

Is there Promise in AI-generated faces?



Pictures of highly realistic fake people that were generated by a computer (Photo: NYTIMES/Kashmir HILL and Jeremy WHITE)

A world where what we see may no longer be real can change our lives forever – the people we trust, the way we communicate, and the very fabric of our reality.

And the truth is, every day we are inching closer to such a world. The meteoric rise of highly realistic artificial intelligence (AI) generated human faces is rapidly blurring the lines between reality and fiction, forcing us to question the authenticity of our digital interactions. According to Manos Tsakiris, Professor of Psychology from the University of London, [AI-generated faces are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish from actual human faces](#). In fact, a recent [study](#) by the World Economic Forum suggests that on average, people tend to trust AI-generated faces 7.7% more than they trust actual human faces.

Such findings hint at a potential erosion of social trust looming soon. I believe that may be why some people dread the idea of living in a world with AI-generated faces.

Dark side of AI-generated faces

AI-generated faces can be dangerous weapons. Malicious actors determined to undermine social trust exploit the realism of AI-generated faces to create fake identities for fraudulent purposes. They make it all too convenient for malicious actors to [commit scams](#), [make sexual accusations](#), and [unlawfully influence political elections](#) while avoiding detection. A widely circulated [deepfake of Former US President Barack Obama](#) highlights the potential of such impersonations to spread misinformation, manipulate public opinion, and divide populations. And every day, countless other deepfakes are being generated and circulated, each one posing a significant threat to

individuals and society at large. The irresponsible use of AI-generated faces for nefarious purposes is not only infuriating, but also deeply concerning as it raises serious ethical issues.

With that said, AI-generated faces are here to stay so it is crucial that we call out bad actors who misuse them. While concerns have been raised regarding the potential for AI-generated faces to erode social trust, what is equally important is to recognise its benefits and responsibly leverage on them for advancing society.

A hopeful antidote

Despite being used as a tool to create deepfakes, I am hopeful that AI-generated faces also hold the potential to combat the harmful effects of it when used for research purposes.

By generating large datasets of easily varied and authentic-looking faces, AI-generated faces provide researchers with an opportunity to improve the accuracy and resilience of facial recognition algorithms. As we [train these algorithms on the vast dataset of AI-generated faces](#), we can gradually enhance their precision and improve their ability to distinguish real from fake faces.

That is one way we can use AI-generated faces in research, but there are other possibilities. Specifically in medical research, I most welcome the use of AI-generated faces to simulate the progression of diseases such as Alzheimer's in a patient. I find it fascinating that with their aid, researchers can easily identify early warning signs associated with the disease, develop better treatment strategies, and eventually [improve the speed of medical diagnosis](#).

Beyond research, AI-generated faces can also be handy virtual companions.

AI-generated facial companions

If the viral AI chatbot [ChatGPT](#) was useful for answering some of your burning questions, a facial one could be better.

When programmed well, a human-like AI-generated facial assistant can also evoke expressions and emotions crucial for communication and display of empathy in interactions.

My view is that these characteristics make them well-suited for teaching roles. By conveying information while being mindful of both verbal and non-verbal cues, an AI-generated facial tutor can provide students with tailored academic and emotional support. This is key in fostering a trusted and supportive learning environment.

And it does not end there.

They also make for [emotionally engaging virtual companions](#) for the aged and sick. During tough times, it can be more comforting and reassuring to speak with a realistic human-like face that is able to convey understanding through facial expressions and

tone of voice. To me, this seems like a better way of providing reassurance and emotional support.

Of course, I do not believe AI-generated faces can fully replicate the nuances of human faces, as they lack the biological components that make up our unique physical features and expressions. However, this does not diminish their potential to create positive impact on society when used responsibly.

Forging trust

The impact of AI-generated faces on society is immense, but the risks associated with their misuse cannot be ignored. Without being transparent about how they are generated or taking measures to prevent their misuse, we run the risk of a fractured society driven by weaponized AI-generated faces.

But we can act now. Individuals and organizations must play a role in acting and advocating for ethical and responsible use of AI-generated faces in shaping the future of this technology. Only then can trust be strengthened and become a driving force for meaningful digital transformation. (843 words)