

“THE HUMAN GUIDE TO DETECTING AI IMAGERY”

For journalists, researchers, and fact-checkers
investigating our information ecosystem. And for users
defending themselves against a world of AI slop.

AI FORENSICS



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Introduction to the Human Guide to Detecting AI Imagery

This guide supports users in detecting distinct visual artifacts that can help identify whether an image or video they encounter on a platform is AI-generated. Different cues to detect AI-generated content are discussed along with examples. In this guide, we account for a spectrum of synthetic content that can be referred to as “generative AI imagery,” including outputs in the form of still images as well as moving images or clips. This guide is intended for both professionals, such as researchers, journalists, and fact-checkers, as well as daily users of social media platforms looking to be better equipped in the age of AI slop.

Due to the rapidly progressing and changing formats of AI-generated visual content, this guide does not attempt to provide an exhaustive or definitive set of guidelines. In fact, we acknowledge that some elements of this guide will become outdated in the coming months as AI technologies advance. Ultimately, this limited guide offers an overview and a suggested order of steps to take when encountering visual content in the contemporary digital media environment, particularly on social media platforms.

This guide is structured as a series of steps a user can follow to assess the likelihood that the media content they see was generated using AI tools. The steps are divided into four focus areas: 1) Before the Image: AI Telltales; 2) Synthetic Artifacts in AI Imagery; 3) Moving Images/Clips; 4) Digital Provenance. These four areas denote the broader points of interest constituting the overall detection process. It is important to consider the steps across all four areas when assessing the plausibility that the content is AI-generated.

We recommend consulting the steps in the specified order. That said, users should feel free to consult these steps based on their unique needs or queries. The recommended order of steps in each of the four areas is structured based on the difficulty level of the inquiry and result uncertainty. For relative assurance that an image or video is likely AI-generated, the content in question should meet more than one of the following characteristics. Also, please note that while this guide does its best to structure and utilize current digital media expertise and literacy, it cannot always guarantee absolute correctness of results in practice.

1-LABELS
Visible labels to help users identify AI, inconsistent across platforms which limits their reliability.

2-PROFILE/DESCRIPTION/BIO
Account names or bios may disclose AI-generated content, but this often requires viewing the profile to confirm.

3-TITLE, DESCRIPTION, HASHTAGS
Creator-added AI disclosures may appear in titles, descriptions, or hashtags, but are not always prominently visible.

4-INDECIPHERABLE INSCRIPTIONS
Illegible or distorted text, numbers and symbols remain common indicators of AI-generated imagery.

5-COMMENTS
May signal whether content is AI-generated, though user speculation and trolling can reduce reliability.

6-STYLIZED SMOOTH GLOW
Much AI-generated content shares a recognizable aesthetic marked by oversaturated colors, exaggerated lighting, and a smooth, artificial texture.

7-TOO MANY/TOO FEW BODY PARTS
Incorrect or inconsistent hands, fingers, and limbs remain persistent signs of AI-generated imagery.

8-UNMATCHING OR MISSING ACCESSORIES
Asymmetrical accessories, distorted clothing details, and unnatural reflections can indicate AI-generated content.

9-IMPOSSIBLE PHYSICS
AI content may show impossible physics or distorted object structures that defy real-world logic.

10-WATERMARKS
Titles, descriptions, or hashtags may disclose AI generation or deepfake content.

Image courtesy: Miriam Sáenz de Tejada/[Euractiv](https://www.euractiv.com), based on AI Forensics’ “The Human Guide to Detecting AI Imagery.”

1. BEFORE THE IMAGE: AI TELLTALES

Written Indicators on Platform Interface

Prior to any assessment of the visual object (still image or video clip), there may be several elements within the platform interface that can serve as telltale signs that a piece of content was entirely or partially made using generative AI tools. While the following examples are based on specific features embedded across three platforms (Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube), the detection elements roughly encompass the main features users can look out for across other platforms as well. It is crucial to note that these features change over time and over the version of the platform the user can access.

1.1. LABELS

Many platforms have introduced content labels to address the concern around the detectability of AI-generated or AI-edited content. These content labels should be either visible or at least accessible via the platform interface while viewing a post. If available and applied to a piece of content, such labels are a quick and easy way to verify whether the visual object is AI-generated. The following examples demonstrate what AI content labels tend to look like and where they are usually located based on examples from TikTok (Tables 1 and 2), YouTube (Tables 3 and 4), and Instagram (Table 5). It is also crucial to note that the terms of service differ across platforms and evolve over time; in general, most platforms place responsibility on content creators to label and disclose photorealistic AI content they upload. In practice, most content creators do not label their content as AI, making the AI labels useful in around half the cases.¹

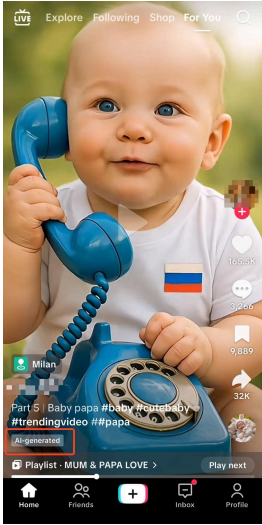
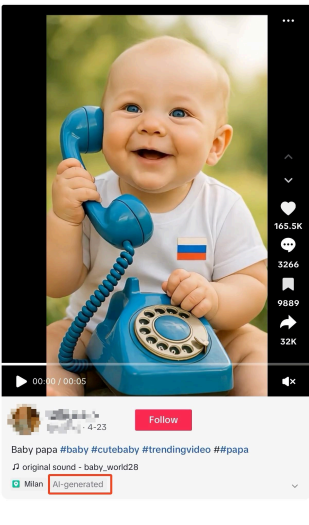
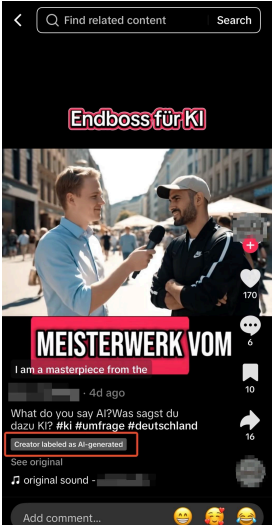
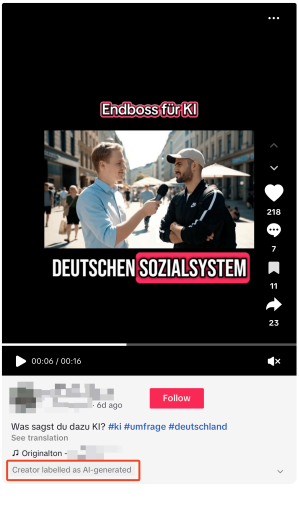
The following are takeaways and considerations for assessing the presence of AI content labels on platforms:

- **Labels' appearance** might differ and/or change. Different AI content labels disclosing AI content might be used simultaneously on the same platform (Table 1), and these labels might change in appearance over time (Table 2).
- **Labels' visibility** might appear as more or less obvious across platform interfaces. AI content labels might be accessible only upon clicking for

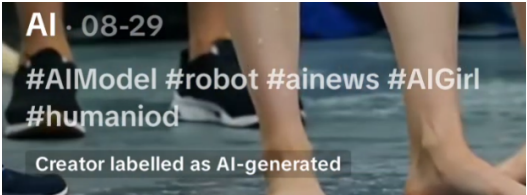
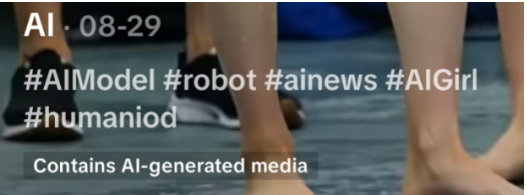
¹AI Forensics' investigations found that at least 50% of AI content on platforms such as TikTok is not labelled and disclosed as AI. For more details, see the following reports: aiforensics.org/work/gen-ai-slop and aiforensics.org/work/agent-ai-accounts.

‘further information’ on a post, e.g., by expanding the description tab (Tables 3 and 4).

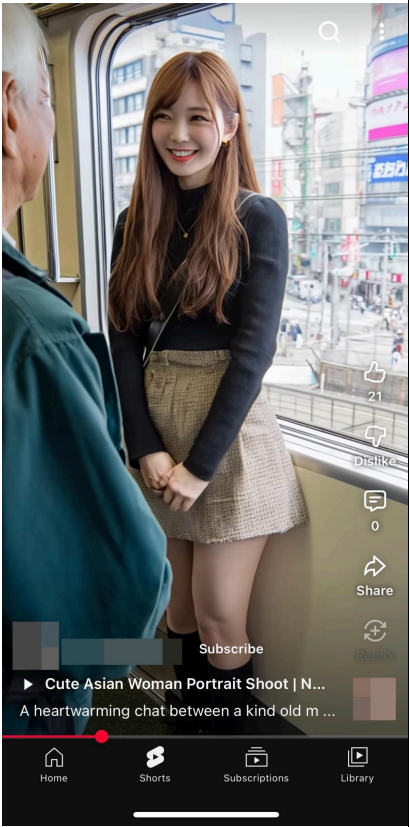
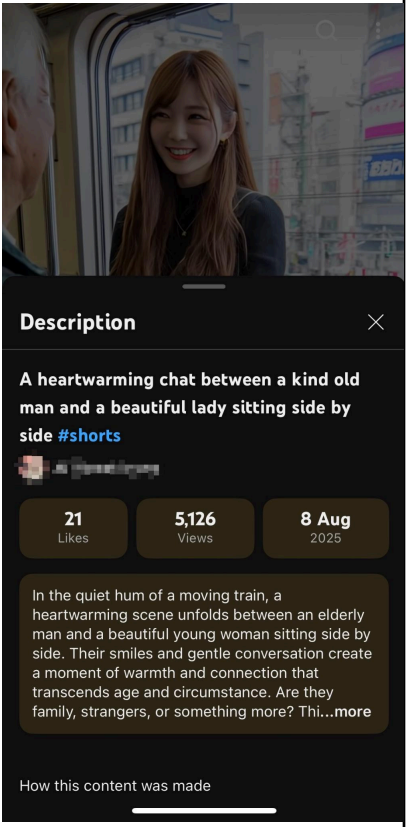
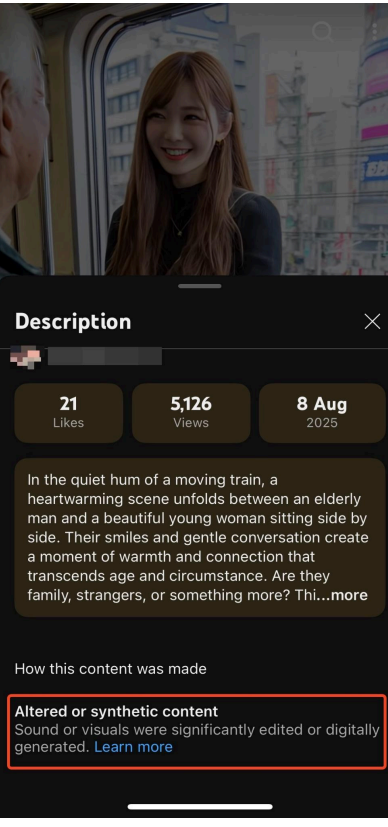
- **Labels’ accessibility** might vary across the app vs web version of the platform. For example, AI content labels might be present on the app interface of the platform but absent on the web interface (Table 5).

| Table 1. AI content labels’ appearance on the same platform | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| ‘AI generated’ | | ‘Creator labelled as AI-generated’ | |
| app | browser | app | browser |
|  |  |  |  |
| Figure 1A | Figure 1B | Figure 1C | Figure 1D |

The visibility of TikTok’s AI content labels on the platform across the app (Figure 1A and 1C) and web (Figures 1B and 1D) interfaces. The red rectangle outlines the positioning of the labels within TikTok’s interface.

| Table 2. AI content labels’ appearance over time | |
|---|--|
|  |  |
| Figure 2A | Figure 2B |

In this example, TikTok’s AI label with the text “Creator labelled as AI-generated” (Figure 2A) has been changed to a label that reads “Contains AI-generated media” (Figure 2B), possibly as a result of A/B testing. The change in the label’s text was documented on 28 October 2025.

| Table 3. AI content labels’ accessibility (app) | | |
|---|--|---|
| app (invisible) | app (invisible) | app (visible) |
|  <p>Figure 3A</p> |  <p>Figure 3B</p> |  <p>Figure 3C</p> |

Accessibility of YouTube’s AI content label via the platform’s app. The AI content label is visible at the bottom of the screen after clicking the tab to expand the post’s description. Furthermore, the label is not visible immediately given the lengthy description of the post but requires the user to scroll down to the bottom of the screen to see it.

Table 4. AI content labels' accessibility (browser)

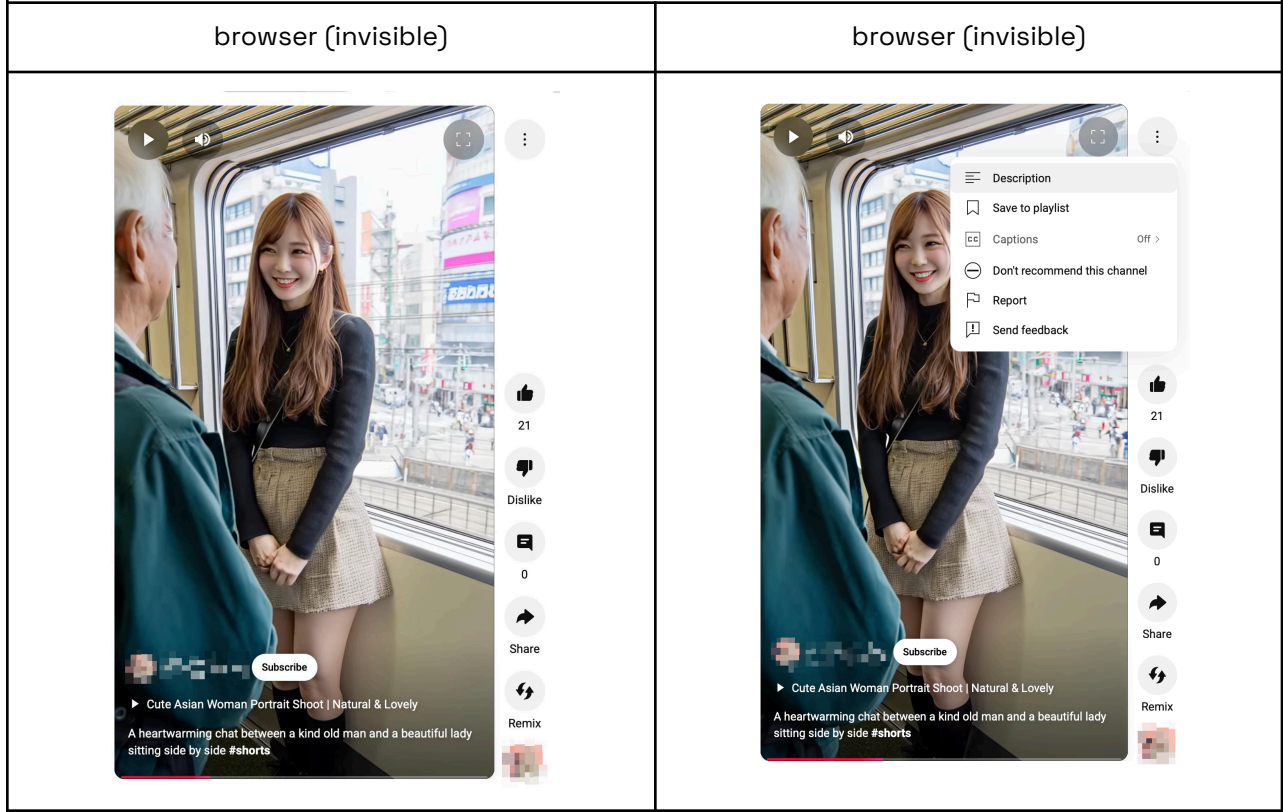


Figure 4A

Figure 4B

browser (visible)

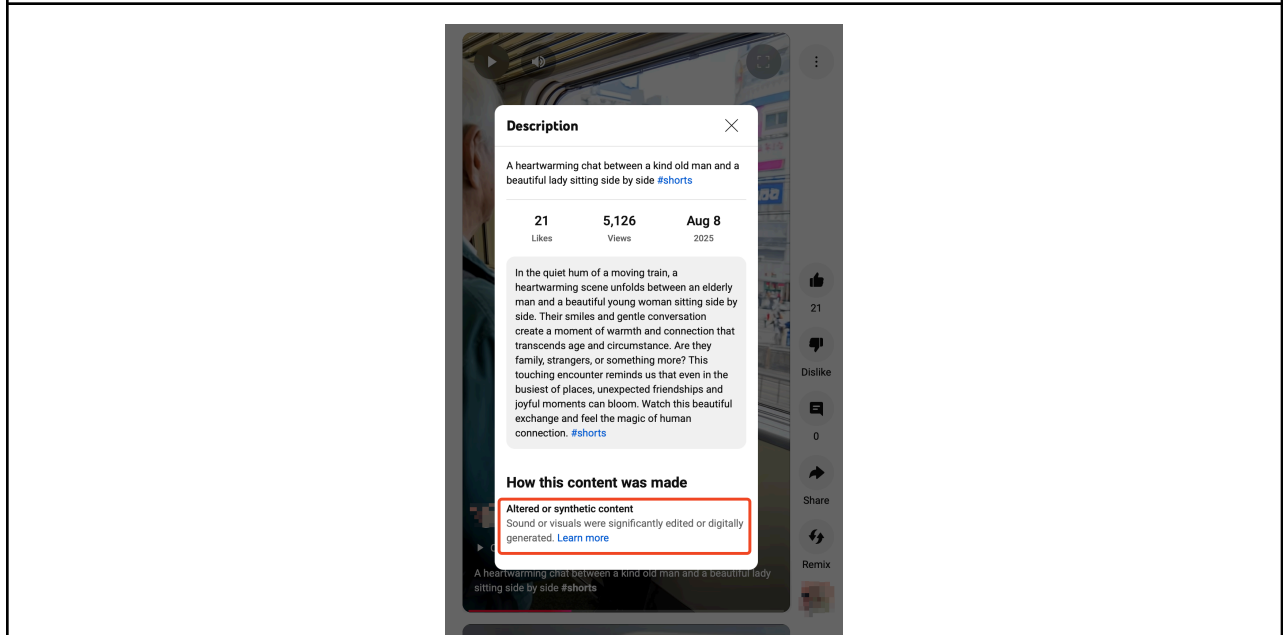

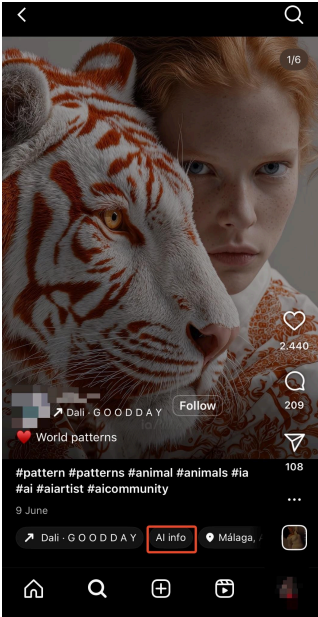



Figure 4C

Accessibility of YouTube’s AI content label via the platform’s browser may appear as more difficult for the user than doing so on the app (Figures 4A-C). The AI content label is visible once the description tab is expanded; the description tab appears when the “more options” icon is clicked in the interface.

| app (invisible) | app (visible) | browser (invisible) |
|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |
| Figure 5A | Figure 5B | Figure 5C |

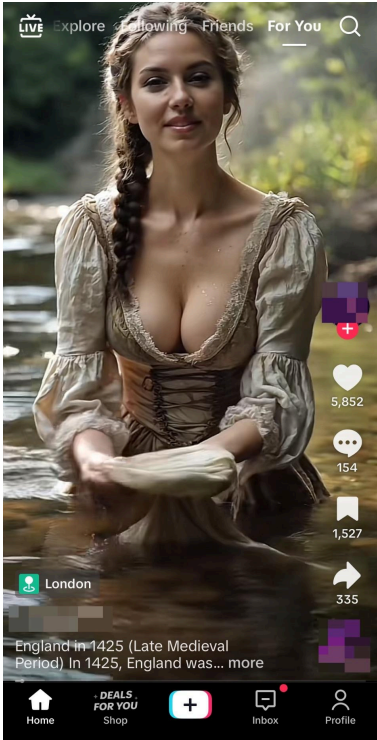
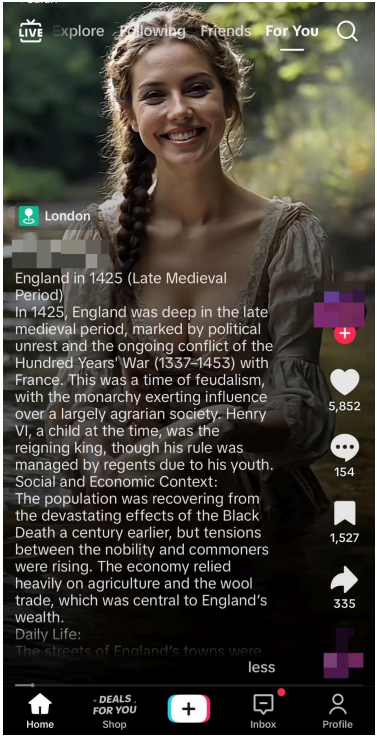
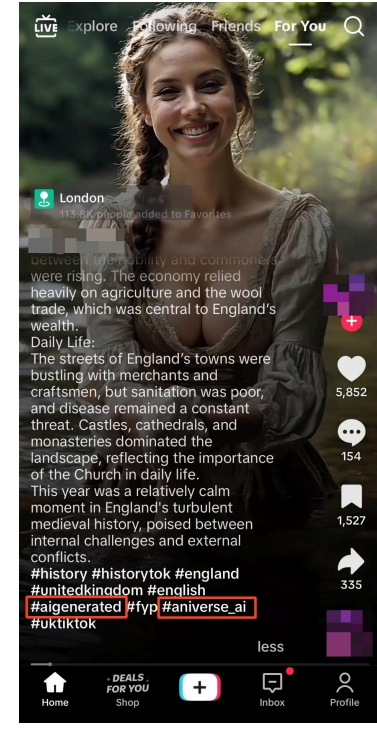
In the case of Instagram, the AI content label is not visible by default in many posts but often hidden among other information. The user is forced to search for the AI label, which can appear on different parts of the screen depending on the post and is hidden from the initial content view (Figure 5A). Furthermore, no AI label is displayed on Instagram’s web interface (Figures 4C and 5C) as of 30 October 2025.

1.2. TITLE, DESCRIPTION, HASHTAGS

Posts might include remarks indicating whether the content was generated by AI. Such information is included by the content creators when they upload their posts on the platform. An AI content disclosure is easy to spot when it is located at the forefront, e.g., as the first words in a description, title, or list of hashtags. However, sometimes the disclosure is located in the middle or near the end of the description text or hashtag

list, making it invisible unless the user deliberately seeks it (Table 6). AI content disclosures might be straightforward, such as ‘#AI’ or ‘made with AI.’ They might also be more context-specific, referring to a particular generative AI tool. Table 7 provides a non-exhaustive, common list of keywords/phrases, hashtags, and tools that are often mentioned in AI content disclosures across platforms. Such AI content disclosures may be included in:

- AI content disclosure can be included in the **title of a post, post’s description, and post’s hashtags**
- **AI content disclosures can differ in visibility** depending on content creator’s choice of where to include it within the post.

| Table 6. Visibility of alternative AI content disclosures as hashtags | | |
|---|---|---|
| app (invisible) | app (invisible) | app (visible) |
|  <p>Figure 6A shows a TikTok post with a woman in a medieval-style dress. The caption reads: "England in 1425 (Late Medieval Period) In 1425, England was deep in the late medieval period, marked by political unrest and the ongoing conflict of the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) with France. This was a time of feudalism, with the monarchy exerting influence over a largely agrarian society, Henry VI, a child at the time, was the reigning king, though his rule was managed by regents due to his youth. Social and Economic Context: The population was recovering from the devastating effects of the Black Death a century earlier, but tensions between the nobility and commoners were rising. The economy relied heavily on agriculture and the wool trade, which was central to England's wealth. Daily Life: The streets of England's towns were less". The AI disclosure is not visible in this screenshot.</p> |  <p>Figure 6B shows the same TikTok post. The caption is identical to Figure 6A. The AI disclosure is not visible in this screenshot.</p> |  <p>Figure 6C shows the same TikTok post. The caption is identical to Figure 6A. The AI disclosure is visible in the hashtags: "#history #historytok #england #unitedkingdom #english #aigenerated #fyp #aniverse_ai #uktiktok". A red rectangle highlights the "#aigenerated #fyp #aniverse_ai" portion of the hashtag list.</p> |
| Figure 6A | Figure 6B | Figure 6C |

Examples of the visibility of alternative user disclaimers of AI content on TikTok’s app interface. The red rectangle outlines the positioning of the user’s AI disclosure, which in this case is a hashtag.

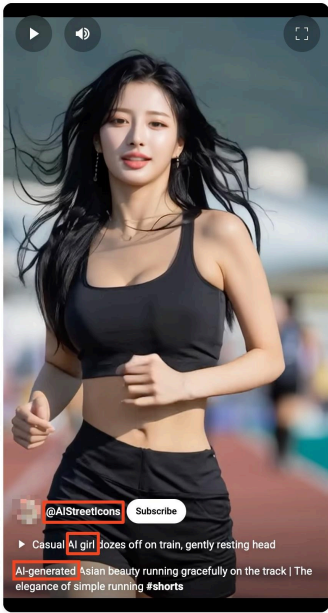
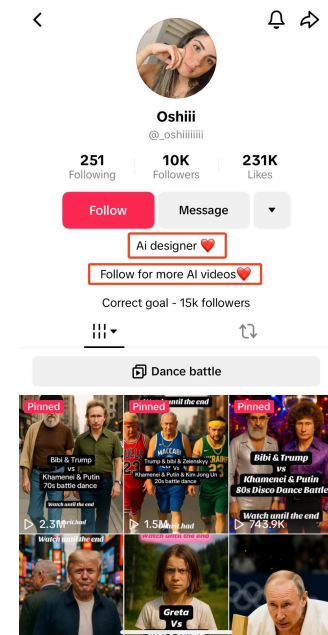
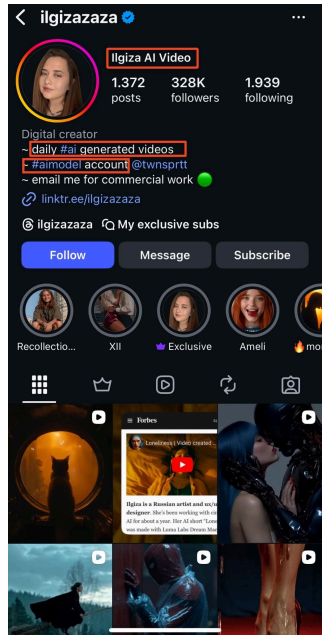
| Keywords/Phrases | Hashtags | Tools |
|-------------------------|--|------------------|
| ai-generated | #aigenerated | ChatGPT |
| aigenerated | #madewithai | Grok |
| AI | #ai | Kling |
| artificial intelligence | #artificialintelligence | Midjourney |
| künstliche Intelligenz | #kunstlicheintelligenz | Nano Banana |
| KI | #ki | Pika Labs |
| inteligencia artificial | #inteligenciaartificial | Runway |
| IA | #ia | Sora |
| ia | #Aistory | Sora2 |
| aiart | #TikTokAI | Stable Diffusion |
| _ai | #AIVideo | Veo |
| | # + [a word, e.g., 'creative,' 'lookbook', or 'elegant'] + 'AI'; e.g. #fashionAI | Veo3 |
| | # + 'AI' + [+any other word, e.g., 'creative,' 'cat', or 'girl'], e.g., #Aldogs | Wan |

Examples of AI content disclosures content creators might include in the title, description, and hashtags list while uploading their AI-made posts. The list (Table 7) contains keywords and phrases, hashtags, and the names of generative AI tools used for generating still and moving images. The list was compiled during AI Forensics' investigations and exploratory analyses of AI content across Instagram and TikTok.

1.3. PROFILE/DESCRIPTION/BIO

Account-level disclosure might be visible immediately when the account's username contains such information, or it might require accessing the account's profile page (Table 8). A disclosure that the account is used to post AI content, increasing the possibility that the piece of content in question is also AI-generated, can be included in:

- Username as an AI-content disclosure.
- The account’s description as an AI-content disclosure.
- The account profile’s bio as an AI-content disclosure.

| Table 8. Alternative AI content disclosure in a username, account description, or profile bio | | |
|---|--|--|
| Username (YouTube) | Profile bio (TikTok) | Account name (Instagram) |
|  |  |  |
| Figure 8A | Figure 8B | Figure 8C |

Examples of instances from YouTube (Figure 8A), TikTok (Figure 8B), and Instagram (Figure 8C) where either the username (Figure 8A), profile bio (Figure 8B), or account name (Figure 8C) includes AI content disclaimers. As seen in the above figures, such AI content disclaimers are often (but not always) included across multiple features mentioned in points 1.2 and 1.3.

1.4. ACCOUNT POSTING HISTORY

Checking an account's profile and posting history might reveal that the account has a history of posting some AI content (or only AI content, constituting an example of an Agentic AI Account – an AAA²). Relevant (if available) account information and the feed uploads' history include:

- **The account's creation date**, if established recently (after 2023), may indicate that the account was created to be an AAA, meaning an account made for the purpose of uploading (and exploiting) AI-generated content. It is unlikely to encounter an account older than 2023 (the year when many generative AI tools went mainstream) focused on posting AI-generated content. However, some accounts' older creation date may be misleading if the account's feed was 'cleaned' (deleted), and possibly sold to a different user, to be turned into an AAA.
- **The account's earliest posts** might reveal examples of AI-generated content that is easier to spot compared to content made with state-of-the-art AI tools. Older generative AI models showed more noise and lower-quality outputs. If an account does not actively delete its earlier AI-generated posts, it is likely that, while scrolling through earlier posts, one can spot AI-generated posts containing more obvious signs of AI content.
- **The account's posting convention** may reveal its tendency to include conventions indicating AI-generated content, increasing the likelihood that the newer posts are also AI-generated. Such conventions are established or emerging content trends that other AAAs exploit, which demonstrate strong format and subject-matter similarity. A content repetition often surges in correlation with the release of new (versions of) generative AI models.
- **The account's posting patterns** may reveal that an account reproduces patterns indicating automated content creation, increasing the likelihood that the posts may be AI-generated. One can check whether an account posts a similar amount of content at the same time and days, and if the posting times correspond to the account's declared time zone.

² For a detailed discussion of Agentic AI Accounts (AAAs), see the following AI Forensics' investigation: aiforensics.org/work/agentic-ai-accounts.

1.5. COMMENTS

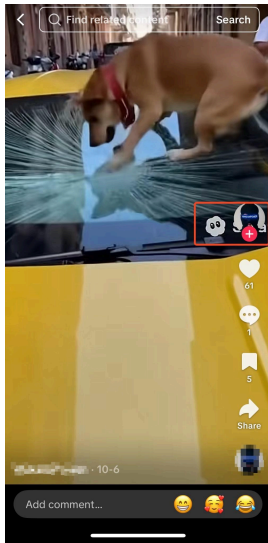
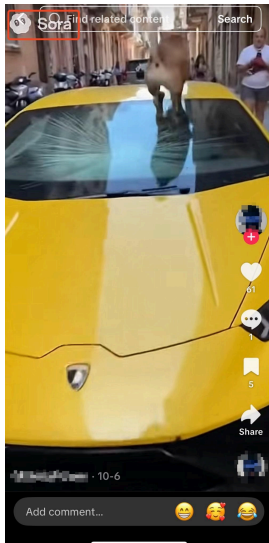
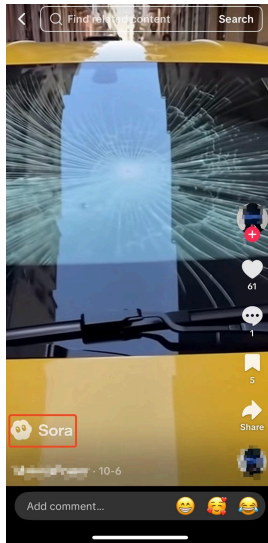
The comments section might reveal an ongoing discussion about the AI-generated status of the content in question and include relevant clues and indicators regarding AI use in the post. However, it is important to stay wary of any ambiguity between users' genuine 'questioning if it's AI' and commenting in a more 'memefied' and 'trolling' spirit.

Written Indicators Within the Post's Frame

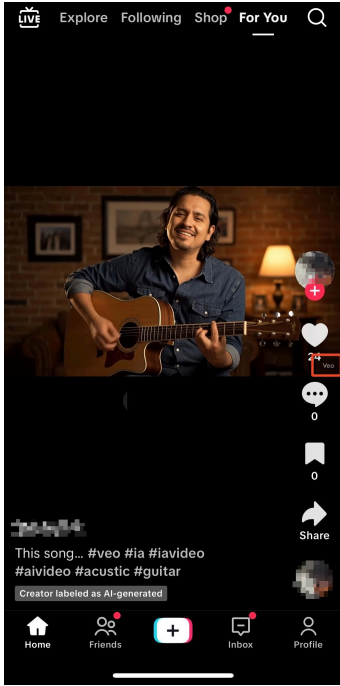
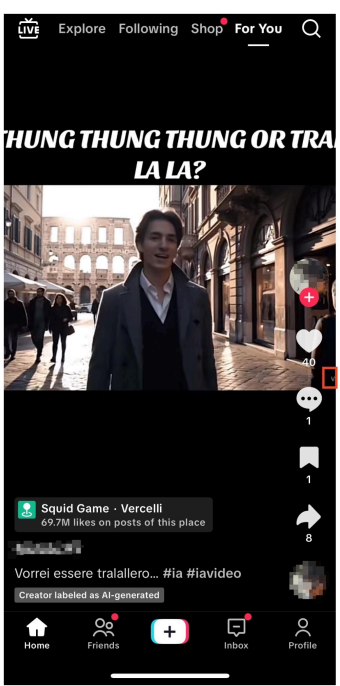
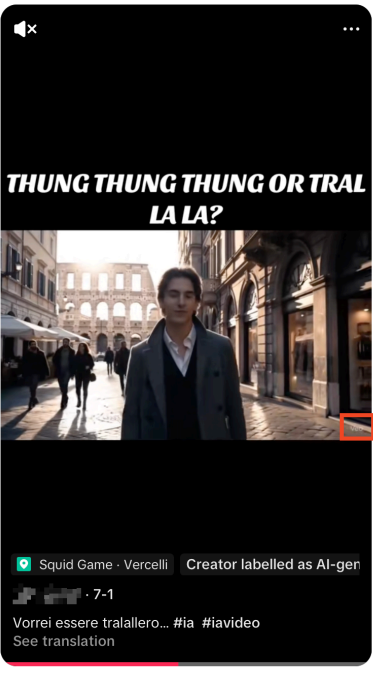
Some content might include indicators of AI use within the content frame itself. Such indicators include watermarks, stickers, and other forms of text that either stand out as external elements (Tables 9 and 10) to the subject matter of the content or form an integral part of the uploaded content (Table 11). While such indicators might usually be easy to spot, it's good to be aware of possible obfuscations of the visibility of AI indicators caused by the platform's interface design or the content creator's frame cropping in some instances.

1.6. WATERMARKS

The visible watermark applied by the generative AI tool, indicating that the content is generated by AI, included within the frame of an image or video.

| Table 9. Sora watermark visibility on TikTok's app interface | | |
|---|---|---|
| app (partially hidden) | app (partially hidden) | app (fully visible) |
|  |  |  |
| Figure 9A | Figure 9B | Figure 9C |

When analyzing the visibility of OpenAI's Sora2 model watermark on TikTok's app interface, the watermark appears across different parts of the screen as the video progresses. Depending on the watermark's placement, interface elements, such as the user's avatar, partially obscure the watermark's visibility (Figures 9A and 9B).

| Table 10. VEO watermark visibility on TikTok's app interface | | |
|--|---|--|
| app (visible) | app (hidden) | browser (visible) |
|  <p>This screenshot shows the TikTok app interface. The video content is partially obscured by the app's navigation bar at the bottom. A red box highlights the watermark in the bottom right corner of the video frame.</p> |  <p>This screenshot shows the TikTok app interface. The video content is partially obscured by the app's navigation bar at the bottom. A red box highlights the watermark in the bottom right corner of the video frame, which is partially hidden by the navigation bar.</p> |  <p>This screenshot shows the TikTok browser interface. The video content is fully visible within the browser frame. A red box highlights the watermark in the bottom right corner of the video frame.</p> |
| Figure 10A | Figure 10B | Figure 10C |

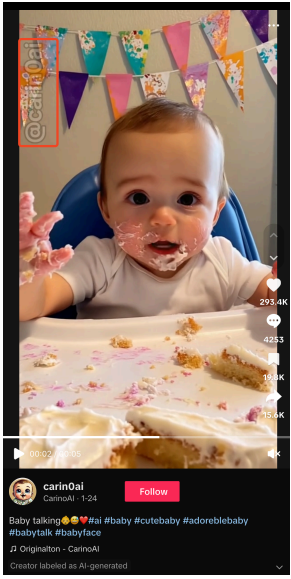

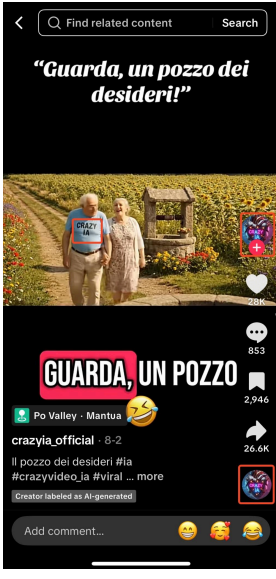

The visibility of Google's VE03 model might depend on how the user has cropped the content. However, on TikTok, the app interface might crop the frame of the uploaded content, practically deleting the VEO watermark, which tends to be located on the bottom right corner (Figure 10B). On TikTok's browser interface, however, the watermark remains correctly visible (Figure 10C).

1.7. STICKER/TEXT

Some users might choose to include their username within the post's frame. This is particularly useful if the AI-generated content has been shared or reuploaded by other accounts, possibly losing its original AI disclosures and/or labels. It is particularly helpful if the original username contains an indication of AI use (Figures 11A and 11B). However, such indications might also be included as an

integral part of the image or video, e.g., when a written indication of the content's AI origin or content creator's username is included as part of the background or character design (Figures 11B-11D).

Table 11. Written AI indicator as an integral part of the uploaded content

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
|  |  |  |  |
| Figure 11A | Figure 11B | Figure 11C | Figure 11D |

These examples of visibility and placement of written AI indicators, included as an integral part of the uploaded content on TikTok, range from an inclusion of the content creator's username within the frame of the uploaded post (Figure 11A) to an inclusion of the content creator's username which also serves as an AI disclosure appearing in various locations and styles across uploaded content (Figures 11B-11D).

2. SYNTHETIC ARTIFACTS IN AI IMAGERY

This section focuses on synthetic artifacts that can be spotted in AI imagery. As such, they are applicable to both still and moving images (short clips, films, etc.). While these artifacts tend to be the defining qualities of AI imagery, it has to be noted that visual qualities that are subjectively viewed as meeting some of the following criteria – and thus serving as ‘evidence’ of a piece of content being AI-generated – are not definitive proofs and could lead to an error-prone judgement. Nonetheless, the following description of visual artifacts can be considered as a set of ‘places to look’ and ‘things to look for’ while assessing whether a piece of content might be AI-generated.

Each of the following example images contains several of the synthetic artifacts described in this section. For clarity, the highlighted and discussed elements in each of the examples call attention only to the specific synthetic artifact that the particular subsection is dedicated to, rather than discussing all synthetic artifacts present in each image or the presence of any of the previously mentioned AI telltales (e.g., AI content labels).

Content and Subject Matter

The following subsection discusses the “what” elements when assessing visual objects, such as still photos and “film” clips, in relation to characteristics of AI imagery. It draws attention to details in the content’s subject matter that can be seen in the foreground and background as indicators of AI imagery.

The following examples focus on details within the subject matter and take for granted the first question a user should ask, namely, is the combination of time, characters, setting, and/or circumstances portrayed in the content physically plausible? Does the ‘gut feeling’ tell that the content appears too perfect or too shocking? If the answer to these questions is no, further assessment can serve as an additional artifacts-based affirmation of the potential AI-origin of the content.

2.1. IMPOSSIBLE PHYSICS

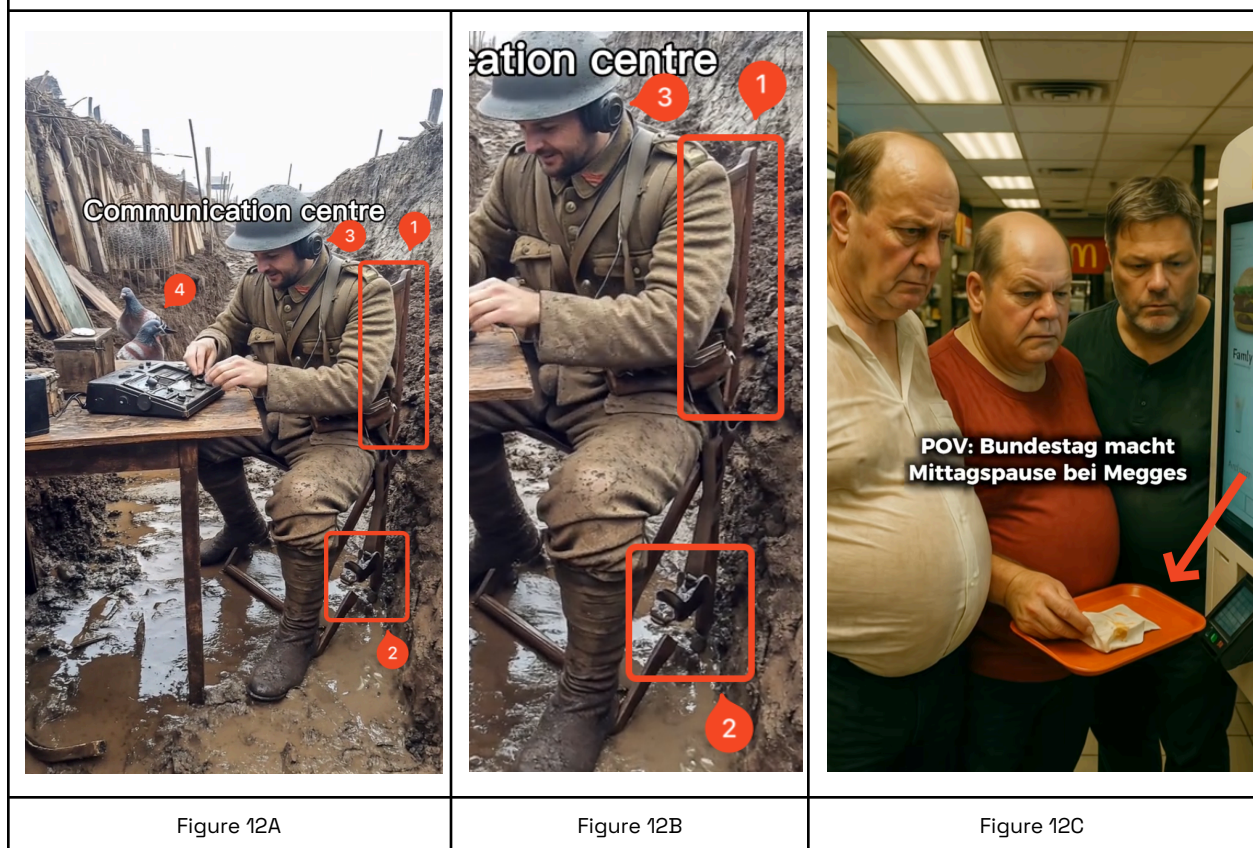
Synthetic artifacts that fall under the category of impossible physics are often striking and readily noticeable. They connote all material configurations that would not occur in the “real” world due to, most often, gravity or contextual plausibility. In AI-generated imagery, these logical structures, their order, placement, and form are often distorted and “hallucinated.” Examples include:

- **Objects are missing crucial parts** and lacking correspondence to the physical makeup, especially technological objects and their components.
-

For example, cameras, radios, and technical instruments would be impossible to function if made as depicted.

- **Objects are floating** in the air.
- **A visual of a real person misses their distinguishing characteristics or real age.** In encountering an image of a public person, searching for other images of that person published in reputable sources is a useful strategy. While doing so, one should pay special attention to distinguishing characteristics, such as birthmarks, moles, scars, or other details, that can reveal the errors of AI imagery of real people. Additionally, by comparing the imagery from the period the AI image claims to portray, one can assess whether the person's age is depicted consistently. AI models tend to depict “younger” versions of public persons compared to their contemporary appearance.

Table 12. AI artifacts exemplifying impossible physics



The highlights in red numbered 1 and 2 in the first example (Figures 12A and 12B) draw attention to the physical impossibility of the chair standing in the given spot while missing a part of its leg (number 2 in the image) and the backrest being positioned

perpendicularly to the person’s back, instead of in parallel (number 1). The pigeons (number 4) appear to be floating in the air despite looking as if they were seated. In the second example (Figure 12C), the red tray seems to be floating in the air, not being held by any hand or support.

2.2. INDECIPHERABLE INSCRIPTIONS

The incomprehensibility of words and numbers in AI imagery has been one of the most iconic telltale signs of early AI content. While the similarity of synthetic words, numbers, and signs to the ‘real’ ones has improved, they remain one of the elements where AI imagery continues to fail and ‘hallucinate.’

- **Words, text, signs, logos, and symbols** look “messy” upon closer examination: the details are missing, appear asymmetrical, or lack coherence or legibility.
- **Numbers and letters** do not attune to any existing alphabet, dissolve into each other, and are, simply put, not real.

| Table 13. Illegible writing and numbers, inconsistently rendered logos and symbols | | |
|--|------------|------------|
| | | |
| Figure 13A | Figure 13B | Figure 13C |

In Figure 13A, almost all numbers and words in the background are illegible and bear stylistic and formal qualities of “messy,” unreal AI-made inscriptions. The highlights in


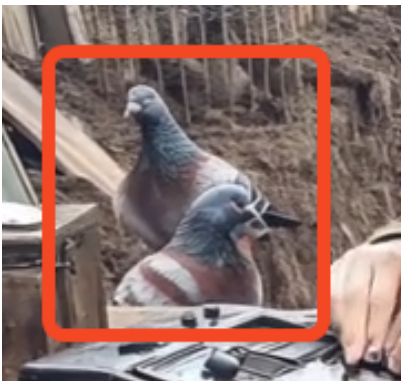

red bring attention to all details in the background that show such artifacts. In Figure 13B, we observe somewhat recognizable symbols, such as the logo of Adidas and Coca-Cola. However, upon closer examination, the word “adidas” contains “o” instead of the first “a,” the letters are not symmetrical, and the “s” at the end of the word appears as if it’s “melting.” Similarly, the actual writing on the Coca-Cola bottle, while partially obscured, does not appear to contain any believable writing behind the hand that holds it. The other logo on the T-shirt is also asymmetrical, blurry, and each star above it has different proportions and a different number of arms. Figure 13C shows a similar inconsistency: first, the numbers on the phone’s rotary dial are not placed in a decreasing order, and most of them are indecipherable and illegible. The symbol of what appears to be the Russian flag is asymmetrical (especially on the left side).

2.3. INCONSISTENT PROPORTIONS

As the generation of AI imagery is grounded solely in probability rather than the laws of physics and ‘knowledge’ of the world, the differences in scale, size, and perspective of objects within the frame can often appear off. Here, synthetic artifacts can be detected in relation to the relative proportion of different objects.

- **Objects appear too big or small**, from shoes to cars and buildings.
- **Body parts mismatch** between the sizes of different body parts, especially the head or hands and the rest of the body.

Table 14. Inconsistent or unrealistic proportions between objects and/or background

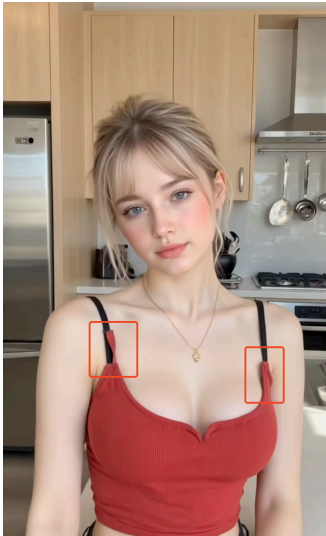
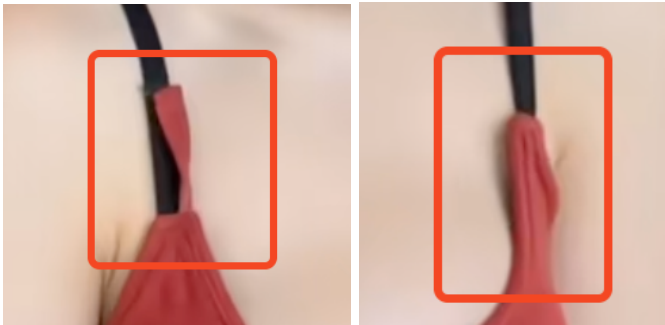
| | | |
|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |
| Figure 14A | Figure 14B | Figure 14C |

Figures 14A and 14B draw attention to the unlikely size of the two pigeons, given the context and placement of the scene. While one appears to be farther back than the other, they both appear to be the same size. Figure 14C shows an unrealistically small horse compared to the rest of the proportions of the indoor space and humans visible in the background.

2.4. UNMATCHING OR MISSING ACCESSORIES

Further synthetic artifacts to look for include earrings, makeup, and other accessories or clothing details that are not symmetrical or appear totally different on each side. This also applies to object-specific details of clothing or background objects, such as the lack of or too much glare in glasses.

- **Asymmetrical elements** in clothes that can be expected to be consistent, e.g., the left and right pockets of a jacket are sewn differently.
- **Clothing lacks texture** or includes artificially looking wrinkles and fabric patterns.
- **Mismatched elements of clothing or accessories** (e.g., earrings) that look suspiciously different or with inconsistent level of detail/blur.

| Table 15. Unmatching accessories | |
|---|--|
|  |  |
| Figure 15A | Figure 15B |

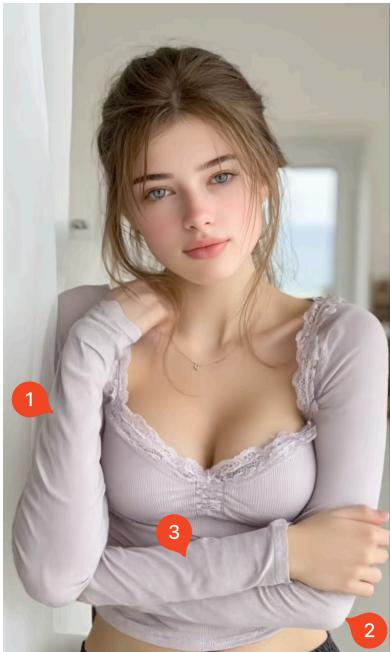

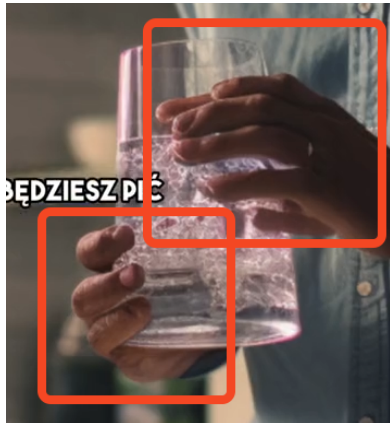
The following example (Table 15) highlights the lack of consistency and symmetry often expected in elements of attire. The two parts of the top worn by this AI woman look

strikingly different, where the black straps connect to the rest of the red top. Such inconsistency is highly unlikely in reality and therefore constitutes a plausible example of an AI-generated synthetic artifact.

2.5. TOO MANY/TOO FEW BODY PARTS

Even though this detail has been a telltale sign since the inception of AI-generated imagery, it remains applicable to even the newer AI models. This can include instances where the number of fingers and/or the size and realism of the hands are incorrect; limbs, hands, and especially fingers appear and disappear during movement sequences; or there are too many, too few, or an indecipherable number of limbs that appear unlikely to be natural.

- **Unnatural number and/or style of limbs.**
- **Anatomically incorrect size** of body parts, bones, etc.

| Table 16. Unnatural number and/or style of limbs | | |
|--|---|--|
|  |  |  |
| Figure 16A | Figure 16B | Figure 16C |

The female body in Figure 16A has too many arms. The two hands holding a glass in Figures 16B and 16C have either too few (bottom hand) or too many (top hand) fingers. The fingers merge, dissolve, and multiply around the glass.

Format and Form

There are several formal qualities of visuals that might indicate AI imagery. The first indicator and simultaneously the major challenge is that, often, AI-generated footage and images shared across platforms tend to be of low quality. This low quality, especially if appearing only in a section of the image or video compared to the rest of the footage, can be a useful indicator, raising suspicion about whether the piece of content has been manipulated or is synthetic; however, the low quality also poses a major difficulty in analyzing other details of the piece of content.

2.6. STYLIZED SMOOTH GLOW

To say that AI imagery has a particular set of stylistic qualities is an overstatement. Many of those who turn to AI tools might aim to generate a piece of content in a particular stylistic convention, or imitate the look of older techniques (e.g., gelatin silver print photographs, early film, VHS amateur recordings, to name a few). In such cases, the stylistic elements in the piece of AI-generated content will likely lack many qualities described below. Nonetheless, the majority of so-called AI slop (especially prior to mid-2026) tends to display similar aesthetic qualities that we can broadly refer to as a particular “style.” This style is most noticeable in oversaturation of colours, unrealistically exaggerated light and shadow play, and a smooth, clay-like (“glazed”) texture.


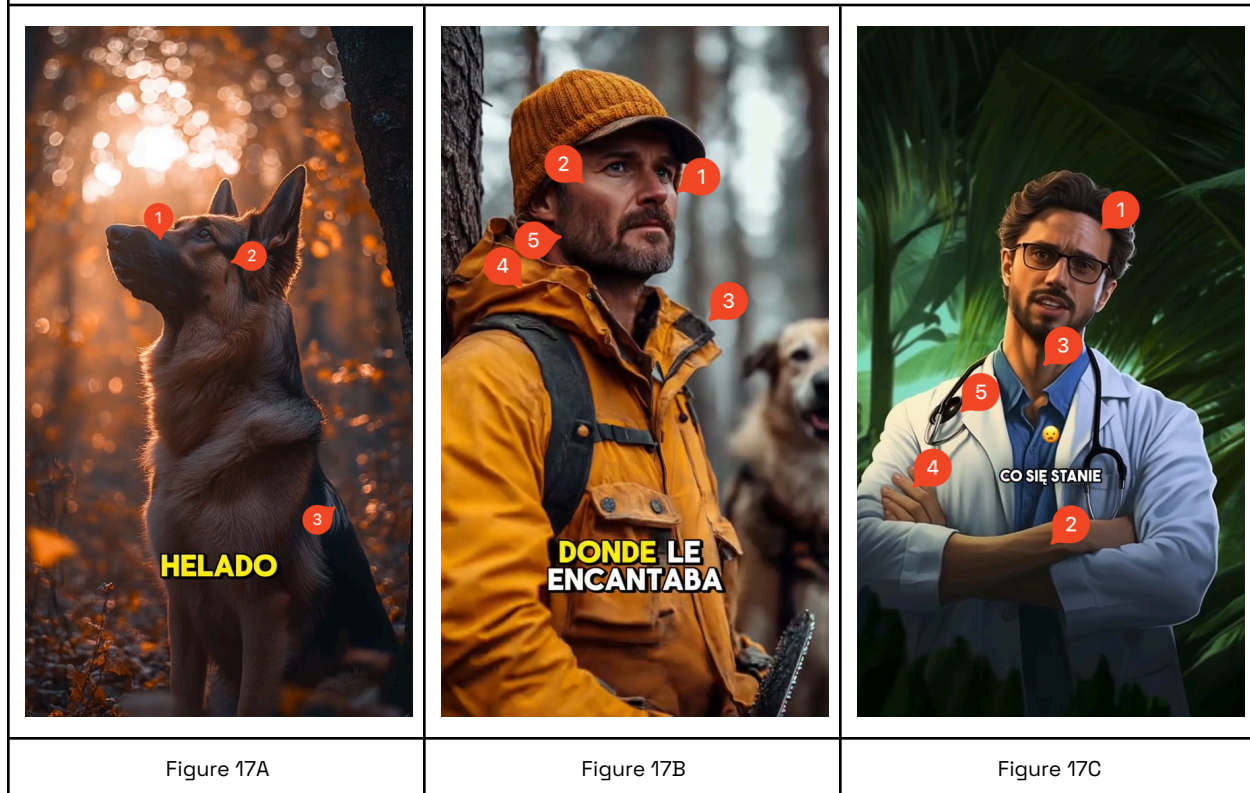
- **The image looks ‘too’ perfect**, the person, object, animal or the overall scene appears to be ‘too good to be true’ to display the situation it claims to capture
 - **‘Glazed’ texture**, especially notable on the skin and the face, where AI-generated images tend to smooth out what is considered natural texture, lacking pores, imperfections, and texture.
 - **Strong but flat light**, introducing unnatural glow to the objects depicted.
 - **Inconsistent sharpness of the image**, with unreasonably blurred parts of the objects where different textures overlap, resulting in a subtle residue of pixelated noise.
-
- 

Table 17. The style of genAI: artificial dramatic glow and texture plasticity



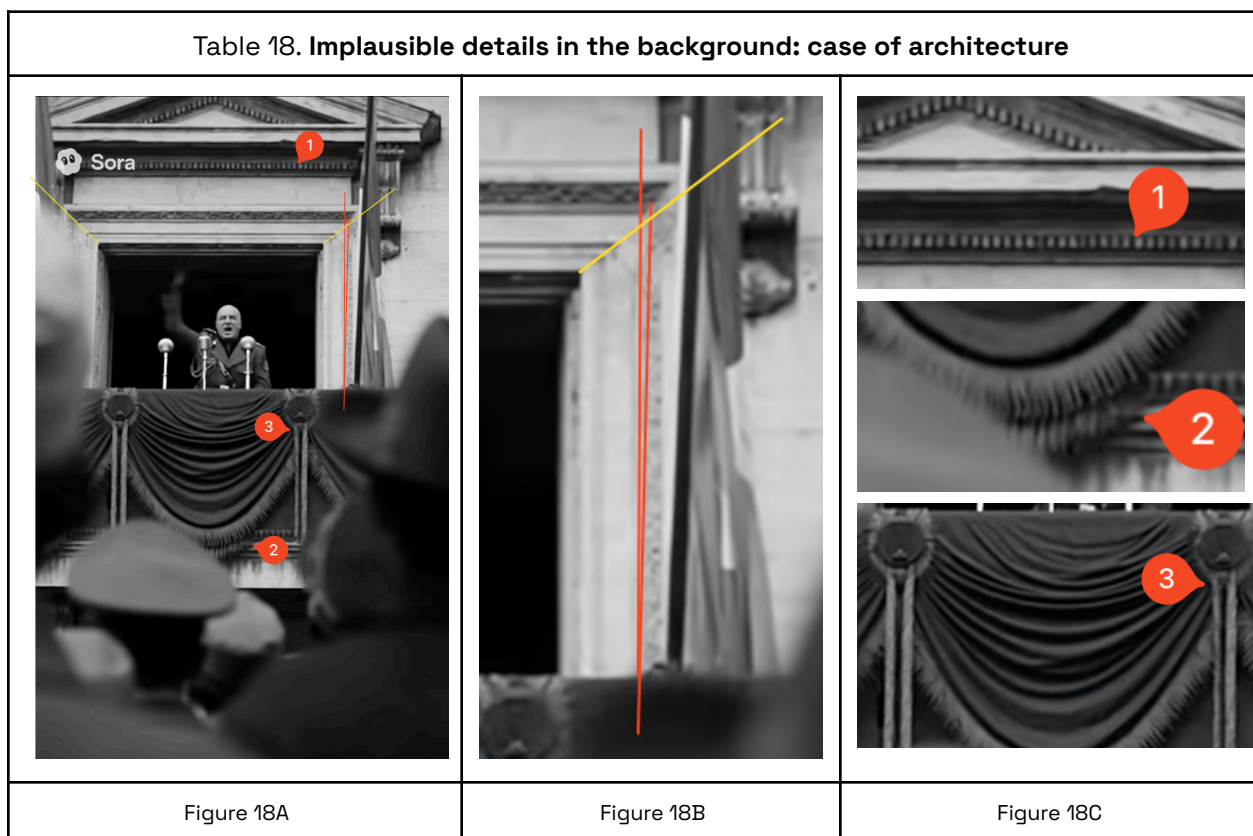
The three images (Figures 17A-17C) display similar qualities of a stylized smooth glow that is usually a characteristic of AI imagery. Across the three figures, point no. 1 draws attention to an unrealistic and exaggerated light and shadow play, where the surface (whether human skin or dog fur) glows with white highlights and flat but strong light. Point no. 2 across all three figures draws attention to the “glazed over” texture of skin, muscles, and even hair (or fur). This glazed-over, smooth texture appears more similar to clay or dough rather than real flesh with imperfections and variations. This “texture glaze” bears resemblance to some social media “filters,” used to smooth out skin texture and often resulting in a somewhat similar glazed-over look. Point no. 3 draws attention to the inconsistency of quality and detail in the image, particularly across edges, where we can observe a blurring of otherwise sharp details alongside a subtle residue of pixellated noise. Point no. 4 in Figures 17B and 17C further highlights the blurriness of particular areas in the image. Point no. 5 draws attention to the noise residue combined with unnatural play of highlights and shadows, both of which can be inspected upon zooming into the images.

2.7. IMPLAUSIBLE SYMMETRY, VANISHING POINTS, AND SHADOWS

The background setting of a scene can reveal its artificial origin as it often contains inconsistencies similar to the ones noticeable in foreground details. In architectural details, expectations are tied to the type of objects analyzed. In most architectural details, one can look for a lack of expected symmetry and coherence. In natural settings, strangely symmetrical elements or uncanny patterns repeating in the background can be suspicious.

- **Implausible symmetry**, where expected (especially architectural) details do not match.
- **Unnatural perspective**, where object proportions and placement lines once extended toward the horizon do not follow natural perspective rules and incorrectly converge in multiple (instead of a single) vanishing points.
- **Unrealistic placement of shadows** in relation to the light source. If an image appears to depict a single light source (a sun), all shadows must face the same direction, unless the image is AI-generated or manipulated.

Table 18. Implausible details in the background: case of architecture



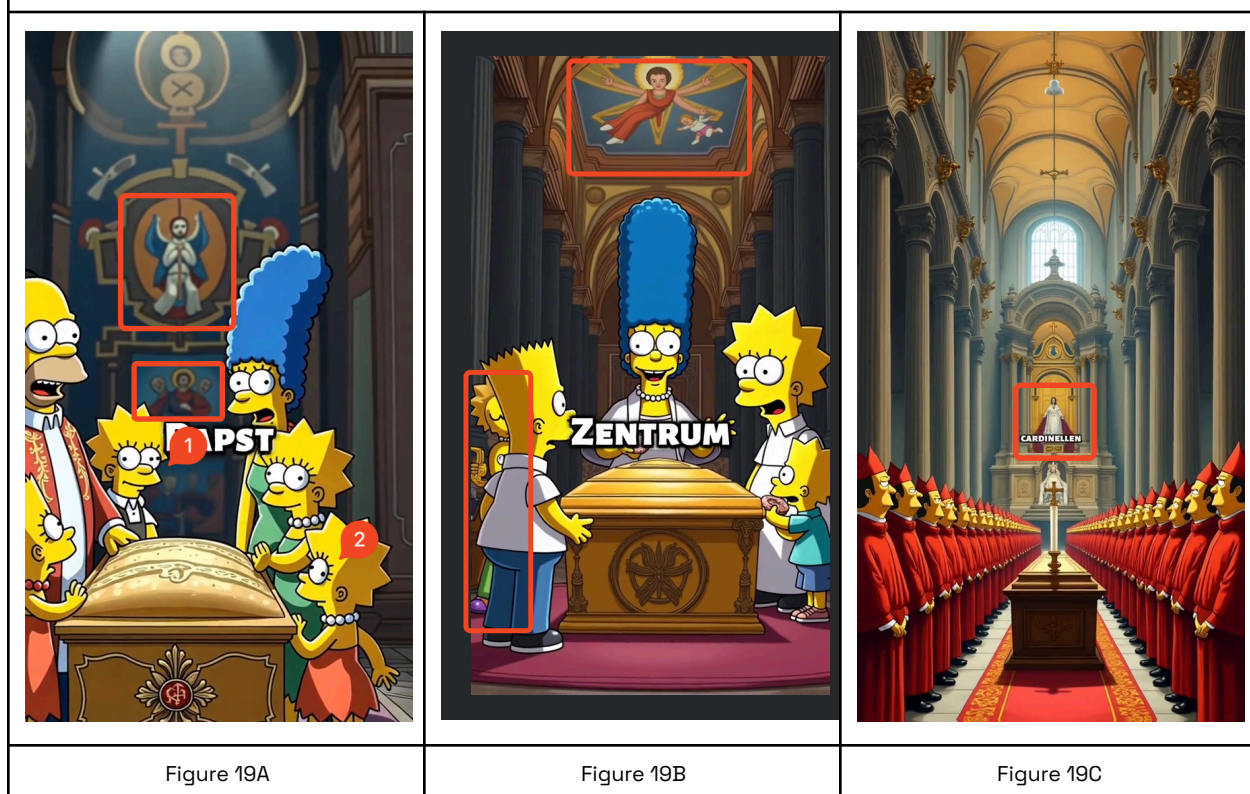
This example (Table 18) contains several architectural details revealing synthetic artifacts. Point no. 1 draws attention to the irregularity of shape and size of ornaments

around the frieze in the pediment above the door; the low quality of the footage, however, might be blamed for this seeming lack of symmetry. Point no. 2 draws attention to the floating, hazy layer of the ornamental cloth, seemingly merging and disappearing into the wall. Point no. 3 invites a comparison of the texture and thickness of ropes between the two ornaments on each side of the cloth, drawing attention to the implausibility of these ropes varying in thickness to this extent. Finally, the straight lines visible in Figures 18A and 18B outline how details around the doorframe are not parallel to each other, showing an unlikely lack of symmetry.

2.8. INCONSISTENT STYLE

Some AI imagery might be made in a particular (animated) style, e.g. in the style of a cartoon like The Simpsons. The application of a particular style to all elements in the foreground and background can be scrutinized for any inconsistencies.

Table 19. Inconsistencies in the application of an existing 'style'



Figures 19A-19C show three different still images generated with AI in the style of The Simpsons. The red rectangles across the images point to several inconsistencies in how figures in the background are handled; several Christian-like ornaments in the

background depict humanoid figures, some of which are rendered with more realistic proportions and details than others, yet none show the stylistic and formal qualities of *The Simpsons*. Figure 19B includes a character in the background whose body appears partially missing and out of proportion, with the hair showing an inconsistent colour gradient compared to the rest of the characters. In Figure 19A, points no. 1 and 2 draw attention to too many pupil-like dots in the eyes of the characters.

3. MOVING IMAGES/CLIPS

Body Details




Inconsistency of body details in moving images can be one of the most obvious signs of AI-generated content. To be able to track these inconsistencies, it is recommended to watch the video in slow motion or frame-by-frame, as many motion-related artifacts appear only for a fraction of time. Examples to look for include:

- **Unnatural body language**, especially observable in inconsistent or “choppy” movements and expressions.
- **(Dis)appearing and/or morphing body parts**.

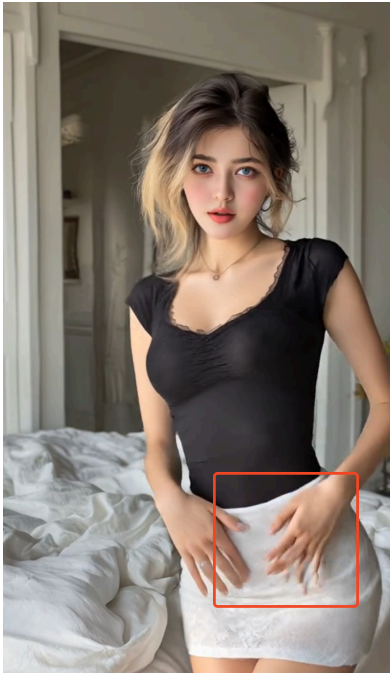
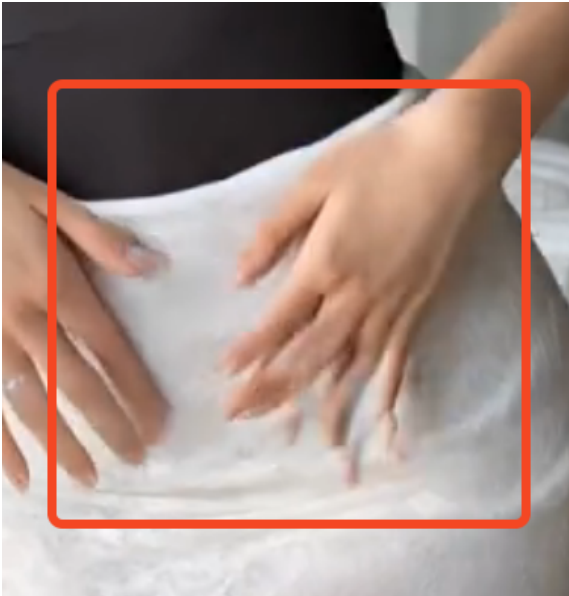
3.1. DISAPPEARING/MORPHING BODY PARTS

These details include movements of body parts (most often, hands) that morph the details of these body parts with other limbs or the background, or cause the body part(s) to disappear in motion.

Table 20. **(Dis)appearing and/or morphing body parts**

| | | |
|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |
| Figure 20A | Figure 20B | Figure 20C |

These three examples (Figures 20A-20C) show different frames from the same AI-generated clip. The red rectangles draw attention to how only one hand (the rectangles to the left) displays clear signs of morphing as the movement is executed. The rectangles positioned around the hand to the right draw attention to the more subtle detail of morphing and disappearing nails on the fingers of the hand.




| Table 21. Morphing fingers in motion | |
|--|---|
|  |  |
| Figure 21A | Figure 21B |

Figures 21A-21B display another example of a hand movement that results in one of the hands showing “melting” fingers. Once the hands move, what appears is a visible residue of synthetic artifacts emerging as the visible fingers morph into each other while other finger-like elements blur next to them.

3.2. UNNATURAL BODY LANGUAGE

Other indications of AI content can be when body movements lack fluidity and seem to appear out of sync with the rest of the body. The position of the head and body might seem uncoordinated. Body movements might not correspond to actual human/animal movements or might take place “against physics.” If the person is a public figure with particular mannerisms in the way they act/speak,

such mannerisms might be missing from AI-generated footage or appear highly exaggerated.

| Table 22. Unnatural body movements | | |
|--|---|--|
|  <p>The Field Hospital</p> |  <p>The Field Hospital</p> |  <p>The Field Hospital</p> |
| Figure 22A | Figure 22B | Figure 22C |

These three screenshots (Figures 22A-22C) display three consecutive frames from an AI-generated video. The soldier standing at the tent entrance has his back facing the “viewer.” As he turns back, his right leg steps backwards, appearing unnaturally twisted towards the back. In the following frame, his right leg morphs with his left leg, while the left leg disappears behind it.


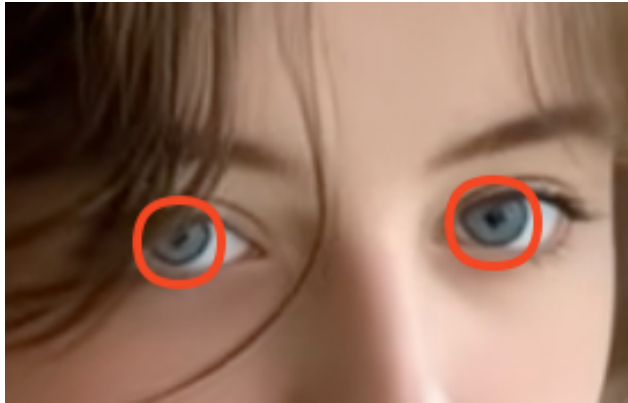
Facial Details

The human face remains one of the areas where generative AI tools err most often, especially when generating clips and video-like content. Some of the details to watch out for include:



- **Asymmetrical irises and eyes**, especially their movement, shape, color, and the appearance of the irises.
- **Unnatural lips** that change shape, morph, or move in an unnatural way.
- **Perfectly symmetrical or blending teeth.**
- **Blurring hair** with a ‘glitchy’ texture.

3.3. UNNATURAL EYES

Inconsistency of the appearance and movement of the eyes is yet another detail that can be spotted in AI imagery. Such inconsistencies include rapid or disconnected movements between eyes, eyebrows, eyelids, lack of blinking or continuous blinking, as well as lack of consistency in the eye colour and physical symmetry.

| Table 23. Asymmetrical irises and eyes | |
|--|--|
|  A full-body photograph of a young woman with long brown hair, wearing a white tank top. Her eyes are highlighted with red circles, showing a noticeable difference in color and shape between the two irises. |  A close-up photograph of a person's eyes. Both irises are highlighted with red circles. The left iris is a light blue, while the right iris is a darker, more vibrant blue, illustrating asymmetry in eye color. |
| Figure 23A | Figure 23B |

Human eye pupils tend to be perfectly round. Similarly, human irises are also usually circular. Therefore, if the two pupils or irises in a footage are not visibly circular and alike (Figures 23A-23B), it is highly likely that the image contains synthetic artifacts.

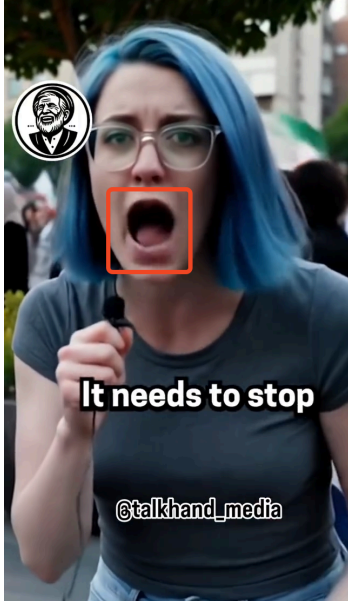

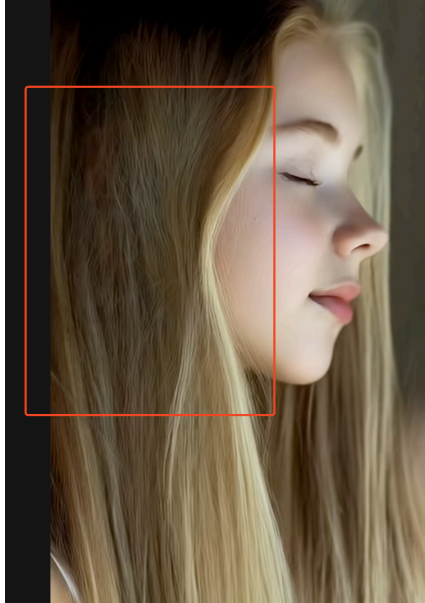
| Table 24. Morphing and inconsistent eye color | |
|---|---|
|  A photograph of a woman wearing a brown headscarf. A red box highlights her eyes. The image contains a watermark for 'talkhand_media' and the text 'in the street'. |  A close-up photograph of a woman's eyes. A red box highlights the eyes, which appear to be in the process of morphing or changing color, with one eye appearing darker than the other. |
| Figure 24A | Figure 24B |

In some cases of AI-generated imagery, the inner details of the eyes (such as the colour of the irises) tend to morph. In this case, one of the irises might appear to change color or “spill over” the eye, making the pupil and irises disappear and/or lack the expected light reflection off the eye surface (Figures 24A-24B).

3.4. UNMATCHING/IMPOSSIBLE LIPS/TEETH/HAIR MOVEMENT

Focusing further on the facial inconsistencies in AI-generated footage, several types of details in lips, teeth, and hair can reveal synthetic artifacts. In the case of lips, focusing on the movement can reveal several inconsistencies, e.g., when the lip movement does not match the face or does not show pauses in speech. The lips may also show unnatural movements, especially when the head is turned or when any object (such as a hand) moves in front of the face. Teeth might be generated as a white strip at the bottom of the mouth, unlike realistic-looking teeth, or the mouth might lack any signs of tongue movement. Hair may lack any flyaways or show fizziness throughout the footage.

Table 25. Glitching lips, teeth, and hair

| | | |
|--|--|---|
|  |  |  |
| Figure 25A | Figure 25B | Figure 25C |

“Glitches” can often be observed between frames, including movement of lips and hair. Figure 25A shows an example of a mouth movement where both lips and teeth disappear. Figure 25B is an example of a frame where the tongue appears to merge with the bottom line of teeth. Figure 25C offers an example of a section of the hair showing a

“glitchy” texture, where hair strands are visibly pixellated, blurry, and expanded onto the texture of the facial skin.

Object Motion Details




Similar to inconsistencies in body and facial details in AI-generated moving images, inconsistencies in objects and accessories can also indicate the likelihood of AI imagery. Such indications can be spotted both in the content foreground and background, and range in size from smaller accessories or object details to broader background patterns and settings.

- **Objects or figures disappear, licker, change shape** or morph into the background.
- **Objects or figures appear ‘out of nowhere,’** usually in the background.
- **Objects behave unnaturally,** against the laws of physics or our expectations of what is expected (e.g., movement of water).

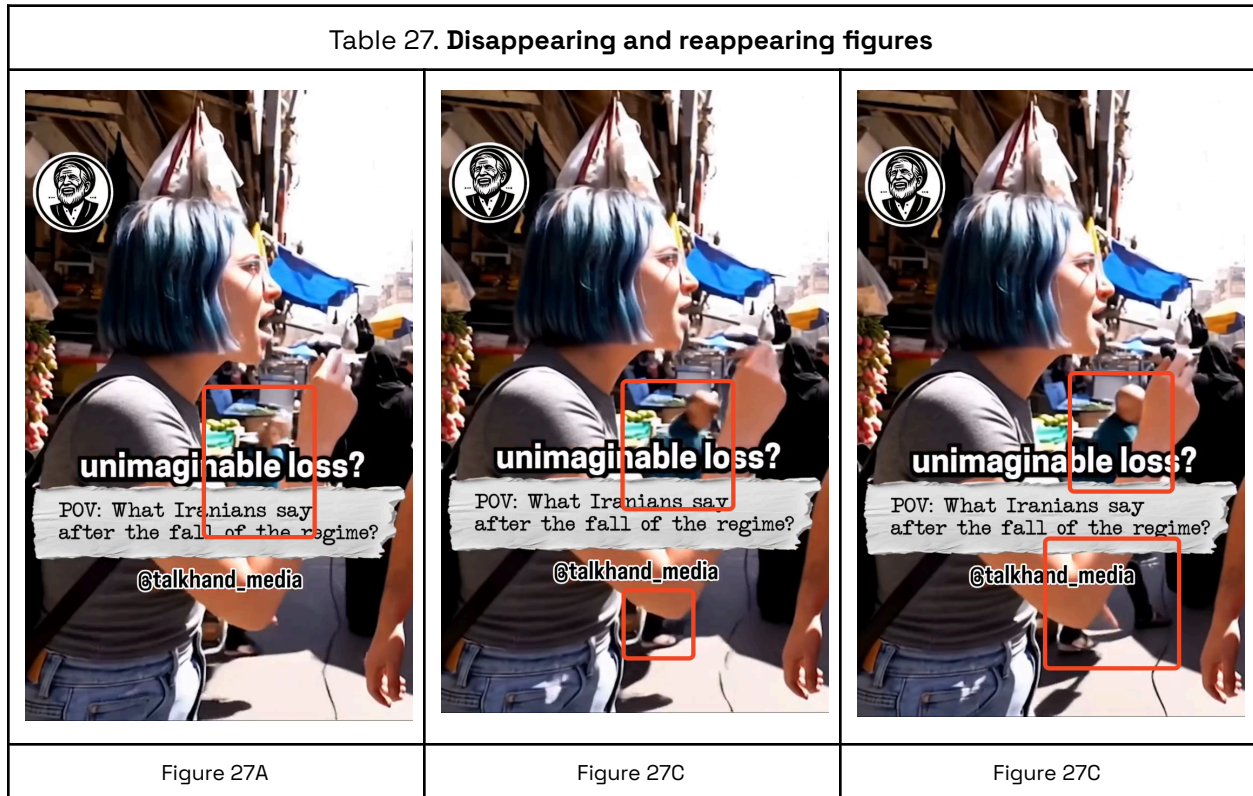
3.5. (DIS)APPEARING OBJECTS

Synthetic artifacts can be suspected when objects, including characters’ accessories, appear and/or disappear between frames. The objects might also morph into the background or change shapes.

Table 26. **Disappearing and reappearing objects**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
| Figure 26A | Figure 26B | Figure 26C |

The following series of frames (Figures 26A-26C) shows several details which give away a set of synthetic artifacts: an earring appears out of thin air, a necklace pendant changes in size and form, one of the two finger rings disappears, the pant button changes colour and shape, a bracelet becomes a smartwatch and morphs back to being a bracelet.



Figures in the background of the main action might appear and disappear seemingly out of thin air. In this series of frames from the same video (Figures 27A-27C), a human figure “materializes” out of pixelated noise (Figure 27A) as the action unfolds in the foreground and appears fully “formed” a few consecutive frames later (Figure 27C).

Table 28. Disappearing and reappearing object details



In this video of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, showing a card deck with pictures of military planes to viewers, the cards merge with one another while the writing on the cards glitches (Figures 28A-28C).

3.6. UNNATURAL PHYSICS

Other signs of AI imagery include objects moving, changing, or remaining the same against the physics of the real world, e.g., water passing through a glass, plates bouncing off or dissolving into a table instead of breaking, waves moving in the opposite direction compared to the coastline, and no footprints left on the snow. Inconsistent physics also applies to unnatural movements of fabrics as well as placements of staircases, pavements, and roads that lead nowhere.

Table 29. Unnaturally occurring physical phenomena



Figure 29A



Figure 29B



Figure 29C

Figures 29A-29B show two consecutive frames from the same AI-generated footage. In the first frame, water appears perfectly still with no undulation. In the following frame, the surface of the water is immediately and completely transformed into ripples and scattered movements. Figure 29C shows an example of a frame in which the staircases in the background would be physically unclimbable in real circumstances.

4. DIGITAL PROVENANCE

A final step in assessing the likelihood that a visual piece of content is made using generative AI tools is to verify the content's origin. Such an assessment focuses on questioning and verifying the origin of the content, or what we might call "digital provenance": where was the content first posted, whether it is similar to something already online, and whether it was reshared.

Internet Provenance

One aid for tracking the digital provenance of visual objects is the use of search engines offering reverse-image searches. This way, a still image or a frame from a footage can be exported (or screenshotted) and used as a query. This could resurface visually-alike content, alongside references to the sources. This way, one can attempt to verify whether a piece of content was reshared across various platforms and/or accounts and whether it displays subject matter (a place or a person) that seems visually similar to what has already been shared online in the past. Another option is to search for news stories and mentions by authoritative sources (such as credible news media organizations) of an event that a suspected AI imagery claims to represent. If there is a detailed object in the frame of the suspected AI imagery piece (as described in "[2.1 Impossible Physics](#)"), it can be useful to search for authoritative images or descriptions representing this object (e.g., a telegraph from the 1930s) to compare its visual details and specifics.

AI Provenance

Some generative AI tools implement a digital watermark, which, while invisible to the human eye, can be read by some tools. Currently, the leading example is Google's [Synch ID](#). Synch ID is incorporated into AI-generated or altered images, video, audio, and text using Google's generative AI tools. As of now, in order to verify if a piece of content was generated using (Google's) AI tools, a user has to access Google's [Gemini](#) chatbot, upload the file, and prompt Gemini to check whether that piece of content was made or altered by Google AI. While this verification method is limited to Google's products, it still offers a relevant option in tracking the provenance of generative AI content.

Tracking digital provenance, similarly to the previously mentioned steps, is unlikely to provide definitive answers and certainty on its own; however, combined with other elements of detection-driven analysis, it can offer additional insights otherwise unattainable from a single platform's interface and content-only analysis.
