



Is It Real or Is It ...?

It's getting harder to tell phony information from real maps, photos, video, audio, and writing. Here are ways that can help anyone determine what's authentic.

Photos

Run the image through a Google Images search or the reverse image search engine TinEye. Seeing that the exact image has occurred in many different contexts on the web is a sign that it was digitally dropped into yours. At the very least, a photo supposedly taken yesterday shouldn't be reproduced on web pages from a month, a year, or a decade ago.

Maps

Google Maps has to work constantly against groups that try to fake map content, the company has said. The culprits are often businesses trying to promote themselves or even governments manipulating areas for national security reasons. One way to check maps for fakery is to compare multiple versions and types. Traffic, topological, and satellite images may not line up.

Video

Video manipulation often causes changes in lighting, shadows, and coloring that can be hard to restore. It takes little time for a trained expert to detect and document these incongruities, according to Hany Farid, a computer-science professor and digital-forensics expert at the University of California Berkeley. There are also AI tools for detecting fakery, such as the web-based analysis app Shallow, available for free.

Text

AI is built to recognize and generate patterns—not to understand what the patterns represent. Look for such references to impossible events (fires occurring under water, for example). Similarly, because machines know patterns but not meanings, AI writing can produce weird phrases that a human writer would never use.