

## **The Ethics Behind AI Use in WWF-UK Advertisements**

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is a global environmental charity that focuses on restoring the environment around the world and has been implemented in roughly 100 countries. One of the organizations that is included in the WWF network, WWF-UK, was founded 64 years ago and has been working with governments and communities to “stop deforestation, deliver a sustainable future in the UK, bring nature back from the brink, and inspire public action for nature” with the hopes of producing these results by the year 2027 (WWF-UK, 2024). One of the methods that WWF-UK utilizes to advocate for public action is to create advertisements to encourage support for the organization. *The Race to Bring Our World Back to Life* is an advertisement premiered in 2022 that was designed to spread awareness about the effects of climate change that are negatively impacting the environment (WWF-UK, 2022). In order to ensure that the audience was able to fully grasp the issue at hand, WWF-UK used Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance the issues that the environment is experiencing. Because the organization used AI to design the advertisement, ethical concerns arise regarding misinformation and exaggeration to elicit fear in the audience.

The primary philosophies that can be utilized to examine the issue at hand are deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics. The deontological approach focuses on the action itself rather than consequence. Immanuel Kant, the prominent representative of this approach, describes actions as either being prohibited or obligatory in a given situation regardless of the outcomes that will result once the act is conducted (Tännsjö, 2013, p. 59). In other words, an action is either deemed right or wrong and can be differentiated using the formulation including the categorical imperative and the formula of humanity. To use the categorical imperative to determine if an action may be deemed right or wrong, it is crucial that the potential effects of the

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action are factored into the decision if it were to be acted universally (Kant, 2021, p. 421). The formula of humanity ensures that moral actions do not use individuals to achieve a desired outcome (Kant, 2021, p. 429). In accordance with right and wrong actions, there are perfect duties that individuals are obligated to conform to and imperfect duties that individuals should strive to achieve. However, individuals should always prioritize perfect duties and never sacrifice a perfect duty to achieve an imperfect duty (Tännsjö, 2013, p. 62). The utilitarian approach focuses on the consequences of actions rather than the action itself. Furthermore, utilitarianism uses particular instances to determine the morality of an action instead of the generality of the action. Utilitarianism acknowledges that obligatory actions exist, but are a type of right action alongside other actions that may improve situations. However, there is only one obligatory action that improves a situation the most and results in the most good in the world (Tännsjö, 2013, p. 18). To determine which action is obligatory, the likelihood and possibility of the consequences of actions are balanced and compared to determine the action that would be responsible for the most good. According to Jeremy Bentham's classic hedonistic utilitarianism, the obligatory action is the action that should result in reaching the highest overall happiness level one can manage in order to produce the most positive consequence (Tännsjö, 2013, p. 19). The virtue ethics approach focuses on the person, specifically their character traits. Unlike deontology and utilitarianism, which focus on actions and consequences respectively, virtue ethics focuses on the virtues themselves (i.e. truthfulness, honesty, respect) and acting in accordance with these traits to determine the morality of an individual (Tännsjö, 2013, p. 96). Virtue ethics uses details about the issue at hand and virtuous character traits to determine if the actions related to an issue were conducted by a moral person. The virtue ethics approach highlights virtues as its focus to

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determine ethicality because the development and implementation of virtues can be considered as setting the standard for right actions (Tännsjö, 2013, p. 96).

With the issue of misinformation and exaggeration caused by the use of AI in this advertisement presenting itself, the different philosophical approaches can be used to address this issue and result in highlighting different elements to determine the advertisement's ethicality. When viewing the issues in this advertisement through a deontological perspective, the focus is on the act of deception rather than the outcome that could be the result of the deception. In *The Race to Bring Our World Back to Life*, the WWF-UK used AI to raise awareness to the urgent actions that the public needs to take in order to restore the environment. The use of AI can be seen throughout the video in various exaggerated clips that demonstrate the catastrophic state the world seems to be enduring. A deontological perspective would view this advertisement as WWF-UK attempting to achieve their goal on environmental awareness by manipulating the public's emotions through exaggeration, or breaking the formula of humanity's rule of using the public as a means to an end. The categorical imperative allows the deontological approach to acknowledge what the outcome would be if these actions were to be acted upon universally. If all environmental organizations used AI to instill fear in the audience to raise awareness, advertisements would be sharing misinformation of the actual state of the environment. When viewing the issues in this advertisement through a utilitarian perspective, the focus is on the consequence of the actions. While WWF-UK using AI to exaggerate the state of the environment is dishonest, the consequence of misinforming the public of the current environmental state through altered videography results in a greater beneficial consequence. The likelihood that the advertisement will elicit fear in the audience, to the extent that human activity may be alerted,

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leads to WWF-UK's actions being obligatory because it improves the situation the most and results in the most good in the world. Because the end result includes increased environmental awareness, the ends justify the means of potentially misinforming the public through exaggerated AI editing. In this situation, the consequential benefits of potential improvement in the environment and the audience becoming aware of the importance of their role in this matter outweighs the detriments of misinforming the public through AI's role in exaggeration to elicit public fear. When viewing the issues in this advertisement through a virtue ethics perspective, the focus is on the important virtues that should be considered being truthfulness, honesty, and respect. Because AI was used to exaggerate the intended message and produce fictional content, WWF-UK was not relying on their truth or honesty to express their concerns to the public. Furthermore, WWF-UK did not express respect towards the public which can be seen in their lack of openly sharing accurate imagery due to AI alterations. Instead, the organization resorted to eliciting fear in the audience through emotional coercion rather than attempting to inspire action in an honest manner.

After viewing the issues that arise when determining the ethicality behind AI use in WWF-UK advertisements through each of the philosophical lenses, it can be noted that each philosophy has a different conclusion on the matter based on their specific focus. Because deontology is focused on the act rather than the consequences that result from the act, deontology would say the advertisement is unethical. WWF-UK uses deception to elicit fear in the audience about the current environmental state through the use of AI-generated material. The use of AI to alter the appearance of the environment spreads misinformation to the public by exaggerating the appearance. Deontology may suggest that WWF-UK should include real footage of the

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environment in *The Race to Bring Our World Back to Life* in order to articulate their concerns about human activity. Using authentic material would eliminate the act of deception and allow the organization to be honest without spreading exaggerated misinformation, which aligns with deontology's belief of perfect duties. Because utilitarianism is focused on the consequences of the act rather than the act itself, utilitarianism would say the advertisement is ethical. After balancing and comparing the likelihood and possibility of the consequences of actions, utilitarianism may determine that deception is the obligatory action that improves the situation the most and results in the most good in the world. By exaggerating the current environmental state, WWF-UK is eliciting fear in the audience about the future of the environment and potentially inducing positive change in human activity. Because virtue ethics is focused on the person, specifically their character traits, virtue ethics would say the advertisement is unethical. The virtues in this situation that should be considered are truthfulness, honesty, and respect. By using AI to generate exaggerated material in *The Race to Bring Our World Back to Life*, WWF-UK was not relying on these virtues to convey their concerns. Therefore, the lack of development and implementation of these virtues leads to the inability to set the standard for right actions. Virtue ethics may suggest that WWF-UK should inspire action in an honest manner by being truthful in their conveyance of their message without using AI, honest about the current environmental state, and respectful to the audience by sharing accurate imagery.

The approach that I think is best to determine the ethicality behind AI use in WWF-UK advertisements is utilitarianism. While spreading misinformation about the current state of the environment through exaggerated AI-generated material is dishonest, I think the benefits that could be imposed on the environment outweigh the detriments inflicted on the audience. Using

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the audience's emotions to achieve WWF-UK's mission of saving the environment by exaggerating the urgency for change in human activity could lead to an improved environment for future generations. By using a utilitarian approach in this situation, I believe that the positive consequences of using AI in *The Race to Bring Our World Back to Life* outweigh the potential issues that may arise.

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### References

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