Synthetic Content Disclosure: Evaluating the Impact of AI Disclosure on Political Ad Persuasiveness

Background/Introduction

In September 2023, Google mandated that political ads containing synthetic or AI-generated content that depicts real or realistic-looking events that did not occur must contain a disclosure in a 'clear and conspicuous' place, in a location that will likely be noticed by users (Google, September, 2023). Meta followed suit, enacting a similar policy, which began at the beginning of 2024 (Meta, November, 2023), though they also coupled this with the announcement that political ads would not be granted access to their use of generative AI targeting and other content assistance. There is an established precedent for the placement of disclosure of online political information through the application of fact checks. However, while fact-check warnings were placed by the social media platform, the user is responsible for placing this warning. Fact-checks have been studied extensively in academic literature. Their intention, to mitigate either the quantity or the impact of false statements bridges a fine line between the desire for the platforms to serve as a medium of free speech, and the fast nature in which false information spreads, and the impact it can have (Vosoughi et. al 2018). The effects of the fact-checks have also been studied as a measure of the quantity of misinformation by politicians (Nyhan, Reifler, 2015). Also, the impact of fact-checks on viewer's both knowledge and belief updating has been observed to both increase the knowledge of true fact, but have no partisan impact, but also to sow doubt in true headlines (Nyhan et. al 2019, Clayton et. al 2019).

Specifically surrounding an election, however, there is a demonstrated academic interest in the information environment. Some studies have evaluated the varying successes of different mediums of get-out-the-vote efforts and found canvassing, a more 'personal' persuasive medium to be the most effective (Gerber & Green, 2000). Other studies, carried out after the advent of the

cell phone, highlight the success in motivating voter turnout with text messages, and also through the utilization of partisan robo-phone calls (Dale & Strauss, 2009 | Kling & Stratman 2022). There has been an investigation into the voter's information consumption when they have the choice of medium to consume election-related information (Boudreau et. al, 2022).

However, the design of social media homepages and algorithms does not provide much choice of information but adds to the greater literature around technological mediums for persuasion. Candidates, especially in more local or lower positions, are advertising more on Facebook and other social media platforms than on television and other mediums (Fowler et. al, 2021). The lack of choice cuts both ways but originates from economic reasoning. Social media platforms exist as businesses, and generate profit from continued screen time. Therefore, it is advantageous to the platform to refrain from showing individuals ads they may not like or agree with, which makes it costly to show political ads to diverse audiences (Ali et. al, 2019).

With the upcoming 2024 election and the recent developments in generative AI, many scholars are worried about the implications of false information/the speed in which fabricated content can spread. Other scholars have already begun the study of political ad disclosures on algorithmic targeting (Papakyriakopoulos et. al, 2022). This study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of synthetic content disclosures on the viewers and is tangential to the study of fact checks and candidate advertisements.

Our study will investigate the effects of a synthetic ad disclosure– as to whether it affects support for a candidate's belief of a fact or policy. We will vary both the phrasing of the disclosure and the salience of the placement. To evaluate the effect of synthetic ads, we will administer a survey that will first control for the participants' partisan alignment, opinion on certain facts, and intentions in the 2024 election. We will then show individual group ads, which

will either have a synthetic content warning or will not. After they view the ad on a social media-esque window, we will ask them questions about the ad and their opinion of the candidate, and compare the results. This study, taking heavy cues from papers at the beginning of the era of fact-checking, will evaluate the efficacy of these synthetic content warnings to observe the effect they will have, as social media platforms, candidates, and voters grapple with the use of generative AI.

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