

NEWS

Activist Group Fools Journalists With AI Hoax Criticizing Toyota's Anti-EV Views

Activist acting group The Yes Men set up the fake Toyota press conference.

By **Steve DaSilva** Published Friday 3:10PM | Comments (23)



Gif: [The Yes Men on YouTube](#)

Some members of the automotive press were bamboozled by a Toyota press release and accompanying conference last week. The story was that, in order to promote the company's electrified offerings, Toyota had released an AI companion named Electra — an AI that immediately went off the rails and began talking about Toyota's hesitancy to embrace electric vehicles.

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The press release, of course, was fake. The conference featured real media members watching as actors played out a script. The AI assistant was a ruse, but the message it delivered was very real: No matter how much Toyota uses the term “electrified,” its hybrids still burn gas. But who, if not Toyota, was delivering that message?

That answer came this past weekend, when actors and activists [The Yes Men](#) posted a full video of the Toyota conference to their YouTube channel. The group later added the project as [a case study on its website](#), confirming that it was their own creation.

Other groups have criticized Toyota’s “electrified” branding as misleading, from [EV owners groups](#) to the [Federal Trade Commission](#). Yet, when I reached out to The Yes Men, the group claimed that no other parties were involved in this effort:

I developed the idea for this project after friends told me about the “electrified diversified” campaign Toyota was running. It felt like such a sick “newspeaky” ad strategy, to literally redefine words, it was just ripe for a brandalism takedown.

I asked about the social shares as well — posts that sprang up on [Twitter](#) and [Reddit](#) from user PersianCowboy — and was told that they were completely organic spread. The user behind the account, Hooman Hedayati, was referred to as “a friend of a friend who works in labor organizing ... Hooman posted a vid of it, not coordinated by us.”

It seems The Yes Men pulled off their stunt successfully, convincing folks both in and out of the media that this AI was truly built by Toyota. Perhaps some of that believability comes from the stunt’s messaging — on some level, we all know there’s a real gap between “electrified” and “electric.”

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