

AI tool creates South Park episodes with user in starring role

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A US company says it has cracked the formula for making an episode of South Park using artificial intelligence – and it allows users to be the star of the show. Fable Simulation has created an AI tool that can create brief original episodes of the cartoon. “Not just the dialogue. It animates, it does the voices, it does the editing,” the company’s chief executive, Edward Saatchi, told the GamesBeat website. The tool, called AI Showrunner, allows users to enter a one- or two-sentence prompt that then generates an episode, and can create a character based on the user’s own looks and voice. Generative AI, the catch-all term for tech systems that produce convincing text and images from prompts, has gripped the public imagination since the launch of ChatGPT in November. It has also played a part in Hollywood actors joining writers on the picket lines over wages, technology and how to divide the profits of the digital streaming era. Saatchi stressed that the South Park tool, produced without copyright permission, was purely for research and would not be available for public use. “We did the South Park episode as an example and for research to show generative TV. We don’t want to profit from it and we are not releasing a way for other people to do it. We realised it was hard to illustrate how the model works without a comparison,” he said. He added that the show’s creators, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, as well as the show’s broadcaster, the Paramount-owned Comedy Central, had not been approached about the experiment. Last year, Parker and Stone said they had secured a \$20m investment for their own AI entertainment company, Deep Voodoo, which creates “leading deepfake technology, cost-effective visual effects services and original synthetic media projects”, according to its website. This year, South Park released an episode that was partially written using ChatGPT. In the fourth episode of season 26, titled Deep Learning, pupils in the town’s school explore new technology that can do their homework for them. The episode features voices that were created by an AI-powered text-to-voice generator. The potentially transformative role of generative AI across TV and film has been a key concern among writers and actors participating in the Hollywood strike. Fran Drescher, the president of the SAG-AFTRA union, said when announcing the strike last month: “This is a moment of history ... We are all going to be in jeopardy of being replaced by machines.” A letter signed by more than 300 actors, including A-listers such as Meryl Streep and Jennifer Lawrence, reiterated members’ concerns about AI. Copyright is proving a bone of contention around the creation of AI models, and Saatchi stressed that he would work with intellectual property holders before allowing any such technology to become available to the public. “We’re speaking with several studios and IP holders to potentially use this with their IP to allow fans to create shows,” he said. “We think for any show, fans being able to make their own episodes, potentially even competitively, with permission of IP holders – we think it can lead to something interesting.” South Park Studios

has been contacted for comment.