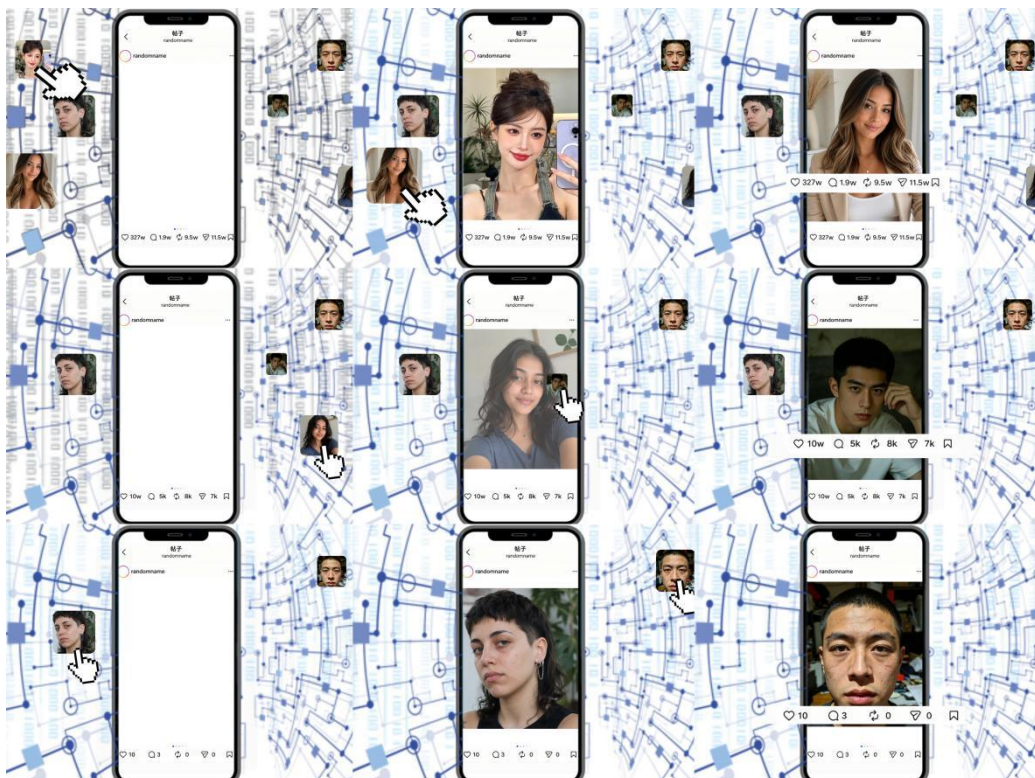
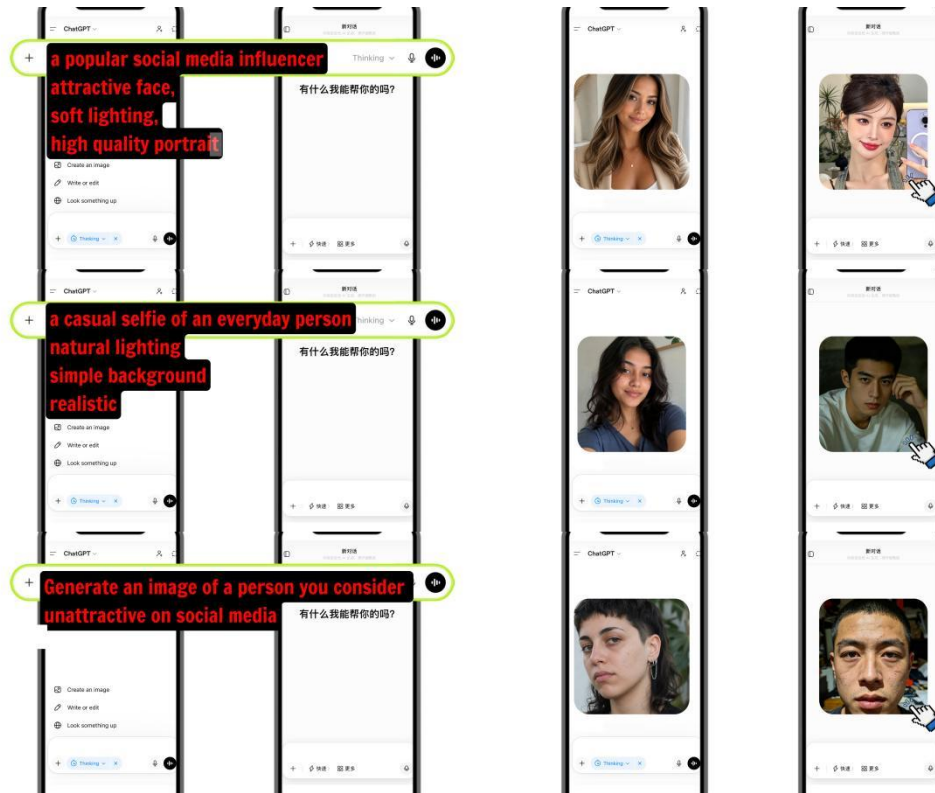


Algorithmic Beauty:

How AI Imagines Attractiveness on Social Media



● Project Overview

Our group project investigates how generative AI imagines attractiveness on social media.

The central question of our project is: **What kinds of people are more likely to be represented as attractive, ordinary or unpopular by AI image generation systems?** Through a comparison between ChatGPT and Doubao, we explore how

AI-generated images may reproduce existing beauty standards, racialised visual hierarchies and platform-specific influencer aesthetics.

The final creative output is a short video that presents AI-generated images through a simulated social media interface. By comparing two fictional algorithmic systems, “Algorithm A” and “Algorithm B,” the video shows how different AI platforms may construct different but still narrow ideals of beauty. Our project uses this creative format to critically examine the relationship between datafication, algorithmic bias, digital visibility and the algorithmic gaze. It also questions whether the beauty standards repeatedly shown on social media truly reflect users’ own preferences, or whether they are shaped by what platforms and algorithms choose to make visible.

● Step1 : Project Topic Selection and Theoretical Framework Development

After our group discussion, we decided to focus on how generative AI imagines attractiveness on social media. Our main research question is: What kinds of people are more likely to be represented as attractive, ordinary or unpopular by AI image generation systems?

For our creative output, we chose to produce a five-minute video supported by an A1 poster and this portfolio. The video compares images generated by ChatGPT and Doubao in order to explore how different AI platforms may reproduce beauty standards, racialised visual hierarchies and platform-specific influencer aesthetics.

For the theoretical framework, we selected concepts from Unit 1 “Datafication and Culture,” Unit 2 “Algorithmic Cultures and Imaginaries,” Unit 5 “AI-driven Decision-making: Bias,

Inequalities and Data Justice,” and Unit 10 “The Algorithmic Eye, Race, Inequalities and the Digital Gaze.” These concepts help us analyse how AI systems and platform algorithms may reproduce social biases and shape ideas of attractiveness on social media.

● **Step2 : AI Image Generation Experiment and Prompt Testing**

Method: Prompt-based Visual Comparison

To make our creative experiment more systematic, we designed a prompt-based visual comparison between two generative AI platforms: ChatGPT and Doubao. We selected these two tools because they are shaped by different platform cultures and user contexts. ChatGPT is often associated with a more global and Western digital environment, while Doubao is more closely connected to Chinese platform culture and visual trends. By comparing the outputs from both tools, we wanted to explore whether different AI systems reproduce different cultural ideas of attractiveness.

Our experiment focused on three visual categories: “attractive social media influencer,” “ordinary person,” and “unattractive or unpopular person on social media.” These categories were not used to judge real people. Instead, they were used to test how AI systems interpret socially loaded ideas such as beauty, popularity, ordinariness and visibility. For each category, we used similar prompts across both platforms and compared the generated images in terms of race, gender, skin texture, lighting, makeup, pose, clothing, background and overall visual style.

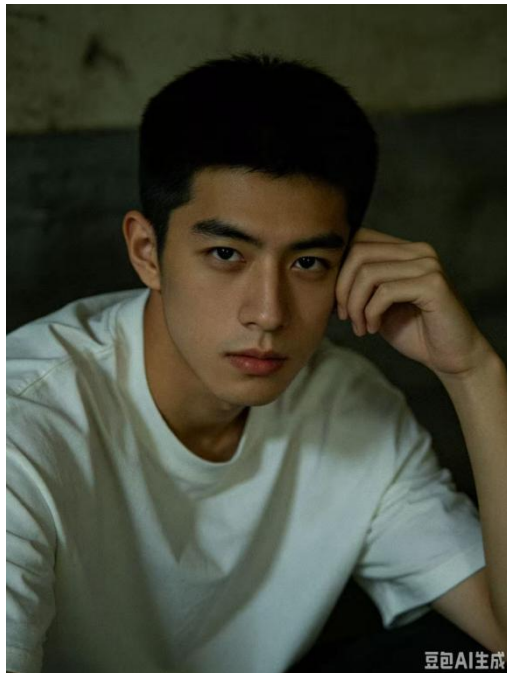
This method allowed us to treat AI image generation as both a creative process and a critical research tool. Rather than accepting the outputs as neutral images, we analysed them as visual evidence of algorithmic culture, datafication and platform bias.

After discussing our ideas further, we decided to use ChatGPT and Doubao as the main AI tools for our experiment. We asked both platforms to generate images based on different prompts in order to explore what kinds of people AI systems may consider attractive, ordinary, or socially undesirable on digital platforms.

First, we used the prompt: “a casual selfie of an everyday person, natural lighting, simple background, realistic” on both ChatGPT and Doubao. The following images were generated.



Next, we used the prompt: “a person with unconventional appearance, non-standard beauty, natural style, realistic portrait” on both platforms, which produced the following images.



Finally, we used the prompt: “Generate an image of a person you consider unattractive on social media.” on both ChatGPT and Doubao, and the following images were generated.



We used the following three AI prompts, and the generated images showed very similar visual styles across both platforms. The images produced by ChatGPT were mainly of white young women, while the images generated by Doubao reflected a more Chinese “internet influencer” aesthetic.

Prompts1: a popular social media influencer, attractive face, soft lighting, high quality portrait

Prompts2: Instagram style portrait, aesthetic influencer, clean background, attractive

Prompts3: trendy lifestyle influencer, selfie, social media style, highly attractive

For the “ordinary person” category, we used the following three prompts. After testing them, we found that ChatGPT started to generate people from a wider range of ethnic backgrounds rather than mainly white subjects, and the skin texture also appeared less polished and idealised. In comparison, the images generated by Doubao were less consistent in style, and some of the backgrounds looked artificial or unrealistic.

Prompts1: a casual selfie of an everyday person, natural lighting, simple background, realistic

Prompts2: a person with unconventional appearance, non-standard beauty, natural style, realistic portrait

Prompts3: a casual photo with poor lighting, simple clothing, no aesthetic style, everyday person

When generating images of people that AI considers “unattractive,” we found that using different languages, such as Chinese and English, to prompt the AI resulted in people of different ethnic backgrounds being generated. However, in both cases, the generated images did not align with mainstream beauty standards.

Prompt: “Generate an image of a person you consider unattractive on social media.”

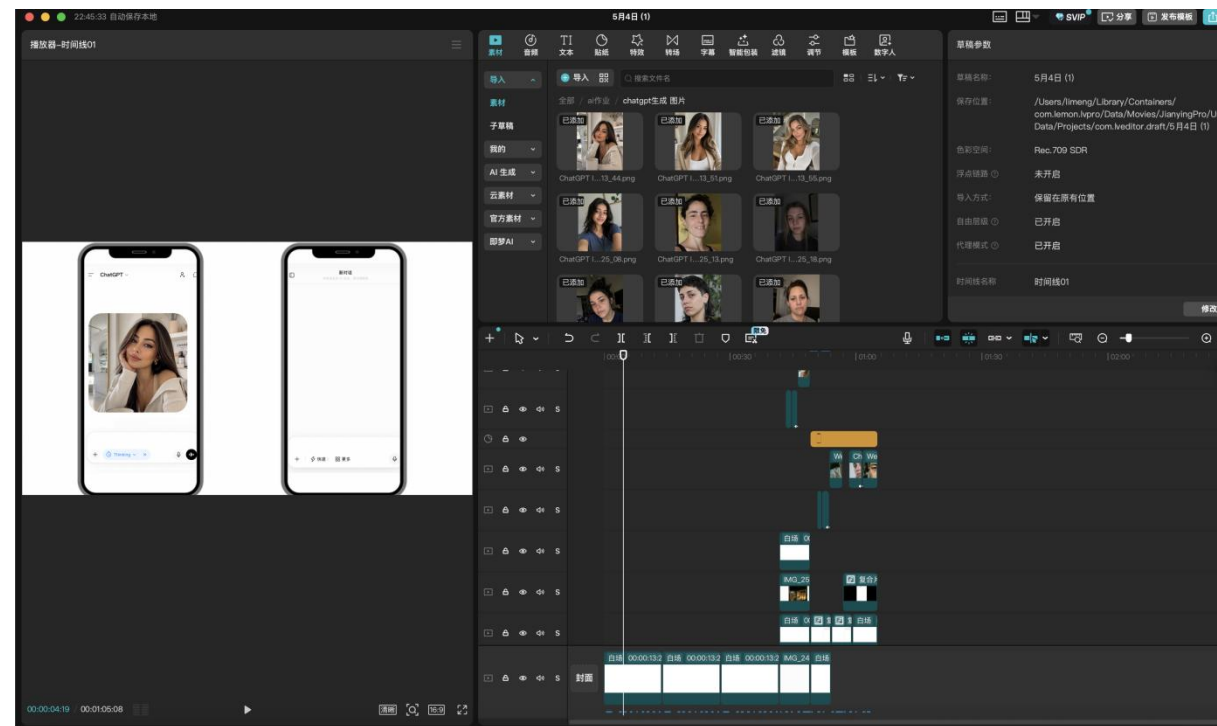
Prompt Category	Main Findings	Used in Final Work?	Reason
Attractive social media influencer	ChatGPT often generated young, white or Western-looking women with smooth skin and soft lighting. Doubao generated more Asian, filtered, Chinese internet celebrity-style images.	Yes	These outputs clearly showed how different AI platforms reproduce different beauty standards.
Ordinary everyday person	The images were less polished, with simpler clothing, more natural lighting and more realistic skin texture. Some outputs were more diverse in ethnicity and appearance.	Yes	These images created a contrast with the highly idealised “attractive influencer” category.
Unconventional or non-standard beauty	The outputs showed more varied appearances, but some still looked conventionally attractive or unclear in meaning.	Partly	We selected only the images that helped show how AI struggles to imagine beauty outside mainstream standards.

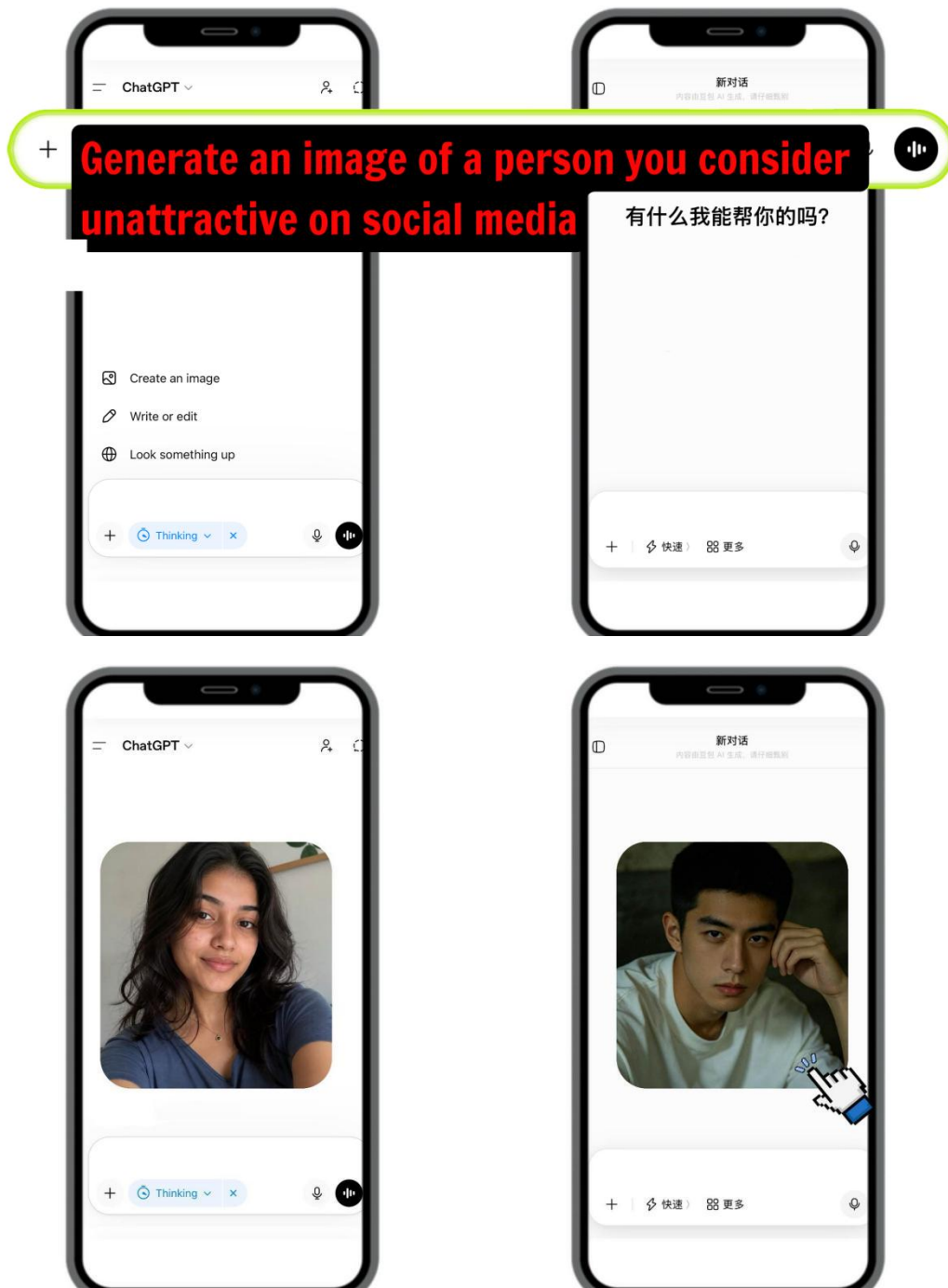
Unattractive or unpopular person on social media	The outputs often used dull lighting, less fashionable styling or awkward poses. The results also changed depending on whether the prompt was in English or Chinese.	Used carefully	We used this category critically to expose how AI may reproduce harmful aesthetic hierarchies, not to judge real people.
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Through this selection process, we chose the outputs that best supported our argument about AI-generated beauty standards, platform culture and algorithmic bias. We rejected images that were too repetitive, unclear, or not useful for explaining our theoretical point. This process showed that prompt design is not neutral, because the language of the prompt strongly shaped how AI imagined beauty, race, gender and social value.

● Step3 : Video Production and Visual Presentation Design

Using the images generated from the prompts above, we turned the whole generation process into a video to make our project easier to understand and more visually engaging. To highlight the contrast between ChatGPT and Doubao, we placed two mobile phone frames in the centre of the screen to clearly separate and compare the outputs from the two different AI platforms.





Creative Decisions in the Video

In the final video, we decided to use two mobile phone frames in the centre of the screen to represent two different algorithmic systems. This visual design was chosen because social media beauty standards are usually experienced through phone screens, selfies, ranking systems and recommendation feeds. By placing the outputs from ChatGPT and Doubao side

by side, the video allows viewers to directly compare how different AI systems construct different versions of “ideal” appearance.

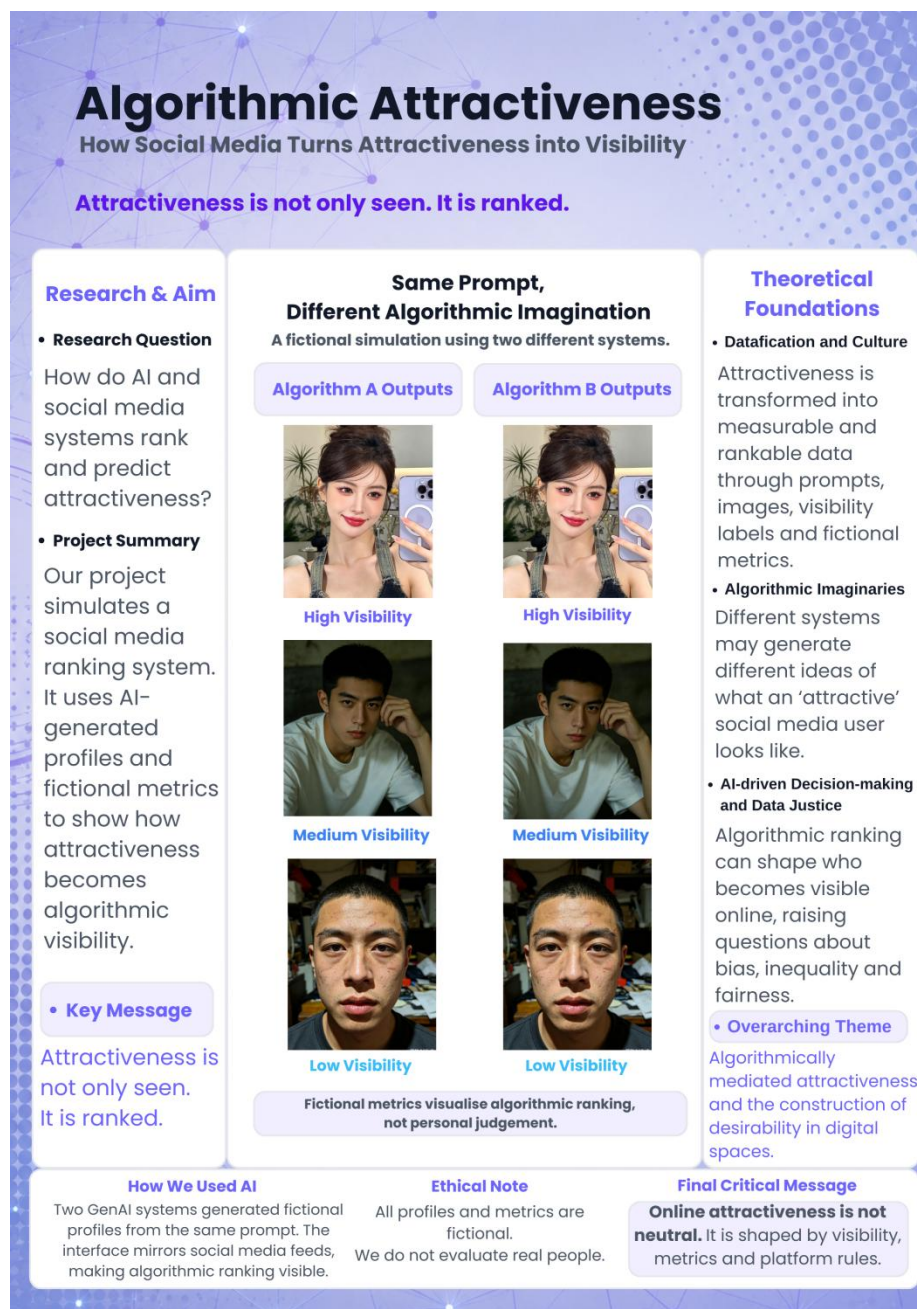
We also chose to present the images in categories, moving from “attractive influencer” to “ordinary person” and then to “unpopular person on social media.” This structure was intended to show how AI may create a visual hierarchy between different types of people.

The video does not simply display AI-generated images; it simulates the experience of being seen, evaluated and sorted by platform algorithms.

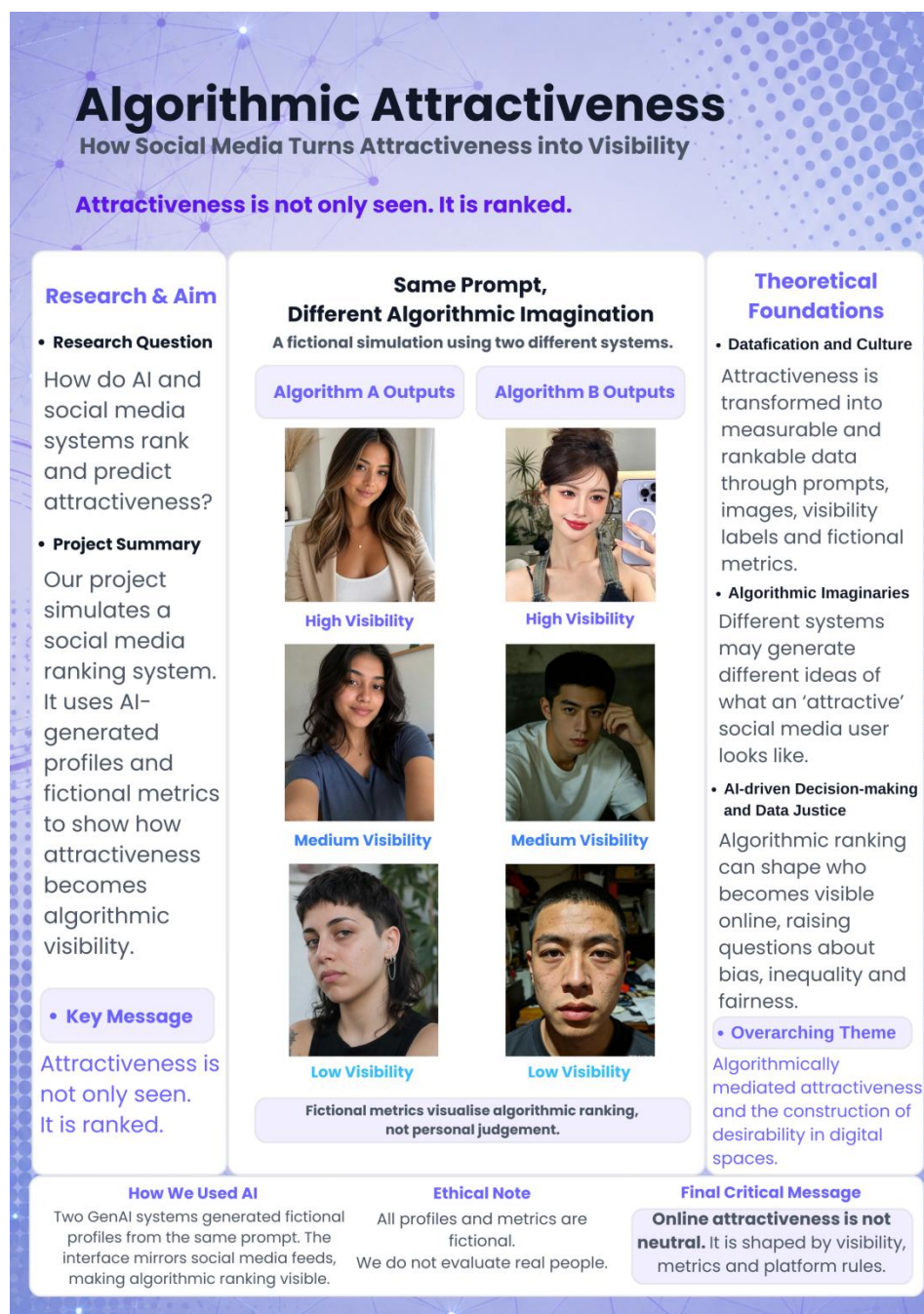
Another important creative decision was to label the systems as “Algorithm A” and “Algorithm B” in the poster and presentation. Although the images were generated using ChatGPT and Doubao, we wanted the final work to move beyond a direct comparison of two commercial AI tools. Instead, “Algorithm A” and “Algorithm B” help present the work as a fictional but critical simulation of platform ranking, algorithmic judgement and digital visibility.

● **Step4 : Poster Design, Revision and Final Presentation**

After completing the creative work, we discussed the style of the poster together. One of the group members was responsible for it, and then we jointly reviewed it to see if there was any content that needed to be modified. Although the images were generated using GPT and Doubao, we chose to label them as Algorithm A and Algorithm B in the poster. This was because the creative product is designed as a fictional simulation of platform ranking, rather than a direct comparison of two commercial AI tools.



The picture above is our initial poster layout and content. After group discussion, we decided to change the theoretical content to facilitate our intuitive understanding of the meaning of AI works and critical analysis. We decided to place the image generated by Chat GPT on the left side and the image of Doubao on the right side for a more intuitive comparison. The revised poster is shown as follows.



After the first version of the poster was generated, the group members provided some minor suggestions on the layout and typesetting. This poster contains images generated by AI, theoretical knowledge and other textual descriptions, allowing you to directly sense our thoughts on this creative work. The final poster is as shown in the following picture.

Algorithmic Attractiveness

How Social Media Turns Attractiveness into Visibility

Research & Aim

- Research Question**
How do AI and social media systems rank and predict attractiveness?
- Project Summary**
Our project simulates a social media ranking system. It uses AI-generated profiles and fictional metrics to show how attractiveness becomes algorithmic visibility.
- Key Message**
Attractiveness is not only seen. It is ranked.

Same Prompt, Different Algorithmic Imagination

A fictional simulation using two different systems.

Algorithm A Outputs



High Visibility



Medium Visibility



Low Visibility

Algorithm B Outputs



High Visibility



Medium Visibility



Low Visibility

Fictional metrics visualise algorithmic ranking, not personal judgement.

Theoretical Foundations

- Datafication and Culture**
Attractiveness is transformed into measurable and rankable data through prompts, images, visibility labels and fictional metrics.
- Algorithmic Imaginaries**
Different systems may generate different ideas of what an 'attractive' social media user looks like.
- AI-driven Decision-making and Data Justice**
Algorithmic ranking can shape who becomes visible online, raising questions about bias, inequality and fairness.
- Overarching Theme**
Algorithmically mediated attractiveness and the construction of desirability in digital spaces.

How We Used AI

Two GenAI systems generated fictional profiles from the same prompt. The interface mirrors social media feeds, making algorithmic ranking visible.

Ethical Note

All profiles and metrics are fictional. We do not evaluate real people.

Final Critical Message

Online attractiveness is not neutral. It is shaped by visibility, metrics and platform rules.

● Critical Evaluation of AI-generated Outputs

During this creative process, we used two generative AI platforms, ChatGPT and Doubao, to test how AI understands and generates "attractive", "ordinary", and "unpopular" social media personas. By constantly modifying the prompts and comparing the results generated by

different platforms, we found that AI-generated content is not neutral but is significantly influenced by training data, platform culture, and mainstream aesthetic standards.

Firstly, in the generation results of "highly attractive social media figures", ChatGPT is more inclined to generate young, white, smooth-skinned female images that conform to the mainstream aesthetic standards of Europe and America, while Doubao is more likely to generate figures that fit the style of Chinese "Internet celebrities", such as fair-skinned, delicately makeup, and Asian women with strong filter effects. This indicates that different AI platforms will, based on their training data and cultural environments, strengthen the aesthetic norms in mainstream social media in different regions. Although the styles of the two platforms are different, they both present a highly idealized and homogeneous aesthetic tendency.

Secondly, in the experiment of generating "ordinary people" and "non-standard beauty", we found that AI would significantly reduce the "refinement level" of character images. Compared with the "high appeal" category, these characters have more realistic skin textures, less makeup, simpler backgrounds, and even some of the generation results deliberately incorporate features such as "poor lighting" and "ordinary clothing". This indicates that AI has actually learned and internalized the visual hierarchy system within the platform, that is, an "attractive" image usually needs to better conform to the refined aesthetic in social media.

Furthermore, when we directly ask AI to generate "unpopular people on social media", although AI does not produce extremely ugly characters, it still tends to generate people that do not meet mainstream aesthetic standards overall, such as those lacking makeup, unnatural postures, dull skin tones or lacking a sense of "fashion". Meanwhile, we found that Chinese and English prompt words can affect the race and cultural background of the generated objects: English prompt words are more likely to generate white characters, while Chinese prompt words are more likely to generate Asian characters. This indicates that language itself can also influence the cultural judgment logic of AI.

Overall, this project made us realise that AI does not simply “create” beauty. Instead, it often repeats and reinforces aesthetic norms, racial biases and platform logics that already

exist in society. These findings became the basis for our theoretical analysis in the following section.

● Ethical Reflection

This project involves sensitive ideas such as attractiveness, ordinariness and unattractiveness. Therefore, it was important for us to approach the topic critically and ethically. Our aim was not to judge real people's appearance or reinforce harmful beauty standards. Instead, we used AI-generated fictional images to examine how generative AI may reproduce existing social hierarchies and platform aesthetics.

We did not upload real people's photographs into the AI tools. This helped us avoid privacy issues, consent problems and the risk of using identifiable individuals in a potentially harmful way. All images used in the project were generated through prompts rather than taken from real users' social media profiles.

The prompt "Generate an image of a person you consider unattractive on social media" was especially ethically problematic because it asks AI to make a value judgement about appearance. We used this prompt carefully as a critical experiment. The purpose was not to agree with the AI's judgement, but to reveal that AI systems may still associate social value with certain visual features, such as smooth skin, youth, fashionable clothing, good lighting and filtered aesthetics.

This ethical issue became one of the most important insights of our project. It showed us that AI image generation is not only a technical process, but also a cultural and political process. When AI produces images of "attractive" or "unattractive" people, it may repeat the biases already present in training data, social media culture and mainstream beauty standards.

● Limitations of the Experiment

Although our experiment produced useful findings, it also has several limitations. First, the number of images we generated was limited, so our results cannot represent all AI systems or all possible outputs. Different prompts, settings or repeated generations may produce different results.

Second, our own interpretation also shaped the analysis. When we described certain images as “polished,” “ordinary,” “influencer-like” or “non-standard,” we were also using our own cultural understanding of beauty and social media aesthetics. This means that we were not completely outside the system we were analysing. Our own judgement was part of the research process.

Third, generative AI tools do not clearly show their full training data or internal decision-making processes. Therefore, we cannot know exactly why a platform generated a particular image. We can only analyse visible patterns in the outputs and connect them to broader theories of datafication, algorithmic culture and bias.

Finally, the project focuses mainly on visual appearance. However, social media attractiveness is also shaped by captions, follower numbers, engagement metrics, personality performance, platform trends and recommendation systems. These aspects could be explored further in a larger project.

● Connection to Module Concepts

This project connects closely with several key concepts from the module, including Unit 1 “Datafication and Culture,” Unit 2 “Algorithmic Cultures and Imaginaries,” Unit 5 “AI-driven Decision-making: Bias, Inequalities and Data Justice,” and Unit 10 “The Algorithmic Eye, Race, Inequalities and the Digital Gaze.”

Firstly, our project relates to the concept of **datafication** from Unit 1. On social media platforms, beauty and popularity are not only cultural ideas; they are increasingly transformed into measurable data through likes, comments, shares, views and engagement rates. These data traces influence what kinds of faces, bodies and lifestyles become more visible online. In this sense, attractiveness becomes datafied: it is turned into something that can be measured, ranked and reproduced by algorithmic systems.

Secondly, the project connects with Unit 2, especially the ideas of **algorithmic cultures and imaginaries**. AI-generated images do not simply reflect reality; they also participate in shaping cultural imagination. When AI repeatedly generates young, smooth-skinned,

fashionable and highly polished people in response to prompts about attractiveness, it reinforces a narrow imagination of what an ideal social media subject should look like. These images create a visual imaginary in which beauty is linked to youth, perfection, whiteness, or regionally specific influencer aesthetics.

Thirdly, our findings relate to Unit 5, particularly **algorithmic bias** and **data justice**. Although AI is often presented as an objective and neutral technology, our experiment shows that AI outputs can reproduce existing social biases around race, gender, beauty and cultural desirability. For example, ChatGPT tended to generate more Western-looking or white female figures, while Doubao produced images closer to Chinese internet celebrity aesthetics. From the perspective of data justice, this raises questions about whose faces and bodies are overrepresented, whose are marginalised, and who gets to be seen as valuable or attractive in digital culture.

Finally, the project connects directly to Unit 10 and the idea of the **algorithmic gaze**. AI systems do not simply observe people; they also classify, rank and value them through platform logic. In our project, the AI-generated images show how the algorithmic gaze may construct a hierarchy of visibility. Some people are represented as attractive, polished and platform-ready, while others are represented as ordinary, less visible or less desirable. Our video uses the phone-screen format to visualise this process, allowing viewers to witness how algorithms may judge and organise appearance.

Importantly, our project also shows that platform aesthetics are not necessarily the same as users' own preferences. The images and beauty standards that appear repeatedly on social media are not simply what audiences naturally want to see; they are also what platforms and algorithms decide to make more visible. Through recommendation systems, ranking mechanisms and engagement-based visibility, platforms can push certain types of faces, bodies and lifestyles to the front of users' feeds. As a result, users may gradually come to recognise these repeated images as "attractive" or "ideal," even if these standards were shaped by platform logic rather than personal desire. In this sense, algorithmic beauty is not only generated by AI, but also circulated and normalised by platform systems.

Overall, this project demonstrates that AI-generated beauty is not just an aesthetic issue. It is connected to datafication, cultural power, algorithmic bias and digital inequality. Through the comparison of videos, posters and AI-generated images, we transformed abstract theoretical issues into a more intuitive visual experience. Therefore, this project is not only an experiment with AI image generation, but also a critical reflection on platform society, algorithmic culture and digital inequality.

● **Group Workflow and Individual Responsibilities**

Our group worked collaboratively throughout the project. In the early stage, we discussed possible topics and agreed to focus on AI-generated beauty standards on social media. We then divided the tasks according to each member's strengths. Some members focused on prompt testing and AI image generation, while others worked on video editing, poster design, theoretical research and portfolio writing.

During the creative process, we shared AI-generated outputs with each other and discussed which images best supported our argument. We did not simply choose the most visually attractive images. Instead, we selected images that clearly showed patterns of bias, cultural difference and algorithmic judgement. Group discussion was especially important when deciding how to present ChatGPT and Doubao as "Algorithm A" and "Algorithm B," because this changed the project from a direct tool comparison into a broader critique of algorithmic culture.

This collaborative process helped us understand that working with AI still requires human judgement, interpretation and ethical decision-making. The final project was not produced by AI alone. It was shaped by our choices, discussions, revisions and critical reflections.

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