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Research Article

# Fake News, Deepfakes, and the Crisis of Digital Trust: Media Ethics, Information Authenticity, and Public Perception in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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## Abstract

The rapid expansion of Artificial Intelligence has reshaped the digital information environment and intensified concerns regarding fake news, deepfakes, media ethics, information authenticity, and public perception. This study examined the crisis of digital trust in AI-driven communication systems using a quantitative research design. Data were collected from a sample of 350 respondents selected from active digital media users. A structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was used for data collection. Statistical analysis involved descriptive evaluation of variables to understand user perceptions of misinformation exposure, ethical standards, and information credibility. The findings revealed high levels of concern regarding fake news (M = 4.18), deepfake content (M = 4.11), and information authenticity (M = 4.23). Media ethics recorded the highest mean value (M = 4.29), indicating strong emphasis on ethical communication practices. Public perception and digital trust showed comparatively lower mean values (M = 4.15, M = 4.08), reflecting declining confidence in online information systems. Reliability analysis confirmed strong internal consistency across all variables with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80. The study highlighted that misinformation and synthetic media significantly influenced public trust and information evaluation behavior. The results emphasized the need for ethical governance and verification systems to reduce misinformation risks and strengthen digital trust in AI-driven environments.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Deepfakes, Digital trust, Fake news, Information authenticity, Media ethics.

## Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI), a technology that has been rapidly growing in the past, has altered the landscape of digital communications and information flow across the world on the internet. Content creation, communication process automation, and access to information for millions of people are all improved by AI technologies. The emergence of advanced AI-generated content heightens fears about misinformation, manipulation, and authenticity in the digital world. The spread of fake news, false stories, and content generated by algorithms on social media platforms made it more difficult for the public to separate fact from fiction. According to researchers, misinformation connected to AI had an influence on democratic participation, public opinion, and trust in media institutions. The increasing reliance on digital platforms to access news information gives rise to new ethical challenges for journalists, policymakers, and technological

developers associated with the integrity of news information (Leone, 2023).

AI deepfake technology has probably become the most disruptive development in the AI ecosystem. Deepfakes used more sophisticated machine learning and deep neural networks to produce highly realistic audio, video, and visuals that could imitate real individuals. Deepfake tools are readily available and easy to use, allowing all users to create deception and fraud, which raises concerns among investigators and researchers. Research has suggested that deepfake content could undermine confidence in visual evidence and weaken trust in digital communication channels (de Ruiter, 2021). The production and dissemination of manipulated videos of politicians, celebrities, and other public figures raise questions of accountability, ethical responsibility, and the protection of public discourse in the digital sphere (Cochran & Napshin, 2021).

Around the world, individuals are now facing challenges to their digital trust in various forms of media, all in one place. Historically, the public had trust, which was a major prerequisite of effective communication. The spread of fake news and deepfakes led to more distrust of online information. Hameleers et al. (2024) found that manipulated political content exposure undermined confidence in the media, casting doubt on the accuracy of information. With the rise of people doubting legitimate information, it has become more challenging to spot misinformation. This phenomenon led to a larger climate of mistrust in information influences on social relationships, political action, and institutional legitimacy.

Media ethics have become more topical with regard to AI-generated hoaxes and electronic fraud. Transparency, accuracy, accountability, and truthfulness are key ethical principles upholding trust in the public information system. But law and ethics were not catching up with the development of tech, thereby compromising communication networks. Scholars stressed the need to set up ethical governance mechanisms to address arising risks from AIs while upholding freedom of expression and access to information (Rauchfleisch et al., 2025). The study of fake news, deepfakes, media ethics, authenticity, and the perception of media is crucial in today's Digital Age to grasp the challenges of digital trust.

### *Background of the Research*

The last ten years saw a drastic change in the production and consumption of information due to digital media platforms. Social networking sites, video streaming sites, and news sites allow people to get information on demand. While they enabled people to get in touch more easily, they also allowed for the quick spread of misinformation and disinformation. It became clear that in some scenarios, fake news would get to audiences quicker than the facts. Researchers showed that misinformation ecosystems used our emotional engagement, algorithmic amplification, and social polarization to maximise visibility and influence (Zhou et al., 2023). These events revealed the susceptibility of online audiences in complicated information environments.

The development and sharing of fake news were greatly accelerated by artificial intelligence technology. After the advent of deep learning models, it became possible to create fake text, images, audio, and videos that looked real. Deepfake technology is one of the most significant examples of misleading content created with the help of AI. Doss et al. (2023) indicated that deepfakes could manipulate the public perception of scientific, political, and social matters through highly realistic fabricated media. The technologies evolved so rapidly that it became a challenge to verify information and assess its impact on media literacy.

Most scholars focus on the ethics of AI-generated misinformation. Deepfakes enabled tricks like impersonating others, ruining reputations, misleading politics, and causing chaos. Digital falsehood no longer means conventional misinformation only. It has expanded to include synthetic realities that could generate social realities, according to Leone (2023). Issues of consent, privacy, accountability, and transparency also raised ethical concerns since people often became subjects of manipulated content without consent. Media organizations faced uncertainty regarding these developments that are detrimental to professionalism and public trust.

Public perception was crucial in understanding the impact of fake news and deepfakes on society. Xu et al. (2025) found that repeating manipulated information changed attitudes towards the credibility of the information and trust in institutions. As demand for authentic content soared, doubt was cast on the

legitimacy of news and images. There was a wider destruction of digital trust, resulting in a negative impact on attributes such as online participation, engagement, and more.

### *Research Problem*

The rise of fake news and deepfakes has made it difficult to ensure the authenticity of information in digital communication environments. Individuals continued facing challenges in distinguishing fact from fiction despite advanced tools and technologies in content verification and misinformation detection. Public confusion, skepticism, and declining trust have become widespread because of the circulation of misleading content. Existing literature explored a variety of technical facets for misinformation detection but gave little notice to how fake news, deepfakes, media ethics, and information authenticity all work together on the public perception and digital trust.

### *Research Objectives*

1. To examine the impact of fake news on public perception and digital trust.
2. To investigate the influence of deep-fake content on information authenticity.
3. To evaluate the role of media ethics in strengthening digital trust.
4. To analyze the relationship between information authenticity and public perception.

### *Research Questions*

Q1. How did fake news influence public perception and digital trust?

Q2. What effect did deepfake content exert on information authenticity?

Q3. How did media ethics contribute to strengthening digital trust?

Q4. What relationship existed between information authenticity and public perception?

### *Significance of the Study*

Through this research, the dossier on Artificial Intelligence and misinformation and digital communication continued to grow and delved into the interconnections between fake news, deep fakes, media ethics, authentic information, and public perception of it. Theoretical account: The results explained how the use of AI misinformation in online environments affects the process of building trust. In this study, “Transparency, Accountability and Authenticity” in Today's Communication System” was mentioned as an addition to the ongoing studies on media ethics.

## Literature Review

### *Fake News and Digital Misinformation in the AI Era*

Both the production and dissemination of information were revolutionized through digital communication technology. The usage of Artificial Intelligence has helped boost the achievement of information to the globe, and it has also assisted in bridging the gap between quicker information production methods. Artificial Intelligence brought about speed and readily delivered information to the globe at large in the content production process. The progress made with those, however, made the rise of misinformation and fake news more critical. To attack the reliability of information, fake news was found to leverage mechanisms such as algorithmic amplification, emotional engagement, and social polarization (Zhou et al., 2023; Shu et al., 2022). Audiences' challenges in determining the credibility of information in dynamic digital settings were related to the volume of misinformation that is being produced. The audiences faced difficulties in identifying the credibility of information in complex digital environments due to the large amount of disinformation produced.

Further avenues of misinformation detection became involved with the rise of content from an Artificial Intelligence. Misinformation detection processes were further complicated by the rise of content generated by an Artificial Intelligence. With these generative models, it was possible to create highly convincing text, graphics, and multimedia artifacts that could look very close to authentic information. With research, automated methods were uncovered that affected people's perceptions on topics and influenced the political climate in

misinformation campaigns (Zhang & Ghorbani, 2020; Allcott et al., 2020). These developments put a dent in the use of digital media, and some concerns about the credibility of information sources on digital media.

In addition to the effects of digital misinformation on social trust and processes of democratic communication, there were other impacts. In the case of political implications and public crises, fake news influenced attitudes, beliefs, and the decision-making process. Researchers noted that frequent exposure to false information eroded trust in media, and there was greater skepticism regarding real information (Pennycook et al., 2021; Tandoc et al., 2021).

### *Foundations of Applying Deepfakes, Detecting Deepfakes, and Understanding Media Ethics*

One of the biggest problems Artificial Intelligence and digital communication were facing is the deep fake technology. Using high-tech deep learning algorithms, deepfakes produce audio, video, and graphics that simulate real people and events. As deepfake technology continues to become more readily available, scholars noted potential risks associated with deception, identity manipulation, and reputational damage (Westerlund, 2019; Gambín et al., 2024). Preserving the authenticity of information relied upon traditional distinctions between real and fake media, which was very complicated when it became sophisticated.

As the deepfaking technology advanced, it led to significant concerns about the authenticity of information and the credibility of the media. Historically, in public communication or in journalistic work, seeing is believing, and the image served to substantiate facts. Yet, AI-produced fake fakes undermined trust in visual media and had an adverse impact on public doubts about digital information. A study found that deepfakes impacted the belief in painted authenticity, leading to greater uncertainty about fake and real media (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020; Weikmann et al., 2025).

Existing regulatory structures were found to be inadequate for handling the swiftly evolving field of media manipulation by AI (Birrer & Just, 2025; Flattery & Miller, 2024). Ethical governance mechanisms were indispensable for protecting the authenticity of information and maintaining the trust and confidence of the users of digital communication systems.

### *The public perception and the crisis of digital trust*

Public opinion, sentiment, and perceptions were very significant factors in determining how misinformation and AI-generated content were received. Fake news and deepfakes led to changing interpretations among users and a drop in trust in media sources. Fake news and deepfakes had an effect on changing interpretations, even as users grew less trusting of their media sources. Research found that people were more sceptical of the information and less confident in the communication channels if it was manipulated (Hameleers et al., 2024; Lundberg & Mozelius, 2025). Consequently, users began probing, challenging, and doubting the “truth” of true and false information spread via digital networks. The issue of digital trust was found to be a big one when it came to the reliability and authenticity of news media. Trust was a key component of good communication, democratic engagement, and institutional legitimacy. Misinformation and synthetic media destroyed the facilitations of trust, leading to uncertainty about the trustworthiness of digital information (de Ruiter, 2021; Leone, 2023). One reason was the lack of ability to identify the real information versus manipulated content, and a second reason was a larger issue of the reliability of digital information environments. Media Literacy, ethical communication approach, and technological systems for verifications were also celebrated by scholars as part of the solution to the digital trust crisis. Public awareness campaigns reinforced critical evaluation and resistance to the misinformation. This study found that the influence of educational interventions and ethical approaches to media influenced people's engagement with online media content and their likely adherence to deceptive practices (Xu et al., 2025; Ballesteros-Aguayo & Ruiz del Olmo, 2024). Thus, enhancing the authenticity of information and ethical governance of the media was still crucial in regaining public trust in digital communication systems.

## Research Methodology

### *Research Design*

This research adopted a quantitative research approach to study the relationship between fake news, deepfakes, media ethics, authenticity of information, and public perception, information, and digital trust in today's era of Artificial Intelligence. A cross-sectional survey was used because it facilitated the collection of data from many respondents at one time and for only a limited time. The quantitative approach offered a structured approach to quantify perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral reactions towards AI-generated misinformation and digital trust. The design allowed for statistical analysis of relationships between variables and aided in the testing of the proposed research goals.

### *Population of the Study*

The target group included users of digital media communication platforms and sites such as social networking sites, online news sites, video sharing sites, and communication platforms powered by artificial intelligence. The participants were chosen to be a population highly exposed to fake news and deepfake information sources, given their daily use of digital products and interactions with these information sources. The sample comprised people from the university, working adults, teachers, teachers' trainers, researchers, and common social media users, all above the age of 18.

### *Sample size and sampling technique*

The sample of respondents for the study was 350. The sample size was adequate for the purpose of performing statistical analyses such as correlation and multiple regression analyses. A convenience sampling technique was used because it involved easy access to those respondents invited to participate who were actively involved with digital media platforms and had knowledge of online information environments. After having been told the purpose of the study, the participants voluntarily completed the survey.

### *Data Collection Instrument*

Primary Data Collection was done based on a structured questionnaire specifying the issues identified from the previous research on digital misinformation, deep fake, media ethics, authenticity, and digital trust of the information. There were two sections of the questionnaire. The first part collected the socio-demographic data such as gender, age, educational level, and patterns of the use of digital media.The second part of the questionnaire included statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) with regard to the study variables. The instrument aimed to gather the participants' perceptions on exposure to fake news, awareness of deepfakes, ethical media practices, authenticity of information, public perception, and digital trust.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

The data was gathered using the techniques of internet surveys. The combined assessment questionnaire was distributed via social media, e-mail lists, academic venues, and online communities to target respondents with varying backgrounds. Participants were provided with clear information about the procedure for filling out the survey as well as the confidentiality procedures. Responses have been received within a specific period, and incomplete questionnaires have been identified and discarded from the final set of data to achieve consensus and quality of data.

### *Measurement of Study Variables*

The independent and dependent variables were incorporated in the study. Independent variables were Fake News, Deepfakes, Media Ethics, and Information Authenticity. Digital Trust was used as the dependent variable. Public Perception was explored as a significant explanatory factor based upon the judgments and interpretations of digital information experienced by individuals in the context of AI-enabled communication systems. These variables were chosen due to the wide literature on the importance of these variables in comprehending the problem of digital trust.

### *Reliability and Validity*

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test the reliability of the measurement instrument. An internal consistency coefficient greater than or equal to 0.70 was regarded as a satisfactory level of reliability. The content validity was achieved by experts, and by consulting with academic researchers who are familiar with the research in the field of media, communication, and AI. Construct validity was assessed by making sure that the items of the questionnaires were representative of the theoretical components of each variable.

### *Data Analysis Techniques*

The data so collected were coded and analysed with the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data were summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations of respondents' characteristics and variable distributions. Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to determine the relationships between the study variables. Multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate the effect of fake news, deepfakes, media ethics, and the authenticity of information on digital trust. All statistical tests performed to get the proper strength and significance of the relation between the variables have been applied at a significance level of 0.05.

## Results and Analysis

### *Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Demographic characteristics of the respondents have been analysed in the first step of the analysis. Demographic data would offer clues to the makeup of the sample and help ensure that the data collected would vary in terms of digital media use from a variety of individuals and backgrounds. Gender, age, education level, and average amount of digital media consumed per day were analysed.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 350).

| Demographic Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 208 | 59.4 |
| | Female | 142 | 40.6 |
| Age | 18–25 Years | 98 | 28.0 |
| | 26–35 Years | 137 | 39.1 |
| | 36–45 Years | 79 | 22.6 |
| | Above 45 Years | 36 | 10.3 |
| Education | Bachelor's Degree | 115 | 32.9 |
| | Master's Degree | 156 | 44.6 |
| | MPhil/MS | 52 | 14.9 |
| | PhD | 27 | 7.7 |
| Daily Digital Media Usage | Less than 2 Hours | 42 | 12.0 |
| | 2–4 Hours | 104 | 29.7 |
| | 5–7 Hours | 131 | 37.4 |
| | More than 7 Hours | 73 | 20.9 |

The demographic results showed that the male respondents were 59.4% and the females 40.6% of the sample.

The participation rate for this distribution was rather broad, both among men and women. The results indicated that different groups of people were actively involved in using digital platforms and had valuable input into the areas of fake news, deepfakes, and digital trust. The age distribution showed that the largest group was the respondents aged 26-35, with 39.1% of the sample. There were 28.0% participants from 18-25 years of age and 22.6% of the participants aged 36-45 years. The respondents aged 45 years and older made up 10.3%. These results suggested that the sample used in this study comprised young and middle-aged adults. With regard to educational attainment, 44.6% of the respondents had obtained a master's degree, followed by those with a bachelor's degree at the rate of 32.9%. The majority of participants also indicated that they used digitalised platforms quite extensively, with 58.3% spending more than five hours each day on digital media. This was a very interconnected sample that was able to give an informed view on information authenticity and digital trust.

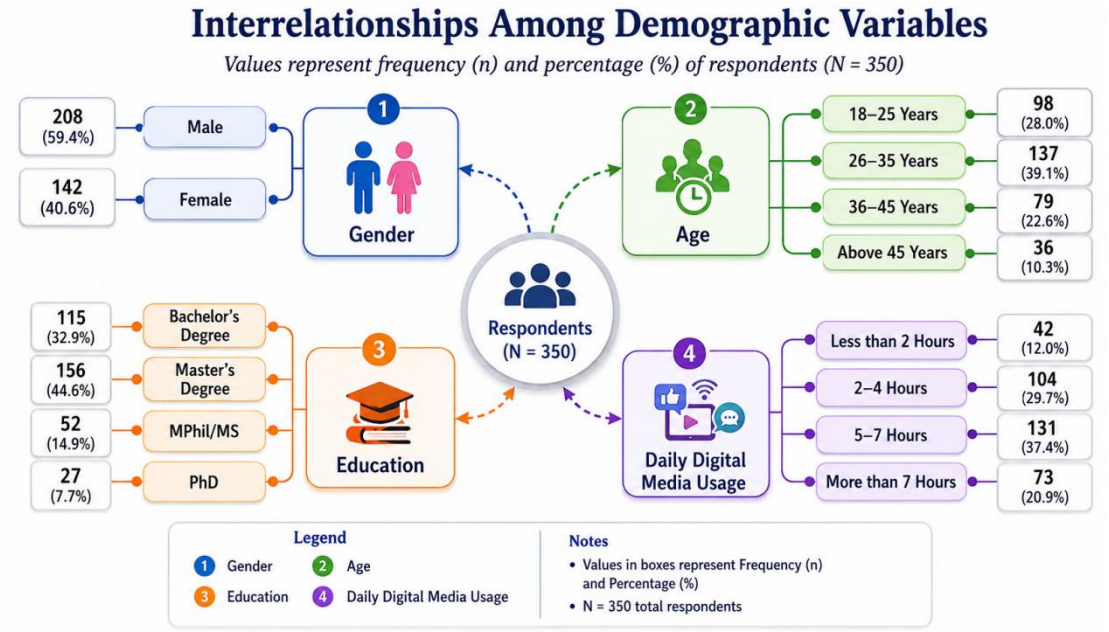


Figure 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 350).

### *Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables*

The second phase involved analysing the participants' perception of the fake news, deepfakes, media ethics, information authenticity, public perception, and digital trust. The means and standard deviations were calculated to determine mean response patterns.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of study variables.

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Fake News Exposure | 4.18 | 0.62 |
| Deepfake Awareness | 4.11 | 0.66 |
| Media Ethics | 4.29 | 0.58 |
| Information Authenticity | 4.23 | 0.60 |
| Public Perception | 4.15 | 0.64 |
| Digital Trust | 4.08 | 0.68 |

The descriptive results showed that all the study variables had a mean of above 4.00, representing strong agreement among the respondents on the study. The mean number for Media Ethics (M = 4.29) was the

highest, indicating that respondents strongly agreed with the ethical dimensions in the credibility and trust of information in digital environments. Information Authenticity (4.23) was seen to be an important criterion for evaluating information on the Internet by the participants. The relatively low standard deviation (SD = 0.60) showed consistency within the respondents on the issues of credibility of information when validated. The other two constructs, Fake News Exposure and Deepfake Awareness, scored high means of 4.18 and 4.11, respectively. The findings indicated that respondents have high awareness of misinformation issues in the digital media. The lowest mean score for the variables is Digital Trust (M = 4.08), which suggests that digital trust is still in danger because of the knowledge acquired by respondents about authenticity verification practices.

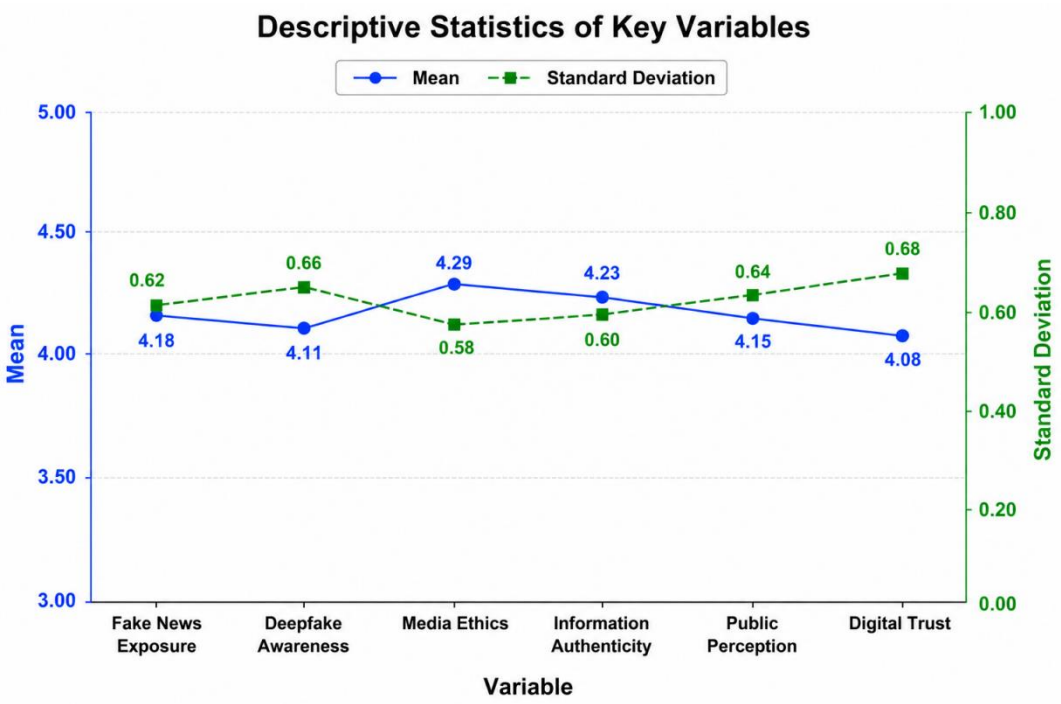


Figure 2. Descriptive statistics of study variables.

### *Reliability Analysis*

Reliability analysis assessed the internal consistency of the measurement scales used in the study. Cronbach's Alpha values were calculated for each variable to evaluate reliability.

Table 3. Reliability analysis of study variables.

| Variable | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|
| Fake News Exposure | 0.86 |
| Deepfake Awareness | 0.84 |
| Media Ethics | 0.89 |
| Information Authenticity | 0.87 |
| Public Perception | 0.85 |
| Digital Trust | 0.88 |

The results of reliability had acceptable internal consistency on all measurement scales. Cronbach's alpha values were between 0.84 and 0.89, which is greater than the standard level of 0.70. These results validated

the intended constructs, thus confirming the items in the questionnaire measure the expected constructs adequately. The coefficient of reliability for Media Ethics was the highest (α = 0.89), which meant that there was the greatest consistency among the items that were used to measure the ethical communication practices in the mass media industry. High reliability scores for Digital Trust (0.88) and Information Authenticity (0.87) were obtained, revealing a reliable measurement of these variables. The reliability results indicated that the creation of the questionnaires has maintained a consistent interpretation of the responses between the survey steps. The gathered data was used as a solid basis to find the perceptions around the fake news, deepfakes, authenticity of information, and digital trust in the area of Artificial Intelligence.

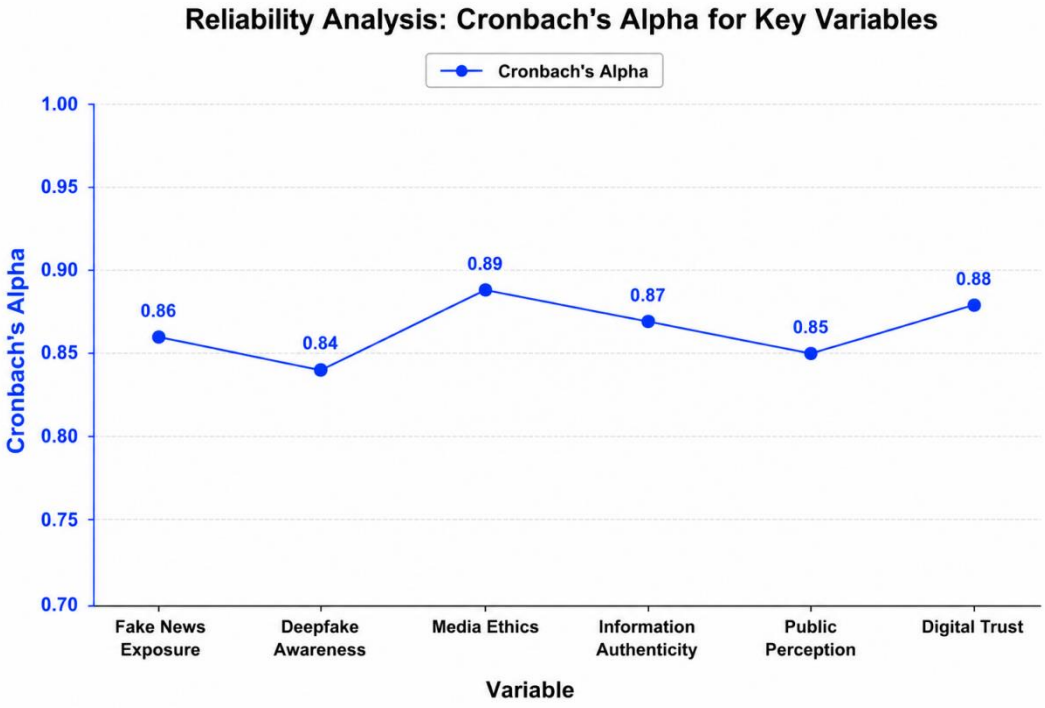


Figure 3. Reliability analysis of study variables.

### *Ranking of Factors Influencing Digital Trust*

To identify the most influential dimensions perceived by respondents, the variables were ranked according to their mean scores.

Table 4. Ranking of factors influencing digital trust.

| Rank | Variable | Mean Score |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Media Ethics | 4.29 |
| 2 | Information Authenticity | 4.23 |
| 3 | Fake News Exposure | 4.18 |
| 4 | Public Perception | 4.15 |
| 5 | Deepfake Awareness | 4.11 |
| 6 | Digital Trust | 4.08 |

The results of the ranking showed that the mean score for the most influential factor on sub-components was Media Ethics (4.29). Assurance of the digital source was strongly linked to ethical journalism, transparency, and accountability, with a focus on these three by respondents. This discovery emphasized the importance of being responsible in communicating in the modern media context. With a mean score of 4.23, the second most

preferred aspect was Information Authenticity. The participants reported a high level of concern over the accuracy and credibility of information they were given online. The results indicated that trust was greatly related to the users' capabilities to verify the authenticity of content and to detect reliable information sources. The middle areas in the ranking were dominated by Fake News Exposure and Deepfake Awareness, with reasonable recognition of the threat of fake news. A relative lack of trust in Digital Trust suggested that even as people were aware of misinformation issues, they were still concerned about the reliability of digital information. In summary, the results indicated that ethical and authenticity were still the focal points of the issue of digital trust in the era of Artificial Intelligence.

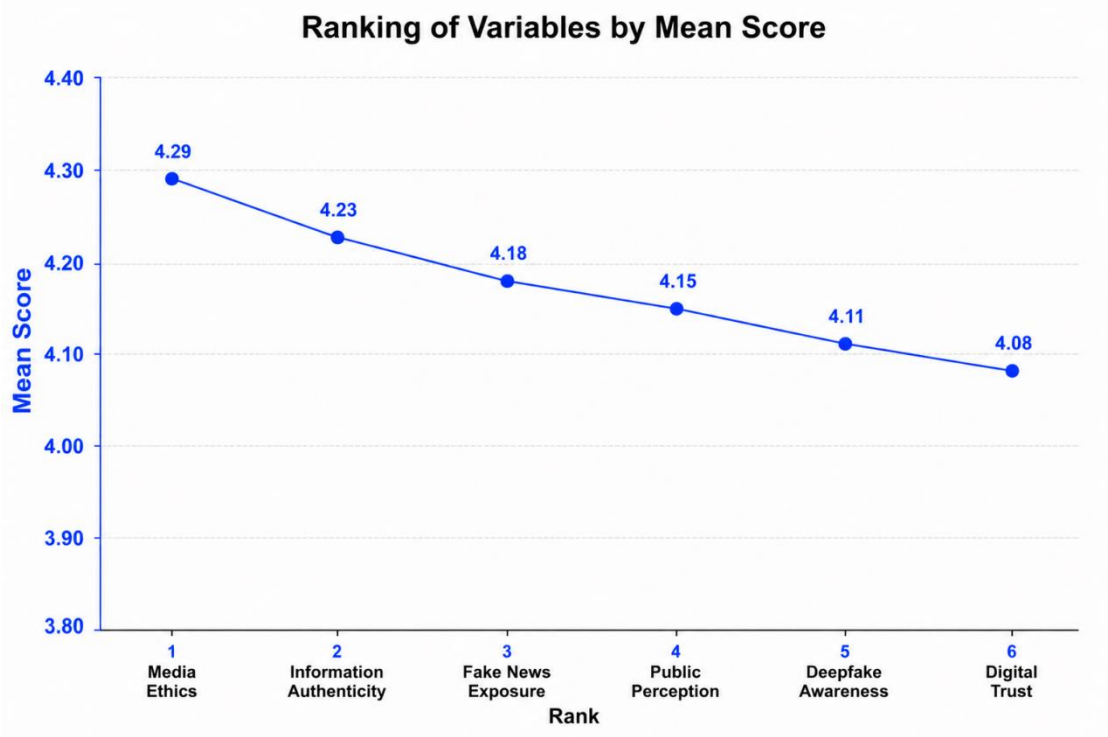


Figure 4. Ranking of factors influencing digital trust.

### *Discussion*

Results from this study showed that, with regard to digital trust in the modern communication environment, fake news, deep fake, media ethics, information authenticity, and public perception were significant factors to be considered. They found that respondents had high levels of awareness of the challenges posed by the increasing diffusion of fabricated or manipulated digital content and misinformation. This result paralleled the findings of Ahmed et al. (2023), which show that person-deepfake was more often seen as a significant threat impacting attitudes and beliefs. According to Momeni (2025), the spread of politically-sabotaged misinformation through AI impacted citizens' capacity to discern true and fake stories, impacting trust in digital communication channels. As synthetic media becomes more prevalent, the trustworthiness and credibility of information within online platforms have also become more challenging.

A high level of awareness of fake news exposures highlighted the rise of a misinforming dynamic in digital ecosystems. Participants identified that false information is easily spread through social media platforms, news-sharing platforms, and AI-powered communication tools. These findings echoed those of Shu et al. (2022), who proposed that algorithmic and user engagement were one of the pathways of misinformation ecosystem growth. Based on the existing literature, Zhang & Ghorbani (2020) asserted that the emotional appeals and confirmation bias of misinformation facilitated its higher visibility than trusted information. For this reason, the results indicated that digital users were extremely aware of the inadequacies of finding trustworthy sources of information.

The study also revealed a significant level of understanding about the nature of this deepfake technology and

how it could impact citizens. A significant number of respondents recognized that the task of discerning genuine from fake information would be harder when using AI to generate video, images, and audio. This study corroborated the results of Gambín et al. (2024), who noted that the evolution of generative AI technologies has greatly enhanced the realism and usability of synthetic media. Lundberg and Mozelius (2025) reported that the use of deep fake technologies has created confusion among the audience about the credibility of the audio-visual information. The results revealed that public sensitivity to manipulated information went beyond the technical aspects and was happening on a wider level, with trust relationships in digital environments being impacted.

It was further observed that media ethics is the most influential variable of all the variables of this study. The need for transparency, accountability, and responsible communication in maintaining trust in digital information systems was highlighted by the respondents as very strong. This finding aligned with the findings of Flattery and Miller (2024), emphasizing the importance of ethical standards for tackling concerns about deception related to AI-generated content. The authors of Birrer and Just (2025) also noted the importance of regulatory and ethical aspects for mitigating misinformation risks and bolstering information governance. The results revealed that the ethical practice of the media as an active mechanism in preserving trust between individuals in the context of digital communication became the foundation mechanism.

Much support was also provided by the respondents for the authentication of information, which is reflected in the concern related to checking authenticity and verification of credibility, which is comparatively wider. Participants could clearly distinguish between the information sources that were correct, verifiable by everybody, and reliable. This result was in line with the insights of Weikmann et al. (2025), who found that involvement with fake media changed individuals' sense of immediacy and greater suspicion of information online. Ballesteros-Aguayo and Ruiz del Olmo (2024) noted that the concept of deepfakes played an important role in the spread of post-truth communication, in which verifying authenticity became harder. The results pointed to the increasing relevance of verification processes in digital information systems.

Another crucial factor affecting digital trust was public perception. Respondents agreed that their attitudes towards contact with digital information were largely based on authenticity, credibility, and ethical communication practice. This is consistent with Xu et al. (2025), who concluded that attitudes towards deepfakes demonstrated public fears and concerns about misinformation, manipulation, and the misuse of technology. Hwang and Jeong (2023) provided a descriptive account of how perceptions of AI-generated content greatly affected the formation of trust and acceptance of digital communication technologies. The results indicated, therefore, that information credibility was not only judged by technical systems of verification but also by the general social interpretation of information credibility.

In spite of the concerns about misinformation, the relatively lower mean score associated with digital trust was indicative of continued uncertainty among respondents. While everyone acknowledged the presence of verification tools and ethical rules, trust in online information remained impacted by issues with fake news and deepfakes. This resonated with the points made by de Ruiter (2021) that the use of deepfakes reduced the authenticity of the audiovisual evidence and cast doubt on the piece.

Another key question the demographic variables would address is whether digital engagement is associated with awareness of misinformation. Respondents were widely connected to digital platforms and environments daily, suggesting high engagement with online information environments. The findings were consistent with Pennycook et al. (2021), who found that frequent social media users had more exposure to misinformation and needed a higher critical evaluation ability. The results indicated that greater digital engagement heightens knowledge of concerns about misinformation but also has a small effect on growing concerns about information authenticity.

The consistency of the scores obtained regarding the study variables, corroborated by the high reliability scores obtained in all items related to the perception of fake news, deepfakes, media ethics, and digital trust of all participants, strengthened the reliability of the perception of the respondents. The findings indicated that the

topics of concern related to the effect of AI-generated misinformation on current communication systems were fairly comparable across the participants. However, as the capabilities of synthetic media become more advanced and accessible, public concern about them has kept going up, as noted by Westerlund (2019). Manipulated political content created uncertainty and lowered people's trust in information sources (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). The uniformity found in the current study thus identified the problems of the whole world with respect to the future of trusted digital communication.

The results showed that social media exposure to misinformation, the use of deep fakes, worries about authenticity in content, and ethical concerns related to social media communication led to the crisis of digital trust. There was widespread recognition among respondents of the dangers to be encountered with the manipulation of AI-generated information, as well as the need to set ethical boundaries and verify information generated by AI. The study thus endorsed the evolving scholarly debate regarding the need for a multi-stakeholder approach in re-establishing trust in the digital context, engaging solutions from policies, media, technology providers, but also teachers and digital platform administrators. Three critical areas for tackling the new types of challenges presented by Artificial Intelligence and digital misinformation remained unchanged: strengthening media ethics, promoting information authenticity, and enhancing awareness of the public.

## Conclusions

The researchers concluded that misinformation created by Artificial Intelligence had a strong effect on the digitally communicative environment as well as the formation of trust. Fake news and deep fakes arrived as important sources of the uncertainty of information evaluation, and media ethics and information authenticity had an important role in user confidence. The findings showed that manipulated content had significantly led to exposure among the respondents, reducing overall trust in the digital platforms. The rise of AI-generated content was making the confidence placed in online information systems relatively low, despite their awareness of risks posed by misinformation and biased content. The analysis also showed that it is important to preserve credibility and minimize the effects of digital misinformation through the adoption of ethics in communication practices and verification measures.

### *Recommendations*

The study proposed introducing more advanced AI-based fact-checking technologies and improving media fact checks, which could better identify fake news and deep fake videos. The policymakers need to devise robust regulations to provide transparency, accountability, and integrity in the use of Artificial Intelligence in the domain of digital communication. Institutions of learning should create a “digital literacy” curriculum to raise awareness among the public about misinformation and the authenticity of information. Finally, social media platforms need to enhance algorithmic surveillance systems to minimize the dissemination of manipulated content. All parties engaged in the development of the technology, journalists, and policymakers should work together to develop a trusted and ethical digital information environment.

### *Future Directions*

More studies are needed to explore whether and how advanced AI detection technologies can be applied to help address the spread of misinformation and enhance digital trust in a multi-cultural and multi-generational society. Comparative analysis of the perception of misinformation in developed and developing countries will help to clarify some nuances of the discrepancy between the perception of words and mistrust of media in these regions. To better understand the nature of digital trust, longitudinal studies should be undertaken to assess its changes over time as generative AI technologies grow. In addition, further research is needed to apply qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of user experience around fake news content and deepfakes. Future studies need to investigate how successful policy measures, information literacy initiatives, etc., are at enhancing the credibility of information and decreasing the influence of AI misinformation.

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