty, Ferragamo and many others.

Forgery Implications:

- **Forging Racial and Cultural Identity:** The identity of Shudu is aesthetically built on a cultural representation of a black women. However, the creator & controller of the account does not belong to the race. This leads to controversy of cultural appropriation in the hands of a white creator with a digital black face.
- **Exploitation Without Representation:** The success profits of Shudu goes entirely to the creator and does not in any way benefit economically or socially to the community. It is seen as a potential opportunity that has been taken away from women in that race who could have benefited from this.

Absence of Consent:

although it is not based on a real person, the forgery lies in its mimicking of an entire demographic group, commodifying appearance without representation.

Implication: This case is an example of identity simulation and cultural forgery through AI-generated models, raising profound ethical issues around the concepts of racial exploitation (violating rights) and misrepresentation.

2. Deepfake of Indian Politician Manoj Tiwari

Overview:

In 2020, during Delhi's legislative elections, a deepfake video surfaced of BJP politician *Manoj Tiwari*, where he appeared to speak fluently in Haryanvi (a dialect he does not know). The video was disseminated across WhatsApp and Facebook to appeal to regional voters.

Forgery Implications:

- **Political Persona Forgery:** Tiwari's image and voice were synthetically altered to simulate a direct appeal to a specific audience—constituting impersonation and political manipulation.
- **Voter Deception:** Many viewers believed the video was authentic, undermining democratic discourse by misrepresenting a candidate's linguistic identity and message.
- **Legal Gray Area:** At the time, India had no legal precedent for prosecuting deepfake impersonation in political campaigns, allowing the forgers to escape accountability.

Implication: This case exemplifies AI-enabled visual and vocal impersonation for electoral influence, blurring personal identity, political messaging, and authenticity in public communication.

The boundaries between authenticity and fabrication are collapsing. While some cases (e.g., *Lil Miquela* or *Shudu*) remain within the realm of artistic or commercial experimentation, others (like the *Manoj Tiwari deepfake* or *Instagram bot network*) demonstrate direct misuse of identity or likeness for political or economic manipulation.

Key Themes Emerging from the Case Studies**a. Deception of Audience Trust**

Fake influencers erode the trust-based economy of social media. Influencers are expected to represent authentic, lived experiences—especially in health, fashion, politics, or activism. AI-generated personas subvert this by offering simulated behavior without real human stakes. For instance, *Lil Miquela*'s political activism and emotional storytelling manipulate followers by leveraging empathy toward a character that cannot truly experience what she claims.

b. AI-Enabled Identity Theft and Cultural Appropriation

In the case of *Shudu*, the virtual supermodel, the implications of aesthetic identity forgery are more cultural than personal. While not based on a real person, her hyperrealistic portrayal of Black femininity—controlled entirely by a white male creator, raises issues of digital blackface, where marginalized identities are adopted for visual profit, without accountability or inclusion.

c. Political Weaponization of Deepfakes

The *Manoj Tiwari* deepfake highlights how AI-generated videos can be used to manipulate electoral demographics through hyper-targeted misinformation. This represents real-time, scalable political forgery, bypassing language, geography, and even voter scrutiny. The lack of legislation capable of punishing or even defining such acts leaves democratic processes vulnerable.

d. Economic Fraud and Influencer Marketplace Exploitation

As seen in the Instagram fake network, entire economies are emerging around synthetic influence. Fake followers, AI-written captions, and GAN-generated faces are used to secure brand deals, effectively stealing marketing budgets from legitimate influencers. This constitutes digital commercial fraud, where authenticity is fabricated to generate revenue.

e. Legal Challenges

Current legislation struggles to classify synthetic identities and digital forgeries. Few countries have explicit deepfake laws, and most focus on sexual content or defamation rather than influencer fraud or aesthetic impersonation. The ambiguity surrounding the legality of using GAN-generated faces or morphed audio poses a challenge for prosecution and deterrence.

Psychological Effects on Audiences

Exposure to fake influencers may distort perceptions of beauty, behavior, and social status. Research has shown that even brief interactions with synthetic characters can influence political opinions, consumer preferences, and self-image (Westerlund, 2019; Maras & Alexandrou, 2019). When these influencers present unrealistic lifestyles or identities, they can damage user mental health, especially among younger audiences.

Recommendations Moving Forward

1. **Mandatory Disclosure:** Platforms should require clear labels for AI-generated content or synthetic influencers.
2. **Global Regulation:** A unified legal framework is needed to define and penalize digital forgery and unauthorized use of likeness.
3. **AI Literacy Programs:** Public education initiatives must teach users how to identify deepfakes and understand their risks.
4. **Forensic Detection Tools:** Investment in deepfake and GAN detection algorithms must be a top priority for tech companies and governments.
5. **Ethical AI Standards:** Developers of generative AI tools should follow strict ethical protocols, especially when their technologies can fabricate human identities.

Conclusion

The rise of AI-generated fake influencers signals a profound shift in how identity, influence, and authenticity are constructed and consumed in the digital age. Enabled by powerful technologies such as GANs, deepfakes, and natural language generation, synthetic personas now operate across social media platforms with human-like credibility, often surpassing real individuals in visual realism, emotional engagement, and marketing potential.

As demonstrated through the five diverse case studies, ranging from commercial avatars like Lil Miquela and Shudu to politically charged deepfakes and fraudulent Instagram networks, identity forgery via AI takes many forms: aesthetic, cultural, emotional, and vocal. These cases collectively reveal that such forgeries are not merely technical curiosities or entertainment novelties; they have real-world consequences that impact democratic integrity, brand trust, psychological well-being, and cultural representation.

Despite the transformative capabilities of these technologies, the legal and ethical frameworks surrounding them remain underdeveloped. The lack of explicit regulation allows synthetic influencers and face-forgery

systems to flourish with minimal accountability. Audiences often remain unaware of the inauthentic nature of the content they consume, while brands and political actors risk engaging with deceptive or even malicious entities.

To mitigate these threats, a coordinated response is essential, combining AI literacy, platform governance, legal reform, and ethical AI development. Transparency must become the norm: audiences should have the right to know whether the "person" they are engaging with is human or machine. Without such measures, the erosion of trust in digital identities may become irreversible.

Ultimately, as society embraces more AI-generated content, the central question is not whether these technologies should exist, but how they should be ethically and responsibly integrated into our digital ecosystems. Only through informed, multidisciplinary collaboration can we ensure that innovation does not come at the cost of truth, autonomy, and human dignity.

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