

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly
SPECIAL ISSUE CALL

**Disinformation in Times of Artificial Intelligence (AI):
Consequences for Journalism and Mass Communication**

Christian von Sikorski, *University of Kaiserslautern-Landau (RPTU), Germany*
Michael Hameleers, *University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands*
Special Issue Editors

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has ushered in a new era in the production, dissemination, and use of information in modern digital media environments. The introduction of generative AI including models such as *ChatGPT* and *DALL-E*, present both new opportunities and challenges for communication in (social) media and journalism. Although AI has been associated with positive implications for the efficient generation of content, it also affords the rapid creation and dissemination of hyper-realistic synthetic media that are difficult to distinguish from authentic information. As such, the embedding of AI in the current information landscape may exacerbate existing trends related to increasing distrust in information, and high levels of uncertainty when it comes to the discernment between true and false information.

Thus, one of the most pressing challenges related to AI is the ability to generate and disseminate *disinformation*, which is defined as the creation and dissemination of falsehoods with the intention to deceive. AI-generated disinformation may pose significant risk to global publics as more than four billion potential voters head to the polls in 2024. Both (political) policy makers and scholars have warned that AI-generated disinformation can negatively influence the democratic electoral process and contribute to declines in trust towards the media, politics, and democracy more generally. AI tools make it possible to produce textual, audio, and visual disinformation quickly and cost-effectively in large quantities, personalize it and target it to specific groups of people via social media platforms. This “democratization of falsehoods” allows more and more actors to disseminate AI-generated disinformation with less and less effort and is also increasingly difficult to identify. Yet, to date, we lack systematic research on the prevalence of such forms of deception, their impact on recipients, and the effectiveness of interventions to pre- or debunk AI-generated disinformation.

Beyond the political realm, new challenges arise for journalism and other practitioners or policy makers in dealing with AI-generated disinformation (e.g., whether to report about AI disinformation campaigns or fact-check AI-generated disinformation). Thus, despite the alarm on AI-driven disinformation is sounding louder than ever before, we currently lack concrete evidence-based recommendations on how to best deal with its threat and instill resilience in the digital society.

At the same time, we should also consider the impact of warning about disinformation in light of these new developments, and the weaponized use of AI-powered disinformation as a blame-shifting label. Indeed, different studies indicate that threat frames and warnings about disinformation may negatively impact news trust, or lower the credibility of true information by emphasizing risk and deception. These contrasting perspectives call for a comprehensive approach to understand the content, consequences, causes, and counter-strategies of AI-driven disinformation.

Scope and Objectives

The proposed special issue will encompass a broad range of topics related to AI and disinformation and aims to explore the intricate relationship between AI-generated disinformation,

social media audiences and journalism in modern digital media environments. Ultimately, the special issue is intended to spark discussion about the role of AI for journalism and democracy and serve as a springboard for initiating new research to address the evolving challenges posed by AI-generated disinformation. We invite scholars to contribute original research articles using a wide range of methodologies that address, but are not limited to, the following key themes:

- **Conceptualization of AI-generated disinformation**

First, we need to better map out the landscape of AI-generated disinformation, and contrast it to more traditional forms of deception. We are interested in investigating what forms of AI-generated disinformation exist, in which contexts AI-generated disinformation is used, and what role text, audio, visual or multimodal disinformation play. We want to explore the following questions: which topics (politics, health, climate change, etc.) and what types of actors are involved in AI-generated disinformation? Who are the (alleged) sources of disinformation, and who are targeted for what reasons? What are the main categories of deepfakes, auditory and textual disinformation? How does personalized content (i.e., microtargeting) relate to say brand recognition or political ideology? What are the current blind spots when it comes to mapping the AI-driven disinformation landscape?

- **Consequences of AI-generated disinformation**

We are also interested in the consequences of AI-generated disinformation and its impact on attitudes, emotions, cognitions and behavior. Do certain forms of AI-generated or AI-altered disinformation activate negative stereotypes towards social groups? Does AI disinformation promote political divisions and affective polarization? How do individual AI disinformation campaigns or, more generally, the knowledge of the existence of AI-generated disinformation on digital platforms influence uncertainty, skepticism, media trust and news credibility, trust in political institutions, but also scientific institutions and their results? Are the effects of AI-generated disinformation limited in scope or duration? Do individual characteristics such as partisanship or levels of education moderate the effects?

- **Combating AI-generated disinformation**

Ultimately, we seek to understand what strategies exist for effectively combating AI-generated disinformation. What types of debunking and fact-checks are particularly effective, especially with regard to personalized, multimodal AI disinformation? What form can warnings about AI-generated disinformation take and which forms of pre-bunking are most or least effective? Here, we also consider under which conditions disinformation interventions may potentially backfire by lowering perceived credibility in authentic information. How can media literacy programs or specially designed video games help resist AI-generated disinformation? Is there potential for collaborative efforts between humans and AI systems to tackle AI-generated disinformation and help identify AI-generated disinformation in user comments and multimodal disinformation on social media?

Submission Guidelines

We invite original research contributions that align with the scope of this special issue. The submission process is organized as a two-stage procedure. In a first step, we invite extended abstracts for submission to the special issue editors Dr. Christian von Sikorski and Dr. Michael Hameleers via email (jmcq.ai.disinfo@gmail.com). In these abstracts, we ask authors to indicate the maturity of the project: Are data already collected or analyzed? How feasible is it to submit a full draft with empirical conclusions before the full submission deadline? After initial internal screening, the special issue co-editors will invite selected contributions for full paper submission that will undergo rigorous peer review. Full submissions should adhere to the guidelines of [Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly](#) and follow APA style, 7th ed.

Timeline

- **Sept. 1, 2024:** Abstract submission (expression of interest, information on data collection, feasibility and maturity statements 400-500 words)
- **Oct. 1, 2024:** Feedback & invitation (selected authors/abstracts) to submit full papers
- **Feb. 1, 2025:** Deadline for full paper submissions (7,000-10,000 words)
- **Target publication date of special issue: Summer 2025**