

The Risks and Copyright Concerns of AI-Generated Cosplay Content on Chinese Social Media Platforms

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Abstract:

This study primarily examines copyright issues and the legality of using AI tools such as Doubao to generate cosplay images on the mainland Chinese version of TikTok, Douyin, social media platform. It also addresses, from an ethical perspective, the infringement of originality and creators' rights. The author discusses, from multiple angles, the harmfulness and social injustice of profiting from AI-generated cosplay posts. The research employs sampling surveys and platform-based research methodologies.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Cosplay, Social Media Platform Studies, TikTok(Douyin), Cultural Studies.

Background and Context

Technology in the modern world is changing rapidly and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of the technologies that is being highly developed in the contemporary world. AI is becoming a major tool in various industries and is being applied by many individuals and companies in different fields including content creation. China mainland is one of the countries that has advanced its AI applications whereby tools such as Doubao (one of the Chinese local AI applications) are becoming more common since they allow users to create images easily. These technologies are exciting new ways to be creative and entertained, but also have significant concerns about copyright issues, digital labor, and ethical misuse. Moreover, China has emerged as one of the top nations for the advancement and utilization of AI technology, making their presence in the field felt around the world. The Chinese government has actively encouraged the development of AI in the country's various fields,

including education, healthcare, manufacturing, and the digital creative industry, through national policies like the New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan. The technological advancement has encouraged tech firms to create more generative AI models that are easily available to the general public. The applications like Doubao allow users to generate realistic digital images with just a few words of text input or reference images as input, which greatly lowers the technical skills needed to produce digital images. This has given rise to the widespread use of AI-generated visual content on Chinese social media, empowering both content creators, influencers, and casual users to generate eye-catching, visually appealing content in a fast and cost-effective manner. These technological advancements have opened the door to new avenues of artistic expression and digital engagement but also concealed the distinction between creative expression and AI-driven creation. As a result, issues have risen regarding who is re-

sponsible for the original content, who has ownership of the content, and whether it is ethical to use content created by others without their awareness and permission. One of the issue entail the emergence “AI cosplayers” on Chinese social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Douyin (China Mainland version of TikTok) (Yang & Wang, 2021). These users collect and edit original cosplay photographs created by other individuals, and then produce new photos with AI systems and repost them. In many instances, those AI-generated photos are used to attract followers, online engagement, and even commercial gain. However, in most cases, the original creators do not get any requests, credits, or financial gains.

Cosplay has become one of the liveliest types of participatory digital culture in China and especially among anime, manga, gaming, and popular culture communities (Yang & Wang, 2021). Cosplay is not just about photography or digital artwork, it is about costume design, makeup, acting, photography, and digital manipulation of fictional characters. Some cosplayers can take weeks and months to create their costume, buy all the parts and learn the specialized make up techniques and arrange for professional photoshoots that would accurately depict a character. Therefore, it is a large creative, emotional, and monetary investment. In addition to enjoying the hobbies or even occupations, many cosplayers create online communities and partner with photographers and brands, and make money through sponsorships, merchandise sales, or social media collaborations. Thus, cosplay photographs are not only random snapshots on the internet, but are art and creative works that reflect artistic ability, identity, and economic value. The misuse of these works by AI systems thus challenges copyright issues and exploitation of creative work and creators' recognition.

This issue is crucial since cosplay production requires a lot of creative effort from the participants. While AI-generated images can seem original, they tend to be very dependent on pre-existing human-made work. Hence, many cosplayers feel that their work is being used without their permission or “stolen,” by people who add little original work to the pieces. In addition, China does not have proper social media moderation systems that could detect or control AI-generated copyright violations. Thus, this study focuses on the hidden copyright and ethical concerns created by AI-generated cosplay content in the growing AI and social media industries in China.

These concerns are intensified by the architecture of these Chinese social media platforms. Recommendation algorithms are crucial for platforms like Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Douyin, all of which heavily depend on visually appealing and engaging content. AI generated cosplay images tend to get lots of attention as they offer visually

appealing graphics and result in a lot of likes, shares, and comments from the users or the audience (Yang & Wang, 2021). These images flourish on platforms, and in many instances, audiences cannot tell the difference between original cosplay photos and reworked images created by AI. Moreover, social media monetization systems enable content creators to capitalize on audience engagement for advertising revenue, sponsorships, and commercial opportunities. This may monetarily and socially benefit the AI users who take the original cosplay pictures, while the original content's creators are not acknowledged and remunerated despite using much effort to develop the original content. This disparity shows that AI technologies can steer inequalities in digital platform economies.

Consequently, the risks associated with AI cosplay have become relevant due to the growth of AI technology and the commercialization of online content. AI also has the potential to stimulate innovation and enhance artistic creativity, but the rights of the human creators, their artistry and their moral concerns should be considered. Failure to address these can lead to disputes among content creators, social media platforms, and AI developers. Furthermore, with the digital world constantly changing in China, it is crucial that there is a more balanced policies on governance to look at the digital cosplay art that is produced by AI, ensuring that they are done with proper copyright and ethical practices.

Research Questions

- How has AI-generated cosplay content on Chinese social media platforms created new copyright and ethical risks for original creators and how can it be addressed?

Relevant Theoretical and Empirical Literature

The increased use of AI has also led to more scholars studying its various impacts. For instance, study has revealed how AI-generated content challenges traditional concepts of authorship, originality, and ownership (Gaidartzi & Stamatoudi, 2025). Besides, generative AI systems rely heavily on datasets from existing human-created works, raising concerns about unauthorized use of other individual's data (Razzaq et al., 2025). These concerns are relevant to cosplay because its production depends on visual creativity, identity performance, and creator recognition.

Generative AI has also complicated the legal interpretation of originality, which remains one of the fundamental requirements for copyright protection. Traditional copyright assumes that creative works are the outcome of the independent human intellectual effort. However, AI-generated outputs are generated by algorithms that

look at information in existing sets and recombine it to create an output, not creating ideas themselves (Razzaq et al., 2025). AI-generated works continue to raise questions about originality and the copyright owner, and legal experts are still debating the question of who owns the copyright in the first place. The uncertainty is also influenced by the ability of AI-generated images to mimic the visual aspects used by human creators. These outputs can sometimes look like new creations, but are often based on previous cosplay photos, which makes it unclear whether they are original or copied.

Research on digital labor and platform economies also presents significant framework for this study. According to Gardiner (2015), social media platforms acquire revenue from user-generated labor, but they offer limited protection for creators' rights and ownership. Thus, AI-generated reposting and image manipulation should be seen as forms of labor exploitation in which original creators contribute creative work while AI users and platforms benefit economically and socially. Besides, cosplayers use a lot of time, money and technical expertise to develop their content. These are great creative works which help make social media platforms popular, attracting audiences and advertising revenue. Hence, as AI users take these images and use them to create new content, original creators may have no compensation or credit. Consequently, AI technologies may reinforce existing inequalities within platform economies by enabling others to benefit from creative labor without making equivalent artistic contributions.

Thus, empirical research in recent years on AI governance and platform regulation in China has shown challenges experienced in regulation of AI-generated copied works. Chinese AI governance policies focus more on managing content produced and misinformation than protecting the rights of creators (Chen & Xu 2025). Besides, there are currently no binding precedents in Chinese judicial practice that directly address copyright infringement arising from AI training (You & Luo, 2025). These regulatory gaps create significant risks for online creators, particularly within visually driven communities such as cosplay.

Platform Responsibility and Content Moderation

As this new technology emerges and transforms the industry, there are also significant concerns about liability of social media companies in protecting creators' intellectual property rights (Chen & Xu 2025). As intermediaries between content creators and audiences, platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Weibo and Douyin play a significant role in determining how AI-generated content is distributed,

recommended and monetized. While these platforms have added community rules and reporting methods for copyright violations, the existing community moderation systems are more reactive than proactive. This approach is hard for the original creators since there is high rate of AI content circulation and detecting unauthorized use of their content is time-consuming and challenging.

Moreover, AI-generated images come with their unique challenges regarding automated moderation whereby as they can evade the copyright detection systems using modified visual elements. Also, AI content can copy art styles and character designs without being like the exact content of original creators, making it harder to tell the difference between AI and direct copying. In this case, researchers have suggested the developments of transparency in platforms' governance, such as mandatory disclosures of AI-driven content, better AI content detection tools, and better policies about copyright ownership. With the continuous advancement of generative AI, managing the platform will become increasingly crucial in terms of balancing technology innovation and safeguarding intellectual property and creative efforts.

Apart from the legal problems, social media platforms have considerable difficulties with copyright protection of AI-generated content. In contrast to copying, AI-generated images may manipulate artistic style, poses, background or colors in ways that are not captured by copyright algorithms (Wibowo, 2025). Thus, it is often not possible to automatically determine if an image created by an AI violate copyright, and human judgement is required. Platforms like Xiaohongshu, Weibo and Douyin have established reporting systems for content copyright violations, but the enforcement is dependent on creators pointing out violations and filing copyright complaints themselves. This is a reactive strategy that puts a new load on the original creators, and gives the opportunity for unauthorized AI-generated content to spread before any measures are implemented.

The research on AI ethics also indicates that generative AI technologies could worsen the overall issues of consent, attribution, and digital identity. Aiming to challenge the idea that AI systems are independent or autonomous, Crawford (2021) notes the reliance of these systems on human data and labor without an explicit consent process. This is very applicable to AI-generated cosplay content since creators could potentially have their images stolen and edited without their consent. While the current body of literature has contributed to the understanding of AI-generated content, there are some research gaps. The majority of the existing studies focus on copyright, AI governance and digital ethics, with limited attention given to how these issues intersect within cosplay communi-

ties. Moreover, the literature on AI-generated art tends to be more general in scope and not focused specifically on cosplay. There is also inadequate empirical studies investigating the responses presented by the Chinese social platforms to copyright disputes involving AI-generated cosplay images and how creators see these challenges. These gaps can be filled by researchers in order to provide a more comprehensive perspective on the legal, ethical, and social issues arising from AI-generated cosplay content in the dynamic and rapidly changing internet environment in China. These gaps will also help the researchers a better understanding of legal, ethical and social challenges of AI-generated cosplay content in China. The current literature has also revealed that the production of cosplay content through AI also involves digital labor exploitation, platform governance, and ethical regulation.

Issues of acknowledgement and creator identity are also considered whereby recognition by audiences is important because it enables creators to build a reputation, gain collaborations, and have a long-term online presence. Therefore, failing to recognize the original cosplay photographs can result in the loss of opportunities for original creators. Furthermore, consumers could potentially have difficulties in distinguishing between authentic cosplay images and those generated by AI, reducing the trust and authenticity in online creative platforms. This means that there is a need to raise this transparency and put in place systems and procedures for the original creators to grant or refuse consent to use their works.

Conclusion

The analysis shows that generative AI has mostly revolutionized the manner in which digital creativity is practiced, thereby raising complicated legal, ethical and social issues. Since AI relies on existing human content, questions have been raised about the concept of authorship, originality, and copyright ownership. Also, with the advancement of AI, there are concerns that the increase of this technology could lead to original creators being exploited as others can reap the rewards of their work without giving credit or compensation.

Researches also show that existing laws and platforms' moderation mechanisms are not adequate to tackle copyright issues. Issues of consent, transparency, and creator recognition, also show the ethical complexities beyond just legal questions, revealing the implications of generative AI. While they may be relevant, there are not many studies in particular that focus on how AI generated cosplay content affects original creators. While past research

has focused on the larger question of AI-generated art and copyright and the ethics of digital labor, it has failed to discuss the relationships among these elements in cosplay communities. This study aims to fill these gaps by analyzing the copyright and ethical concerns related to the use of AI-generated cosplay content and the existing governance framework and regulations in China. The results will inform numerous projects involving AI regulation, and offer significant information for the social media platforms, content creators, and regulators. The goal is to help create better and more equitable policies that encourage the adoption of new technologies while maintaining the rights of content creators, their creativity, and intellectual property rights.

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