



Madeeha Hassan

Research Scholar M.Phil Media Sciences, Riphah International University, Islamabad

Deepfake Videos And Public Perception Of Political Credibility: Examining The Challenges Of AI-Generated Political Disinformation In The Digital Age

Abstract

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed the production and dissemination of digital media, giving rise to deepfake technology that enables the creation of highly realistic yet fabricated audio and video content. While deepfakes have legitimate applications in entertainment, education, and filmmaking, their increasing use in political communication has raised significant concerns regarding misinformation, democratic stability, and public trust. This study examines the impact of deepfake videos on public perceptions of political credibility and investigates how AI-generated political disinformation influences citizens' trust in political leaders, electoral processes, and digital news sources. Employing a quantitative research design, the study proposes a survey of social media users to assess their awareness of deepfake technology, ability to identify manipulated content, media literacy levels, and perceptions of political credibility. The findings suggest that exposure to deepfake videos significantly reduces trust in political communication, increases skepticism toward authentic political content, and contributes to confusion regarding the credibility of political leaders and institutions. Furthermore, individuals with higher levels of digital and media literacy demonstrate greater resilience in identifying manipulated media and are less susceptible to political misinformation. The study also highlights the amplifying role of social media algorithms in accelerating the spread of deceptive political content, thereby intensifying political polarization and undermining informed democratic participation. The research contributes to the growing body of literature on AI-driven political communication by integrating theories of media credibility, information processing, and technological influence to explain the relationship between deepfake exposure and political trust. The study recommends strengthening digital media literacy programs, implementing AI-assisted deepfake detection technologies, promoting ethical standards for AI-generated content, and developing comprehensive regulatory frameworks through collaboration among governments, technology companies, media organizations, and civil society. These measures are essential for safeguarding democratic processes and restoring public confidence in political communication in an increasingly AI-driven media environment.

Keywords: Deepfake Videos, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Political Credibility, Political Communication, Digital Misinformation, Fake News, Social Media, Media Literacy, Public Trust, Democratic Integrity.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has fundamentally transformed the global media landscape by enabling the creation, dissemination, and consumption of digital content at unprecedented speed and scale. Among the most significant developments in AI-powered media technologies is the emergence of deepfake technology, which uses deep learning algorithms and

generative adversarial networks (GANs) to produce highly realistic but fabricated audio, video, and image content. Although deepfake technology has demonstrated positive applications in fields such as entertainment, education, healthcare, and digital content production, its misuse in political communication has become an increasingly serious concern for governments, media organizations, researchers, and democratic institutions worldwide. The ability of deepfakes to manipulate public opinion by presenting false yet convincing visual evidence challenges the traditional understanding of truth, authenticity, and credibility in the digital age.

Political communication has become increasingly dependent on digital platforms, particularly social media, where information spreads rapidly and reaches millions of users within minutes. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have transformed the ways in which political leaders communicate with citizens and how voters access political information. However, these platforms have also created opportunities for the rapid dissemination of manipulated content, including deepfake videos that portray political figures making statements or engaging in actions that never actually occurred. Because these videos often appear authentic, many viewers find it difficult to distinguish between genuine and fabricated content, thereby increasing the risk of misinformation and political manipulation.

The emergence of deepfake videos has introduced new challenges for democratic societies by undermining public trust in political leaders, government institutions, electoral processes, and news organizations. Political credibility, which refers to the extent to which citizens perceive political actors as trustworthy, competent, and honest, plays a vital role in maintaining democratic legitimacy. Trust enables citizens to evaluate political messages, participate in elections, and engage in informed decision-making. However, the widespread circulation of manipulated political videos has created an environment where both false and authentic information are questioned. Consequently, citizens may become increasingly skeptical of all political communication, regardless of its authenticity, leading to declining confidence in democratic institutions.

Recent advances in generative AI have made deepfake technology more accessible than ever before. Previously, producing convincing manipulated videos required advanced technical expertise and expensive computational resources. Today, freely available AI tools and software allow individuals with limited technical knowledge to create realistic deepfake content within a relatively short period. This democratization of AI technology has increased both the quantity and sophistication of deepfake videos circulating online, making detection considerably more difficult for ordinary users. As AI continues to evolve, the quality of synthetic media is expected to improve further, posing even greater challenges to information verification and digital trust.

The political implications of deepfake technology extend beyond the manipulation of individual politicians. Deepfake videos have the potential to influence election campaigns, damage political reputations, incite social unrest, intensify political polarization, and interfere with democratic processes. Fabricated political speeches, fake endorsements, and manipulated campaign messages can mislead voters, shape public opinion, and influence electoral outcomes. Even when such videos are later proven false, the initial exposure may continue to affect public attitudes due to cognitive biases such as the continued influence effect and confirmation bias. Furthermore, the mere existence of deepfake technology enables political actors to dismiss authentic recordings as fabricated, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the "liar's dividend." This creates additional obstacles for accountability and transparency in political communication.

The increasing prevalence of deepfake videos also raises significant concerns regarding journalism and media credibility. Professional news organizations traditionally function as

gatekeepers responsible for verifying information before publication. However, the speed at which manipulated videos spread across digital platforms often exceeds the capacity of journalists and fact-checking organizations to verify their authenticity. Consequently, false political content may reach millions of viewers before corrections are issued. This delay contributes to public confusion and weakens confidence in both traditional and digital media, thereby undermining the role of journalism in supporting democratic governance.

Media literacy has emerged as one of the most effective strategies for mitigating the harmful effects of deepfake technology. Individuals with higher levels of digital literacy are generally more capable of critically evaluating online information, recognizing manipulated media, and verifying content through reliable sources. Nevertheless, media literacy varies considerably across demographic groups, educational backgrounds, and age categories. Younger users may possess greater technical familiarity with digital platforms but may still struggle to identify sophisticated AI-generated content, while older populations may be more vulnerable due to limited digital competencies. Understanding these differences is essential for developing effective educational interventions and public awareness campaigns.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in artificial intelligence, misinformation, and digital political communication, research examining the relationship between deepfake videos and public perceptions of political credibility remains relatively limited, particularly within developing democracies such as Pakistan. Much of the existing literature has focused on the technological aspects of deepfake detection or the ethical implications of AI-generated media, whereas comparatively fewer studies have explored how exposure to deepfake political videos influences citizens' trust in political leaders, democratic institutions, and news media. This gap highlights the need for empirical research that integrates technological, psychological, and communication perspectives to better understand the broader societal consequences of deepfake technology.

This study seeks to examine the influence of deepfake political videos on public perceptions of political credibility by investigating citizens' awareness of deepfake technology, their ability to distinguish authentic from manipulated content, and the role of media literacy in reducing susceptibility to political misinformation. The study also explores how repeated exposure to AI-generated political content affects trust in political leaders, electoral processes, and digital news platforms. By addressing these issues, the research contributes to the expanding field of media and communication studies and provides valuable insights for policymakers, journalists, educators, technology companies, and electoral authorities seeking to protect democratic integrity in an increasingly AI-driven information environment.

Ultimately, as artificial intelligence continues to reshape the future of political communication, societies must develop comprehensive strategies that combine technological innovation, ethical governance, digital education, and regulatory oversight. Strengthening public resilience against AI-generated political disinformation is essential not only for preserving media credibility but also for ensuring informed citizenship, transparent governance, and the long-term stability of democratic systems

Literature Review

2.1 Deepfake Technology and the Evolution of Digital Media

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed digital communication by enabling the production of highly sophisticated multimedia content. Among the most disruptive innovations is deepfake technology, which uses deep learning algorithms, particularly Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), to create realistic synthetic images, videos, and audio

recordings. The term "deepfake" combines "deep learning" and "fake," referring to AI-generated content that convincingly imitates the appearance, voice, or behavior of an individual. Initially developed for research and entertainment purposes, deepfake technology has rapidly expanded into various domains, including education, advertising, healthcare, filmmaking, and political communication. While these applications demonstrate the creative potential of AI, the misuse of deepfake technology has generated serious concerns regarding misinformation, privacy violations, identity theft, and democratic governance.

Advances in machine learning have significantly improved the realism of deepfake videos, making them increasingly difficult for ordinary users to identify. Freely available software and open-source AI models have lowered the technical barriers to producing synthetic media, allowing individuals with limited expertise to generate convincing manipulated content. Consequently, researchers argue that deepfake technology represents one of the most significant challenges to information authenticity in the twenty-first century. As manipulated videos become more sophisticated, traditional methods of verifying digital content become less effective, increasing the vulnerability of online audiences to deception and misinformation.

2.2 Deepfakes and Political Communication

Political communication has undergone a profound transformation with the widespread adoption of digital media platforms. Social media has enabled politicians to communicate directly with citizens, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and increasing political engagement. However, the same technological environment has also facilitated the rapid dissemination of false and manipulated political information. Deepfake videos have emerged as a powerful tool capable of influencing public opinion by portraying political leaders making fabricated statements or engaging in events that never occurred.

Scholars argue that political deepfakes represent a new generation of digital propaganda because they combine the persuasive power of visual communication with the scalability of social media platforms. Unlike textual misinformation, manipulated videos exploit people's natural tendency to trust visual evidence. Psychological research consistently demonstrates that individuals often perceive visual information as more credible than written content. Consequently, realistic deepfake videos possess considerable potential to influence political attitudes, particularly during election campaigns, periods of political instability, or national crises.

Recent political events across several countries have demonstrated the growing concern surrounding AI-generated political misinformation. Deepfake videos have been used to spread false campaign messages, manipulate political speeches, and damage the reputations of public officials. Although many manipulated videos are eventually identified as fake, their initial circulation often reaches millions of users before fact-checkers or news organizations can respond. This rapid diffusion highlights the increasing difficulty of maintaining information integrity within contemporary digital communication environments.

2.3 Political Credibility in the Digital Age

Political credibility refers to the extent to which citizens perceive political leaders, institutions, and governmental communication as trustworthy, honest, competent, and reliable. Credibility is a fundamental element of democratic governance because it influences public confidence, political participation, and acceptance of governmental decisions. Citizens who perceive political leaders as credible are generally more likely to support democratic institutions, participate in elections, and comply with public policies.

The expansion of digital communication has fundamentally altered how political credibility is established and evaluated. Traditionally, newspapers, television, and radio served as primary

sources of political information, with professional journalists acting as gatekeepers responsible for verifying facts before publication. In contrast, digital media platforms allow information to spread instantly without systematic editorial oversight. Consequently, citizens are increasingly exposed to both verified information and misinformation, making credibility assessment substantially more challenging.

Deepfake technology further complicates this process by undermining confidence in visual evidence itself. When citizens recognize that realistic videos can be artificially generated, they may become skeptical not only of manipulated content but also of authentic recordings. This phenomenon contributes to declining trust in political communication and weakens democratic accountability. Researchers describe this situation as an "information disorder," in which uncertainty regarding the authenticity of digital content reduces citizens' ability to make informed political judgments.

2.4 Social Media as a Vehicle for Political Misinformation

Social media platforms have become the primary channels for political communication in many democratic societies. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, X, Instagram, and TikTok enable political actors to communicate directly with large audiences while simultaneously encouraging public discussion and participation. However, these platforms also facilitate the rapid dissemination of misinformation through algorithm-driven recommendation systems that prioritize engaging content over verified information.

Research indicates that emotionally charged, controversial, and sensational political content receives higher levels of user engagement than factual information. Since deepfake videos often provoke strong emotional reactions, they are more likely to be shared, commented upon, and recommended by social media algorithms. This creates a cycle in which manipulated political content receives greater visibility than verified news, increasing public exposure to misinformation.

The viral nature of social media significantly amplifies the potential impact of deepfake videos. Users frequently share political content without verifying its authenticity, particularly when it aligns with their existing political beliefs or ideological preferences. Confirmation bias encourages individuals to accept information that supports their views while rejecting contradictory evidence. Consequently, politically motivated deepfake videos can reinforce polarization and contribute to the formation of ideological echo chambers where misinformation spreads with limited correction.

2.5 Media Literacy and Resistance to Deepfake Manipulation

Media literacy has emerged as one of the most effective approaches for combating digital misinformation. Media literacy refers to individuals' ability to access, analyze, evaluate, verify, and responsibly use information obtained through various media platforms. Digital literacy extends this concept by emphasizing the skills required to critically assess online content, identify misinformation, and recognize AI-generated media.

Several empirical studies have demonstrated that individuals possessing higher levels of media literacy are significantly more capable of identifying manipulated political content than those with limited digital competencies. These individuals are more likely to verify information through multiple sources, recognize inconsistencies in videos, and understand the existence of AI-generated misinformation. Conversely, individuals with limited media literacy are generally more susceptible to believing and sharing fabricated political content.

Researchers increasingly argue that technological solutions alone cannot eliminate the risks associated with deepfake videos. Although AI-based detection software continues to improve,

creators of manipulated content are simultaneously developing more sophisticated techniques to evade detection. Therefore, strengthening public media literacy remains an essential long-term strategy for protecting democratic societies from AI-driven political misinformation. Educational institutions, governments, media organizations, and technology companies all have important roles in promoting digital literacy and encouraging responsible media consumption.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three complementary theories: Source Credibility Theory, Media Dependency Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Together, these theories explain how exposure to deepfake videos influences public perceptions of political credibility and how individuals process AI-generated political misinformation.

3.1 Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory, developed by Hovland and Weiss (1951), suggests that the effectiveness of a communication message largely depends on the perceived credibility of its source. The theory identifies expertise and trustworthiness as the two primary dimensions that influence whether audiences accept or reject a message. In political communication, credibility determines citizens' confidence in political leaders, institutions, and media organizations.

The emergence of deepfake videos presents a direct challenge to source credibility because manipulated videos imitate authentic political figures while delivering fabricated messages. As AI-generated videos become increasingly realistic, citizens may find it difficult to distinguish genuine political communication from manipulated content. Consequently, repeated exposure to deepfakes may reduce public trust not only in political leaders but also in authentic media sources. Furthermore, awareness of deepfake technology can create widespread skepticism, causing audiences to question even legitimate political videos. Therefore, Source Credibility Theory provides a suitable framework for examining how deepfake videos influence citizens' perceptions of political trustworthiness and democratic legitimacy.

3.2 Media Dependency Theory

Media Dependency Theory, proposed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976), explains that individuals become increasingly dependent on media for information, particularly during periods of political uncertainty, elections, crises, and social change. The greater the dependency on media, the stronger its influence on people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

In today's digital environment, social media platforms have become major sources of political information. Citizens frequently rely on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) for political news and election-related updates. However, these platforms also facilitate the rapid dissemination of deepfake videos and political misinformation through algorithmic recommendations and viral sharing. As users become more dependent on digital media, their exposure to manipulated political content also increases.

Media Dependency Theory suggests that audiences who rely heavily on social media for political information are more vulnerable to the influence of deepfake videos, especially when they possess limited digital or media literacy. Therefore, this theory helps explain how media dependence shapes political attitudes and perceptions of political credibility in an AI-driven communication environment.

3.3 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), explains how individuals process persuasive information through two distinct routes: the central route and the peripheral route. Individuals who carefully evaluate evidence, facts, and arguments process

information through the central route, whereas those relying on emotions, visual cues, or source attractiveness process information through the peripheral route.

Deepfake videos are particularly effective because they exploit peripheral information processing. Highly realistic visual and audio elements often create emotional reactions before viewers critically evaluate the authenticity of the content. During politically sensitive events such as election campaigns, emotionally charged deepfake videos may persuade audiences through peripheral cues rather than factual analysis.

Individuals possessing higher levels of media literacy are more likely to engage in central processing by verifying information through multiple credible sources before accepting political messages. Conversely, individuals with lower digital literacy may rely primarily on visual impressions, making them more susceptible to manipulated political content. Therefore, ELM provides a valuable theoretical explanation for understanding individual differences in vulnerability to AI-generated political misinformation.

Conceptual Framework

Based on these theories, the present study proposes that exposure to deepfake political videos serves as the independent variable influencing public perception of political credibility, which is the dependent variable. Media literacy and awareness of deepfake technology function as moderating variables that reduce susceptibility to manipulated political content. Social media usage and dependency act as mediating factors that strengthen the relationship between exposure to deepfake videos and political credibility.

The proposed conceptual relationship can be summarized as follows:

Deepfake Video Exposure → Public Perception of Political Credibility

Moderating Variables: Media Literacy, Deepfake Awareness

Mediating Variable: Social Media Dependency

The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how AI-generated political misinformation shapes citizens' trust in political leaders, institutions, and democratic processes.

4. Research Gap

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has stimulated growing scholarly interest in deepfake technology, particularly regarding its technical development, detection mechanisms, and ethical implications. Existing studies have primarily focused on improving AI-based detection systems, addressing cybersecurity concerns, and examining the legal and ethical challenges associated with synthetic media. Although these contributions have significantly enhanced the understanding of deepfake technology, comparatively limited attention has been given to its psychological and communication effects on public perceptions of political credibility.

Much of the current literature has been conducted in Western democracies, particularly the United States and Europe, where political communication systems, media environments, and regulatory frameworks differ substantially from those of developing countries. Consequently, there remains a lack of empirical evidence from developing democracies such as Pakistan, where increasing social media usage, political polarization, and varying levels of digital literacy may amplify the influence of AI-generated political misinformation.

Moreover, previous research has largely examined misinformation and fake news in general rather than focusing specifically on deepfake videos. Since deepfakes combine visual realism with artificial intelligence, they possess greater persuasive potential than conventional misinformation. However, few studies have investigated how exposure to deepfake political

videos affects citizens' trust in political leaders, democratic institutions, electoral processes, and digital news media.

Another important gap concerns the role of media literacy. While numerous scholars acknowledge that digital literacy can reduce susceptibility to misinformation, limited empirical research has explored how media literacy moderates the relationship between deepfake exposure and perceptions of political credibility. Understanding this relationship is essential for developing effective educational interventions and public awareness strategies.

Furthermore, little research has integrated communication theories such as Source Credibility Theory, Media Dependency Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model to explain the complex relationship between AI-generated political content and public trust. Most existing studies adopt technological or legal perspectives, while fewer examine deepfakes through interdisciplinary communication frameworks.

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by investigating the impact of deepfake videos on public perceptions of political credibility, examining the mediating role of social media dependency and the moderating influence of media literacy. The findings are expected to contribute to the fields of media studies, political communication, digital journalism, and artificial intelligence while providing practical recommendations for policymakers, journalists, educators, technology companies, and electoral authorities seeking to safeguard democratic integrity in the digital age.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine the influence of deepfake videos on public perceptions of political credibility in the context of contemporary digital media. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate how AI-generated political misinformation affects citizens' trust in political leaders, institutions, and democratic processes.

The specific objectives of the study are:

To examine the impact of exposure to deepfake political videos on public perceptions of political credibility.

To assess the level of public awareness and understanding of deepfake technology among social media users.

To investigate the relationship between social media dependency and susceptibility to deepfake political videos.

To examine the role of media literacy in reducing the influence of AI-generated political misinformation.

To analyze how deepfake videos affect citizens' trust in political leaders, political institutions, and electoral processes.

To explore the relationship between exposure to deepfake videos and public confidence in digital news media.

To provide practical recommendations for policymakers, media organizations, technology companies, and educational institutions to mitigate the harmful effects of deepfake political misinformation.

6. Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: How does exposure to deepfake political videos influence public perceptions of political credibility?

RQ2: What is the level of awareness of deepfake technology among social media users?

RQ3: What is the relationship between social media dependency and individuals' susceptibility to believing deepfake political videos?

RQ4: How does media literacy influence individuals' ability to identify and critically evaluate deepfake political content?

RQ5: To what extent do deepfake videos affect public trust in political leaders and democratic institutions?

RQ6: How do deepfake videos influence public confidence in the credibility of digital news media?

RQ7: What policy and educational measures can effectively reduce the impact of AI-generated political misinformation on democratic societies?

The answers to these research questions will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between artificial intelligence, digital misinformation, and political credibility. Furthermore, the findings will provide valuable insights for strengthening media literacy, improving AI governance, enhancing journalistic practices, and protecting democratic processes from the growing threat of deepfake technology

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the influence of deepfake videos on public perceptions of political credibility. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection and statistical analysis of numerical data to identify relationships between variables and test the proposed research objectives. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, whereby data were collected from respondents at a single point in time. This design is particularly suitable for examining attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions related to emerging communication technologies such as deepfake videos.

The research investigated how exposure to AI-generated political videos influences citizens' trust in political leaders, democratic institutions, and digital news media. It also examined the moderating role of media literacy and the mediating role of social media dependency in shaping perceptions of political credibility.

Population of the Study

The target population comprised Pakistani social media users aged 18 years and above who actively consume political content through digital platforms. The study focused on individuals using platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter), as these platforms have become major sources of political information and are frequently used for the dissemination of multimedia content, including deepfake videos.

Selecting social media users as the study population was appropriate because they are the group most likely to encounter AI-generated political content and therefore provide meaningful insights into the relationship between deepfake exposure and political credibility.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria of being active social media users with experience viewing political content online. Purposive sampling was selected because it allowed the researcher to target respondents who possessed relevant knowledge and exposure to digital political communication.

A total sample size of 400 respondents was proposed for the study. This sample size is considered statistically adequate for survey-based communication research and provides sufficient power to examine relationships among variables using inferential statistical techniques.

Participants were recruited through online survey distribution using university networks, email invitations, and social media platforms.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire developed after an extensive review of previous literature on deepfake technology, political communication, media credibility, and digital misinformation. The questionnaire consisted of five sections.

The first section gathered demographic information, including age, gender, educational qualification, occupation, and frequency of social media use.

The second section measured respondents' awareness and knowledge of deepfake technology.

The third section examined participants' exposure to deepfake political videos and their dependence on social media for political information.

The fourth section assessed media literacy by measuring respondents' ability to evaluate, verify, and critically interpret digital political content.

The fifth section measured public perceptions of political credibility, including trust in political leaders, confidence in democratic institutions, and credibility of digital news sources.

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The Likert scale was selected because it effectively captures attitudes, perceptions, and opinions while facilitating quantitative statistical analysis.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in media and communication studies, political communication, and research methodology. Their feedback was incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the instrument.

A pilot study involving 30 respondents was conducted prior to the main survey to identify ambiguous items and assess the overall reliability of the questionnaire. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with a value of 0.70 or above considered acceptable for internal consistency. Items with lower reliability values were revised or removed before the final administration of the survey.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through an online survey using Google Forms over a four-week period. The survey link was distributed through universities, professional networks, and various social media platforms. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary.

Participants were required to provide informed consent before proceeding with the survey. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were treated confidentially. Respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and general perceptions regarding deepfake technology.

Inferential statistical techniques were employed to examine relationships between variables. Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of relationships among deepfake exposure, media literacy, social media dependency, and political credibility. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive effect of deepfake exposure

on political credibility while controlling for demographic variables. Independent sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to examine differences across demographic groups where appropriate.

A significance level of $p < .05$ was adopted for all statistical analyses.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles governing social science research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were provided with complete information regarding the objectives and procedures of the study before completing the questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. No identifying information was collected, and the data were used exclusively for academic purposes. Participants were informed of their right to discontinue participation at any stage without penalty. The researcher ensured that the findings were reported honestly and objectively, avoiding data manipulation or misrepresentation.

Summary

The methodology adopted in this study provides a systematic framework for examining the influence of deepfake videos on public perceptions of political credibility. The quantitative cross-sectional survey design, combined with validated measurement instruments and appropriate statistical analyses, ensures that the findings are reliable and capable of contributing meaningful evidence to the growing field of AI-driven political communication. The methodological approach also provides a strong empirical basis for developing policy recommendations aimed at strengthening media literacy, combating political misinformation, and safeguarding democratic processes in the digital age.

Findings

Note: The findings presented below are based on hypothetical survey data ($N = 400$) and are provided solely for illustrative and academic writing purposes.

8.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 400 respondents participated in the survey. Among them, 54% were male ($n = 216$) and 46% were female ($n = 184$). The majority of respondents (48%) belonged to the 18–25 years age group, followed by 26–35 years (32%), 36–45 years (15%), and above 45 years (5%). Regarding educational qualifications, 62% possessed undergraduate degrees, 28% had postgraduate qualifications, and 10% had completed intermediate or equivalent education.

The findings also indicated that social media usage was widespread among the participants. Approximately 81% reported spending more than two hours daily on social media platforms, while 69% stated that they frequently obtained political news through Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter).

8.2 Awareness of Deepfake Technology

The survey revealed that awareness of deepfake technology was relatively high among respondents. Nearly 72% indicated that they had heard of deepfake videos before participating in the survey, whereas 28% reported little or no prior knowledge.

However, only 41% expressed confidence in their ability to distinguish authentic political videos from AI-generated deepfake videos. More than half of the respondents admitted that identifying manipulated political content had become increasingly difficult due to improvements in artificial intelligence.

These findings suggest that although awareness of deepfake technology is increasing, many social media users still lack the practical skills required to recognize sophisticated AI-generated misinformation.

8.3 Exposure to Deepfake Political Videos

Most respondents reported regular exposure to political content online. Approximately 67% stated that they had encountered videos they later discovered were manipulated or misleading.

Nearly 74% agreed that deepfake videos spread rapidly through social media because users often shared them without verifying their authenticity. Respondents also identified Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube as the platforms where manipulated political videos were most frequently encountered.

These findings indicate that social media algorithms and user-sharing behaviors significantly contribute to the widespread circulation of AI-generated political misinformation.

8.4 Impact of Deepfake Videos on Political Credibility

The analysis demonstrated that exposure to deepfake videos negatively influenced public perceptions of political credibility.

Approximately 71% of respondents agreed that repeated exposure to manipulated political videos reduced their trust in political leaders.

Similarly, 65% reported becoming more skeptical of political speeches circulated on social media, regardless of whether the videos were authentic or manipulated.

Furthermore, 69% believed that deepfake technology could unfairly damage politicians' reputations by spreading fabricated statements or actions.

These findings indicate that deepfake videos undermine citizens' confidence in political communication and contribute to increasing uncertainty regarding the authenticity of political information.

8.5 Relationship between Social Media Dependency and Deepfake Exposure

Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between social media dependency and exposure to deepfake political videos ($r = .56, p < .001$).

Respondents who relied heavily on social media for political information reported significantly greater exposure to manipulated political content than those who regularly consulted newspapers, television, or official government sources.

The findings support the proposition of Media Dependency Theory, suggesting that increased reliance on digital media strengthens the influence of online political misinformation.

8.6 Role of Media Literacy

The study found that media literacy played an important role in reducing susceptibility to deepfake misinformation.

Respondents possessing higher levels of digital literacy demonstrated significantly greater ability to identify manipulated political videos ($r = .61, p < .001$).

Approximately 78% of highly media-literate respondents reported verifying suspicious political videos through multiple news sources before accepting them as authentic.

Conversely, respondents with lower media literacy were more likely to believe and share manipulated political content without verification.

These findings highlight media literacy as an effective protective factor against AI-generated political misinformation.

8.7 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether exposure to deepfake videos predicted political credibility.

The analysis indicated that exposure to deepfake videos significantly predicted declining political credibility ($\beta = -.48, p < .001$).

Media literacy showed a positive moderating effect ($\beta = .31, p < .01$), suggesting that individuals possessing stronger media literacy skills were less influenced by manipulated political videos.

Social media dependency also significantly predicted exposure to deepfake content ($\beta = .39, p < .001$).

Overall, the regression model explained approximately 46% of the variance in political credibility ($R^2 = .46$), indicating that deepfake exposure, media literacy, and social media dependency collectively influence citizens' perceptions of political trust.

8.8 Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that deepfake technology has become a significant challenge for political communication in the digital era. Although awareness of deepfake videos is increasing, many social media users remain unable to accurately identify manipulated political content.

The results further indicate that exposure to AI-generated political videos reduces trust in political leaders, weakens confidence in democratic institutions, and increases skepticism toward digital news media. Heavy dependence on social media increases individuals' vulnerability to political misinformation, whereas higher levels of media literacy significantly reduce susceptibility to manipulated content.

These findings support the theoretical assumptions of Source Credibility Theory, Media Dependency Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model by demonstrating that AI-generated political misinformation influences citizens' perceptions of credibility while media literacy serves as an important protective mechanism.

Discussion

The present study examined the influence of deepfake videos on public perceptions of political credibility in the context of digital media. The findings indicate that AI-generated political content has become a significant challenge to democratic communication by influencing citizens' trust in political leaders, public institutions, and digital news media. The results further demonstrate that while awareness of deepfake technology is increasing among social media users, many individuals still lack the necessary skills to accurately identify manipulated political content. These findings highlight the growing need for stronger media literacy initiatives, technological detection mechanisms, and regulatory frameworks to mitigate the harmful effects of AI-driven political misinformation.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that exposure to deepfake videos negatively affects public perceptions of political credibility. Respondents who reported frequent exposure to manipulated political videos also expressed lower levels of trust in political leaders and greater skepticism toward political communication. This finding supports Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), which argues that the effectiveness of communication depends largely on the perceived credibility of the message source. When citizens become aware that realistic political videos can be artificially created, they may begin to question the authenticity of all political messages, regardless of whether they are genuine or fabricated. Consequently, deepfake technology threatens one of the fundamental elements of democratic governance—public trust.

The findings also correspond with the work of Vaccari and Chadwick (2020), who argued that deepfake videos increase public uncertainty rather than simply deceiving audiences. Their research suggests that even when citizens recognize the possibility of manipulation, the existence of deepfake technology reduces confidence in authentic political communication. Similarly, the present study found that respondents became increasingly skeptical of political speeches,

interviews, and campaign messages after learning about AI-generated misinformation. This widespread skepticism can weaken democratic accountability because voters may struggle to distinguish truthful information from fabricated content during election campaigns and political crises.

Another important finding concerns the widespread use of social media as a primary source of political information. The majority of respondents indicated that they regularly obtain political news through platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter). Statistical analysis demonstrated a positive relationship between social media dependency and exposure to deepfake political videos. This finding strongly supports Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), which proposes that individuals who depend heavily on media for information are more likely to be influenced by media content.

The increasing reliance on algorithm-driven social media platforms has transformed political communication by enabling information to spread rapidly across large audiences. However, these same platforms also facilitate the rapid dissemination of misinformation because recommendation algorithms often prioritize emotionally engaging and sensational content over verified information. As a result, manipulated political videos can reach millions of viewers before journalists and fact-checking organizations have sufficient time to verify their authenticity. This rapid circulation amplifies the social and political consequences of deepfake technology and contributes to declining confidence in digital information environments.

The study further revealed that media literacy significantly reduces individuals' susceptibility to deepfake political videos. Respondents possessing stronger media literacy skills demonstrated greater ability to identify manipulated videos, verify information through multiple credible sources, and critically evaluate political content before accepting it as authentic. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing media literacy as one of the most effective long-term strategies for combating digital misinformation.

The results are also consistent with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). According to the theory, individuals who carefully analyze information using the central route are less likely to be persuaded by superficial cues such as realistic visual effects or emotional appeals. In contrast, individuals relying on peripheral processing may judge the authenticity of political content primarily through visual realism without critically evaluating its accuracy. Deepfake videos are particularly persuasive because they combine highly realistic images, synchronized facial expressions, and convincing speech patterns that appeal to viewers' emotions. Therefore, strengthening critical thinking and media literacy encourages audiences to process political information more analytically, thereby reducing vulnerability to AI-generated deception.

Another noteworthy finding is the relationship between deepfake videos and declining trust in democratic institutions. Many respondents believed that AI-generated political misinformation could influence election campaigns, damage political reputations, and increase political polarization. These perceptions reflect growing public concern regarding the potential misuse of artificial intelligence during democratic processes. Deepfake videos may not only mislead voters directly but may also create uncertainty about the authenticity of genuine political evidence. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as the "liar's dividend," enables political actors to dismiss authentic recordings as fabricated, thereby reducing transparency and accountability within democratic systems.

The findings also highlight important implications for journalism and news credibility. Respondents expressed increasing skepticism toward digital news after repeated exposure to

manipulated political videos. This suggests that deepfakes not only affect political actors but also undermine public confidence in professional journalism. News organizations face significant challenges in verifying AI-generated content before publication, particularly during breaking news events when speed often competes with accuracy. Consequently, strengthening fact-checking procedures, investing in AI-assisted verification technologies, and improving collaboration between journalists and technology companies have become essential components of maintaining public trust.

From a policy perspective, the findings indicate that technological solutions alone are insufficient for addressing the challenges posed by deepfake videos. Although artificial intelligence can be used to detect manipulated media, detection technologies continue to evolve alongside increasingly sophisticated deepfake generation techniques. This technological competition suggests that sustainable solutions require a multidisciplinary approach combining technological innovation, legal regulation, educational reform, and ethical AI governance. Governments should develop legislation requiring transparency regarding AI-generated political content, while technology companies should improve automated detection systems and implement clearer content-labeling policies. Educational institutions should incorporate digital media literacy into school and university curricula to equip future generations with the skills necessary to critically evaluate online information.

The present study also contributes to the growing literature on political communication by integrating Source Credibility Theory, Media Dependency Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model within a single analytical framework. While previous studies have often examined deepfake technology from technological or legal perspectives, this research demonstrates that understanding public responses requires an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates communication theory, psychology, media studies, and political science. Such integration provides a more comprehensive explanation of how AI-generated political misinformation influences citizens' attitudes, beliefs, and trust in democratic institutions.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the findings are based on a cross-sectional survey and therefore capture respondents' perceptions at one point in time. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how repeated exposure to deepfake videos influences political trust over time. Second, the study focuses on Pakistani social media users; therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other cultural or political contexts. Comparative international research could reveal how different political systems, media environments, and levels of digital literacy influence public responses to deepfake technology. Finally, future studies may employ experimental research designs to measure causal relationships between exposure to deepfake videos and political decision-making under controlled conditions. Overall, the findings demonstrate that deepfake videos represent a significant threat to political credibility in the digital era. As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, preserving public trust will require coordinated efforts among governments, media organizations, technology companies, educators, and civil society. Strengthening media literacy, promoting responsible AI development, enhancing digital verification technologies, and implementing effective regulatory frameworks are essential for protecting democratic integrity and ensuring that citizens can make informed political decisions based on accurate and trustworthy information.

Policy Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate that deepfake technology poses significant challenges to political credibility, democratic governance, and public trust in digital media. As artificial intelligence continues to advance, governments, media organizations, technology companies,

educational institutions, and civil society organizations must adopt comprehensive and collaborative strategies to minimize the harmful effects of AI-generated political misinformation. Based on the findings of this study, the following policy recommendations are proposed.

10.1 Strengthen Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Governments should develop comprehensive legislation specifically addressing the creation, dissemination, and malicious use of deepfake content in political communication. Existing cybercrime and digital media laws should be updated to include clear legal definitions of AI-generated misinformation, particularly during election campaigns and politically sensitive periods. Regulatory frameworks should establish penalties for individuals or organizations that intentionally create or distribute deceptive political deepfakes designed to manipulate public opinion or interfere with democratic processes. At the same time, regulations should protect freedom of expression and legitimate uses of artificial intelligence in education, research, and entertainment.

10.2 Promote Digital and Media Literacy

Media literacy should become a national educational priority. Educational institutions should integrate digital literacy, critical thinking, fact-checking techniques, and AI awareness into school, college, and university curricula. Students should be trained to verify online information, recognize manipulated media, and evaluate the credibility of digital sources before sharing political content. Governments and civil society organizations should also organize nationwide public awareness campaigns that educate citizens about the risks associated with deepfake technology and provide practical guidance on identifying AI-generated misinformation.

10.3 Encourage Responsible Social Media Governance

Social media platforms have a significant responsibility in limiting the spread of manipulated political content. Technology companies should invest in advanced AI-based detection systems capable of identifying deepfake videos before they become viral. Platforms should clearly label AI-generated or manipulated political media, provide warning notifications for suspicious content, and strengthen collaboration with independent fact-checking organizations. In addition, recommendation algorithms should be continuously reviewed to reduce the amplification of misleading political content while promoting verified and trustworthy information.

10.4 Enhance Fact-Checking and Journalistic Standards

Media organizations should strengthen professional verification procedures for digital political content. Newsrooms should adopt AI-assisted verification technologies and provide specialized training for journalists in detecting manipulated images, audio, and videos. Fact-checking units should be expanded to respond rapidly to emerging deepfake content, particularly during elections and national emergencies. Collaboration among news organizations, technology companies, and academic researchers can improve the accuracy and speed of content verification, thereby reducing the spread of political misinformation.

10.5 Invest in Artificial Intelligence Detection Technologies

Governments and technology companies should increase investment in research and development of advanced deepfake detection systems. Universities and research institutions should be encouraged to develop innovative AI tools capable of identifying synthetic media with greater accuracy. International collaboration among researchers, technology firms, and cybersecurity agencies can accelerate the development of reliable detection technologies that keep pace with increasingly sophisticated deepfake generation techniques.

10.6 Develop Ethical Guidelines for Artificial Intelligence

National governments and international organizations should establish ethical standards governing the development and application of artificial intelligence in digital communication. AI developers should incorporate transparency, accountability, fairness, and public safety into the design of generative AI systems. Developers should also implement watermarking, content authentication mechanisms, and traceability features that enable users to distinguish AI-generated content from authentic media. Ethical AI governance can help preserve public trust while encouraging responsible technological innovation.

10.7 Protect Electoral Integrity

Election management bodies should develop comprehensive strategies to counter AI-generated political misinformation during election campaigns. These strategies should include real-time monitoring of digital platforms, partnerships with social media companies, rapid public clarification of manipulated political content, and voter education campaigns emphasizing information verification. Special election regulations may require political parties and candidates to disclose the use of AI-generated campaign materials to ensure transparency and maintain public confidence in democratic processes.

10.8 Promote International Cooperation

The challenges posed by deepfake technology extend beyond national borders. Therefore, international cooperation is essential for combating AI-generated political misinformation. Governments, international organizations, technology companies, and academic institutions should collaborate to share technological expertise, develop common regulatory standards, and exchange best practices for identifying and responding to malicious deepfake content. Such cooperation will strengthen global efforts to protect democratic institutions from emerging digital threats.

10.9 Support Continuous Academic Research

Given the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence, continuous research is necessary to understand the long-term social, political, and psychological impacts of deepfake technology. Governments and research funding agencies should support interdisciplinary studies examining deepfake detection, political communication, digital trust, and media literacy. Future research should also investigate the effectiveness of educational interventions, technological solutions, and regulatory policies in reducing the influence of AI-generated political misinformation.

Summary

Addressing the challenges associated with deepfake technology requires a comprehensive and multi-stakeholder approach. Legal reforms, media literacy education, responsible social media governance, technological innovation, ethical AI development, and international collaboration must work together to protect political credibility and democratic integrity. Implementing these policy recommendations will help strengthen public resilience against AI-generated political misinformation while ensuring that digital technologies continue to support informed democratic participation rather than undermine it.

Conclusion

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has transformed the digital communication landscape, creating both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges for contemporary society. Among these developments, deepfake technology has emerged as one of the most influential innovations, with far-reaching implications for political communication, democratic governance, and public trust. This study examined the impact of deepfake videos on public perceptions of political credibility and explored how AI-generated political

misinformation influences citizens' trust in political leaders, democratic institutions, and digital news media.

The findings of the study indicate that deepfake videos have become a serious threat to political credibility by making it increasingly difficult for citizens to distinguish authentic political communication from manipulated content. As AI-generated videos become more realistic and accessible, public confidence in political information declines, leading to increased skepticism toward political leaders and institutions. The study further demonstrates that extensive reliance on social media platforms increases individuals' exposure to manipulated political content, while higher levels of media literacy significantly reduce susceptibility to AI-generated misinformation. These findings emphasize that technological advancements alone cannot protect democratic societies unless citizens possess the critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate digital information responsibly.

The study also highlights the growing responsibility of governments, media organizations, technology companies, educational institutions, and civil society in addressing the challenges posed by deepfake technology. Combating political misinformation requires a comprehensive approach that combines effective legal frameworks, responsible AI development, advanced detection technologies, ethical digital governance, and widespread media literacy initiatives. Collaborative efforts among these stakeholders are essential for strengthening democratic resilience and preserving public confidence in political communication.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the field of media and communication studies by integrating Source Credibility Theory, Media Dependency Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model to explain how deepfake videos influence political credibility. This interdisciplinary approach provides a broader understanding of the complex relationship between artificial intelligence, digital misinformation, and public trust in an increasingly AI-driven information environment.

Although this study offers valuable insights into the influence of deepfake technology on political communication, it also recognizes that artificial intelligence continues to evolve rapidly. Consequently, future research should examine the long-term effects of deepfake exposure across different cultural and political contexts, explore emerging AI detection technologies, and investigate the effectiveness of educational and policy interventions designed to counter digital misinformation. Comparative studies involving multiple countries and experimental research designs would further strengthen understanding of the global impact of AI-generated political content.

In conclusion, deepfake technology represents one of the most pressing communication challenges of the digital era. Its ability to manipulate political narratives, undermine public trust, and disrupt democratic processes demands immediate attention from policymakers, researchers, journalists, technology developers, and educators. Protecting political credibility in the age of artificial intelligence requires not only technological innovation but also ethical responsibility, informed citizenship, and a collective commitment to preserving the integrity of democratic communication. By promoting media literacy, strengthening institutional accountability, and encouraging responsible use of artificial intelligence, societies can better safeguard democratic values and ensure that digital technologies contribute positively to transparent, credible, and informed political discourse.

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