

The Corrosive Tide: An In-Depth Analysis of the Ethical Implications of Deepfake Technology in Political Discourse

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Abstract - This paper gives a critical analysis of the ethical implications of deepfake technology in political discourse. The discussion will focus on the ethical aspects that are serious concerning the misuse of the deepfake technology in politics. Deepfakes are created through the Artificial Intelligence (AI) and are based on creating believable but false video and audio messages. This poses a significant and growing threat to political discourses, citizen trust and democracy.

The highest ethical issues explained show how deepfakes affect the life of the population in a negative way by providing apparently unquestioned sensory information. Loss of the public confidence is one of such problems. Deepfakes make it difficult to distinguish between genuine and fake information among the citizens and this leads to the loss and doubts on common information that is common to the society. In addition, the integrity of democracy is the other problem that deepfakes threaten with, which tolerates such evil deeds as sabotage of political process, manipulation of voters, and social instability. The next problem with the technology that is raising serious concerns is the privacy and consent since one can be used to create false information using the image and voice of a person without their consent. Among the most troublesome ones is the so-called liar dividend and when accompanied by actual incriminating evidence, it can be admitted that it is considered to be a deepfake. This will help the culprits to get away with it and compromises the overall accountability.

This discussion demonstrates the need to have a balanced approach towards this corrosive tide. Such an approach may incorporate measures by designing more efficient detection tools, establishment of explicit legal and regulatory guidelines and the most important one, media literacy that would allow the people to evaluate the information that they encounter critically. By examining the systemic, psychological and practical dangers, the study aims to inform a roadmap of protecting the democratic discussion against the harmful effects of synthetic media.

I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has brought radical transformations in the manner in which individuals communicate in the era of new digital technologies. One of the most important technologies

is the Deepfake technology, which is rooted in the use of artificial intelligence (AI), and the goal of creating convincing and, at the same time, misleading video and audio content. This aspect is a new level of manipulation of computers in politics and a serious offence and poses an increasing danger to political discourses. Unlike the traditional forms of misinformation, such as photoshop images, which can be proven with references to the source, the deepfakes are able to produce a gray area between the truth and the falsehood in a more powerful manner. They provide an undeniable fact in the shape of sight and sound. This emerging trend threatens to interfere with and manipulate the field of modern-day politics. The subject matter of the study is the Corrosive Tide and this research questions the deep moral issues associated with this potent tool. Even though the application of deepfakes can be harmless entertainment, the misuse of the technology in the sphere of politics might harm the image and the democratic process by influencing the views of the public.

The key ethical challenges when it comes to the use of deepfakes in politics are not confined to misinformation, but it is a question of the fundamental roles of society. The greatest issue is the loss of trust among the people since deepfakes makes it difficult to determine what is real and what is fake by the people. This misconception might be viewed as credible by the people which leads to overall distrust and breakdown of shared facts, without which the functioning of the society is impossible. In addition to loss of trust, deepfakes directly threaten the integrity of democracy, by enabling evil acts like political sabotage, voter manipulation and social unrest and causing misinformed decision making. A significant issue with this technology is privacy and consent issues as well. It allows one to be represented and also be voiced without having consented to any such action. A liar dividend is one of such alarming problems. It occurs when a member of the public is given the chance to disregard real harmful evidence as a deepfake and allow the wrongdoers to evade the consequences and undermine the accountability to the general public.

The potential for deepfakes to cause lasting damage to truth and accountability makes it clear that strong and thoughtful solutions should be implemented. Addressing this issue should be done in a balanced approach built on three interconnected areas. The first is Technological Defense which involves the creation of more advanced detection equipment so as to detect advanced fakes. The second one is Legal and Regulatory Standards that demand the establishment of clear laws and regulations on the creation

and distribution of synthetic content, especially at election times. The third one is the Societal Resilience that aims at increasing the media literacy of the citizens in order to make them in a position to doubt the information they encounter. Current work is put in this important debate by researching the way in which individuals view these threats and the potential solutions. It serves as a very useful starting point in the development of responsible policies and educational initiatives of the population in addressing the serious ethical challenges of the deepfake technology.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The creation and rapid evolution of deepfake technology have led to the problematic academic study of its versatile threat to democracy, media trust and individual rights. This review is a synthesis of ten significant articles in legal theory, experimental psychology and ethical philosophy which has attempted to give a framework within which one can examine "The Corrosive Tide."

1. ***The article by Robert Chesney and Danielle Citron (2019) "Deepfakes: A Looming Challenge to Privacy, Democracy, and National Security"*** studies the various threats of the deepfake technology. It asserts that the said technology is one of the biggest threats to democracy and national security [1]. The authors used law analysis and theoretical frameworks in the study of the problem [1]. Their most significant findings show how deepfakes are applied concerning the disinformation and political manipulation. This adds to the mistrust of the population of the media and political institutions [1]. The major flaw of this first publication, however, is that, by the time of its release, no empirical data exist as to the real-world impact of deepfakes because the technology was still in its infancy [1].
2. ***Deepfakes and Disinformation: Exploring the Effect of Synthetic Political Video on Deception, Uncertainty, and Trust in News by Cristian Vaccari and Andrew Chadwick (2020)*** The paper examines how deepfakes have impacted the audience, in relation to the issue of information uncertainty in the age of synthetic media. The researchers used an experimental study to monitor the reaction of the subjects towards the deepfake materials [2]. Their findings reveal that despite the fact that people are not directly misled, there is a certain level of uncertainty and compromising of the credibility of news in general since there are deepfakes. This issue is what they refer to as the truth decay [2]. The only weakness of this research is that it was done in a specific group of individuals and thus, findings cannot be anticipated to be applicable to the whole population [2].
3. ***"Anticipating and addressing the ethical implications of deepfakes in the context of elections" by Nicholas Diakopoulos et al. (2020)*** The primary problem that this research will study is the ethical concerns of deepfakes in elections [3]. According to the authors, a framework that incorporates a number of stakeholders is proposed. This involves media literacy campaigns, verifying tools, and moderating platforms as a way of combating disinformation in deepfakes [3]. This paradigm is a valuable addition to the discipline [3]. One of such limitations is that such a wide framework is difficult to test and apply in the real world of politics.
4. ***"The Threat of Deepfakes: The Challenge to Democracy and the Rule of Law" by Susan A. Bandes (2021)*** The paper explores the legal and ethical loopholes surrounding deepfakes. It explains the ways in which deepfakes may jeopardize the rule of law. The author states that existing laws lack effectiveness in addressing the use of deepfakes in manipulating voters and damaging reputations [4]. The article emphatically demands reforms of the law systems [4]. Its main drawbacks are that it primarily presents a theoretical and legal discussion and does not offer much practical evidence of the prevalence of deepfakes in the legal system when it is published.
5. ***"The Distinct Wrong of Deepfakes" by A. de Ruiter (2021)*** The ethical issue that is addressed in this paper is the creation of deepfakes without the consent of the person [5]. It pursues a philosophical and ethical approach to claim that such practices are detrimental to the digital identity of a person and their right to control their own image. It is an apparent wrong not the same as defamation [5]. The paper provides a powerful ethical argument establishing the foundation of a more comprehensive legal method [5]. But there is one great weakness it is a conceptual argument that does not propose any particular legal or technical solution to the problem.
6. ***"Deepfakes and Democracy (Theory): How Synthetic Audio-Visual Media for Disinformation and Hate Speech Threaten Core Democratic Functions" by Julia R. H. C. Schuetze (2022)*** This article outlines a theoretical framework that describes the ways in which deepfakes can erode democratic principles [6]. The methodology implies the analysis of the possibility of the technology to interfere with discourse [6]. One of the contributions is the concept of a liar dividend. It is at this point that an evil actor can claim that authentic, incriminating information is a fake, or a deepfake, to evade responsibility. This essentially damages the factuality of political discussion [6]. Its primary limitation is that it is a theoretical article which does not present empirical evidence or a feasible solution [6].
7. ***"Cutting through the Hype: Understanding the Implications of Deepfakes for the Fact-Checking Actor-Network" by Tobias Weikmann and Stefanie Lecheler (2023)*** This study examines the response by fact-checking organizations to the risk of deepfakes [7]. The study involved interviewing of fact-checking experts to get information on their practical experiences [7]. An important discovery is that, although the media covers the issue, fact-checkers are also more concerned with less complex types of cheapfakes and decontextualized videos. They are less expensive, and more prevalent [7]. The weakness of this work is that it dwells on a particular group which may not be reflecting the whole issue.

8. **"The Real-World Impact and Ethical Challenges of AI-Driven Deepfake Technology in Fintech" by an Unnamed Author (2024)** The paper provides a valuable framework to interpret the ethical issues of deepfakes in different fields, such as politics [8]. It talks about privacy, consent and trust of the people. It also proposes how such issues can be minimised like the use of improved detection systems and multi-factor authentication [8]. It demonstrates an approach to the study of various industries, using the experience of a certain area (Fintech) to address the ethical issue on a larger scale [8].
9. **"Exploring the Ethics of Deepfake Technology in Media: Implications for Trust and Information Integrity" by Avantika Raina and Garima Mann (2024)** The article is a peer-reviewed journal that discusses the ethical concerns surrounding the use of deepfakes in media. It contains case studies that demonstrate how deepfakes can damage the trust of people, misinform, and manipulate the political discussion [9]. The authors also consider the flaws of the existing legal and regulatory frameworks and propose a unified solution to these issues that will be adopted by technologists, policymakers, and the society [9].
10. **"Deepfakes and Journalism: Normative Considerations and Implications" by Godulla, Hoffmann, and Seibert (2025)** This paper examines the ethical issues that deepfakes pose to journalism [10]. It explains ways in which journalists can ethically apply deepfakes as a tool of non-malicious intent, e.g., satire or visualization, without undermining key journalistic principles of correctness and openness [10]. This article plays a critical role in comprehending the relationship between deepfakes and media ethics. [10]

Year of Publication	Title of Paper and Authors' Names	Technique/Approach Utilized	Objectives of Research	Advantages and Key Findings	Limitations
2019	"Deepfakes: A Looming Challenge for Privacy, Democracy, and National Security" by Robert Chesney and Danielle Citron	Legal and theoretical analysis [1]	To identify and analyze the legal and political threats of deepfakes [1].	Lays the groundwork for understanding the threat to democracy and national security [1].	Limited empirical data at the time of publication [1].
2020	"Deepfakes and Disinformation: Exploring the Impact of Synthetic Political Video on Deception, Uncertainty, and Trust in News" by Cristian Vaccari and Andrew Chadwick	Experimental study [2]	To examine the psychological effects of deepfakes on audience trust [2].	Findings show deepfakes increase uncertainty and erode trust in news media [2].	Findings may not be generalizable to all populations [2].
2020	"Anticipating and addressing the ethical implications of deepfakes in the context of elections" by Nicholas Diakopoulos et al.	Multi-stakeholder framework analysis [3]	To propose a comprehensive approach to address deepfakes in elections [3].	Provides a framework for combining media literacy campaigns, verification tools, and platform moderation to combat disinformation [3].	The effectiveness of such a broad framework is difficult to test and implement in a real-world political environment.

2021	"The Threat of Deepfakes: The Challenge to Democracy and the Rule of Law" by Susan A. Bandes	Legal analysis [4]	To argue that existing legal frameworks are inadequate for deepfake harms [4].	Calls for new legal frameworks to address voter manipulation and reputational damage [4].	Primarily a theoretical analysis with limited empirical evidence [4].
2021	"The Distinct Wrong of Deepfakes" by A. de Ruiter	Philosophical and ethical analysis [5]	To analyze the specific ethical harm of deepfakes without consent [5].	Provides a strong ethical argument that deepfakes violate a person's digital identity and their right to control their likeness [5].	It is a conceptual argument and does not propose specific legal or technical solutions [5].
2022	"Deepfakes and Democracy (Theory): How Synthetic Audio-Visual Media for Disinformation and Hate Speech Threaten Core Democratic Functions" by Julia R. H. C. Schuetze	Theoretical framework [6]	To create a framework for understanding deepfakes' systemic threats [6].	Introduces the concept of the "liar's dividend" and how it erodes accountability [6].	Conceptual paper without empirical data or practical solutions [6].
2023	"Cutting through the Hype: Understanding the Implications of Deepfakes for the Fact-Checking Actor-Network" by Tobias Weikmann and Stefanie Lechler	Qualitative analysis (Interviews) [7]	To understand how fact-checkers are responding to the deepfake threat [7].	Finds that "cheapfakes" are more prevalent and problematic for fact-checkers than complex deepfakes [7].	Focuses on a specific community, limiting generalizability [7].
2024	"The Real-World Impact and Ethical Challenges of AI-Driven Deepfake Technology in Fintech"	Cross-sectoral analysis [8]	To apply the ethical challenges of deepfakes from the financial sector to a broader context [8].	Provides a framework for understanding ethical challenges and proposing solutions [8].	The primary focus is not on politics, which may limit some findings' direct applicability [8].
2024	"Exploring the Ethics of Deepfake Technology in Media: Implications for Trust and Information Integrity" by Avantika Raina and Garima Mann	Case study analysis [9]	To analyze the ethical concerns of deepfakes and their impact on public trust [9].	Illustrates how deepfakes undermine trust using case studies and proposes a collaborative solution [9].	The legal and regulatory frameworks discussed may not apply to all jurisdictions [9].
2025	"Deepfakes and Journalism: Normative Considerations and Implications" by Godulla, Hoffmann, and Seibert	Normative analysis [10]	To explore the ethical dilemmas deepfakes pose for journalism [10].	Addresses how journalists can ethically use deepfakes while upholding core journalistic values like accuracy and transparency [10].	A forthcoming publication, so its full impact is yet to be realized [10].

Table: Literature Review

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

The research involved a quantitative survey on the perspectives, awareness, and trust of college students on the ethical concerns of deepfake technology in politics. It undertook to analyze the attitudes on psychological factors such as erosion of trust and uncertainty, and behavioral factors such as verification habits, which are dependent on the use of synthetic media.

2. Data Collection

- **Instrument:** Google Forms online questionnaire. It consists of fifteen Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions.
- **Population:** Undergraduate students of Jain (Deemed-to-be University) in Bengaluru. This is a digitally minded and politically conscious group.
- **Sampling Method:** Convenience sampling.
- **Sample Size:** 108 primary responses were obtained. There were 104 to 107 valid responses on a question that were used in the analysis.
- **Data Tool:** The responses were exported in a CSV format and processed using Python to establish frequency distribution and mean scores.

3. Questionnaire Design and Analysis

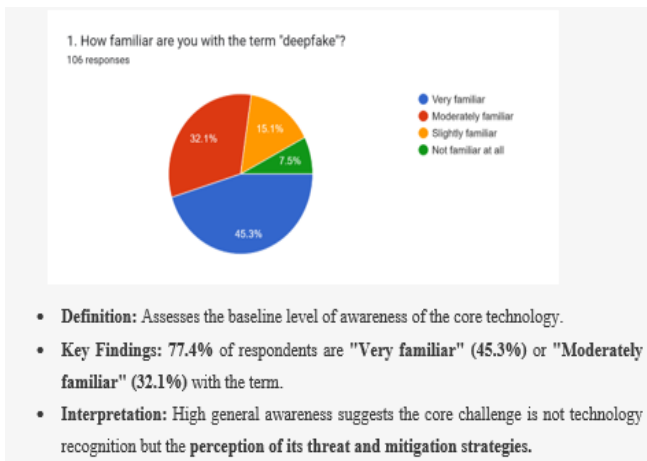


Fig: 1

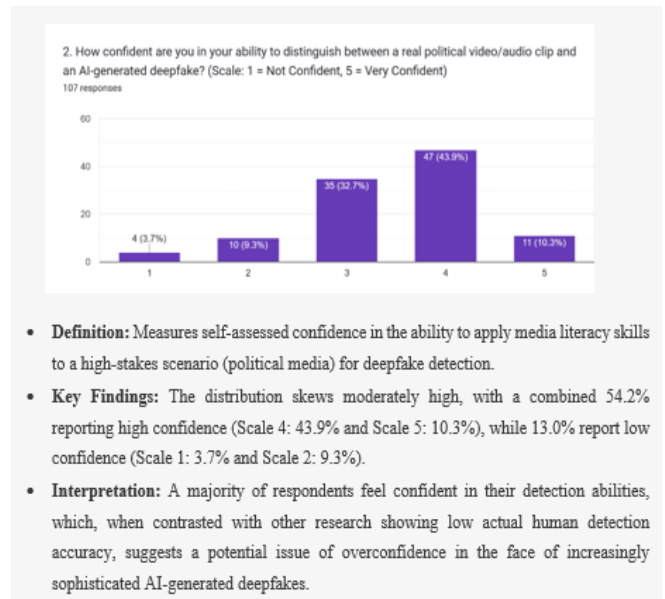


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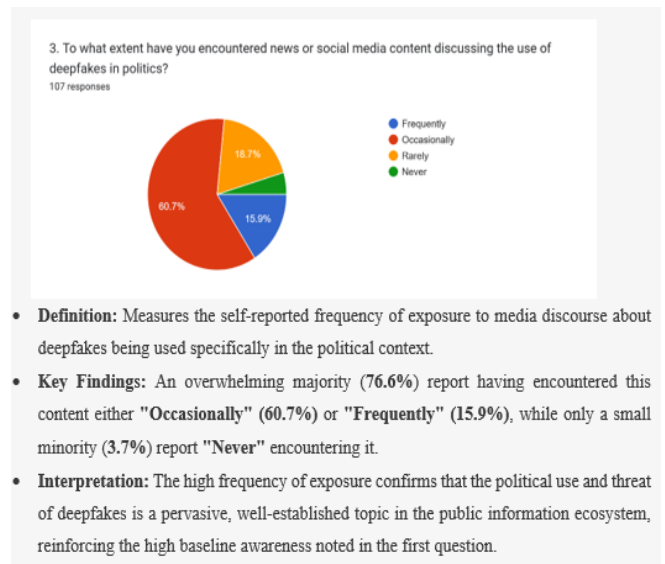


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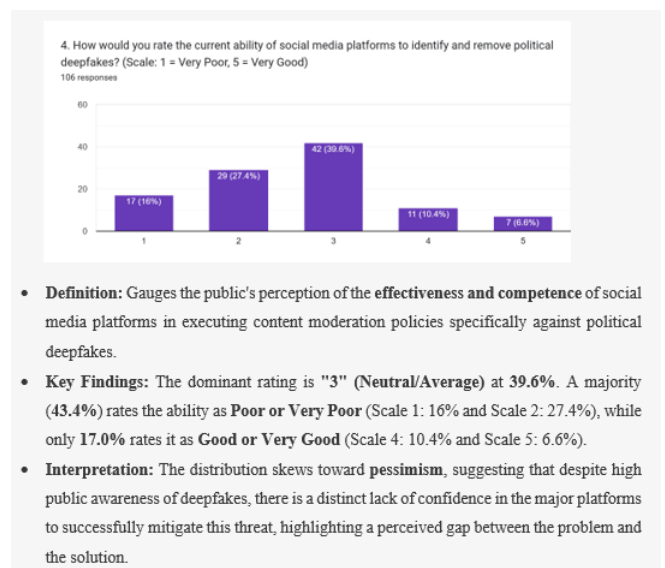


Fig: 4

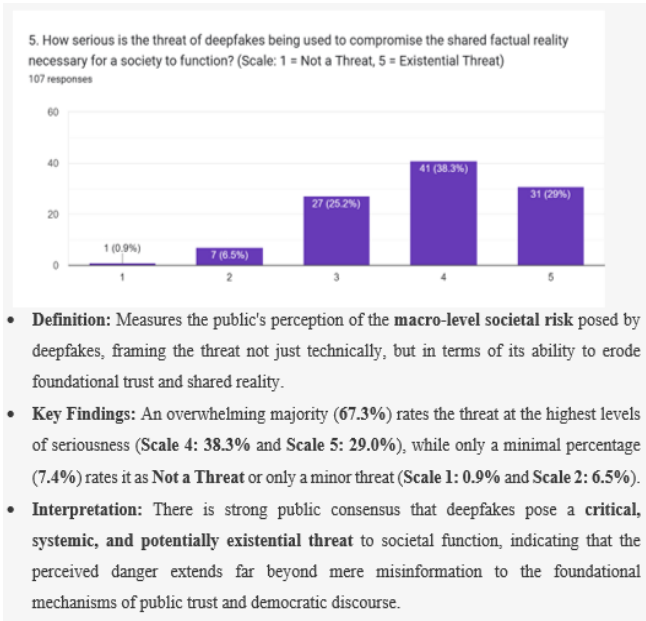


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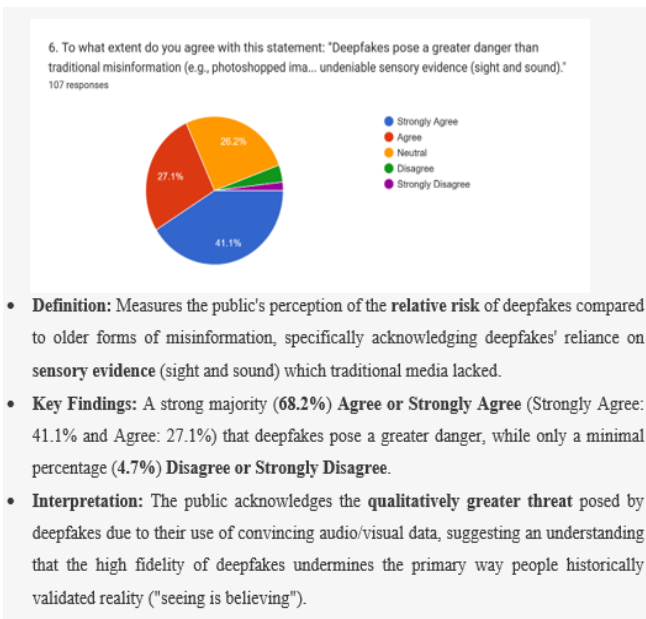


Fig: 6

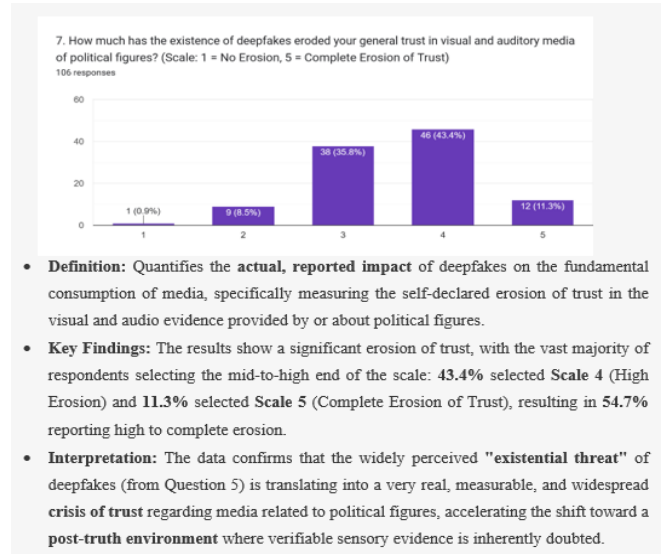


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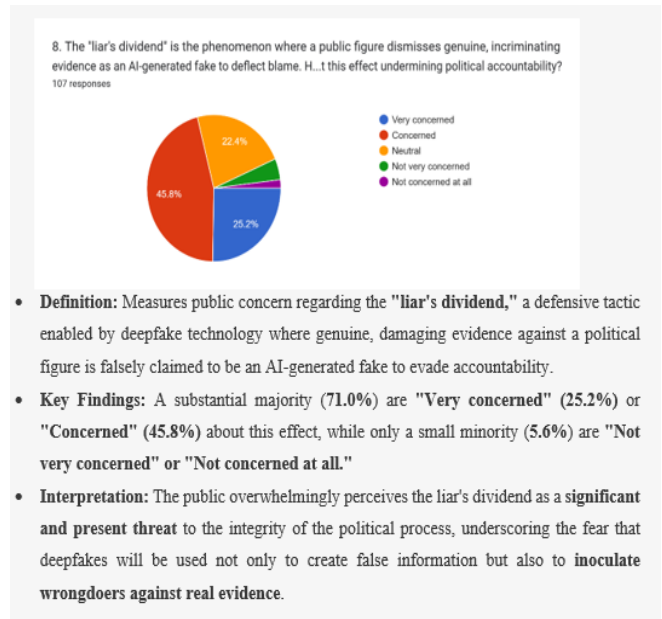
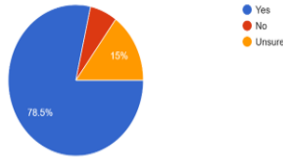


Fig: 8

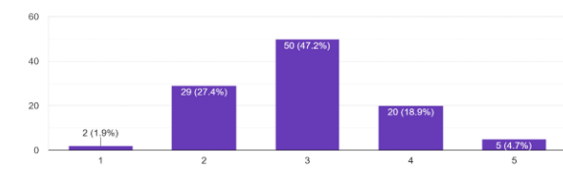
9. Do you believe that deepfakes, even if satirical, violate a person's right to control their own digital identity and likeness?
107 responses



- **Definition:** Measures the public's **ethical and legal conviction** regarding the boundaries of deepfake creation, specifically assessing whether the **intent** (satire) justifies the unauthorized use and manipulation of a person's digital identity and likeness.
- **Key Findings:** An overwhelming majority of respondents (78.5%) believe that deepfakes, even when satirical, **violate a person's rights**, while only a small minority (6.5%) believe they do not.
- **Interpretation:** The public has a strong ethical stance favouring **personal autonomy and control over one's digital likeness**, suggesting that the creative or satirical intent of a deepfake is generally **not seen as a sufficient legal or moral defense** for the unauthorized use of an individual's image or voice.

Fig: 9

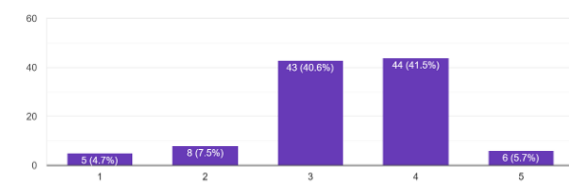
11. How effective do you believe new legal frameworks and regulations are in countering deepfake-based disinformation in elections? (Scale: 1 = Not Effective, 5 = Very Effective)
106 responses



- **Definition:** Measures the public's perception of the **effectiveness of regulatory and legal approaches** (non-technical solutions) in mitigating the deepfake threat, specifically within the sensitive context of elections.
- **Key Findings:** The dominant response is **"3" (Neutral/Average)** at 47.2%. A combined 29.3% rate the legal frameworks as **Effective or Very Effective** (Scale 4: 18.9% and Scale 5: 4.7%), while 29.3% rate them as **Ineffective or Very Ineffective** (Scale 1: 1.9% and Scale 2: 27.4%).
- **Interpretation:** The results show a high degree of **ambivalence and uncertainty** regarding the efficacy of government and legal solutions; the public is divided, with roughly equal segments expressing optimism and skepticism about the ability of laws and regulations to keep pace with and effectively govern the rapid technological challenge posed by deepfakes.

Fig: 11

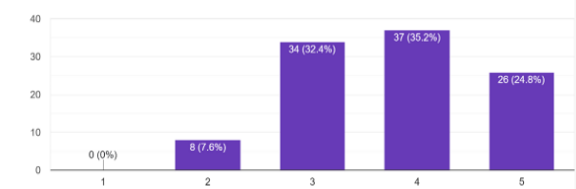
10. How effective do you believe specialized technological detection tools (AI that spots deepfakes) will be in solving the problem? (Scale: 1 = Not Effective, 5 = Very Effective)
106 responses



- **Definition:** Measures the public's **optimism or skepticism** regarding a purely technical solution (AI-based detection tools) to the complex problem of deepfakes, contrasting human detection confidence (Q2) with platform trust (Q4).
- **Key Findings:** The perception is largely ambivalent, with the vast majority rating the effectiveness as **"3" (Neutral/Average)** at 40.6% or **"4" (Effective)** at 41.5%, while only 12.2% rate the tools as **Ineffective or Very Ineffective** (Scale 1: 4.7% and Scale 2: 7.5%).
- **Interpretation:** The public has a **cautious, moderate faith** in AI detection technology, suggesting they view it as a necessary but perhaps **insufficient part of the solution**, reflecting a belief that the race between deepfake generation and detection will remain a persistent, balanced challenge.

Fig: 10

12. To what extent should media literacy campaigns be prioritized over legal or technological solutions to help citizens critically assess information? (Scale: 1 = Low Priority, 5 = Highest Priority)
105 responses



- **Definition:** Measures the public's perception of the **relative importance of behavioural/educational solutions** (media literacy) compared to structural solutions (legal/technological) in the fight against deepfake disinformation.
- **Key Findings:** A very strong majority (60.0%) assigned a high priority (Scale 4: 35.2% and Scale 5: 24.8%) to media literacy, with no respondents selecting Scale 1. The combined high-priority ratings strongly outweigh the low-priority ratings (7.6%).
- **Interpretation:** The public believes that **individual critical assessment (media literacy)** is the most crucial component for solving the deepfake problem, prioritizing it significantly over platform regulation or detection technology, suggesting a belief that the ultimate defense lies with the empowered citizen.

Fig: 12

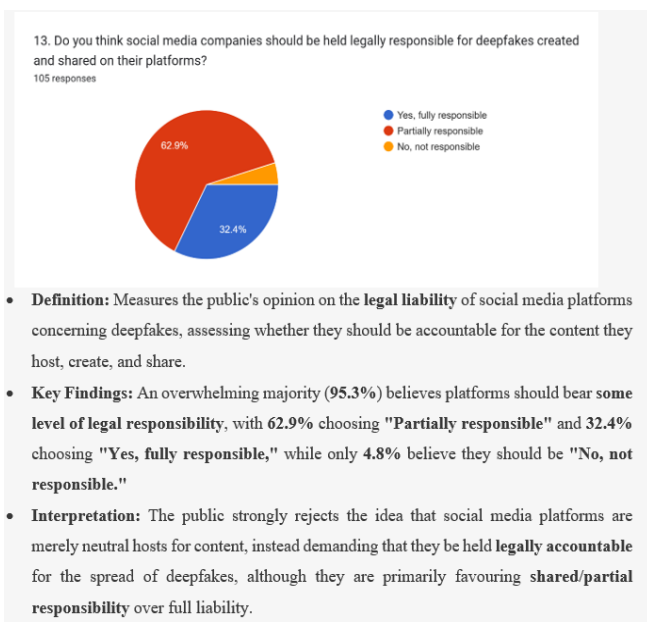


Fig: 13

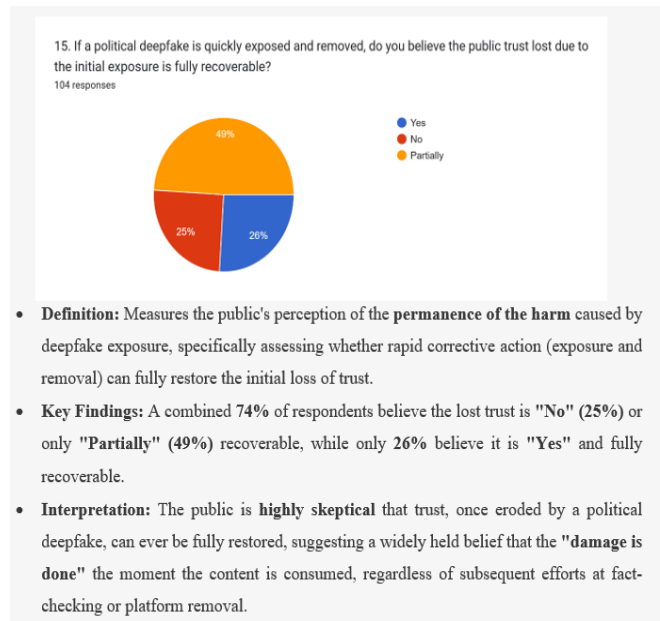


Fig: 15

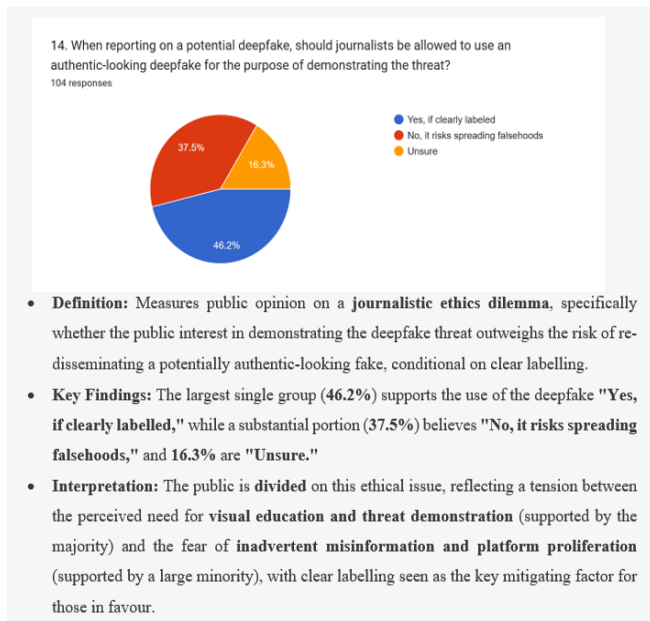


Fig: 14

4. Summary Insight

It is highly probable that the general audience is highly aware of the term deepfake, and they hear about it in the media in relation to political matters. A lot consider this usage as a significant and potentially dangerous threat, more so than conventional misinformation. Reported dramatic loss of trust in political media and concern over the so-called dividend of the liar support this high level of concern. But this fear does not result in trust in solutions. Social media are perceived as not particularly effective in eliminating deepfakes (Q4) and there is a lack of trust that legal actions can help (Q11). Meanwhile, they would like these platforms to be legally liable over the content. After all, as the masses feel, the ultimate long-term defense mechanism is not a technical or legal mechanism, but empowering individual citizens. They put media literacy campaigns over other resolutions and are firmly convinced that deepfakes are infringing on the rights of a person to his/her digital image, even in the context of satire.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on the ethical issues of deepfake technology and validates that it is a significant threat to the political discourse. The results indicate that ordinary people have an idea of the concept of deepfake and that its application in politics is a pressing danger, even more than more classic forms of misinformation. The impact of this perception is quite evident as deepfakes have severely undermined the confidence in visual and audio media concerning political leaders, and many individuals claim to have lost trust altogether. The much-disliked issue is also the so-called lie dividend, which involves criminals escaping with the help of deepfakes to evade real evidence and get away with it.

Despite widespread concern about deepfakes, people do not have much confidence in current solutions. Individuals are not very trusting in social media tools to eliminate deepfakes and are not sure of the effectiveness of new laws. Though a big majority feels that social media sites should be legally held accountable for the contents of their sites, they like collective responsibility rather than complete liability. Finally, the research shows that citizens believe that the most effective defense in the long term is not technical or legal but rather empowering the individual citizens. The fact that media literacy campaigns are given high priorities as compared to other solutions supports this belief.

The information gives a good basis on which one can come up with ethical and political reactions. It stresses that the real point is not the awareness of the technology but understanding its risks and performing strategies to minimize it. The general moral opinion in favor of individual control of their digital image is that deepfakes are unethical in the sense that they violate the rights of individuals, even in satire. Since it is doubtful whether trust can ever be entirely regained once lost to a political deepfake, it is high time that proactive defenses aimed at protecting citizens were put in place. The next round of research would be to extend this study to other demographic groups and utilize long-term data to assess the effectiveness of media literacy programs in dealing with more advanced synthetic media.

The Deepfake technology is transforming the basis of truth in politics. The dilemma is to choose between the necessity of technology and legal protection and the necessity to give individuals more skills on being critical thinkers. The most effective way to counter this worrying trend is through a stronger and techno savvy civil society.

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