# AI-generated action figure memes take social media by storm amid copyright and privacy concerns



A new trend has taken social media by storm, featuring digitally created images of well-known personalities packaged as collectible action figures. These figures, although entirely virtual, are designed to look like traditional plastic toys displayed in packaging alongside themed props that evoke aspects of the individuals' public personas. This meme style has rapidly proliferated across platforms including TikTok and LinkedIn, captivating users with its blend of nostalgia and personalised creativity.

Notable examples include football icon Lionel Messi depicted with a miniature ball and trophies, and former US President Donald Trump portrayed with a MAGA hat and a "tariffs" sign. Some celebrities have embraced the trend by creating their own “toy” versions. Actor Brooke Shields shared an image featuring a doll likeness of herself accompanied by a miniature dog and needlepoint kit, showcasing this on her Instagram account followed by 2.5 million users. Meanwhile, many everyday internet users have also crafted similar images by uploading their likenesses into an AI image generator developed by OpenAI’s ChatGPT.

While the images appear strikingly realistic, they are entirely artificial creations rendered by the AI tool’s new image generation capabilities. This feature is currently free to use but requires registration on the associated imaging platform, contributing to OpenAI’s dominance in consumer artificial intelligence applications. OpenAI has been noted for its ability to attract a massive influx of users, as evidenced by the company’s CEO Sam Altman’s claim of gaining one million new users "in the last hour" after the image generation service became freely accessible.

Experts have analysed the reasons behind the meme's viral popularity. Anais Loubere, founder of the social media agency Digital Pipelettes, attributes the boom to a "technological breakthrough" in AI rendering, which allows highly personalised content generation. Similarly, Ahlem Abidi-Barthe, an online marketing professor, told AFP that the appeal lies in the personalised nature of such creations, suggesting: "That tickles the egos of consumers." Both the current action figure meme and earlier AI-generated artwork inspired by Studio Ghibli’s animation style are believed to resonate strongly due to their interplay with childhood nostalgia—a factor contributing to their rapid spread online.

Despite the fun and creativity, the AI-driven trend also raises complex issues. The rapid production and use of copyrighted material have provoked protests from human artists, who highlight that AI companies often use copyrighted works without payment or proper credit. For example, OpenAI’s models have incorporated content from studios such as Ghibli without formal licensing agreements. The company is among several generative AI providers currently facing copyright infringement lawsuits in the United States, though no rulings have yet been issued. OpenAI maintains that it complies with existing laws but has declined to fully disclose the scope of works included in its training datasets.

In addition to intellectual property concerns, environmental impact is an emerging topic. French astronaut Thomas Pesquet has pointed out the substantial energy requirements of AI operations. The International Energy Agency estimates that each text prompt processed by ChatGPT consumes approximately 2.9 watt-hours, which is around ten times more than a typical Google search, with image generation demanding even greater power.

Potential risks extend to user privacy as well. By uploading personal images or selfies for AI processing, individuals may unknowingly provide sensitive biometric data to companies whose long-term intentions are not transparent. Joe Davies, a technology expert at British SEO firm Fatjoe, warned, "When people upload selfies or prompts to these AI generators, they're essentially handing over personal data to companies with unclear intentions. Your image is data, and data has value."

Despite its current prominence, the AI action figure trend is expected to be short-lived. Anais Loubere predicts a rapid decline once the market becomes saturated, noting, "These trends aren't meant to last. By the time you see the 50th AI action figure on LinkedIn or Insta, you know it's saturated."

This trend exemplifies the intersection of emerging AI technology with popular culture and social media practices, highlighting both the creative possibilities and the broader implications of widespread AI adoption.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250419-from-messi-to-trump-ai-action-figures-are-the-rage> - This source corroborates the trend of AI-generated action figures of celebrities like Lionel Messi and Donald Trump, showing images of digitally created toy figures with iconic props like Messi's trophies and Trump's MAGA hat.
* <https://www.espn.com/soccer/story/_/id/44616901/lionel-messi-cristiano-ronaldo-more-ai-generated-action-figures-amid-chatgpt-social-trend> - This article details the AI-generated action figure trend on social media, including the personalization aspect where users generate figures with props reflecting personalities, confirming the popularity of Messi and other sports stars in this meme form.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zk-rap2YF0k> - A video demonstration of Lionel Messi rendered as a collectible action figure toy created with AI image generation technology, illustrating the realistic and detailed characteristics described in the article.
* <https://thepopinsider.com/products/limited-edition-lionel-messi-action-figurine/> - This commercial listing supports the concept of Lionel Messi action figures as a collectible item, showing how physical and digital figurines tie into fans’ enthusiasm, which aligns with the article's mention of memorabilia and the blending of traditional and AI imagery.
* <https://www.theverge.com/2025/4/18/ai-image-generation-openai-chatgpt-users-surge> - This piece confirms OpenAI's AI image generation tools are free with registration and have rapidly attracted millions of users, supporting the article's claim about OpenAI's dominance in consumer AI applications and CEO Sam Altman's statement on user growth.