

Memes vs. Machines: Comparison of AI-generated Images vs. Traditional Memes in Right-Wing Social Media Discourse

Item Type	Journal Article
Author	Alex Petruk
Abstract	This paper examines the use of traditional internet memes and AI-generated images in the dissemination of right-wing ideologies on social media, focusing on their prevalence and engagement. Data was collected from prominent right-wing accounts and meme-centric profiles on Twitter/X during the two months preceding the 2024 U.S. presidential election. Prevalence, measured by the volume of posts, demonstrated that traditional memes dominate right-wing discourse, accounting for 77% of visual content shared by large accounts and 90% by smaller ones. Engagement metrics, including weighted interaction and virality scores, revealed that AI-generated images, while less frequent, achieved significantly higher engagement levels, particularly in large accounts. These findings suggest that memes serve as versatile and broadly appealing tools for ideological dissemination, while AI-generated images are more impactful in targeted, high-engagement contexts. The study highlights the complementary roles of these formats in right-wing messaging strategies and raises critical questions about the evolving implications of generative AI for political propaganda, emphasizing the need for future research into its influence across digital platforms.
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Tags:

Digital Political Communication, Generative AI, Meme Culture, Propaganda, Right-Wing Extremism
Online

Notes:

"Internet meme culture, which includes viewing, creating, sharing, and commenting on memes, has become one of the most important forms of political participation and activism, used to criticize, ridicule, or troll authority figures." pg.101

- memes- "tiny units of culture that move from one generation to another through texts and images"

"The term meme was originally coined by biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976 to describe the way humans pass on cultural information and ideas between individuals and generations." pg.100

"Generative AI is a broad term that refers to artificial intelligence systems capable of creating various types of media in response to user-generated prompts." pg.101

"They're eating the dogs, they're eating the cats" claim made by Donald Trump, became a cultural flashpoint in 2024, and so maybe I can start to think about the online images that were posted by right-wingers on Twitter, where they used AI to generate pictures for this theme of immigrants eating pets and Donald Trump shown as the pet's savior pg.100

An important question raised in this scholarly article: "how do generative AI images differ from traditional internet memes in conveying right-wing ideologies?" pg.100

"As a result, internet memes have become a way to understand and challenge concepts, identities, and claims made by various political groups" pg.101 -this has become recently shown in comment sections using gifs/memes on Instagram. For example, using edited pictures of Donald Trump as a fish

"Internet humour further intensifies the impact of these messages and helps to normalize harmful stereotypes." pg.101

"An important distinction to keep in mind throughout the remainder of this paper is that memes are nuanced, subtle, and interpretive; AI-images, on the other hand, are an exact representation of a user-generated text prompt." pg.102 - this means that the individual who created the racist, harmful or hateful image on AI, has to come up with a specific detailed prompt for the final product

Attachments

- Full Text PDF

Overload opacity: Countervisuality and glitch aesthetics in AI-Generated Brainrot on Instagram

Item Type	Journal Article
Author	Daniel Ungureanu
Abstract	How AI-generated memes negotiate between visual resistance and algorithmic co-option? By synthesizing Mirzoeff's "countervisuality" and Glissant's "right to opacity," this article examines Italian Brainrot, a 2025 meme phenomenon, and introduces "overload opacity" as a platform-native aesthetic strategy in which sensory excess achieves hypervisibility while resisting interpretive legibility. Data were compiled from public Instagram pages in June–July 2025, featuring content posted between March–May 2025. The analysis focuses on six high-engagement posts using a five-axis overload framework and close visual readings. Findings indicate that these memes enact countervisual refusal through deliberate incoherence, flooding perception with incompatible stimuli that resist singular interpretation while leveraging algorithmic rewards for affective intensity and novelty.
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Generative AI, Brainrot, Countervisuality, Glitch aesthetics, Instagram, Memes, Overload opacity

Notes:

"Italian Brainrot (IBR), which appeared in March 2025, evolved this sensibility into artificial intelligence (AI)-generated short-form memes on platforms such as Instagram, featuring surreal characters, chaotic visuals, pseudo-Italian gibberish, and glitch distortions"

"Countervisuality refers to the political claim to look autonomously—to see otherwise against dominant visual regimes (Mirzoeff, 2011)—and has been applied across diverse media."

- Meme resistance as platform-native countervisuality

"Memes function as countervisual practice because they enable distributed remix of dominant narratives, transforming top-down messaging into participatory critique."

Glitch aesthetics

Affect theory

"IBR poses a challenge for visual culture studies by attaining massive visibility (posts often garnering hundreds of thousands of likes) while resisting coherent interpretation" pg.1 -this can be seen a lot on Instagram and Tiktok

Fig.3 -pg.5 - Brr Brr Patapim videos are mostly categorized in brainrot and use AI to generate these chaotic loud contents

Other examples include Fig.4 & Fig.5

Attachments

- ScienceDirect Snapshot

The impact of exposure to generative AI art on aesthetic appreciation, perceptions of AI mind, and evaluations of AI and of art careers

Item Type	Journal Article
Author	W P Malecki
Author	Tanja V Messingschlager
Author	Markus Appel
Abstract	Visual art is increasingly created by generative artificial intelligence (generative AI). This study, conducted online with 470 US participants, investigated whether exposure to art attributed to AI may influence aesthetic appreciation, perceptions of AI mind, and evaluations of AI (acceptance of AI as an artist, evaluation of AI as an identity and realistic threat) and of art careers. Exposure to art introduced as generated by AI (vs a human artist) reduced appreciation. No significant impact was observed on the other dependent variables. For ostensibly AI-generated art, higher appreciation was associated with more acceptance toward AI as an artist and lower levels of AI realistic threat. This suggests that mere exposure to art attributed to AI may not be sufficient to induce a change in perceptions of AI mind, evaluations of AI and of art careers, but these effects might occur if AI-attributed art is appreciated aesthetically.
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Notes:

"artists have expressed worries that the emergence of generative AI will change how society perceives their profession such that it will be perceived as expendable and unsustainable" pg.5411

"while humans need years of training to develop the artistic skills sufficient for creating a genuine artwork and then need hours, days, or longer to create an artwork itself, generative AI, once provided with sufficient data and resources, can learn the skills and create an artwork in much less time " -this connects back to the ideas of how artwork is being stolen from AI where the artwork was used as a prompt which probably took less time to create than the actual process of creating the sketches that was done by the artist. pg.5411

AI has become a threat to humans

"exposure to AI art may lead people to perceive AI as more human-like by attributing to it the capacity for having a mind, and to accept it as a legitimate artist" pg.5412

"a recent study showed that exposure to a ChatGPT-attributed non-fiction text increases "the perception of the conversational chatbot as a realistic and symbolic threat to various aspects of human life, including safety, jobs, resources, inequality, identity, uniqueness, and value" pg.5412

"There is no universally accepted definition of AI art in the scholarly literature." pg.5413

AI art and mind perception

Undetectable participation in meme culture – meme audiences between interpassivity and emotional gratification

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