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### AI 'Slop' and Growing Online Distrust

In the past, people were often warned to steer clear of misinformation on the internet. Older generations warned others to research carefully and not believe everything they see online. However, with the rise and near-perfection of artificial intelligence models such as ChatGPT and Sora, it has become harder to distinguish fact from fiction. Cautionary tales previously told are becoming more important than ever as technology continues to advance. Joe Tidy, a Cyber Correspondent at BBC World Service, explains how artificial intelligence tools make it easier than ever to create images and videos, utilizing said tools to perpetuate harmful or false narratives. Tidy provides insight into the ongoing backlash that artificially generated content in the media sphere has been facing by labeling AI-generated content as 'slop' or misleading. As artificially generated content continues to blur the line in distinguishing genuine versus fabricated content, AI-generated 'slop' contributes to the spread of misinformation on social media.

Throughout Joe Tidy's BBC article "*AI 'slop' is transforming social media, and a backlash is brewing*", there is an emphasis on the ongoing infiltration of low-quality and mass-produced artificially generated content online. The article features a range of artificially generated content, ranging from scenarios such as a clip of a giant woman being 'healed' by Jesus or realistic videos of a leopard hunt. This rise in AI content is being pushed by tech CEOs such as Mark Zuckerberg, who states social media has entered a "third phase" centered around

AI that makes content creation and sharing easier than ever before. The growing preference towards artificial intelligence leads to an increase in algorithms prioritizing said AI-'slop' content. Tidy continues to explain that while some whimsical content may be easy recognize as fake, other material may be harder to differentiate and might take a higher amount of 'mental effort' to distinguish, effort he argues most people won't exhaust (Tidy, 2025). Social media companies such as Meta and X have decided to cut their moderation teams down and rely on users to distinguish what is real and not. A recent example of the effects of artificially generated content could be seen on X, where AI-generated videos of people thanking the United States for its recent involvement in the Venezuelan Conflict were spread (Tidy, 2025). AI-generated content like this could influence the way the public responds to foreign conflict. As a result, the ever-growing presence of AI-generated content continues to bring concern from online users who argue that the overwhelming increase of AI content will ultimately weaken trust in digital spaces.

The concerns Tidy expresses in his article can also be seen among social media users who have firsthand experience in observing AI-generated content online. To gain a deeper understanding of what the public thinks of artificially generated content appearing on their social media, my groupmates and I conducted a survey examining their experiences with AI in the online sphere. With a sample size of 32 participants, results revealed an equal split in opinions regarding the growing presence of AI in social media. When asked to rate the participants' comfort level with artificial intelligence on a scale from one to five, many participants (53%) selected three. However, 87% of respondents agreed that AI makes misinformation easier to spread online. The results of the survey coincide with Tidy's findings, showing participants are aware of AI 'slop' and, while finding some content interesting, they are also aware of the risks

associated with its growing presence. When asked in what ways AI could be helpful and harmful, participants reported that AI-generated content could make for amusing content but could also be utilized to spread misinformation or negativity. Survey results reinforce that AI-generated 'slop' threatens trust in digital spaces, as participants' opinions match with the concerns that while content may be engaging, there are potential threats of misinformation.

The online consensus appears to be that AI-generated 'slop' is gradually decreasing the overall quality of online spaces. Arwa Mahdawi, a writer for *The Guardian*, argues that low-quality AI content seems to be plaguing online spaces, 'slowly killing the internet' by placing importance on engagement rather than authentic material (Mahdawi, 2025). Instead of regulating said content, major platforms such as Meta or X encourage AI due to economic incentives. This can be seen with Meta's introduction of 'AI profiles' such as "Liv" that can interact with users and generate content (Mahdawi, 2025). Similarly, Katelyn Chedraoui, a writer for *CNET*, describes AI-generated "slop" as substituting most of the human-made content online. Chedraoui explains how 'AI slop' is just a shabby 'imitation of content', reinforcing the recurring idea that AI 'slop' is being published by social media algorithms (Chedraoui, 2026). She states that over a third of YouTube shorts shown to a new user is AI content, and over 1.3 billion videos are labeled as AI-generated content on Tik-Tok. Together, these sources support Tidy's argument that the spread of AI-generated content is largely corporate-driven and socially consequential. Our survey results coincide with these findings as well, where 87% of participants reported that AI makes misinformation easier to spread.

While AI-generated content ideally serves a creative purpose, where others can be entertained, the reality is that misinformation and content in the form of AI 'slop' is what is being pushed to people online. Tidy (2025) emphasizes how AI 'slop' contributes to a distrust of media

where people aren't sure what to believe is true, or have opinions based on false content. This theme of fear of misinformation is consistent throughout the survey we conducted; participants expressed a distrust of AI content. AI slop creates an oversaturation of mass-produced low-quality content that can spread harmful rhetoric or plainly detract from high-quality human-made content. Users must develop stronger media literacy. This is already occurring and can be shown via survey results, where over 50% of respondents answered 'yes' to being able to differentiate AI content from human-made content. AI 'Slop' detracts from the quality of content people see online. As it continues to shape what we see, users must remain vigilant, participating in media literacy where they aren't easily swayed by misinformation, while social media companies should enforce content that prioritizes truth and authenticity over prioritizing engagement alone.

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