

Swifties fight back against online deepfake porn images of singer

New York

Pornographic deepfake images of Taylor Swift are circulating online, making the singer the most famous victim of a scourge that tech platforms and anti-abuse groups have struggled to fix.

Sexually explicit and abusive fake images of Swift began circulating widely this week on the social media platform X.

The White House said it was alarmed by fake online images of the pop singer and said social media companies have an important role to play in enforcing their own rules to prevent the spread of such misinformation.

"This is very alarming. And so, we're going to do what we can to deal with this issue," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said at a news briefing, adding that Congress should take legislative action on the issue.

Her ardent fanbase of "Swifties" quickly mobilised, launching a counteroffensive on the platform

formerly known as Twitter and a #ProtectTaylorSwift hashtag to flood it with more positive images of the pop star. Some said they were reporting accounts that were sharing the deepfakes.

The deepfake-detecting group Reality Defender said it tracked a deluge of non-consensual pornographic material depicting Swift, particularly on X. Some images also made their way to Meta-owned Facebook and other social media platforms.

The researchers found at least a couple of dozen unique AI-generated images. The most widely shared were football-related, showing a painted or bloodied Swift that objectified her and in some cases inflicted violent harm on her deepfake persona.

Researchers have said the number of explicit deepfakes has grown in the past few years, as the technology used to produce such images has become more accessible and easier to use. In 2019, a report released by the AI firm DeepTrace



Taylor Swift, victim of the deepfake porn scourge.

Labs showed these images were overwhelmingly weaponised against women. Most of the victims, it said, were Hollywood actors and South Korean K-pop singers.

Brittany Spanos, a senior writer at *Rolling Stone* who teaches a course on Swift at New York University, says Swift's fans are

quick to mobilise in support of their artist, especially those who take their fandom very seriously and in situations of wrongdoing.

"This could be a huge deal if she really does pursue it to court," she said.

Spanos says the deep fake pornography issue aligns with others Swift has had in the past, pointing to her 2017 lawsuit against a radio station DJ who allegedly groped her; jurors awarded Swift \$US1 in damages, a sum her attorney, Douglas Baldrige, called "a single symbolic dollar, the value of which is immeasurable to all women in this situation" in the midst of the #MeToo movement.

When reached for comment on the fake images of Swift, X directed to a post from its safety account that said the company strictly prohibits the sharing of non-consensual nude images on its platform. The company has also sharply cut back its content-moderation teams since Elon Musk took over the platform in 2022.

"Our teams are actively removing all identified images and taking appropriate actions against the accounts responsible for posting them," the company wrote in the X post early. "We're closely monitoring the situation to ensure that any further violations are immediately addressed, and the content is removed."

Meanwhile, Meta said in a statement that it strongly condemns "the content that has appeared across different internet services" and has worked to remove it.

"We continue to monitor our platforms for this violating content and will take appropriate action as needed," the company said.

A representative for Swift didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Asked about the Swift deepfakes on *NBC Nightly News*, Microsoft chief executive Satya Nadella told host Lester Holt in an interview that there's a lot still to be done in setting AI safeguards and "it behooves us to move fast on this." AP

Trying to put the pizzazz back into shiraz

Katie Spain National drinks editor

When Inkwell Wines owners Dudley Brown and Dr Irina Santiago-Brown look out at their lovingly tended shiraz vines in South Australia's McLaren Vale wine region, they see a challenge – and they're not alone.

Lately, there has been much commentary in the wine industry regarding over-supply and dwindling consumer demand for classic expressions of the famous grape variety. Shiraz has long been associated with big, rich, full-bodied wines, but its image has become a little fusty.

"As a country, we can't walk away from shiraz," Brown says. "It tends to equal reliability, loyalty and love ... but no purchases."

The doggedly determined couple have long been on a mission to change the way we grow grapes and make wine in Australia. The launch of their Hacking the Future of Shiraz @ Inkwell project is a step in that direction.

The winemaking competition will provide five Australian-based winemakers with a tonne of 2024 shiraz fruit each with which to make a wine of their choice. The aim is to rethink the styles in which shiraz is made and attract a new wave of consumers to the variety.

"This is not about making the best traditional shiraz for a wine show. It's about being different," Brown says. "We're trying to get to young winemakers and start creating demand and encourage people to change. Let's give them a crack. We've got fruit, we've got time ... let's share it."

The launch of the competition coincides with the announcement that Inkwell Wines is the first Australian vineyard to achieve ROC (Regenerative Organic Certified) status, placing it at the forefront of global ethical and sustainable



Looking for something new for shiraz: Inkwell Wines owners Dudley Brown and Dr Irina Santiago-Brown. Photo: Ben McMahon

agricultural practices. "This is the ultimate sustainability move," says Brazilian-born Santiago-Brown. "Of course, we could sell that wine over time, but it's become harder and harder. Shiraz has been associated with a certain style. It's a bit like people saying they hate chardonnay. Can we change that? That's what this is about. Change and sustainability."

Respected wine writer Mike Bennie is convener of judges for the

competition, and will lead a global team of industry experts through the judging.

"We're trying to evolve Australian wine, particularly iconic Australian wine," Bennie says. "McLaren Vale and shiraz has obviously been a great success story for a very long time, but anecdotally, we're hearing about a lack of appreciation of the variety from that region.

"Perhaps a new paradigm can be

created in which McLaren Vale shiraz can shine.

"The hope is that the diverse array of winemakers selected through this application process will be able to assist in a kind of 'cultural audit' of McLaren Vale. The idea being that they have creative freedom and autonomy to bring new ideas to the table."

Bennie hopes to see a diversity of winemakers. "People who are creative in their thinking. I hope we

are inundated with entries." The ultimate goal is lighter, fresher, vibrant styles.

"More within the cultural vernacular of Australians drinking chilled reds, drinking outdoors, drinking with seafood and the South-East Asian and Mediterranean cuisines which form the basis of diet and lifestyle here," Bennie says.

Entries, via the Inkwell website, close on Friday, February 2.