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DEEPFAKES AND VISUAL JOURNALISM: RECONFIGURING TRUST, REALISM, AND AUTHENTICITY IN DIGITAL VISUAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of the deepfake technology and its propagation, the landscape of visual journalism has radically changed and brought relevant issues of credibility, realism, and authenticity in the digital visual culture. In this piece, the author investigates the impact of AI-produced synthetic media on the perception of the audience and the credibility of visual journalism. According to a synthesized theoretical framework of the post-truth theory, the visual culture theory, and the trust theory, the research problem is the effect of exposure to deepfakes on the perception of realism, perceived authenticity, and media literacy and the overall influence of the three variables on trust of visual journalism. It is both a mixed-method study design (including a qualitative content analysis of visual media) and a quantitative survey-based audience perception and case studies of real-life deepfake instances. The findings suggest that there is certain paradoxical influence in the application of deepfakes, on the one hand, they enhance visual authenticity and immersion, and on the other hand, they reduce authenticity and lead to the loss of trust among the viewers. The paper further stipulates the moderating role of technological awareness, platform credibility and regulatory systems in the effect of the reaction of the users towards synthetic media. The results show that the traditional verification systems are increasingly becoming inadequate in taking into account the dynamism of depth fake instruments and consequently, there is need to employ sophisticated detection systems, moral policies and codes. Moreover, the paper illuminates the importance of media literacy in the context of enabling the consumer of the visual information to make predominant judgments and prevent misinformation. The study also contributes to the existing gap in the literature of technology development in the creation of deepfakes, and the sociocultural implications of this technology in the journalism field. It is a highly elaborate manner of redefining the reorganization of trust with the visual media and provides practical recommendations to the journalists, policymakers and the individuals that create technology.

Keywords: Deepfakes, Visual Journalism, Media Trust, Authenticity, Realism, Digital Visual Culture, AI-Generated Content, Media Literacy, Misinformation, Deep Learning