

The Pope Drip - Image that fooled millions

Fake news articles can often be difficult to analyze because they are designed to manipulate readers and push a particular agenda or viewpoint. The issue of fake news and manipulation through disinformation is a growing concern in today's society. With the proliferation of social media and the internet, it has become easier for people to spread false information to a large audience, often with malicious intent. In many cases, the "fakeness" of an article or picture may not be immediately apparent and may require careful analysis, to identify the ways in which it is manipulative or misleading.

One recent example of this is the AI image showing Pope Francis, typically a pious and plain man, looking like a "boss" in a sleek, Balenciaga style, winter-white and ankle length puffer coat, which went viral on social media. This picture shows the growing danger of AI images.

Popes wear white to represent Christlike purity and red to symbolize compassion, which contributed to the belief in the truth of the image. The pope didn't actually wear that white puff jacket, but a lot of people were ready to believe he did.

The image was apparently created by Xavier, a 31-year-old construction worker who likes to play around with the artificial-intelligence image generator Midjourney. It is a program, which can create realistic-looking images of people, objects, and scenes that don't actually exist. The fact that an AI program was used to create the image makes it even more concerning, as it shows that sophisticated technology can be used to create convincing fake content that can be difficult to distinguish from real content.

Xavier told BuzzFeed News that he didn't expect a picture like that going viral. He was creating it while being high on mushrooms and just wanted to try and experiment bringing his idea to real life. "I try to do funny stuff or trippy art—psychedelic stuff. It just dawned on me: I should do the Pope. Then it was just coming like water: 'The Pope in Balenciaga puffy coat, Moncler, walking the streets of Rome, Paris, stuff like that,'" Xavier said.

Technology magazine The Verge pointed out that the photo of the Pope has telltale signs of being fake. The chief sign was what they called 'the edge of a glasses lens' - where the outline of the puffer coat seems to transition into its own shadow.

Another way to determine if an image might be AI-generated is to look at the hands, as internet sleuths have recently discovered. For AI, it is the most challenging part of creating a fake picture and it has a lot of difficulties with creating a realistically looking hand. The fakeness of the picture is also visible in the warped recreation of his crucifix.

While there are still flaws in many of these newer programs, they are consistently improving, making it harder to distinguish the real from the fake. As AI technology is becoming more sophisticated, the risk of fake news and other forms of manipulation continues to grow. It is up to individuals and society as a whole to remain vigilant and take action to protect ourselves against the harmful effects of fake news. Analyzing and questioning every kind of content we consume gets more important every day.

While this picture had no bad intention and was **not** used to manipulate the people who saw it, it still shows what a critical situation we are in. And how, without our knowing, we believe fake news so easily.

In addition, fake news articles are using a combination of sensational headlines, false claims, cherry-picked data, emotional manipulation, and lack of expertise to manipulate readers and push a particular agenda. Fake news are often not straightforward and require careful analysis to identify the fake and wrong points. That's why social media platforms are so dangerous - their structure does not push the consumers to research and analyze the content they are viewing. They allow the disinformation platforms to put information inside the user's head little by little, so that they don't question it.

Every short video and almost every picture nowadays needs to be critically scrutinized by its viewers.

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