

The ‘Authenticity’ Crisis of AI-Generated Content: Meaning, Identity and Trust in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

This study comprehensively examines the issue of authenticity triggered by the integration of artificial intelligence systems into content production, addressing its philosophical, sociological, epistemological and cultural dimensions. The central argument is as follows: the concept of authenticity has historically been grounded in human experience, subjective intention and bodily existence; artificial intelligence outputs cannot be subsumed within this definition. However, this does not imply that such outputs are worthless; on the contrary, it necessitates a rethinking of the ‘authenticity’ category itself. The study discusses this issue through the lenses of education, digital identity, epistemic trust and digital content production, highlighting how technologies such as deepfakes challenge perceptions of reality and drawing attention to the inadequacy of existing conceptual frameworks. Two alternative frameworks are evaluated: process-oriented authenticity and a human-AI collaboration model. Ultimately, the issue is positioned not merely as a matter of technology policy, but as a profound cultural and ethical problem concerning how humans understand themselves and others.

Yapay Zeka Tarafından Üretilen İçeriğin “Özgünlük” Krizi: Dijital Çağda Anlam, Kimlik ve Güven

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, yapay zeka sistemlerinin içerik üretimine entegre edilmesiyle gündeme gelen özgünlük meselesini, felsefi, sosyolojik, epistemolojik ve kültürel boyutlarıyla kapsamlı bir şekilde incelemektedir. Temel argüman şöyledir: özgünlük kavramı tarihsel olarak insan deneyimine, öznel niyete ve bedensel varoluşa dayanmaktadır; yapay zeka çıktıları bu tanımın kapsamına alınamaz. Ancak bu, söz konusu çıktıların değersiz olduğu anlamına gelmez; aksine, “özgünlük” kategorisinin kendisinin yeniden düşünülmesini gerektirir. Çalışma, bu konuyu eğitim, dijital kimlik, epistemik güven ve dijital içerik üretimi perspektiflerinden ele almakta; deepfake gibi teknolojilerin gerçeklik algılarını nasıl sorguladığını vurgulamakta ve mevcut kavramsal çerçevelerin yetersizliğine dikkat çekmektedir. İki alternatif çerçeve değerlendirilmektedir: süreç odaklı özgünlük ve insan-yapay zeka işbirliği modeli. Sonuç olarak, bu konu yalnızca bir teknoloji politikası meselesi olarak değil, insanların kendilerini ve başkalarını nasıl anladıklarına dair derin bir kültürel ve etik sorun olarak konumlandırılmaktadır.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, texts, images, musical works and academic studies generated by artificial intelligence have created a deep sense of unease within the world of cultural production. At the heart of this unease lies a single question: Is the resulting product genuine? Why does knowing whether the words filling the pages of a book were written by a human or by a language model alter the way we approach those words so fundamentally?

It would be misleading to assume that the issue is merely a technological panic. The anxiety that has arisen runs much deeper than a superficial resistance to change. For centuries, people have expressed their identities through the works they have produced; through original works in the fields of art, literature and science, they have done more than merely convey information. They have also embedded the traces of their personal history, their struggles and their intentions within these works. The products produced by artificial intelligence in this field, however, carry the very risk of erasing these traces.

The Rise of Artificial Intelligence and Transformation in Education

There are certain turning points in the history of technology; the conference held in Dortmund in 1956 was one such moment, when John McCarthy introduced the concept of artificial intelligence to the public. Since that day, the field has become one of the most dynamic research priorities in computer engineering and has emerged as the driving force behind technological progress in the first half of this century. Governments and companies across the globe are continuously launching new initiatives by channelling significant resources into various application areas. (Arslan, 2020)

One of the most striking branches of this investment wave is the education sector. The learning capacity, intelligent prediction ability, skill in solving complex problems, adaptability to changing conditions, and the ability to comprehend different languages and experiences—all considered defining characteristics of artificial intelligence—make this technology functional across a broad spectrum in education, ranging from knowledge management to direct teaching processes. In reality, artificial intelligence has already entered the classroom under the guise of ‘intelligent, adaptable and personalised learning systems’; it has fundamentally reshaped secondary and higher education worldwide without waiting for students, teachers or families to be prepared. This transformation continues through the collection and processing of vast amounts of data accumulated on each individual student. (Arslan, 2020)

Artificial intelligence technologies, which have gained momentum in recent times with support from various projects, are extending their success across numerous fields into the educational environment. In a significant proportion of developed countries, these technologies are being used effectively in educational processes; tailoring students’ learning experiences to individual needs serves as a concrete example of this. (İşler & Kılıç, 2021)

In discussions comparing artificial intelligence with human intelligence, certain structural differences play a decisive role. Given that human memory may lose information over time, the fact that artificial intelligence preserves data stored in the system—provided it is not deleted—stands out as a significant advantage. Transferring knowledge to an artificial intelligence system also requires significantly less time and resources, whereas bringing a human up to an expert level necessitates a long-term process of education and experience. Furthermore, artificial intelligence produces consistent and predictable responses rather than decisions clouded by emotional and subjective factors; this characteristic provides an advantage over human intelligence in certain contexts. Storage and documentation processes are also far more manageable in machine-based systems. On the other hand, the learning capacity of artificial intelligence relies on acquiring knowledge from encountered situations by modelling human experience. (Yılmaz, 2022)

The Historical and Psychological Background of the Concept of Authenticity

The idea of authenticity has taken shape most clearly within the existentialist tradition in Western thought. The fundamental insight here is very simple: whether individuals are 'being themselves' is determined not by externally imposed moulds, but by an inner originality.

A review of the clinical psychology literature reveals that authenticity is directly linked to psychological well-being. Different theoretical traditions approach this concept from unique perspectives; whilst this diversity of definitions enriches our understanding of authenticity, it also makes it difficult to address it within a common framework. (Yıldırım & Yılmaz, 2024)

Studies in the realm of measurement tools also highlight just how multidimensional this concept is. In psychometric research conducted in Turkey, validity and reliability tests were carried out on the Authenticity Scale; it was found that the internal consistency coefficients for the three core dimensions—alienation, submission to external influences, and authentic living—ranged between .62 and .79. Regression analyses, meanwhile, indicate that authenticity possesses a significant predictive power in explaining variability in subjective well-being. (İlhan & Özdemir, 2013)

In the context of language teaching, however, authenticity takes on a different meaning. In this field, authentic materials are visual, audiovisual and written resources that bring the real language—free from artificial examples—into the classroom environment. Through such materials, students have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the cultural fabric of the target language in a much more natural and rapid manner. (Çelik, 2018)

In the field of art, however, authenticity is generally defined through the creator's intention, the originality of the production process, and the personal traces carried by the work. Viewed from this perspective, content generated by artificial intelligence poses a fundamental problem. Large language models generate output by mimicking statistical patterns; in this process, there is neither intention nor an experienced subject... The output is, in a real sense, a simulation of experiences that have never been and will never be lived.

The Transformation of Digital Identity and Authenticity

The debate on authenticity cannot be considered separately from the issue of digital identity. Digital identity is defined as an entity that represents the individual in the digital space, encompassing everything they do, share and possess in online environments. From a technical perspective, this identity constitutes a set of transferable attributes used by computer systems to identify individuals. People now establish their presence in numerous domains—such as shopping, banking, social media and e-government—through digital identity. In this environment, where identity structures are in a state of constant change and transformation, significant gaps still exist in the relevant literature. (Kavut, 2020)

The reliability of the digital identity infrastructure also harbours deep-seated issues. Digital identity, which enables individuals to prove who they are when securely linked to their real-world identity, constitutes one of the most critical areas of uncertainty in digitalisation. Centralised authorities' control over data, irregularities in data storage processes, privacy breaches, data inconsistencies between different systems, and operational inefficiencies are among the foremost of these issues. Blockchain technology is regarded as a promising alternative due to its potential to address these shortcomings in the current system; both national governments and international organisations such as the UN and the EU are conducting extensive research into developing digital identity models based on this technology. (Karahan & Tüfekçi, 2020)

The concept of digitalisation also warrants re-examination in this context. This concept should not be viewed as a destination for societies and individuals, but rather as a dynamic process in which

each participates, shapes and transforms within their own unique conditions. Consequently, every phenomenon and process brought about by digitalisation must be understood according to its own internal logic, rather than universal templates. This approach necessitates a unique examination of digitalisation across every field, ranging from knowledge production to education, and from institutional structures to individual experiences. (Özkeçeci, 2024)

In the postmodern era, the rapid transformation in information technologies has profoundly shaken perceptions of identity. The growing distinction between offline and online identities is also taking the identity-building processes of Generation Z—who have grown up alongside digital platforms—to a different dimension. This generation, referred to as ‘digital natives’, constructs its identity largely through digital platforms. (Çankal, 2024)

‘The Illusion of Authenticity’ and Past Turning Points

The debate over authenticity is a timeless one; it did not emerge with the advent of artificial intelligence. Painters faced a similar crisis with the invention of the camera. Could a tool that mechanically captures reality replace the artist’s subjective interpretation? When sound recording technology developed, it was argued that recorded music might lose the energy of a live performance.

History shows us this: every new technology has pushed the boundaries of authenticity, yet societies have, over time, developed new values and redefined what is considered original. The crisis of the AI era is simply restarting this cycle. However, this time, the scale and speed of the transformation are making the adaptation process significantly more challenging.

The Role of Artificial Intelligence in the Production Process: Deepfakes and Beyond

The era we are living in marks a threshold where virtual and physical reality intertwine to give rise to new hybrid forms of existence. Whilst social media now functions both as a mirror and a constructor of objective reality, artificial intelligence algorithms enable the reconstruction of reality on virtual platforms. The impact of artificial intelligence on new communication technologies is most strikingly evident in content creation and distribution processes.

Deepfake technology, which stands out particularly in this field, consists of a suite of outputs that use deep learning algorithms to learn, imitate, and even manipulate the characteristics of real objects and individuals. Having come to the attention of malicious online actors around 2018, this technology is transforming various fields—particularly cinema—from a visual and semantic perspective, whilst also paving the way for identity fraud in digital spaces. The anonymity and freedom of movement afforded to users in digital spaces, whilst facilitating the proliferation of such technologies, also brings with it profound perceptual issues regarding what is real as the generated content enters circulation. (Elitaş, 2022)

There are several key characteristics that distinguish the authenticity issue raised by artificial intelligence from those posed by other technologies. The first issue is the potential for anonymity and concealment. The identity of the person using a camera cannot be concealed, but a text generated by artificial intelligence can easily blur this distinction. The second issue is the problem of scale. A human can produce a certain amount of content over the course of a lifetime, whereas artificial intelligence systems surpass this amount in a matter of seconds. The third issue is the loss of traceability. Behind an original work, there is a journey, and visible errors may occasionally emerge. These errors serve as proof of the artist’s humanity. Artificial intelligence outputs, however, do not contain such errors.

Digital Content Production and the Authenticity Economy

The content production process in digital media has evolved into a unique structure that breaks

away from traditional publishing paradigms, blurring the boundaries between users and content creators. This structure, which blends consumer and producer roles, paves the way for content to be shaped both individually and collectively. Whilst personal content production takes place via social networks, professional content is becoming increasingly prevalent on digital publishing platforms. This multi-layered structure of content production gives rise to new producer identities such as influencers, social media stars and bloggers, whilst also revealing how these identities are shaped in collaboration with the user. (Çiltaş & İlhan, 2023)

It is evident that content production has largely become digitalised today, and a vast mass of content is constantly flowing into the online environment across a broad spectrum ranging from ordinary users to professionals. However, what is truly decisive within this crowd is the ability of the produced content to create a distinctive impact. Research conducted in this regard reveals that the most popular content shares certain formal characteristics. (Aytekin & Kılıç, 2022)

This efficiency in content production is facing significant fragility in the age of artificial intelligence. Artists, writers, musicians and journalists operate on the assumption that the content they produce is unique to them and can, in return, yield royalties or prestige. Artificial intelligence is eroding the foundations of this economic model, plunging individuals and institutions into profound uncertainty.

Epistemic Trust and Cultural Legitimacy

The crisis of authenticity is not merely an aesthetic issue, but also a crisis of epistemic trust. Epistemic trust, which plays a critical role in the social learning process, is defined as individuals' capacity to evaluate information received from others. Research conducted in academic, journalistic and legal fields demonstrates that epistemic trust exhibits significant correlations with subjective well-being, mentalisation skills and psychological symptoms. (Bilge vd., 2025)

From the perspective of science communication, the issue becomes even more profound. Science communication is not merely a tool for transmitting information; it is a cultural process that determines the form and value of the social relationship established through knowledge. Popular science practices should be interpreted not merely as an effort to simplify the narrative, but as intellectual actions aimed at generating accountability and visibility. Indeed, the practices of virtual witnessing that developed within the framework of Robert Boyle's experiments in the 17th century demonstrate that scientific trust is established not only through observation but also through narrative style, modes of representation, and the qualities of the subject conveying the knowledge. The legitimacy of scientific knowledge is shaped not only by the laboratory conditions in which it is produced but also by the cultural contexts in which it circulates. (Özdemir, 2025)

This issue is also addressed from the perspective of the philosophy of science. The contemporary scientific community is increasingly acknowledging the inevitable role of social and ethical values in scientific reasoning. The question of what foundations the public's trust in science should be built upon is being addressed through various approaches. The approach advocating high epistemic standards argues that scientists should only share results of high certainty with the public. However, it is observed that this stance falls short in addressing epistemic issues beyond inductive risks and sometimes leads to scientific findings being underutilised. (Kurtulmuş, 2023)

Is a New Framework for Authenticity Possible?

At this point, we arrive at the paper's central philosophical question: Is it possible to expand the concept of authenticity in a way that aligns with the reality of artificial intelligence, or must we abandon this concept altogether?

Two fundamental proposals can be put forward in response to this question:

Process-oriented authenticity: According to this approach, authenticity should be sought not in the product's source but in the production process. Content in which artificial intelligence is used as a tool, provided this use is explicitly stated, can be considered authentic in this new sense. The decisive factor here is the absence of any intent to deceive.

The human-AI collaboration model: Creativity has never been the product of a single subject in the strictest sense; language itself, cultural templates and historical accumulations shape every creator. Viewed from this perspective, artificial intelligence is nothing more than the final link in a long chain of intermediaries. The real question, however, is this: within this chain, which decisions does the human make?

Neither of these proposals is complete, yet it is clear that they are worthy of discussion; for they allow existing categories to be questioned without simply succumbing to a technophobic nostalgia.

METHOD

This study is a theoretical review designed within the framework of the qualitative research paradigm. The primary aim of the research is to examine the issue of authenticity in AI-generated content from a multidimensional perspective and to systematically elucidate the philosophical, sociological, epistemological and cultural implications of this issue.

Document analysis was adopted as the data collection method in this study. Accordingly, domestic and international academic articles, conference papers and theoretical frameworks addressing the themes of artificial intelligence, authenticity, digital identity, epistemic trust and digital content production were examined. The literature review was conducted via Google Scholar, YÖK Academic and various national databases; the search process was based on the key concepts of 'artificial intelligence', 'authenticity', 'digital identity', 'epistemic trust', 'content production' and 'deepfakes'. Although the scope of the review was limited to the period between 2013 and 2026, older studies that contributed to illuminating the historical background of the subject were also included in the analysis.

Descriptive content analysis and thematic analysis techniques were used in conjunction to analyse the data. In the descriptive analysis phase, the key findings and arguments of the examined studies were summarised; in the thematic analysis phase, the conceptual relationships and tensions between these findings were interpreted within the framework of emerging patterns. Thus, the seemingly fragmented findings of the literature were grounded in a coherent theoretical discussion.

Regarding the limitations of the study, the following point should be noted: As this research constitutes a theoretical review, it does not produce an original empirical dataset. Given that artificial intelligence technologies are undergoing extremely rapid evolution, it is acknowledged that the findings and recommendations presented here reflect the current literature and will require updating in the future. Nevertheless, the study claims to provide a consistent theoretical foundation for empirical research to be conducted in the future.

RESULTS

The findings obtained during this study can be summarised under several key headings.

The multi-layered structure of the concept of authenticity

Authenticity is not merely a philosophical abstraction; it is a multidimensional concept that finds functional counterparts in diverse fields such as psychology, language education, science communication and digital culture. This multidimensionality makes the redefinition of the concept in

the age of artificial intelligence both necessary and challenging.

The disruptive impact of artificial intelligence on authenticity

Whilst previous technologies such as photography, sound recording or word processors have shaken the perception of authenticity to a certain extent, artificial intelligence takes this disruption to a qualitatively different level. The absence of an intentional agent, the boundlessness of scale and the concealability of the production process render artificial intelligence outputs incomparable to past technological transformations.

The erosion of epistemic trust

The unchecked proliferation of AI-generated content across academic, journalistic and legal fields threatens the reliability of sources, which is fundamentally required in these domains. The erosion of epistemic trust is not merely an individual concern; it possesses the capacity to negatively impact the entirety of societal knowledge production processes.

Fragility of digital identity

AI-enabled content manipulation technologies, particularly deepfakes, directly undermine the reliability of digital identity. The severing of the link between digital identity and objective reality gives rise to serious uncertainties in how individuals define both themselves and others.

The transformation of the content economy

The already complex prosumer structure of digital content production has reached a new breaking point with the integration of artificial intelligence into the process. The sustainability of content producers' economic models, based on labour, originality and copyright, is increasingly being called into question.

The limitations of two alternative frameworks

Whilst the process-oriented authenticity model and the human-AI collaboration model offer valuable starting points for overcoming the current conceptual impasse, both are open to significant objections. The transparency declaration fails to resolve the issue of verifiability in practice; the collaboration model, meanwhile, cannot eliminate the difficulty of determining where human intervention begins and ends.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

If we are to ask the truly provocative question: what is the fundamental reason why people place such value on authenticity? The answer is partly ethical and partly ontological. Knowing that a human being exists behind the words alters the relationship we establish with those words on an ethical level.

The crisis created by artificial intelligence should therefore not be addressed merely as an aesthetic issue but must also be viewed as an ethical crisis. On what grounds are logical connections established between people, and how can this connection be sustained in an environment where the creative agent has become ambiguous? These questions have yet to find answers, but they will continue to be asked.

The crisis of authenticity brought about by content produced by artificial intelligence has not yet been resolved in its philosophical and practical dimensions. However, this uncertainty does not require us to abandon the discourse on the crisis. On the contrary, remaining within this uncertainty is the very essence of conceptual integrity.

Artificial intelligence has evolved from an idea conceptualised at an academic conference in 1956 into a force that today challenges the very nature of reality. Faced with this transformation, which directly impacts education systems, identity structures, the content economy and epistemic trust, societies must choose which values to uphold. At its core, the issue is not so much a matter of artificial intelligence policy as it is a profound cultural question concerning how people will understand themselves and one another.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings have led to the development of various recommendations for academic circles, policies and content.

Recommendations for the academic and research community

Approaches that treat the issue of originality in AI-generated content as merely a fragmented or purely technical matter are insufficient. It is considered of great importance that future approaches are designed from an interdisciplinary perspective, particularly through the joint evaluation of philosophy, psychology, law and communication science. Furthermore, rather than merely producing theoretical frameworks, there is a need to expand the scope of research based on empirical evidence. In particular, there is a need for large-scale studies that measure users' perceptions of trust and authenticity regarding content generated by artificial intelligence.

Recommendations for policymakers and organisations

Legal regulations regarding the labelling of AI-generated content are no longer a matter of choice but have become a necessity. The conditions under which such content may be circulated, the extent to which it may be distributed, and the transparency standards required are being addressed as a regular policy objective, alongside the examination of financial frameworks. In the field of digital identity security, testing and rolling out blockchain-based solutions at the level of public regulations provides a systemic safeguard against identity fraud. From an educational policy perspective, the integration of economic and AI literacy into curricula is no longer a matter that can be postponed. Furthermore, ensuring that content generated by AI can be critically evaluated, and that systematic education is maintained to ensure this technology is used in a way that safeguards its capabilities, is essential.

Recommendations regarding content and media files

Openly sharing with readers and viewers whether AI tools have been used in content production is becoming one of the fundamental conditions for maintaining the long-sought institutional efficiency. Transparency is not a weakness, but an active tool for building trust. Increasing technical infrastructure investments to detect AI in content platforms and developing industry standards in this regard can be considered a regular step forward.

Recommendations for future research

There is a need for comparative research into how concepts of authenticity are interpreted in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, given the rapid pace of development in AI technologies, it is an inevitable necessity to regularly update focused policy frameworks in this field. Finally, longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of AI-generated content on psychological well-being, epistemic trust and social bonds are of a nature that will fill one of the most critical gaps in the field.

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