

Campaigning with AI images: media debates and dilemmas

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The advent of AI image generators has introduced a new visual economy with the production of photo-like images without any use of photographic equipment (Meyer, 2023). AI image generators have actualised discussions about the ontology of the photographic image now possible to prompt by text (Wasielewski, 2024), and the referential ‘uncertainty’ concerning the status of the depicted object has inspired studies of declared versus non-declared use of AI images, disinformation and manipulation, for example in contexts of social media and consumer culture (Campbell et al., 2022; Wortel et al., 2024). This paper presents a thematic review of media coverage related to the use of AI generated photo-realistic images in professional actors’ communication to public audiences. The paper examines the multimodal discourses shaping understandings of AI generated photo-realistic images in campaigns from commercial and political actors, and how this image category is mediated and discussed as a communicative practice. The review is based on a screening of Danish media outlets in a period from 2025 to 2026 including print and online articles from national newspapers, web-based journalistic media and national broadcast media. The paper identifies the predominant themes and dilemmas by which AI generated photo-realistic images are discussed and conceptualised in order to understand how AI images transform contemporary media culture.

References

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