Deepfakes, sextortion, and other AI-generated image content: A new world order for generative artificial intelligence in universities?

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Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has taken higher education by storm since late 2022 and offered new opportunities and challenges for educators and learners alike. Yet dominant literature to date has emphasised the challenges of assessing effectively in a post-plagiarism and post-truth era, and the new technological affordances offered. Yet, the costs of generative artificial intelligence stemming beyond academic integrity breaches and student cheating are not well understood. In this panel, we discuss the emerging trends of Generative AI that extend beyond student learning but are nested inside the learning environment - from the emergence of AI-generated content to the side effects of extended use of AI on relationship formation, student social skill development, and social anxiety. We will in particular explore how this is occurring in the high school context and its subsequent applicability to university learners' loneliness, isolation, and wellbeing. The panel offers a thought-provoking discussion with three academics in three different disciplines and universities, and a student partner with experience in AI usage.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence, GenAI, higher education, academic integrity, peer interaction

Key literature and background: Generative artificial intelligence

The late 2022 introduction of OpenAI's ChatGPT was far from the first generative form of artificial intelligence to be released publicly, but it has been one of the most popular. Students are using artificial intelligence in droves (Kelly et al., 2023), and educators have mixed interest and concern from academic integrity breaches to learning benefits (Bearman et al., 2023; Rudolph et al., 2023). Other scholars have commented on the need to focus on underlying behaviours that may support effective use of artificial intelligence within learning contexts (Crawford et al., 2023). The higher education sector has likewise been grappling with efforts of disclosure, mapping, assurance, and coherence in public policy (Bearman et al., 2023). The impact is not well understood yet but learning quality ought to be a major concern. Seeing is believing, and synthetic media has become more popular with the potential to be abused (Roe et al., 2024). These hyper-realistic modified videos of people and place can be quickly distributed social media platforms of lies and misinformation, giving the video a whole new meaning. There are benefits of these – including the popularity of emergent short videos used to educate on platforms like Tiktok and YouTube – are seeing benefits for short-term knowledge acquisition. Yet, in high schools, the emergence of 'sextortion' has become a horrific consequence of the accessibility of these tools. This practice is the act of blackmailing someone with private photo or video, usually with the demand for more explicit sexual content or money. Across the community, one in eleven adults has experienced some form of distress relating to AI-generated image content (Henry & Umbach, 2024). More recently some AI content generation hobbyists have used these tools to extort students, peers, and teachers into carrying out things they did not want to do using fake inappropriate images and videos of them. Given the impact that Generative AI can have on loneliness and belonging (Crawford et al, 2024), this feels like an area that needs further exploration and discussion.

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Key Topics to be Explored

The panel will explore topics based on audience questions, but indicative questions for the panel will include:
- What effects, if any, are there on learning and student wellbeing from harmful AI generated image content being used by students?
- What benefits can AI-generated image content offer from a learning-perspective?
- What strategies can educators used to protect themselves from toxic AI-generated image content?
- What pedagogies may support better deployment of ethical AI-generated image content for learning?
- What technologies are enabling AI-generated image content – both good and bad?

The Panel

In this panel, we debate and discuss the impacts of generative artificial intelligence on higher education, with a focus on human costs rather than direct learning or integrity costs. We acknowledge that learning spaces and student experiences effects the quality of higher education learning and on students' sense of self, belonging and wellbeing.

We propose to discuss the relational and human costs that AI-generated image content is having within a university context, and the cost of this to learning and teaching. Four panellists with vastly different perspectives ranging from technology to leadership to educational psychology will participate, along with a recent graduate student, to discuss how AI-generated content may be shaping student behaviour.

Engagement

The panel is aimed as a moderated panel activity with panellists initially being able to add comment to the cause and effects of AI-generated image contents emergence from their key viewpoint. The moderator will facilitate an initial conversation and draw on an interaction from the audience using Mentimeter or similar will allow audience members to pose questions, upvote popular comments/questions, and drive the discussion. The intended outcomes are to build awareness of the multifaceted nature of AI issues – and to encourage thought from a broader technological, sociopsychological, and pedagogical lens. The intended audience is broad – and is likely to be of interest to anyone with current teaching responsibilities, or responsibilities to support teaching; as the challenge of damaging AI-generated image content is likely to enter their educational environments (now, or in the short-term).

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