



MYUNG J. CHUN Los Angeles Times

DEMOCRATS ARE BUOYANT

A Kamala Harris poster appears on a bridge across from a Trump tower in Chicago on Wednesday. The city is hosting the Democratic convention. Scan this code to read our coverage at latimes.com and in our eNewspaper, where subscribers get an exclusive “LATEXtra.”

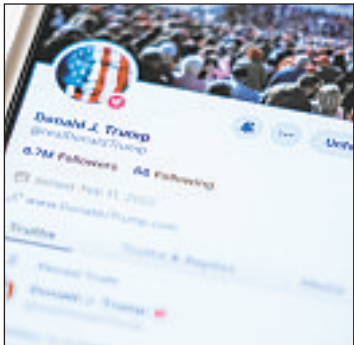


AI, deepfakes will only get worse

A patriotic image shows megastar Taylor Swift dressed up like Uncle Sam, falsely suggesting she endorses Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump. “Taylor Wants You To Vote For Donald Trump,” the image, which appears to be generated by artificial intelligence, says. Over the weekend, Trump amplified the lie when he shared the image along with others depicting support from Swift fans to his 7.6 million followers on his social network, Truth Social. Deception has long played a part in politics, but the rise of artificial intelligence tools that allow people to rapidly generate fake images or videos by typing out a phrase adds another complex layer to a familiar problem on social media. Known as deepfakes, these digitally altered images and videos can make it appear someone is saying or doing something they aren’t. As the race between Trump and Democratic nominee Kamala Harris intensifies, disinformation

Concerns rise over electoral impacts of the new form of false information

By QUEENIE WONG AND WENDY LEE



JOHN MINCHILLO Associated Press
DONALD TRUMP amplified a fake post that suggested Taylor Swift endorses him.

experts are sounding the alarm about generative AI’s risks. “I’m worried as we move closer to the election, this is going to explode,” said Emilio Ferrara, a computer science professor at USC Viterbi School of Engineering. “It’s going to get much worse than it is now.” Platforms such as Facebook and X have rules against manipulated images, audio and videos, but they’ve struggled to enforce these policies as AI-generated content floods the internet. Faced with accusations they’re censoring political speech, they’ve focused more on labeling content and fact-checking, rather than pulling posts down. And there are exceptions to the rules, such as satire, that allow people to create and share fake images online. “We have all the problems of the past, all the myths and disagreements and general stupidity, that we’ve been dealing with for 10 years,” said Hany Farid, a UC Berkeley professor who focuses on [See Deepfakes, A6]

Despite ascent, Harris remains a ‘blank slate’ to some voters

Polls suggest many still know little about the VP, whose team is racing to define her before Trump does.

By NOAH BIERMAN

CHICAGO — Vice President Kamala Harris will make history Thursday night as the first woman of color to accept a major party presidential nomination. But did you know she worked at McDonald’s in college and confronted a bully when she was 4? As Harris’ campaign tries to reintroduce her to the country at this week’s Democratic National Convention, they are seeking to balance the excitement of a trailblazing candidate with the need to paint her in three dimensions. That means playing up her background as a middle-class child of a single mother as much as her status as the first female and mixed-race vice president. “Her story is your story,” former First Lady Michelle Obama said Tuesday. “It’s my story. It’s the story of the vast majority of Americans trying to build a better life.” Polling and focus groups suggest many Americans know who Harris is but not much about her. The compressed nature of the campaign puts more pressure on the party convention to define her in positive terms before former President Trump, who held his convention before President Biden stepped aside last month, can cast her in a negative light. Americans have largely fixed opinions of Trump, who has served a term as president and been in the public eye since the 1980s, including the reality television show “The Apprentice,” which framed his image as a successful business tycoon. He is viewed favorably by about 43% of them, according to the FiveThirtyEight.com polling average, a number that has been fairly stable for much of his time in politics, aside from a 4- to 5-point dip after the Jan. 6 insurrection. Harris, by contrast, stayed in the background as vice president after a brief and unsuccessful run for president in the 2020 Democratic primary. Her approval rose from under 38% to more than 44% in the month since Biden dropped out of the election and endorsed her, a large swing for a national politician in the heat of a presidential contest. “The thing about vice presidents: The downside is nobody knows who you are. The upside is nobody knows who you are,” David Axelrod, former President Obama’s lead strategist, said at a [See Harris, A6]



ROBERT GAUTHIER Los Angeles Times

DEMOCRATS HAVE bombarded the home audience with videos about Vice President Kamala Harris.

‘Magic’ is missing in mushroom candies

Products sometimes have risky ingredients but no psilocybin, tests find

By KERI BLAKINGER AND CONNOR SHEETS

Beneath the psychedelic colors and cartoon mushrooms, the labels are often vague: Some claim to be “vegan space capsules” while others warn they are only “novelty collectibles.” A few obliquely say that they contain a “proprietary mushroom blend” or that they are “infused with magic.” But many of the mushroom chocolates and gummies sold in Southern California head shops, it seems, are not as advertised. This year, the Food and Drug Administration began issuing warnings about one brand’s products after dozens of people who ate them fell ill or died. Federal regulators said tests found synthetic hallucinogens and other psychoactive compounds not listed on the labels. The company, Santa Ana-based Prophet Premium Blends, ultimately recalled all its candies. An investigation by The Times found that the problem of questionable mushroom products may be far more widespread. Testing done on 33 samples purchased at smoke shops in Los Angeles and San Diego counties found 40% contained no psilocybin — one of the main chemicals that [See Mushroom, A7]



CONNOR SHEETS Los Angeles Times

MUSHROOM candies at a Long Beach shop. They may or may not contain psilocybin, a key ingredient in magic mushrooms.

This Airbnb empire in L.A. was a ‘bait and switch,’ city suit alleges

Partners are accused of operating more than 30 illegal short-term rentals that took in millions of dollars.

By SUMMER LIN

By all accounts, Vladislav Yurov was living the rags-to-riches American dream. When he was 20 years old, the Ukrainian national came to the U.S. on a student exchange program and decided to stay, he said in a since-deleted Instagram video. He worked multiple low-wage jobs in Ohio, learned English and tried to

make ends meet. He moved to Los Angeles and spent all his savings setting up his first rental unit for Airbnb, only to lose his lease two months later because, he said in the video, the arrangement wasn’t legal. He didn’t give up. By age 29, Yurov was a millionaire, operating 28 “fully automated” short-term rentals on Airbnb and other hosting platforms, making more than \$200,000 every month. He even found a way to monetize his business model, running an online Airbnb “Hosting Academy” where clients paid to be taught his techniques. In an Instagram post, he wrote about how he helped students “make thousands with properties they don’t even own.” Four weeks later, all of that came crashing down. On June 20, Los Angeles City Atty. Hydee Feldstein Soto’s office filed a lawsuit against Yurov, his companies Skysun and Hugs & Smile, and two business partners, alleging that they made more than \$4 million [See Airbnb, A9]

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Tech giant and California agree to a \$250-million pact.
BUSINESS, A8

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