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The Threats of Ai and Disinformation in Times of Global Crises

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the threats posed by artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled disinformation during global crises, including pandemics, geopolitical conflicts, and climate emergencies. While prior research has examined AI's role in enhancing information processing and communication, few studies have critically analyzed how AI tools such as deep-fakes, NLP-generated fake news, and social media bots are systematically weaponized to distort facts and manipulate public perception at scale. This research addresses that gap by offering a thematic and case-based analysis of AI-driven disinformation campaigns during crisis periods. Using a qualitative descriptive design, this study employs library research and digital observation methods to analyze a variety of sources—academic publications, digital media artifacts, and case studies—related to disinformation. Data were collected through purposive sampling of literature and observed disinformation trends on social platforms. The data were analyzed thematically to classify the types of AI-assisted disinformation and examine their social, political, and psychological impacts. The results reveal that AI technologies significantly amplify the scale, speed, and believability of disinformation. Deep-fake content was found to influence public opinion by mimicking credible figures, while NLP-generated fake news exploits confirmation bias to spread ideologically charged narratives. Meanwhile, AI bots disrupt online discourse by creating echo chambers and undermining trust in public institutions. These dynamics were particularly evident in the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and climate change denial movements. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated approach to mapping AI-powered disinformation as both a technological and socio-political phenomenon. It proposes a tripartite mitigation framework involving technological detection systems, regulatory policy interventions, and media literacy campaigns to enhance societal resilience. This research contributes to the growing discourse on information disorder by offering a critical lens on how AI can both exacerbate and help solve the global crisis of trust and truth.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Disinformation; Deep-fakes; Global Crises; Information Disorder; Digital Propaganda.*

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become an integral part of modern life, revolutionizing various sectors and offering unprecedented benefits. Nonetheless, its capacity to generate and amplify disinformation poses serious threats, especially during global crises [1]. Disinformation can undermine public trust, exacerbate crises, and destabilize societies. The advent of AI has revolutionized communication, decision-making, and crisis management [2]. However, its misuse has also facilitated the rapid dissemination of disinformation, particularly during periods of global instability. Disinformation—false or misleading information intended to deceive—is amplified by AI technologies such as deep-fakes, natural language processing (NLP) systems, and automated bot networks [3]. These tools enable bad actors to manipulate narratives, erode trust in institutions, and exacerbate societal divisions [4].

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has permeated nearly every aspect of contemporary life, from healthcare and education to communication and governance [5]. While AI brings efficiency and innovation, its potential for misuse has become increasingly apparent, especially in the context of information dissemination [6]. One of the most concerning developments is the rise of AI-facilitated disinformation. Unlike misinformation, which is spread without malicious intent, disinformation is deliberately crafted to deceive [7]. During global crises, when timely and accurate information is vital, AI-driven disinformation can be especially destructive [8].

The COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and climate change are recent examples where AI tools were deployed to manipulate public opinion and disrupt crisis management efforts [9]. Deep-fake technologies, AI-generated fake news, and social media bots have been utilized to create confusion, foster distrust, and manipulate political outcomes [10]. This paper investigates the mechanisms and impacts of AI-enabled disinformation in times of global crises and proposes a multi-dimensional framework for mitigation [11].

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has brought major transformations in various aspects of modern life, from communication, economics, to crisis management [12]. However, behind its revolutionary potential, AI also poses a significant threat, especially in the form of disinformation that is spread massively during a global crisis [13]. Social realities show that the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war, and the climate crisis have become fertile ground for the spread of false information mediated by AI technology. In this context,

disinformation is not just misinformation, but is a systematic attempt to mislead the public, undermine social trust, and manipulate public opinion [14].

Contemporary literature has highlighted the dangers of this phenomenon. Chesney and Citron (2019) emphasize that deep-fakes, as AI products, threaten the integrity of democracy and public trust [15]. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) also emphasized that digital disinformation is a form of information disorder that requires a multidisciplinary approach to countering it [16]. Furthermore, Vosoughi et al. (2018) found that fake news spreads faster and more widely than true news on social media, suggesting that the algorithmic dynamics of online platforms exacerbate the spread of disinformation [17].

In this study, AI-powered disinformation is categorized into three main forms: (1) deep-fakes, i.e. hyper-realistic visual and audio manipulation; (2) fake news generated by natural language processing; and (3) social media bot activity that reinforces certain narratives [18]. These three categories have an important role in creating crises of trust, social polarization, and public policy dysfunction, especially in times of emergency.

The main purpose of writing this article is to analyze in depth the threat posed by AI-based disinformation in the context of a global crisis [19]. Using a qualitative approach based on literature studies and digital media observations, this study aims to explore the working mechanisms of disinformation, the socio-political impacts it causes, and mitigation strategies that can be implemented by the state, institutions, and civil society [20].

The hypothesis proposed in this paper is that the higher the penetration of AI technology in the production and distribution of information, the greater the potential for disinformation to create social instability and disrupt the effectiveness of handling global crises. Therefore, cross-sector collaboration is needed in building a robust detection, regulation, and literacy system against AI-based disinformation.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research design to explore the phenomenon of artificial intelligence (AI)-based disinformation in the context of a global crisis [21]. This approach was chosen because the main focus of the study lies in an in-depth understanding of the narratives, social contexts, and impacts of AI disinformation that are developing in digital media and the scientific literature. The unit of analysis in this study is the forms of AI-based disinformation that have emerged in three major cases of global crises, namely: the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the climate change crisis [22]. The analysis unit is analyzed based on how AI is used to create, disseminate, and amplify false information through various digital platforms.

The research design adopts an exploratory-descriptive method that aims to map the threat of AI disinformation as well as mitigation strategies that can be applied by state and non-state actors [23]. This study does not intend to test hypotheses statistically, but rather to build theoretical understanding through the interpretation of textual and phenomenological data. Information sources are obtained from a variety of relevant academic literature, including scientific journals, policy reports, and credible media articles [24]. In addition, secondary data sources in the form of documentation of social media activities, international organization reports, and analysis from independent institutions are also used as study materials.

The data collection technique was carried out through a systematic literature search using keywords such as "AI disinformation", "deep-fakes", "digital propaganda", and "information disorder" in scientific databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect [25]. Observations of relevant phenomena on social media, especially related to COVID-19 cases, geopolitical conflicts, and climate issues, also complement the data collected [26]. Data analysis uses content analysis techniques with a thematic approach. The data is classified into categories of AI-based disinformation, its impact on society and institutions, and proposed policy and technological responses [27]. Each finding is critically analyzed to find patterns, relationships, and theoretical implications that support the construction of this article's main argument.

Result

This research reveals that artificial intelligence (AI) has become a key tool in massively producing and disseminating disinformation, especially in the context of a global crisis. Three main forms of AI-based disinformation were successfully identified as a result of literature studies and digital media observations, namely: deep-fake, fake news based on natural language processing (NLP), and social media bot activity [28]. These three elements contribute significantly to the creation of social instability, public distrust, and political polarization.

Deep-Fake as a Digital Propaganda Tool

Deep-fakes, as AI-based visual and audio manipulation products, have been found to play an important role in manipulative reframing social reality. Fake videos and audio that resemble public figures are used to spread hate speech, incite conflict, and degrade the reputation of individuals or institutions [29]. In the political context, deep-fakes have been used to discredit political opponents or create tension between social groups. This technology makes it difficult for people to distinguish between reality and digital engineering.

Figure 1. Deep Fake as a Digital Propaganda Tool

Figure 1 shows several faces that resemble a public figure, surrounded by social media icons such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp. The background

consists of code and digital data, creating an atmosphere that describes the world of technology and information [30]. The silhouette of the people observing creates the impression that they are the audience affected by the content being presented.

Deep Fake Theme: This image highlights how deep fake technology can be used to create misleading content. Familiar faces show the potential for manipulation of public image [31]. The Influence of Social Media: The presence of social media icons shows how these platforms can accelerate the spread of information, both true and false. This creates a challenge in distinguishing fact from fiction. Viewer Silhouette: The silhouette of the observer reflects how society can be affected by digital propaganda, highlighting the importance of media literacy in today's information age.

Digital Aesthetics: The background of the code creates a futuristic atmosphere, hinting that technology and information play a huge role in shaping public opinion [32]. This image illustrates the challenges faced by people in dealing with manipulated information and the importance of thinking critically about what is seen and shared in the digital world.

Fake News and Bias Confirmation

Fake news produced by advanced AI NLP systems has been rampant in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. These articles are designed to take advantage of societal cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias, that make individuals more likely to receive information that matches their beliefs [33]. As a result, fake news spreads rapidly, creating mass disinformation that exacerbates the ongoing crisis.

Figure 2. Confronting Fake News in the Digital Age

Figure 2 shows an individual looking at a computer screen with the caption "FAKE NEWS" clearly read. Around the screen, various social media icons and newssheets are scattered, showing a fast and diverse flow of information. The person appears focused, reflecting interest or uncertainty about the news presented.

Fake News Theme: The use of the phrase "FAKE NEWS" prominently highlights an important issue of disinformation. This image reflects the challenges faced by the public in recognizing inaccurate information. Connection with Social Media: The social media icons that appear around the screen show how these platforms play a role in spreading fake news. This hints that information can easily go viral without verification [34]. Individual Reactions: The focus of the person looking at the screen reflects how fake news can affect the individual, generating curiosity or confusion. It also highlights the importance of media literacy in understanding the information received.

Disinformation in Crisis: Although not shown explicitly, the context of the image is reminiscent of crisis situations, such as pandemics or conflicts, where fake news can exacerbate the situation and create panic. The image as a whole

invites viewers to reflect on how they interact with information and the critical importance of the news they consume.

Social Media Bots and the Amplification of Disinformation

AI-controlled bots automatically amplify disinformation messages on social media. These bots are capable of mimicking human behavior, spreading false narratives at scale, and amplifying digital echo chambers [35]. As a result, disinformation has become part of the mainstream of online communication, reinforcing ideological polarization and undermining trust in institutions such as governments, media, and health institutions.

The existence of these three elements suggests that AI is not only a neutral tool, but can be a significant agent of social disruption when used unethically. These results show the urgency to develop mitigation mechanisms that include disinformation detection technologies, effective digital regulation, and media literacy education among the wider community.

Table 1. About Social Media Bots and the Amplification of Disinformation

Aspects	Description
Bot Definition	Automated programs that perform tasks on social media, such as posting and interacting.
Main Functions	- Disseminate information quickly. - Imitating human behavior to increase trust.
The Impact of Disinformation	- Amplification of false messages. - Digital echo chamber amplification.
Ideological Polarization	Increasing divisions between groups with different views.
Loss of Trust	Reduce public trust in the government, media, and health institutions.
Mitigation Urgency	- Development of disinformation detection technology. - Effective digital regulation. - Media literacy education.

The table provides a clear and structured summary of the impact of social media bots in amplifying disinformation. Some key points to note: Clarity: Each aspect is presented concisely, making it easy for readers to understand [36]. Focus on Impact: Highlighting significant social impacts, such as ideological polarization and loss of trust, provides context that is essential for understanding the urgency of this issue. Mitigation Urgency: Including mitigation measures

demonstrates awareness of the solutions needed, not just the problems faced. Overall, this table is effective in conveying important information about the role of social media bots and the challenges faced in the age of disinformation. Social media bots have the potential to exacerbate disinformation and polarization. Effective mitigation strategies are needed to address this issue.

Discussion

AI-Driven Disinformation in Global Crises

Deep-fakes: The Invisible Puppeteers

Deep-fake technology, powered by AI, has reached a sophistication level where distinguishing between real and fake media content can be nearly impossible. These hyper-realistic manipulations have been utilized to fabricate speeches, create fake endorsements, and even incite violence.

Psychological Impact

Deep-fakes can severely impact psychological well-being by creating a pervasive sense of distrust. When individuals can no longer trust what they see and hear, it undermines their sense of reality, which can lead to anxiety and paranoia.

Political Manipulation

In political contexts, deep-fakes can be used to discredit opponents, spread propaganda, or interfere with elections. For instance, a deep-fake video of a political leader making inflammatory statements could incite unrest or alter the outcome of an election.

Fake News: The Silent Spreaders

AI-generated fake news leverages natural language processing to craft articles that appear credible [37]. These articles can exploit cognitive biases, making them particularly effective at spreading disinformation.

Confirmation Bias

Fake news often aligns with existing beliefs, making it more likely to be accepted and shared. This confirmation bias reinforces existing prejudices and divides, contributing to societal polarization.

Virality and Reach

The design of social media platforms to prioritize engagement means that sensationalist and emotionally charged fake news can spread faster and reach a larger audience than factual information [38]. This can lead to widespread misinformation in critical situations, such as during a global health crisis.

Social Media Bots: The Digital Agitators

AI-powered social media bots can create and amplify disinformation at an unprecedented scale. These bots can simulate human behavior, making it difficult to distinguish between genuine discourse and orchestrated disinformation campaigns.

Amplification of Echo Chambers

Social media bots can exploit echo chambers, where users are exposed primarily to information that reinforces their existing beliefs. By flooding these spaces with disinformation, bots can intensify group polarization and hinder constructive dialogue.

Erosion of Trust in Institutions

When bots are used to spread disinformation about governmental or international institutions, they can erode public trust [39]. For example, disinformation campaigns targeting health organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased scepticism about vaccines and public health measures.

AI and the Mechanization of Disinformation

AI has elevated disinformation to new levels of sophistication. Deep-fake technology, for instance, enables the creation of hyper-realistic but entirely fabricated videos and audio clips. Such tools have been weaponized to impersonate political leaders, fabricate evidence, or inflame tensions [40]. Similarly, AI-driven bots can flood social media platforms with coordinated messaging campaigns, creating an illusion of consensus or dissent.

According to a study by Chesney and Citron (2019), deep-fakes present unique challenges to democratic governance by undermining public trust and destabilizing institutions. When combined with algorithms optimized for engagement rather than accuracy, the reach and impact of disinformation are exponentially amplified.

Case Studies

1. COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, AI-driven disinformation campaigns propagated false cures, vaccine misinformation, and conspiracy theories. These narratives spread rapidly on social media, contributing to vaccine hesitancy and undermining public health efforts.

2. 2022 Russia-Ukraine Conflict

The Russia-Ukraine war witnessed the deployment of AI-enabled propaganda to manipulate international opinion. AI-generated images and videos were used to blur the lines between fact and fiction, complicating efforts to discern credible information.

3. Climate Crisis

Climate-related disinformation campaigns have also leveraged AI to sow doubt about scientific consensus. Automated networks amplify denialist narratives, delaying urgent policy action.

Implications of AI-Driven Disinformation

The societal impact of AI-enabled disinformation is profound. It undermines democratic processes by distorting electoral integrity and eroding trust in media and government institutions. During crises, such misinformation can lead to panic, disrupt coordinated responses, and exacerbate human suffering.

Economic ramifications are equally severe. Misinformation about financial markets or supply chains during emergencies can trigger instability. Moreover, AI-generated disinformation can tarnish corporate reputations, affecting consumer trust.

Strategies for Mitigation

1. Technological Countermeasures

Developing AI systems to detect and neutralize disinformation is critical. For instance, machine learning models can identify deep-fakes by analysing inconsistencies in data patterns. Collaboration between tech companies, governments, and academia is essential to create robust detection frameworks.

2. Regulatory Approaches

Governments must establish policies to hold platforms accountable for disinformation. Transparency in AI algorithms, ethical standards, and penalties for non-compliance are vital components of a comprehensive regulatory strategy.

3. Public Awareness and Education

Media literacy programs should be expanded to equip citizens with the skills to critically evaluate information. Public campaigns can also foster resilience against disinformation by promoting trusted sources.

Conclusion

While AI holds immense potential for addressing global challenges, its misuse in spreading disinformation poses existential threats to societal stability and governance. By understanding the mechanics of AI-driven disinformation and adopting a multi-pronged mitigation strategy, stakeholders can safeguard public trust and strengthen societal resilience in times of crisis.

Author Contributions

Mukhtar Imam: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration.

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Conflict of Interest

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