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Artificial Intelligence and the Post-Truth Dilemma: Rethinking Political Communication and Democracy in the Era of Deepfakes

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ABSTRACT: The study examined how Artificial Intelligence (AI) has changed how information is garnered, processed and disseminated. This also applies to political communication and democracy, which undergo prospects and challenges due to rapid advancement in AI. However, the research assessed the synergy between Artificial Intelligence and the post-truth dilemma in promoting misinformation and emotional appeal at the expense of objective facts and how deepfakes, which are one of the AI-driven tools, spread fake news and have become a source of political manipulation, falsehood and misinformation in society. This paper analysed different literature to bridge the gap between artificial intelligence and deep fakes. The post-truth theory was deployed to foreground this work as it investigated the implications of synthetic media on elections, public opinion, and freedom of expression. According to the theoretical discussion of the study, the post-truth theory and artificial intelligence-based technologies like deepfakes are not only a means of innovation but an influential force that transforms the way of producing and spreading truth. However, they destroy the boundary between reality and the fake, and they move democratic communication as a platform of reasoned discussion towards an emotional platform.. Furthermore, the theoretical implications of the study indicated a complete shift in production, mediation, and understanding of truth in the digital era. Thus, the research suggested a new paradigm of communication based on critical media awareness and responsible AI governance.

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence, Deep fakes, Post-truth, Political Communication, Democracy, Misinformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of the most transformative technological revolutions of the 21st century, transforming the most important areas of human life, including the healthcare sector, finance, education, and communication (Nyale, Karume, and Kipkebut, 2024; Bahroun et al., 2023; Farrelly & Baker, 2023). In the political communication field, AI has made a particularly important impression, transforming the process of political storytelling, its dissemination, and the ways in which it is perceived. However, even as AI allows access to more information, as well as promoting participatory communication, it also presents new threats to the values of democracy by propagating misinformation, disinformation, and manipulating synthetic media. An obvious example of the two-sided effect of AI in politics is the emergence of deep fakes, AI-assisted synthesised videos and audio that appear convincingly real and are completely fake. Momeni (2025) explains that deepfakes are a form of misinformation, which is persuasive in nature and can be used to influence the masses, and this is made possible by building a false reality of politics. Similarly, Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) state that deepfakes foster suspicion and distrust of the media, thus creating credibility and transparency deficits in democratic communication. Moreover, Pawelec (2022) describes that deepfakes threaten the very core of democracy, including key processes, like empowered inclusion, collective deliberation, and decision-making, and shake the very foundations of their functioning.

This crisis has been worsened by the post-truth condition in both Nigeria and other democracies. The proliferation of fake political stories, as noted by Pate, Gambo, and Ibrahim (2019), has accelerated the levels of ethno-political conflicts, propaganda, and loss of confidence in the governance system. This tends to displace rational thinking with emotion so that people start believing politically convenient lies as the truth. Pathak (2023) cautions that deepfakes can harm reputations and influence the mood of the population because they can create political events, whereas Britt (2023) also mentions that they often serve to harass, intimidate, or deceive individuals and groups. On the same note, Godulla et al. (2024) additionally point out that with the rise of AI accessibility, it has become easier to create highly realistic fake content, and Kietzmann, Lee, McCarthy, and Kietzmann (2020) state that the content has become even harder to discern by human viewers. In line with this, such a phenomenon is referred to as malicious media

manipulation by Gregory and Cizek (2021), and it consists of the intentional manipulation of media objects to be used deceptively or harmfully. Furthermore, the post-truth dilemma, which Sharma (2019) argues about, represents a period when sensations and impressions prevail over facts and reason. In this context, alternative realities are not constructed on proven facts but instead on stories that simply seem persuasive. Consequently, there is a distortion of the common understanding, and the epistemic foundations of democracy are compromised over time. In this regard, AI-based deepfakes become not only an effect but also a driver of post-truth politics, creating a synthetic reality that alters perception and reduces the standards of reasonable social dialogue.

Thus, the paper, "Artificial Intelligence and the Post-Truth Dilemma: Rethinking Political Communication and Democracy in the Age of Deepfakes", aims to analyse the problem of AI-created fake news and the ways it undermines the mechanisms of democratic communication and political responsibility. It seeks to place AI in the wider context of political discourse and reveal the crisis of democracy caused by the proliferation of deepfakes. The paper is based on Post-Truth Theory and presents the ways in which the deception generated by technology undermines trust, corrupts civic reason, and renegotiates the communicative ethics required to preserve democracy in the digital era. The following section elucidates the conceptual frontiers of Artificial Intelligence, political communication, democracy, and deepfakes to offer a conceptualisation of their relation to each other in post-truth dynamics.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON THE ABOVE DISCOURSE

An Overview of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a revolutionary change and has matured out of a hypothetical notion to a process that is transforming almost all facets of human existence. The era leading to 1956 can be widely considered as the incubation stage of AI because the scientists and engineers at the time were too busy trying to solve the problem of recreating human cognition processes on machines. Jiang, Li, Luo et al. (2022) say that the initial purpose of AI was to bring human intelligence into machines. Its theoretical background is said to date back as far as 1950 and the work by Alan Turing, Computing Machinery and Intelligence, in which he suggested the so-called Turing test to determine whether a machine was capable of thinking in a human manner (Vivek Kaul et al., 2020). John McCarthy coined the term Artificial Intelligence six years later and defined it as the science and engineering of creating intelligent machines. Since that time, researchers have broadened the understanding of AI to encompass the capability of machines to reproduce human reasoning, judgment, and decision-making. According to Ghosh and Arunachalam (2021), AI is a subdivision of computer science that allows computers to imitate human behaviour and thus improve performance in the fields of both science and technology. Equally, Zhang and Lu (2021) conceptualise AI as the area of science that deals with the creation of systems that can learn, reason, and make decisions in a manner that is analogous to human intelligence. Hideyuki and Kelichi (2020) go on to suggest that AI is the capacity of machines to communicate and interact with humans via electronic interfaces in a manner that is likely to resemble human social behaviour, and thus, the boundary between human and non-human is frequently indistinct.

In addition to these technical definitions, the development of AI has become more and more psychologically and socially oriented. Korteling (2018) notes that the human-conscious AI systems, particularly systems that are embedded in sophisticated domains like the military or policymaking, should be able to detect and react to the broad spectrum of human qualities, including motivation, emotion, and creativity. As a result, specialists who work with AI systems need to create correct mental representations of the AI cognition differences from human cognition. This observation highlights the increased reliance on human and machine intelligence in the contemporary world. Neural networks have also influenced the course of AI development, with their initial purpose to simulate the functionality of neurons in the human brain (Izenman, 2008, as cited in Taeihagh, 2021). Increased computational ability in the late 20th century, these neural networks became more advanced and could be used to perform complex tasks such as image and speech recognition. Nevertheless, such technological advancement has not lacked implications for society. According to Taeihagh (2021), the recent increase in automation of routine cognitive activities has raised concerns regarding unemployment and social unrest because machines have been replacing the human workforce in knowledge-intensive industries.

An Overview of Deep Fakes

The term deepfake is a combination of deep, borrowed from AI deep-learning technology, a form of processing that includes multiple layers of processing, and fake, to deal with the fact that the content is not real. Karnouskos (2020) asserts that "Deep fakes are strongly connected with digital media, and especially social media, via which they reach a wide audience". This means that deep fakes and fake news have become sources of falsehood and misinformation in society. Deep fakes are an emergent type of threat falling under the greater and more pervasive umbrella of synthetic media, utilising a form of artificial intelligence/machine learning (AI/ML) to create believable, realistic videos, pictures, audio, and text of events which never happened. According to Adeola & Okocha, et al. (2025), "deep fake and fake news are some of the problems that confront the credibility of the mass media today, especially in areas such as grapevine or rumours". It is a synthetic image or video (a sequence of images) created by a special type of machine learning known as deep learning. Scholars like Botha and Pieterse (2020) rightly observed that the age of manipulated images and the continuous presence of fake news have led to the emergence of a new technology commonly referred to as Deepfake. Kietzmann et al. (2020) stated that deep fakes can be used in videos to swap or morph faces. Deep fakes are also a technique of altering the source character in a movie. Mohiuddin et al. (2023), in Krishna and Madhavi (2024), also highlighted that deepfakes have been employed to create fake news and other forms of deception, even though technology can be used in good causes, such as the creation of realistic visual effects in movies and TV shows. According to Krishna and Madhavi (2024), deep fakes can be defined as fake media, the development of which involves replacing

the image of a person with the image of a different person on an already existing image or video. Due to its adverse consequences, face alteration on the Internet has become a severe issue in social media and our culture," opined Dong et al. (2023).

An Overview of Political Communication and Democracy

The role of political communication in the operation of a democratic society is vital as it is the medium through which political institutions, media, and the population interact. The media in this interactive space are no longer a conduit of information but are active political actors with the ability to inform the tone, scope, and product(s) of political discourse. According to Papathanassopoulo and Giannouli (2025), political communication has been researched in the expanded perspectives of the societal and political structures, especially through its integration of mediatization, which allures the overlap between the political and media logic. Here, the media would no longer report on politics, but define, interpret and in most cases, they create its realities. Gisela (2020) goes further to indicate that political communication is a professional practice and an academic field of study that includes such activities as propaganda, electoral marketing, political campaigning, and public relations, particularly during periods of elections. These forms of communication dictate the way the citizens view governance, appraise leadership, and engage in politics.

Democracy, however, offers the normative basis in which such communication flourishes. Democracy, as a term that derives from the Greek words demos (people) and kratein (to rule), basically means a government that is controlled by the populace. Paul (2025) defines democracy as the rights that showcase the dignity of the citizen, law that shows a commitment to the common reason and elections as the means of choosing representatives. Paul (2025) goes on to highlight that the meaning of democracy should be construed to mean the rule by the people, and of the people, as opposed to the victory of the electoral winners. Likewise, according to Larry Diamond (2010), the concept of democracy is a political regime based on free and fair elections, engagement of citizens in the political and civic processes, and safeguarding of basic human rights. These values help to demonstrate that real democracy is population-based and relies on transparency and accountability. Paula and Jean (2008) assert that only a democratic system can give rise to the evolution of human rights because it enables the population to be part of the law-making process and keep a check on the activities of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of governance. Similarly, Miskat Jahan (2021) states that democracy does not just maintain freedom but also initiates national progress by providing a facilitating environment to both social and economic growth. Collectively, these views confirm that political communication and democracy reinforce each other: political communication enhances democratic participation, and democratic structures, in their turn, allow keeping political discourse open, inclusive and accountable.

3. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Theoretical Framework: Post-Truth Theory

The post-truth condition is a radical epistemological break in the way societies are making, mediating, and negotiating truth. It goes beyond the concept of misinformation or disinformation to embody a larger cultural shift where truth and fact have been placed under the more important emotions, beliefs, and ideological tuning. With the power of knowledge itself being destabilised as affective resonance is given more and more precedence in the discourse of the masses than the truth. Post-truth thus refers to more than just a descriptive term of modern-day politics; it is a philosophical and communicative crisis whereby the creation and exchange of knowledge is facilitated through technologically enhanced emotions instead of facts. The critical theoretical perspectives of scholars, including Jean Baudrillard, Ralph Keyes, Lee McIntyre, and Jean-Francois Lyotard, allow a strict interpretation of how the manipulation of epistemics, hyper-reality, and strategic disinformation have become the commonplace characteristics of the communication of democracy in the era of artificial intelligence.

The mention of a post-truth condition inevitably brings to mind The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1979) by Lyotard, the publication that preempted the epistemological doubts that currently lie at the center of political communication. Lyotard focused on the demise of grand narratives, the Enlightenment metanarratives of science, reason, and progress that previously legitimised truth claims and enabled people to maintain confidence in knowledge establishments. During the postmodern period, Lyotard found an increase in the number of petits recits, or smaller, fragmented stories that substituted universal systems of justification. However, as Lyotard's postmodernism highlighted pluralisation of knowledge and degradation of totalization of truth regimes, the post-truth condition signifies a more corrosive epistemic condition. It is not merely a stop for justification but a crisis of credibility per se, a distrust of truth-tellers and knowledge institutions in general, now perceived as corrupt, one-sided, or politicised. This condition, according to Stoker (2017), is highly prevalent in dishonesty and distrust, being systemic in nature, marked by epistemic exhaustion, systemic lying, and the erosion of common adjudicating authorities. Harsin (2015) pushes this argument further into the 21st-century media environment, where the information overload, attention fragmentation, and the disappearance of culture-wide truth-tellers like journalists, scientists, and academics create conditions in which rumours, falsehoods, and affectively charged misinformation thrive.

In this line of thought, post-truth may be perceived as a political and cultural climate where objective facts are no longer prioritised in establishing a general opinion, and instead, appeals to emotion and personal belief are made. The emergence of ideological prejudice, social polarisation, and selective trust of politically congruent data has divided the public into epistemic enclaves, as Lee McIntyre (2018), Lewandowsky et al. (2017) and Higgins (2016) note. This disintegration creates a communicative space where information is often and readily discarded as opinion, whereas emotionally appealing opinions are raised to be considered as truth. This results in the shift of democratic deliberation being orchestrated less by rational discussion and more by emotional intensity, which Fischer (2003) links to the populist distortion of policymaking in which emotionally

colored discourses take priority over empirically based analysis. These changes reveal how the post-truth era is being systematically compromised by epistemic integrity.

The theory of hyperreality created by Jean Baudrillard offers an essential ontological insight into understanding this breakdown of epistemic frontiers. In Simulacra and Simulation (1994), Baudrillard claims that in late modernity representations no longer refer to external reality but rather produce their own self-referential systems of meaning. This generates what he refers to as the precession of simulacra, in which the imitation is in advance of the actual. In this condition, the fact-value difference between true and false is epistemically insignificant since the representations have autonomy and authenticity that do not depend on the referent. This postmodern overflow of signs is represented by the appearance of artificial intelligence in the form of deepfakes and synthetic media. Such AI-based simulations are not just distortions of the real world; they substitute for it and create digital truths which are ontologically empty but digitally convincing. In political communication, this is the so-called mediated authenticity credibility made by performance instead of evidence. The framework created by Baudrillard; therefore, sheds light on the importance of algorithmic mediation in changing the ontological position of the truth, whereby it is placed in an emotional persuasion regime as opposed to a factual verification regime.

Ralph Keyes (2004) adds to this ontological observation by explicating the sociocultural aspect of post-truth. He explains a social environment where deception is normalised using euphemism, spin and discursive manipulation. The accuracy of facts is forced out in such a setting to be replaced by emotional consistency and rhetorical impact. This is enhanced by the digital public sphere: algorithmic recommendation systems give more attention to the content that generates emotional responses rather than information that maintains factual accuracy. Consequently, not truths but emotionally pleasing images of reality are spread the most. This epistemic emasculation, in which truth can be distorted to suit the likes of feeling, disempowers the calculated principles of democracy by disaggregating the common factual platforms upon which group thinking can occur.

Based on these scholarly viewpoints, the post-truth condition becomes a multidimensional crisis, ontological, cultural and political. On the ontological level, it erases the difference between the real and the simulated; while on the cultural level, it legitimises lies by gratifying emotions. Lastly, on the political level, it makes truth a tool of persuasion. All these dynamics converge within the context of AI-mediated communication, where artificial intelligence is not just a technological instrument but an epistemic agent that influences what is regarded as truth in a democratic discourse.

4. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION: AI, DEEPFAKES, AND DEMOCRATIC COMMUNICATION

In the context of the Post-Truth Theory, artificial intelligence-based technologies like deepfakes are not only a means of innovation but an influential force that transforms the way of producing and spreading truth. They destroy the boundary between reality and the fake, and they move democratic communication as a platform of reasoned discussion towards an emotional platform. Deepfakes are videos or images that are created with the help of artificial intelligence to make it look real. They are the embodiment of what Jean Baudrillard refers to as hyperreality, where the simulation turns out to be more real than reality. According to Vaccari and Chadwick (2020), deepfakes can only increase the distrust of the population and leave it hard to determine which sources can be trusted. This discrediting leads to what Lyotard termed the breakdown of the grand narratives in which ordinary truths that have unified societies start to evaporate. Politically, this implies that individuals cannot rely on what they hear or see anymore because such a new reality may seem more authentic than the truth, particularly when they are emotional. Momeni (2025) stated that deepfakes are now being used as a form of persuasion. Political actors now propagate fictional news that forms opinion without facts. Pawelec (2022) shows that this act has the ability to undermine democracy by demolishing mutual understanding and equal discourse. This tendency is labelled by Gregory and Cizek (2021) as malicious media manipulation, in which it is possible to provoke anger, fear, or excitement with the help of misinformation. The aim is not to inform anymore, but to control the reaction of people. This is a significant change from a rational debate to an emotional appeal. This trend has been proven by scholars such as Lewandowsky et al. (2017) and Higgins (2016) to be division-driven, as well. Presently, truth will become subjective as individuals will only see what agrees with their thoughts. Godulla et al. (2024) further contribute that anyone can make up fake political videos as AI tools are easily accessible, and it is more difficult to distinguish between real and fake. The article by Kietzmann et al. (2020) goes on to note that the most interesting content on the internet is not always factual. This implies that algorithms ensure the spread of more lies than truth since emotional and engaging information receives more clicks and shares.

According to McIntyre (2018), individuals have come to trust only information that conforms to their opinions. This causes echo chambers, whereby misinformation separates voters. Pathak (2023) cautions that deep fakes might harm reputations and lead to misinformation, whereas Britt (2023) proves that such deep fakes usually attack individuals with the need to demoralise or control the public. According to Fischer (2003), this change is referred to as the populist distortion of democracy, whereby the use of emotion instead of logic is made in making decisions. Nigeria provides a good illustration of such an issue. Pate, Gambo, and Ibrahim (2019) demonstrate that fake news in politics has increased ethnic and political disparities. An example, which was covered by Popoola (2021) of The Guardian, is the rumours that the Late President Muhammadu Buhari had passed away and was substituted with a clone. Even though the statement was made before the age of AI-generated deepfakes, it demonstrated how effortlessly fake news may disseminate in weak information systems. Popoola has cautioned that with the advancement of AI, these kinds of lies will be more believable, and elections, along with unity in the country, will be threatened. Also, in an article about CIO Africa, Odero (2025) informs that women in leadership and journalism in Africa are being attacked using deepfakes. In Ghana, Namibia and Senegal,

discrediting of female politicians has been done using fabricated videos. This, as Odero suggests, is a new kind of digital gender-based violence that puts women into silence and diminishes their role in democracy. In cases of shame or intimidation with the use of technology, trust and inclusivity among the people are compromised. These African experiences demonstrate that the threat of deepfakes is not imaginary. It is real and growing. They reveal how AI may contribute to removing trust, separating societies, and shaping people's opinions. Technological innovation turns into a political weapon undermining democratic values. It is in this respect that deepfakes are not merely a magic digital trick, but a powerful tool that alters the conception of truth and authority of the citizenry. The concept of hyperreality created by Baudrillard can be used to justify this last point.

5. THEORETICAL IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

The theoretical implications of the research suggest a radical change in production, mediation, and the perception of truth in the digital age. Artificial intelligence, particularly deepfakes, is an epistemic agent that redefines the very concept of truth, as the idea that simulations can be seen as more believable than reality echoes Baudrillard (1994), who coined the concept of hyperreality. It is this change, which Patel (2024) and McIntyre (2018) highlight, that transforms AI into more than just an instrument of technology, and a political force that interrupts the objectivity and rational discourse. To this end, the paper demonstrates that the rational mode of deliberation and the trust in factual communication that underlie democracy (Habermas, 1989; Diamond, 2010) are being subverted by the administrative logic of the emotions and algorithms integrated in AI. The idea of a populist distortion, developed by Fischer (2003), is reflected in the form of deepfakes and disinformation that replace rational discussion with emotional appeals, resulting in polarised masses and epistemic fragmentation (Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Stoker, 2017).

Moreover, this study takes Post-Truth Theory further by illustrating that algorithm systems currently act as forms of ideological filtration, defining which information becomes visible and acceptable (Keyes, 2004; Harsin, 2015). This algorithmic mediation enables affective participation that puts sensationalism above factuality and makes democratic energy dependent on data structures instead of discourse (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral, 2018). By foregrounding African conditions, such as the use of deepfakes to silence women in politics, the study enlarged the post-truth scholarship into other forms, with the addition of considering an intersectional aspect of AI manipulation (Odero, 2025). These insights also create an ethical aspect in which artificial intelligence is transformed into an active member of the moral economy of communication, which requires the application of an algorithmic ethics of truth (Gregory & Cizek, 2021). This hypothetical re-characterisation challenges researchers and policymakers to re-understand AI not as a means of communication but as a source of epistemic justice and democratic stability.

Conclusively, this paper reveals that artificial intelligence has changed the principles of truth and democracy as it has replaced rational discussion with emotion mediated by algorithms. Deepfakes and AI-based deception undermine the credibility of political communication, thereby causing division, mistrust, and privatisation of the truth. By connecting the fragmentation of narratives introduced by Lyotard (1984), hyperreality proposed by Baudrillard (1994), and the naturalisation of deception by Keyes (2004) to the realities of digital democracy, the study has succeeded in showing that the strength of AI does not lie in its ability to present facts, but to assume their presence. The paper highlights the pressing need to encourage AI literacy, open ethical rules to govern algorithmic technology, and a new sense of ethical responsibility in digital communication based on rationality, inclusiveness, and epistemic responsibility, in order to protect democratic integrity.

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