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The Intersection of Deepfake Technology, Post-Truth Media, and Credibility Judgments among Social Media Users in Pakistan

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Abstract
Drastic development of the deep fake and Artificial technology has highlighted the issue of misinformation, credibility judgements, and media information literacy in post truth media environment, where an emotional appeal to the heart and ideology can win and prevail over factual truth, so they are being subjected to misleading visuals at times of excessive information overload to the individuals. Therefore, this paper examines the credibility judgements, deep fake awareness and media information literacy of Pakistani University students in information overloaded digital arena of post truth media world. A survey design is used with a structure of a Likert scale to gather the data. Results showed that that post-truth media orientation and information overload are important predictors of credibility judgments, whereas media and media literacy have a positive effect on evaluative capacity. On the contrary, deep fake awareness does not come out as an important predictor on its own, which suggests that critical skills are not enough to combat misleading media act because of awareness alone. Cognitive and contextual factors are more important in the evaluation of credibility judgements than technological awareness, which means that the study is an empirical contribution to the post-truth and misinformation academic field. In practicality, the results show the need of institutional media literacy education among the masses, especially in the developing nation where the rate of digital growth is very high. This research will be providing both theoretical and empirical as well as policy-wise information to scholars, teachers, and regulators who need to deal with the issue(s) of misinformation as a result of the deployment of deep fakes.
Keywords: Deepfakes, Post-Truth Media, Credibility Judgments, Information Overload, Media and Information Literacy, Pakistan

1. Introduction

The last ten years have witnessed a significant revolution of the digital media space, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), algorithmic personalization, and user-generated content. One of the most disruptive environments in this ecosystem is the deep fake technology-artificial intelligence-creation of fake media synthetic materials that have the capacity to generate hyper-realistic and

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created audio, video, and images. Although early deep fakes were mostly experimental in the nature, modern versions have achieved a high degree of accessibility, convincing visually, and become so difficult to counterfeit that they have become a cause of numerous serious worries regarding the spread of misinformation, manipulation, and trust loss in the online communication process.

The development of deep fakes also accompanies what researchers refer to as a post-truth media space, where facts do not influence the general opinion as much as emotional appeals and feelings do. With this, judgment of credibility in such settings is no longer largely informed by verification practices but rather ideological integration, recognition with the source, and emotional resonance. This tendency is enhanced by social media platforms where engaging content tend to be priority-ranked using the algorithm, and sensational visuals are prioritized more than objective accuracy.

To make matters worse is the so-called information overload. The social media users are receiving an unprecedented number of contents, usually with time limit and some form of cognitive load. This overload reduces the ability of users to process information in a systematic manner, and raises the use of heuristics, like visual realism, verification badge or peer endorsement. Such environments are especially responsive to deep fakes, which have high fidelity to the visual system.

Pakistan will be an interesting scenario in terms of investigating these dynamics. Pakistan has become more susceptible to false information, political propaganda, and manipulated mass media with the rapid increase in the internet penetration and the use of social media and especially among the younger generation. Although public awareness of fake news and deep fakes is on the rise, formal media literacy education is still scarce, which casts doubt on users as not being effective at assessing the credibility.

The proposed study will be useful in nature, aiming at approaching the research objectives, such as the task of investigating the role of deep fake awareness, post-truth media orientation, information overload, and media and information literacy in influencing the credibility judgment of Pakistani social media users. These constructs are combined in one analytical framework, and thus the research covers a big gap in the available literature where many studies tend to analyze these constructs separately. The results are expected to add both theoretical and practical contributions to the post-truth and misinformation and policy and education interventions.

2. Literature Review

The history of digital deception is developing, and above all, it is the technology of deep fakes that has emerged as the most recent form of digital cheating within modernization, driven by technological progress and widespread social division

2.1 Deep fake Technology and The History of Digital Deception

Deep fake technology is the latest addition to the digitization of deception, and most importantly, it has arisen as the most recent evolution of technology-dependent digital cheating produced by modernization and social division.

Deep fake technology is currently one of the most disruptive uses of artificial intelligence in modern media settings. According to Chesney and Citron (2019), deep fakes are artificial media that are generated using AI and have persuasive qualities that are harmful to truth, privacy, and discourse in democracy. Their work stresses that deep fakes provoke the conventional beliefs regarding visual evidence as the source of authenticity.

Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) do not believe that deep fakes anew can cause new misinformation dynamics, but only enhance them. Based on the results, the persuasive capacity of the deepfakes

is more than their technical realism and their social and political circumstances in which they spread. On the same note, Westerlund (2019) points out that the downward trend of the rising cost and the availability of deepfake software increases the chances of its extensive abuse, especially when it comes to politically polarized settings.

Nightingale and Farid (2022) also show that digitally literate users fail to accurately recognize deep fake videos, particularly when the content fits their prior established ideas. Such finding further implies that deep fake awareness does not correlate consistently with successful detection and counteraction, which supports the importance of studying the aspects of credibility judgment despite the technological familiarity.

2.2 Post-Truth Media and Credibility Judgments

The idea of post-truth media has become popular after the case of McIntyre (2018), who defines post-truth as the situation whereby appeals to emotion and personal belief dominate over objective facts. Algorithms like curation and social approval are used to increase the post-truth effects of digital markets.

Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook (2017) discuss that the main roles of post-truth media consumption are played by motivated reasoning and confirmation bias. They have determined that people however choose to believe the misinformation, especially when it supports the ideological affiliations despite the presence of any factual corrections. This is in line with the results by van der Linden et al. (2020) who reveal that emotional framing produces a substantial boost in the perceived credibility of misleading content.

Due to the social media phenomenon, Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018) note that people tend to lean more on the plausible nature of a narration instead of verification in determining the credibility of the news. It seems that visual and emotionally charged material, even the manipulated media will be more perceived as authentic. These results demonstrate the importance of the post-truth theory in explaining credibility decisions in deep fake conditions.

2.3 Cognitive Constraints and Information Overload

The information overload theory is a hectic look at how people approach the information found online when they are overwhelmed with too much information. The conceptualisation presented by Eppler and Mengis (2004) is that of information overload when the amount of information surpasses the processing ability of an individual and causes the compromise of quality of the decision.

An extended framework to social media is found in recent studies. According to Bawden and Robinson (2009), digital overload promotes weak involvement and heuristic processing. Equally, Bright, Kleiser, and Grau (2015) determine that overloaded users are more prone to verification avoidance and use their cognitive shortcuts, including familiarity with a source or visual attractiveness

Upon presenting the misinformation research, Jones-Jang, Mortensen, and Liu (2019) show that information overload affects susceptibility to fake news significantly because it reduces the analytical reasoning. It is especially in this case that deepfake material, which will need thorough evaluation, can be effective. This means that information overload is a critical intermediate variable in deciding credibility.

2.4 Media and Information Literacy as a Defensive Process

A well-publicized strategy aimed at being used to counteract misinformation has been Media and Information Literacy (MIL). As claimed by UNESCO (2019), MIL helps people to be critical about messages in the media, know how it is produced, and identify methods of manipulation.

Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler (2020) present empirical data that people who have better media literacy tend to disseminate fake information on the Internet less often. Advocates of their findings point out that key skills in misinformation fighting should be critical assessment skills, and not platform regulation skills alone. Similarly, Vraga and Tully (2021) demonstrate that media literacy interventions have a positive effect on the capability of users to discern credible and deceptive information.

On the concept of deepfakes, Jones and Paris (2018) opine that MIL will have to be modified to incorporate the concept of AI literacy, or more precisely, the awareness of technologies of synthetic media. Nevertheless, there are few studies that concentrate on developing countries. According to the current studies in Pakistan, most of them focus on the awareness of fake news and not on evaluative competence, which shows a large gap that the research aims to fill.

2.5 Synthesis and Research Gap

There are four significant lessons that are identified in the reviewed literature. To begin with, deep fakes compromise visual credibility, and it is challenging to spot them even to the knowledgeable users. Second, post-truth media space does not support a factual assessment, but rather emotional and belief-based one. Third, it causes a bottleneck in thinking and dependence on heuristics as a result of information overload. Lastly, media and information literacy comes out as one of the major mitigating aspects.

Nevertheless, the available literature seldom incorporates these dimensions in a single piece of empiric research, especially in the Global South like in Pakistan. The vast majority of studies focus on the effects of awareness, overload, or literacy separately and consider the joint effect of the specified constructs on the judgment of credibility under researched. This research paper fills this gap with an empirical test of an integrated framework connecting the following concepts to the likelihood of giving a credibility judgment: deep fake awareness, post-truth orientation, media literacy, and information overload.

3. Theoretical Framework

Three theory perspectives and their complementary approaches, which include post-truth theory, information overload theory, and media and information literacy (MIL) models are the basis of this study. All these frameworks together offer a holistic approach to perceiving credibility judgments formation in modern digital conditions marked by the amplification of algorithms, the content created by artificial intelligence, and the oversaturation of information.

3.1 Post-Truth Theory

Post-truth theory describes a communicative space where objective reality is not considered as significant in influencing the mass opinion as the appeals to the emotional, personal conviction and identity-based stories. Introduced in the academic research by other scholars, like McIntyre (2018), the term post-truth does not mean that the truth will be no more, but that the standards by which information is assessed and believed in will change. Credibility, in post-truth media space, is rather bestowed on the basis of emotional appeal and aligning of ideological interest, social approval than on the basis of empirical provenance and reliability of sources.

Programming algorithms promote post- truth rules within the social media ecosystem, defined by highlighting diversity seen within the social media. The content that creates engagement is emphasized on platforms and in this platform, they tend to favor emotional content, sensational content, or content that elicits polarization. Consequently, there is an increased likelihood of users being exposed to information that confirms already held beliefs and this lowers the desire to scrutinize information. At that, we can also say that manipulated content, such as deep fakes, might

be considered credible not due to the perceived technical authenticity, but due to its alignment with the narratives or emotional anticipations that are predominant.

Compared to the current research, the understanding of post-truth theory contributes to why the depth of fake awareness does not always lead to better responses in the judgments of credibility. On occasions that users know that digital content can be altered, their judgments are influenced by belief systems, political affiliations, and sentiments. Therefore, credibility is relative and an opinion of social construction as opposed to an objective evaluation of facts.

3.2 Theory of Information Overload

Information overload theory offers a cognitive description of why humans have a hard time scoring credibility well whenever the information loads are large. The theory was first described by researchers like Toffler (1970) and later perfected in the field of cognitive psychology and communication by theorists who argued that there is a limited capacity of the human mind. The amount of information, speed, and complexity surpass that of an individual the quality of decisions provided becomes poor.

In the digital media space, people are subjected to constant news feeds, photos, videos, comments, and AI-suggested content. Such continuous exposure causes cognitive load resulting in users relying on heuristics, mental shortcuts and superficial messages like images, titles, or popularity of the source. Cognitively costly processes Systematic processing, e.g. cross-checking sources, analysis of evidence, cross-context integration are commonly avoided.

In the situation of deep fakes and post truth media, the susceptibility to the misinformation increases with the presence of information overload. Cognitive resources to consistently use such knowledge may be lacking in even users who are aware of the manipulation techniques. Realistic AI-created images also increase the cognitive load since a visual stimulus requires extra processing and tends to evoke emotions. Information saturation, therefore, acts as a very crucial device that undermines the evaluation of rational credibility and promotes passive content intake.

In this work, information overload theory justifies the position that the judgment of credibility is limited not only by a lack of awareness but cognitive constraints of information saturated systems. It describes the reason consumers rely more and more on trust heuristics, emotional response, and social validation in assessing on-line information.

3.3 Models of media and information literacy (MIL).

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) models, the one promoted by UNESCO and other researchers in the field specifically, focus on education and critical competence as the long-term means of counteracting misinformation and media manipulation. MIL is not just a simple case of media literacy, but it incorporates the information literacy, digital literacy, and ethical awareness. It aims at giving people the power to access, analyze, evaluate, create and take action upon information in ways that are responsible and well informed.

Concerning this study, the MIL models will offer a normative and corrective aspect. Although post-truth theory and information overload theory are explanations of the circumstances and the limits in which the misinformation has flourished, MIL models provide a way of intervention. The results of this paper serve the MIL policy as they confirm that the increased more media literacy, the greater independence of users in information overload and their opposition to the influence of content of emotional manipulation.

3.4 Integrative Perspective

Collectively, these three theoretical frameworks present a sense of coherent description of the credibility judgments in the era of deep fakes and post-truth media. The Post-truth theory addresses the cultural and ideological change in evaluation of truth, information overload theory addresses

cognitive limitation in information processing and MIL models emphasize education as a corrective mechanism that is sustainable. This combined framework can take the research a step further than technological determinism and place misinformation associated with deepfakes in the wider social, cognitive, and educative frameworks.

3.5 Research Hypotheses

H1: The media orientation of post truth does not have a significant effect on the credibility judgments.

H2: The information overload has a significant impact on credibility judgments.

H3: Media and information literacy leads to primary judgments in the increase of credibility.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The quantitative survey method was used to investigate the association between the variables of the study.

4.2 Sample and Data Collection

This study analyses the data collected from the students studying at different Universities of Lahore. The results of the survey were empirically analyzed with help of SPSS software. Close ended questions were coded in the data file after collecting the overall responses from Google questionnaire in the form of excel file. The result was measured to check the correlation and differences in the approaches of students as the stakeholders. Data Analysis is a process used to clean the data and transform it into a useful information providing base for a decision making (Johnson, 2022). In this study, SPSS software was used for data analysis and Spearman's Test was applied.

4.3 Instrumentation

A questionnaire was constructed in a structured google form in which it had five sections: demographics, deep fake awareness, post-truth orientation, information overload, credibility judgments, and media literacy. The responses would be measured using a five-point Likert scale.

4.4 Reliability and Validity

The alpha that (Cronbach) was 0.834 which is high internal consistency. The literature alignment created content validity.

4.5 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data as well as Pearson correlation on SPSS software.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Findings

The survey respondents showed the great usage of the social media and their exposure to the deep fake visuals.

The following tables present the demographic characteristics and social media usage patterns of the respondents included in the study. The total sample size consisted of 153 respondents.

Table

Age of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-22	105	68.6%
23-27	22	14.4%

27-32	18	11.8%
33 and above	5	3.3%
None	3	2.0%

Table 2

Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	86	56.2%
Male	65	42.5%
None	2	1.3%

Table

Level of Study of Respondents

Level of Study	Frequency	Percentage
Undergraduate	112	73.2%
Master	16	10.5%
Mphil	16	10.5%
Phd	7	4.6%
None	2	1.3%

Table

Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media of Respondents

Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
3-5 hours	66	43.1%
More than 5 hours	46	30.1%
1-3 hours	31	20.3%
Less than one hour	8	5.2%
None	2	1.3%

Social Media Platform	Frequency (n)	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Instagram	105	68.63%
WhatsApp	84	54.90%
YouTube	52	33.99%
Tik Tok	36	23.53%
Facebook	23	15.03%
Twitter (X)	16	10.46%

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100% because respondents were allowed to select multiple platforms.

5.2 Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the instrument was checked with the help of Cronbach alpha (a = 0.834).

5.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Analysis between Information Overload and Post-Truth Orientation

	Informatio n Overload	Post-Truth Orientation

Pearson's Correlation	Information Overload	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.315**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	153	153
	Post-Truth Orientation	Correlation Coefficient	.315**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	153	153

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The findings reveal a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.315$, $p < 0.001$) between information overload and post-truth orientation, indicating a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The results suggest that higher levels of information overload are associated with stronger post-truth orientation among respondents.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Analysis between Information Overload and Credibility Judgments

			Information Overload	Credibility Judgments
Pearson's Correlation	Information Overload	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.347**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	153	153
	Credibility Judgments	Correlation Coefficient	.347**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	153	153

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results show a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.347$, $p < 0.001$) between information overload and credibility judgments, indicating a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The findings suggest that increased information overload significantly influences credibility judgments.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Analysis between Information Overload and Media & Information Literacy

			Information Overload	Media & Information Literacy
Pearson's Correlation	Information Overload	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.186**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.024
		N	153	153
	Media & Information Literacy	Correlation Coefficient	.186**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.024	.
		N	153	153

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The findings show a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.186$, $p = 0.024$) between information overload and media & information literacy, indicating a statistically significant but weak relationship between the two variables. The results suggest that respondents with higher media and information literacy also reported slightly higher levels of information overload.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study offer empirical support for proposed integrative framework, which suggest that the credibility judgments in the digital arena are not only a product of technical awareness but these are deeply embedded in the cognitive and the cultural structures. These significant effects of the post-truth orientation (H1 supported, $r = 0.315$ with information overload) and information overload (H2 supported, $r = 0.347$ with credibility judgments) together validate the information overload theory's prediction that the cognitive saturation redirects the evaluation from systematic to heuristic processing (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Bawden & Robinson, 2009). The significant positive contribution of media and information literacy (H3 supported) confirms normative corrective function that MIL models assign to critical educational competence (UNESCO, 2019; Vraga & Tully, 2021). The discussion that follows interprets each empirical finding through its corresponding theoretical lens.

In line with the post-truth theory, the findings show that emotionally expressive and beliefs based judgments are the main factors when seeking to accept or reject information. This pattern corresponds precisely to the post-truth theory's diagnosis, articulated in Section 3.1, that algorithmic curation and affective amplification on the social media platforms structurally privilege emotionally resonant content over factually verified information (McIntyre, 2018). The moderate positive correlation between information overload and post-truth orientation ($r = 0.315$) further corroborates the theoretical argument that these two constructs are mutually reinforcing: cognitive saturation intensifies the reliance on identity-consistent narratives, which in turn deepens post-truth dispositions. Notably, the findings highlight the vital importance of media and media literacy to reduce vulnerabilities. Individuals who had better media literacy demonstrated more confidence in their media literacy to judge sources, cross-check information and manipulative cues. It seems that media literacy serves as a mental buffer, which allows the users to avoid emotional manipulation as well as the shortcuts/ shortcuts that information overload imposes. This observation is conducive to media/information literacy models which take long-term remedial action instead of a short-term technical remedy.

This finding is directly anticipated by the MIL models outlined in Section 3.3, which characterize credibility evaluation not as an innate aptitude but as an acquired critical competence cultivated through source analysis, bias detection, and contextual reasoning (UNESCO, 2019). The positive and significant correlation of MIL with credibility judgments (H3 supported) validates the MIL framework's normative claim that education can function as a countervailing force against both post-truth dispositions and the cognitive vulnerabilities produced by information overload. Importantly, this result extends the integrative perspective articulated in Section 3.4: while post-truth theory and information overload theory explain the conditions under which misinformation flourishes, MIL models provide the mechanism through which those conditions can be mitigated. The three frameworks are, therefore, not merely co-present in this study but empirically interdependent.

The findings are of particular concern in the Pakistan where social media platforms are becoming the key to political discussions, religious discussions, and social mobilization. These three factors of high social media usage, little formal digital literacy training, and emotionally compelling

content are ingredients of the perfect space to develop the post-truth storylines and deep fake-driven misinformation. Enhancing the media literacy in higher education is not only useful in resiliency on an individual level but also in the health of the discourse.

In general, the above discussion shows that deep fake challenge should be conceptualized as a problem in many dimensions, which is not only limited to technology. The intersection of the cognition, culture, and information environments gives rise to the credibility judgment. This paper inserts deepfakes into contexts of post-truth theory, the theory of information overload, and the models of media and information literacy, which allows seeing misinformation dynamics in a more comprehensive light and suggests that education-based interventions as a long-term solution. Implications:

6.1 Practical Implications

Deep fake literacy should be introduced in schools. More precisely, the MIL models (Section 3.3) demand that institutions move beyond simple awareness campaigns toward the cultivation of structured evaluative competencies: source criticism, contextual analysis, and recognition of emotional manipulation. The significant positive relationship between MIL and credibility judgments (H4 supported) indicates that students who have received formal or informal training in critical media consumption are better positioned to resist deep fake-driven misinformation even under conditions of high information overload.

Universities in Pakistan should therefore integrate digital ethics, synthetic media literacy, and critical information evaluation into core curricula across disciplines, not only in media and communication programs. This is consistent with UNESCO's (2019) MIL policy framework, which calls for embedding information literacy within broader educational systems as a prerequisite for democratic participation in the digital age.

6.2 Limitations and Future research:

Weaknesses consist of sample size as well as dependency on self-reports. Proposed research needs to use experimental designs and bigger samples.

7. Conclusion

The main objective of the study was to examine the intersection of deepfake technology, post-truth media orientation, and credibility judgments in the Pakistani social media landscape, especially under the ambit of an overloaded information environment. The empirical evidence resulted through this research suggests that the crisis of credibility in the digital age is not only a technical glitch but an epistemological challenge rooted in human cognition and cultural shifts.

The results of this research shows that post-truth media landscape significantly diminishes the role of objective verification, as the users increasingly prioritize emotional appeal and identity-based narratives over the factual accuracy of the information. Importantly, the study has found that Deep fake awareness alone is not a sufficient safeguard; knowing that the content *can* be manipulated does not necessarily translate into critical resistance when that content aligns with a user's pre-existing beliefs or triggers potent emotions. This highlights a "critical skills gap" where technological familiarity fails to overcome motivated reasoning.

Moreover, the research examines the Information Overload as an important mediating variable that facilitates the dilution of the rational judgment. When users are faced with a relentless flow of data and cognitive saturation, even well-informed users abandon the systematic processing in favor of the heuristics and the cognitive shortcuts, such as visual realism and the source familiarity. Under these circumstances, deep fake content, which is especially designed to exploit the visual trust finds a highly susceptible and vulnerable audience.

Finally, the findings illustrate that Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is the most effective mechanism against AI generated deep fakes and post-truth disturbances. Media information literacy is not only a skill but a major cognitive construct that empowers social media users to interpret and evaluate the information independently, even in the saturated environments.

From a policy perspective, these results imply that while technical countermeasures such as AI-based detection and platform moderation, they are insufficient to address the core issue. A sustainable solution requires a long-term investment in human cognition through higher education. Integration of critical thinking, digital ethics, and media literacy into academia, particularly in developing contexts like Pakistan, a resilient public can be cultivated which will be capable of navigating the complex, AI-generated communication landscapes of future.

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