THE ROLE OF AI-DRIVEN CONTENT, SMART TECHNOLOGIES, AND DISINFORMATION IN THE 2024 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract: This study examines the influence of smart technologies and algorithms on voter behavior, with a particular focus on their role in the 2024 United States (U.S.) presidential elections. By curating content based on user preferences, algorithms create echo chambers that deepen divisions and increase polarization. Advanced AI tools, such as deepfake technology and micro-targeting strategies, further manipulate voter perceptions by spreading misleading information, posing significant ethical and democratic challenges. The findings highlight the need for improved digital literacy and stronger regulations to reduce the impact of digital disinformation and protect the integrity of democratic processes. This research underscores the dual importance of individual awareness and platform accountability in addressing the complexities of digital influence on elections.

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence, Smart technologies, Algorithms, Deepfake, 2024 U.S. Presidential election.*

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2024 ABD BAŞKANLIK SEÇİMLERİNDE YAPAY ZEKÂ ODAKLI İÇERİKLER, AKILLI TEKNOLOJİLER VE DEZENFORMASYONUN ROLÜ

Öz: Bu çalışma, akıllı teknolojilerin ve algoritmaların seçmen davranışları üzerindeki etkisini, 2024 Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD) başkanlık seçimlerindeki rollerine odaklanarak incelemektedir. Algoritmalar, kullanıcı tercihlerini temel alarak içerik sunmakta, bu da yankı odaları yaratarak bölünmeleri derinleştirmekte ve kutuplaşmayı artırmaktadır. Derin sahte (deepfake) teknolojisi ve mikro hedefleme stratejileri gibi gelişmiş yapay zekâ araçları, yanıltıcı bilgileri yayarak seçmen algılarını manipüle etmekte ve önemli etik ve demokratik sorunlar oluşturmaktadır. Bulgular, dijital dezenformasyonun etkisini azaltmak ve demokratik süreçlerin bütünlüğünü korumak için dijital okuryazarlığının geliştirilmesi ve daha güçlü düzenlemelerin uygulanması gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu araştırma, seçimler üzerindeki dijital etkinin karmaşıklıklarına çözüm bulmak için bireysel farkındalık ve platformların hesap verebilirliğinin önemini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Yapay zekâ*, *Akıllı teknolojiler*, *Algoritmalar*, *Deepfake*, *2024 ABD Başkanlık seçimi*.

Introduction

Smart technologies play a pivotal role in shaping not only our access to information but also our social interactions and political preferences in online environments, with their influence becoming particularly pronounced during critical events such as the United States (U.S.) presidential elections. Social media and digital content platforms determine the content we encounter through sophisticated algorithms. These algorithms prioritize content designed to capture our interest or increase engagement rates, encouraging us to spend more time online. This phenomenon can have a significant impact on voters. For instance, social media algorithms often feed users with specific ideological leanings similar to content, exacerbating polarization, and confining them to echo chambers. This, in turn, makes it more challenging for individuals to encounter information that contradicts their views, thereby amplifying the influence of disinformation.

What is particularly concerning is the unconscious influence of these algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) driven content on our behaviors and decision-making processes. As observed in examples from U.S. presidential elections, disinformation disseminated through smart technologies can shape voters' political preferences, raising questions about the reliability and integrity of the electoral process. In this context, implementing regulations for smart technologies and enhancing users' digital literacy skills emerge as essential measures. Therefore, the aim and significance of this study lie in examining how digital disinformation and algorithms influence voter behavior during electoral processes. It is imperative to examine the extent of their impact, assess whether this raises legitimate concerns, and explore how a more conscious and informed digital experience can be fostered. This study seeks to address these key questions:

- How do digital technologies influence behavior in online settings, and should these impacts raise concerns?

- How are these dynamics linked to U.S. elections, particularly in the context of political polarization?

The research methodology comprises case study and literature review approaches. Data collection involves sourcing information from news reports and examples of deepfake (deepfake) content related to the 2024 U.S. presidential elections. The analysis adopts a qualitative approach, employing descriptive analysis to interpret the findings.

1. Conceptual Background: Disinformation, Algorithms, and Political Polarization

Disinformation is examined alongside related concepts such as information pollution, misinformation, and post-truth. While misinformation refers to disseminating incorrect or incomplete information without necessarily intending to deceive, disinformation denotes the deliberate presentation of misleading information for a specific purpose. In digital media, disinformation often spreads through mechanisms such as propaganda, manipulation, and sensational headlines designed to capture attention. The concept of post-truth, on the other hand, describes a context in which emotions and personal beliefs exert greater influence than objective facts, thereby amplifying the impact of disinformation. According to Wardle and Derakhshan, the conversation around regulation in Europe has been notably active since December 2016, when Giovanni Pitruzzella, head of the Italian Competition Authority, proposed a bold solution. Speaking to the *Financial Times*, he recommended that European Union (EU) nations combat the rise of "*post-truth*" politics by creating specialized agencies, like antitrust regulators, to detect and remove false information.[2]

The primary methods used to disseminate disinformation on digital platforms include deepfake content, fake accounts, bots, and propaganda activities facilitated through micro-

[2] Claire Wardle & Hossein Derakhshan (2017), "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making", Council of Europe Report, Date of Accession: 12.12.2024 from https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/7495-information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research-and-policy-making.html, p. 71.

targeting. Deepfake technology enables the creation of fabricated videos and audio recordings, manipulating statements attributed to political candidates or prominent figures, thereby distorting public perception and influencing political discourse. As Chesney and Citron emphasize: "*The most frightening applications of deepfake technology, however, may well be in the realms of politics and international affairs. There, deepfakes may be used to create unusually effective lies capable of inciting violence, discrediting leaders and institutions, or even tipping election*."[3] Such technologies can spread rapidly on social media and are often readily accepted as truthful by users. According to Ferrara et. al.: "*A social bot is a computer algorithm that automatically produces content and interacts with humans on social media, trying to emulate and possibly alter their behavior. Social bots have been known to inhabit social media platforms for a few years.*"[4] Bot accounts and algorithms play a crucial role in facilitating the virality of disinformation, significantly shaping public access to information and influencing user perceptions. Disinformation and fake news producers have two major motivations: "*The first is pecuniary: news articles that go viral on social media can draw significant advertising revenue when users click to the original site. This appears to have been the main motivation for most of the producers whose identities have been revealed. The second motivation is ideological. Some fake news providers seek to advance candidates they favor.*"[5]

Disinformation and fake news have the potential to shape voter perceptions and influence their political preferences. Misleading content disseminated on social media can lead voters to develop negative attitudes toward specific candidates or political parties: "*Audio and video recordings allow people to become firsthand witnesses of an event, sparing them the need to*

[3] Robert Chesney & Danielle Citron (2019), "Deepfakes and the New Disinformation War: The Coming Age of Post-Truth Geopolitics", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, no: 1, p. 149.
[4] Emilio Ferrara & Onur Varol & Clayton Davis & Filippo Menczer & Alessandro Flammini (2016), "The Rise of Social Bots", *Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 59, no: 7, pp. 1-2.
[5] Hunt Allcott & Matthew Gentzkow (2017), "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 31, no: 2, p. 217.

decide whether to trust someone else's account of it […]. Therein lies a great danger."[6] For instance, during U.S. presidential elections, voters were exposed to false information disseminated through fake news and deepfake technology. Such misinformation was particularly observed to influence undecided voters, shaping their perceptions and potentially altering their decisions.[7] The algorithms of digital platforms prioritize content that users are more likely to engage with, creating echo chambers that confine users to information aligned with their existing views. Pariser calls it a "*filter bubble*": "*The basic code at the heart of the new Internet is pretty simple. The new generation of Internet filters looks at the things you seem to like—the actual things you've done, or the things people like you like—and tries to extrapolate. They are prediction engines, constantly creating and refining a theory of who you are and what you'll do and want next. Together, these engines create a unique universe of information for each of us—what I've come to call a filter bubble—which fundamentally alters the way we encounter ideas and information*."[8]

These phenomena of echo chambers and filter bubbles exacerbate polarization and make it increasingly difficult for individuals to be exposed to diverse political perspectives. This process not only facilitates the rapid spread of disinformation and misinformation but also leads to the narrowing and polarization of political discourse. Disinformation, particularly in authoritarian regimes, is frequently employed as a tool for propaganda. Its proliferation through digital platforms aids governments or specific groups in consolidating political power: "*Each country's institutions, media ecosystems, and political culture will interact to influence the relative significance of the internet's democratizing affordances relative to its authoritarian and nihilistic affordances*."[9] This means that the impact of the internet—

[6] Robert Chesney & Danielle Citron (2019), "Deepfakes and the New Disinformation War: The Coming Age of Post-Truth Geopolitics", p. 147
[7] Hunt Allcott & Matthew Gentzkow (2017), "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election".
[8] Eli Pariser (2011), *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You*, New York: Penguin Press, p. 10.
[9] Yochai Benkler & Robert Faris & Hal Roberts (2018), *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 8.

whether it promotes democracy or supports authoritarian and destructive tendencies—depends on each country's unique situation. Factors like the structure of a country's institutions, its media environment, and its political culture will determine how the internet is used and which of its possibilities become more important. In simple terms, how the internet influences a society is shaped by that society's existing systems and values.

The rapid dissemination of manipulative content in digital environments deepens political polarization and undermines the credibility of democratic processes. One of the most effective strategies for reducing the impact of disinformation is enhancing digital literacy. Proliferated as "*media literacy*", this concept "*has become a center of gravity for countering fake news, and a diverse array of stakeholders – from educators to legislators, philanthropists to technologists – have pushed significant resources toward media literacy programs*"[10]. Digital literacy fosters a critical perspective toward digital information sources and strengthens individuals' resilience against disinformation: "*It is essential for today's internet users to acquire digital literacy skills in order to become active members of the information society. Digital literacy skills acquired as informed actors are critical to minimizing problems regarding the security of personal traces in digital social networks.*"[11]

Developing voters' abilities to recognize disinformation and engage in fact-checking can significantly reduce the political influence of false information.

2. Theoretical Background: Political-Historical Climate and Polarization in U.S. Elections

Political polarization in the United States has deep historical roots and has evolved over the past several decades. The increasing ideological divide between political parties has

[10] Monica Bulger & Patrick Davison (2018), "The Promises, Challenges, and Futures of Media Literacy", *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, Vol. 10, no: 1, pp. 1-21.
[11] Cansu Arısoy Gedik (2023), "Yapılaşma Teorisi Çerçevesinden Kullanıcıların Kişisel İzleri için Şeffaf Bir Dijital Ağ Modeli Önerisi", *MEDIAJ*, Vol. 6, no: 1, p. 31.

intensified since the late 20th century, driven by factors such as economic shifts, demographic changes, and media fragmentation.[12] The rise of partisan media ecosystems has further fostered these divisions, with news consumption patterns aligning more closely with political identities.[13] Social media platforms, by amplifying ideological content through algorithmic curation, have accelerated this trend.[14]

The 2024 U.S. presidential election occurred in a period marked by heightened political tensions, with issues such as voting rights, misinformation, and trust in democratic institutions at the forefront. The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath contributed to widespread skepticism regarding electoral processes, exacerbated by narratives of election fraud in previous cycles.[15] Additionally, the role of AI-driven disinformation in shaping public perception has become increasingly evident, as deepfake content and micro-targeting strategies have been leveraged to manipulate political discourse.[16] Research suggests that political polarization reduces citizens' ability to critically assess information, increasing their sensitivity to confirmation bias—the tendency to favor information that aligns with preexisting beliefs.[17] This has critical implications for electoral integrity, as misinformation campaigns exploit these cognitive biases to influence voter behavior.[18] The weaponization of disinformation in elections thus not only distorts democratic discourse but also undermines public trust in electoral institutions.[19]

[12] Nolan Mccarty & Keith T. Poole & Howard Rosenthal (2008), *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, MIT Press.
[13] Natalie Jomini Stroud (2011), *Niche News: The Politics of News Choice*, Oxford University Press.
[14] Joshua A. Tucker et al. (2018), "Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature", *Political Science Research & Methods*, Vol. 36, no: 2, pp. 1-22.
[15] Nathaniel Persily & Joshua A. Tucker (2020), *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform*, Cambridge University Press.
[16] Robert Chesney & Danielle Citron (2019), "Deepfakes and the New Disinformation War: The Coming Age of Post-Truth Geopolitics", pp. 147-155.
[17] D.J. Flynn & Brendan Nyhan & Jason Reifler (2017), "The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs About Politics", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 38 (S1), pp. 127-150.
[18] Yochai Benkler & Robert Faris & Hal Roberts (2018), *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*.
[19] Kathleen Hall Jamieson (2020), *Cyberwar: How Russian Hackers and Trolls Helped Elect a President,* Oxford University Press.

Understanding the historical trajectory of U.S. political polarization provides context for analyzing how digital technologies and AI-driven disinformation operate within this landscape. Addressing these challenges requires an interdisciplinary approach, integrating insights from political science, communication studies, and digital governance frameworks to develop strategies that uphold democratic integrity.

3. The Role of Smart Technologies and Algorithms in Shaping Voter Behavior

The transformation brought about by the global communication infrastructure has had profound implications for social dynamics, as highlighted in the following observation: "*The new global communication infrastructure has completely changed social functioning by affecting the structures for coordinating social activities and organizing social interactions, especially the activity of communication. Although this change has fundamentally increased the capacity of many social functions, it has not prevented the emergence of new problems at various points. It has also created new problems that were not previously part of social functioning, such as who has access to digital networks and how, who is entitled to use the new mass media and their derivatives, and the use and manipulation of information.*"[20]

During the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, the data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica illicitly acquired data from millions of Facebook users to construct psychographic profiles of voters. These profiles facilitated highly specific targeting, where users were exposed to personalized advertisements and curated content designed to influence their political preferences. This form of algorithmic micro-targeting restricted the breadth of the information environment, effectively limiting voters to content that aligned exclusively with their pre-

[20] Cansu Arısoy Gedik & A. İlkay Ceyhan (2024), "The Gender Gap in the Digital Era: Reaching Algorithmic Fairness and Technological Inclusivity in Network Society", *Communication Papers. Media Literacy and Gender Studies*, Vol. 13, no: 26, p. 66.

existing beliefs, thereby reinforcing ideological silos and diminishing exposure to diverse viewpoints.

The article by Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison in *The Guardian*[21] was one of the seminal pieces that exposed the scandal. It discusses how Facebook data was harvested without user consent and used for psychographic profiling to influence voter behavior during the 2016 elections: "*The data analytics firm that worked with Donald Trump's election team and the winning Brexit campaign harvested millions of Facebook profiles of U.S. voters, in one of the tech giant's biggest ever data breaches, and used them to build a powerful software program to predict and influence choices at the ballot box.*" In both the 2016 and 2020 U.S. presidential elections, social media algorithms played a significant role in confining users to echo chambers by predominantly presenting content aligned with their pre-existing views. This algorithmic filtering limited exposure to diverse perspectives, causing voters to encounter information that reinforced their political ideologies and exacerbated political polarization. Most governments and corporations have used the new power that personal data and personalization offer fairly cautiously so far—China, Iran, and other oppressive regimes being the obvious exceptions. But even putting aside intentional manipulation, the rise of filtering has several unintended yet serious consequences for democracies. In the filter bubble, the public sphere—the realm in which common problems are identified and addressed—is just less relevant.[22]

Digital platforms like YouTube and Facebook were particularly noted for guiding users toward specific types of content, thereby deepening ideological silos and reducing the opportunity for cross-ideological engagement. According to the findings of a study by Bakshy and colleagues, which explored how news is shared, encountered, and consumed on social

[21] Carole Cadwalladr & Emma Graham-Harrison (2018), "Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach", *The Guardian*, 17.03.2018, Date of Accession: 10.12.2024 from https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election.
[22] Eli Pariser (2011), *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You*, p. 10.

media, Facebook users' friends tended to share significantly less news from sources that represented opposing ideological perspectives. Additionally, Facebook's algorithmic ranking reduced users' exposure to this type of diverse content in their news feeds by approximately 15 %. Even when users were exposed to cross-cutting content, they clicked on it 70 % less often compared to content that aligned with their existing views. This suggests that within the context of political news on social media, people's attention is largely influenced by selective exposure—where users are more likely to engage with information that reinforces their pre-existing beliefs, rather than content that challenges them.[23] This polarization not only limited users' exposure to opposing viewpoints but also made it increasingly difficult for them to understand alternative perspectives, further amplifying the impact of disinformation.

During the 2020 U.S. presidential elections, the use of deepfake technology to create and distribute fabricated videos became increasingly prevalent. These videos often distorted candidates' speeches or falsely attributed controversial statements to them, spreading rapidly across social media platforms. The dissemination of such content significantly impacted voters by fostering negative perceptions of specific candidates and shaping public opinion in ways that undermined informed decision-making. The 2020 U.S. Presidential elections underscored the growing threat of deepfakes to democratic integrity, not only through their potential to deepen social and ideological divisions but also by fostering what experts term the "*liar's dividend*": "*Deepfakes may also erode democracy in other, less direct ways. The problem is not just that deepfakes can be used to stoke social and ideological divisions. They can create a liar's dividend: As people become more aware of the existence of deepfakes,*

[23] Eytan Bakshy & Solomon Messing & Lada A. Adamic (2015), "Exposure to Ideologically Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook", *Science*, Vol. 348, no: 6239, pp. 1130-1132.

public figures caught in genuine recordings of misbehavior will find it easier to cast doubt on the evidence against them."[24]

To address the spread of misinformation during the 2020 U.S. presidential elections, social media platforms implemented measures aimed at curbing its influence. These included labeling misleading content and restricting access to certain posts. For instance, platforms like Twitter and Facebook flagged misleading statements made by political figures, providing warnings to alert users about the questionable accuracy of such content. While these efforts marked a step toward greater accountability, their effectiveness in reducing the impact of misinformation remains a topic of debate.

However, these efforts often proved limited, as they primarily targeted content already filtered by platform algorithms. In some instances, users perceived these actions as censorship, raising concerns about the platforms' impartiality. This perception, combined with the selective enforcement of such measures, underscored the inherent challenges in balancing the protection of free expression with the imperative to curb the spread of misinformation: "*There needs to be a line between efforts to help and teach, and the types of creepy data gathering and stigmatic characterizations that erode trust.*"[25] As these dynamics underscore the complexities of regulating digital content while preserving user confidence.

During the lead-up to and aftermath of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, significant attention was drawn to the coordinated online harassment tactics employed by the "*alt-right*" to silence outspoken commentators and journalists. Additionally, there was a notable increase in "*fake news*"—intentionally false stories designed to mislead voters or generate profit

[24] Robert Chesney & Danielle Citron (2019), "Deepfakes and the New Disinformation War: The Coming Age of Post-Truth Geopolitics", pp. 151-152.
[25] Frank Pasquale (2020), *New Laws of Robotics: Defending Human Expertise in the Age of AI*, Belknap Press, p. 75.

through the clicks of curious readers.[26] In both the 2016 and 2020 U.S. presidential elections, social media platforms were utilized to deliver advertisements specifically tailored to voters based on their demographic and psychographic profiles. For example, political campaigns designed messages to resonate with distinct voter groups, targeting individuals in specific states to influence their preferences on a personal level. This method was particularly common in swing states, where targeted advertising strategies were extensively employed to sway undecided voters and shape electoral outcomes. Advanced voter databases now aggregate a wide range of information, including political party data collected through millions of voter interactions, "*public records*" from state agencies, and "*commercial marketing*" data traded on international markets.[27] The 2016 U.S. presidential election showcased how social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube enable the "*profiling, identification, tracking, and targeted messaging of individuals*"[28], often with the platforms actively supporting these practices.

These examples vividly illustrate the impact of smart technologies, algorithms, and digital disinformation on voter behavior in U.S. presidential elections. By shaping the flow of information and influencing political decisions, these technologies can even affect election outcomes. As Baldwin-Philippi references to Cadwalladr's article[29]: "*The Cambridge Analytica whistleblower Chris Wylie has repeatedly described their targeting and testing practices as 'psychological warfare tools'*"[30]. Consequently, examining the use of smart technologies in electoral processes is essential to ensuring the integrity and proper functioning of democratic systems.

[26] Tarleton Gillespie (2018), *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*, Yale University Press, p. 9.
[27] Daniel Kreiss (2017), "Micro-targeting, the quantified persuasion", *Internet Policy Review*, Vol. 6, no: 4,
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] Carole Cadwalladr & Emma Graham-Harrison (2018), "Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach".
[30] Jessica Baldwin-Philippi (2019), "Data campaigning: between empirics and assumptions", *Internet Policy Review*, Vol. 8, no: 4.

4. Methodology: Addressing Limitations and Biases

This study employs qualitative descriptive analysis, focusing on case studies from the 2024 U.S. presidential election. Data collection involves media reports, instances of AI-generated content, and secondary academic sources. Recognizing the potential biases in news-based case selection, the study acknowledges the limitations of relying solely on journalistic accounts. To enhance methodological rigor, future research should incorporate:

- Social media content analysis (e.g., X, Instagram, TikTok, Telegram) to track the dissemination of AI-generated misinformation.
- Surveys and interviews to assess public perceptions of digital disinformation.
- Comparative case studies across different electoral contexts to evaluate the cross-national implications of AI-driven disinformation.

5. Digital Disinformation and Algorithms: Case Studies from the 2024 U.S. Elections

The 2024 election cycle saw increased concerns over algorithmic amplification of disinformation, raising ethical and regulatory challenges. In this sense, the research adopts a case study and literature review approach, integrating a discussion on methodological transparency and bias. While qualitative descriptive analysis remains central, this study suggests supplementing traditional approaches with social media content analysis, surveys, or interviews to provide more robust empirical evidence.

5.1. Deepfake Images in Political Campaigns

During the 2024 U.S. presidential election, several instances of artificial intelligence (AI) generated content were utilized to influence voter perceptions. In the election process, artificial intelligence was employed to create fake videos and images designed to manipulate voter perceptions. For instance, in October 2024, Hurricane Helene caused widespread devastation across six southeastern U.S. states, with images of the disaster and subsequent

rescue efforts quickly circulating online. However, the increasing accessibility of AI-powered digital image creation has raised doubts about the authenticity of some viral photos. As an example, a fabricated image of former President Donald Trump depicted him wading knee-deep in floodwaters during a rescue operation, which quickly circulated on social media. Such content was crafted to evoke emotional responses from voters, ultimately leading to the spread of misinformation[3132]. Another example is a widely shared image of a concerned-looking young girl in a life jacket holding a puppy aboard a rescue boat, which was revealed to be AI-generated and not a genuine representation of the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.[33]

Photo 1. Deepfake photos in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene

Moreover, political campaigns employed AI to create deceptive images. For example, the Trump campaign released ads featuring AI-generated images of opponents in compromising

[31] Robert Chesney & Danielle Citron (2019), "Deepfakes and the New Disinformation War: The Coming Age of Post-Truth Geopolitics".
[32] Hannah Hudnall (2024), "Image of Donald Trump wading through flood water is AI-generated | Fact check", *USA Today*, 03.10.2024, Date of Accession: 05.12.2024 from https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2024/10/03/ai-image-trump-hurricane-helene-fact-check/75483588007/.
[33] Peter Gattuso (2024), "Viral Images of Girl and Puppy in Hurricane Recovery Are AI-Generated", *AOL*, 05.10.2024, Date of Accession: 05.12.2024 from https://www.aol.com/news/viral-images-girl-puppy-hurricane-211902608.html.

situations, intending to sway public opinion through fabricated visuals.[34] In the 2024 U.S. presidential election, AI-generated images were utilized to influence public perception. Notably, Donald Trump shared AI-created visuals depicting Kamala Harris addressing a Soviet-style assembly adorned with a hammer-and-sickle flag. These fabricated images aimed to associate Harris with communist symbolism, thereby swaying public opinion through deceptive means.[35] Additionally, AI-generated images falsely portraying Black voters as Trump supporters were disseminated to mislead and manipulate public sentiment.[36]

These instances underscore the growing use of AI in crafting deceptive content within political campaigns, raising concerns about its ethical implications and potential impact on democratic processes. These examples highlight the increasing reliance on AI to create misleading content in political campaigns, raising significant concerns about its ethical implications and the potential consequences for democratic systems. AI-generated videos falsely depicting instances of election fraud circulated on social media platforms, aiming to undermine confidence in the electoral process. These deepfakes were designed to mislead voters by presenting fabricated evidence of misconduct.[37]

5.2. AI-Generated Robocalls Suppressing Voter Turnout

In January 2024, AI-generated robocalls impersonating President Joe Biden were distributed to New Hampshire voters, advising them to abstain from voting in the state's primary

[34] Hany Farid (2024), "Deepfakes in the 2024 US Presidential Election", Date of Accession: 05.12.2024 from https://farid.berkeley.edu/deepfakes2024election/.
[35] Shannon Bond (2024), "How AI-generated memes are changing the 2024 election", *NPR News*, 30.08.2024, Date of Accession: 12.12.2024 from https://www.npr.org/2024/08/30/nx-s1-5087913/donald-trump-artificial-intelligence-memes-deepfakes-taylor-swift.
[36] Marianna Spring (2024), "Trump supporters target black voters with faked AI images", *BBC News*, 04.03.2024, Date of Accession: 12.12.2024 from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68440150.
[37] James M. Lindsay (2024), "Election 2024: The Deepfake Threat to the 2024 Election", Council on Foreign Relations, 02.02.2024, Date of Accession: 05.12.2024 from https://www.cfr.org/blog/election-2024-deepfake-threat-2024-election.

election. These calls aimed to suppress voter turnout by disseminating false information.[38] Voters received AI-generated robocalls impersonating President Joe Biden, urging them to abstain from voting in the state's primary election. The calls featured a voice resembling President Biden's, using phrases like "*What a bunch of malarkey*", and misleadingly advised voters to "*save your vote for the November election*", falsely suggesting that participating in the primary would aid Republican efforts to re-elect Donald Trump.[39] These robocalls were traced back to Life Corporation, a Texas-based company, and were transmitted through Lingo Telecom. In response, the New Hampshire Attorney General's Office issued cease-and-desist orders to both companies and initiated a criminal investigation into potential violations of voter suppression laws. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) also intervened, issuing a cease-and-desist letter to Lingo Telecom to halt the dissemination of such illegal robocalls.[40] This incident underscores the growing threat of AI-generated content in electoral processes and highlights the need for robust legal frameworks and technological safeguards to protect the integrity of democratic elections.

5.3. AI-Powered Chatbots and Disinformation in the European Parliament Elections

Popular AI-powered chatbots spread disinformation about the European Parliament elections, according to a report by a Berlin-based NGO, highlighting the potential of AI technologies to spread misinformation in electoral processes.[41] In April 2024, Democracy Reporting

[38] *Voice of America* (2024), "'Deepfake' of Biden's Voice Called Early Example of US Election Disinformation", 24.01.2024, Date of Accession: 05.12.2024 from https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/deepfake-of-biden-s-voice-called-early-example-of-us-election-disinformation/7455392.html.

[39] Ali Swenson & Will Weissert (2024), "New Hampshire investigating fake Biden robocall meant to discourage voters ahead of primary", *AP*, 23.01.2024, Date of Accession: 11.12.2024 from https://apnews.com/article/new-hampshire-primary-biden-ai-deepfake-robocall-f3469ceb6dd613079092287994663db5.

[40] New Hampshire Department of Justice (2024), "Voter Suppression AI Robocall Investigation Update", 06.02.2024, Date of Accession: 11.12.2024 from https://www.doj.nh.gov/news-and-media/voter-suppression-ai-robocall-investigation-update.

[41] Anna Desmarais (2024), "AI chatbots intentionally spreading election-related disinformation, study finds", *Euronews*, 08.06.2024, Date of Accession: 05.12.2024 from https://www.euronews.com/next/2024/06/08/ai-chatbots-intentionally-spreading-election-related-disinformation-study-finds.

International (DRI) conducted an analysis revealing that AI-powered chatbots from companies like Google, Microsoft, and OpenAI disseminated inaccurate information regarding the European Parliament elections.[42] The study found that these chatbots often provided incorrect election dates and misleading details about voting procedures, such as mail-in voting options that were not available in certain countries. This shows the risk of AI technologies inadvertently disseminating misinformation during electoral processes, emphasizing the importance of robust oversight and ensuring the accuracy of AI-generated content.

All these examples underscore the growing use of AI technologies in crafting persuasive yet deceptive content during election cycles, highlighting the need for vigilance and digital literacy among the electorate. As a result, digital platforms use algorithms to deliver content tailored to users' interests, aiming to maximize engagement. However, this approach often confines users to content that aligns with their existing views, creating echo chambers. Such environments limit exposure to diverse perspectives and facilitate the rapid and effective spread of disinformation. This effect becomes particularly pronounced during election periods, where algorithms amplify the dissemination of politically charged or misleading content.

6. Discussion: Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that digital platforms and algorithms play a pivotal role in shaping voter behavior, particularly during electoral processes. Social media algorithms curate content based on user engagement patterns, reinforcing ideological preferences and fostering echo chambers. This dynamic mechanism puts limits on the voters' exposure to diverse viewpoints, contributing to the intensification of political polarization. As a result, digital

[42] Clothilde Goujard (2024), "AI chatbots spread falsehoods about the EU election, report finds", *Politico*, 11.04.2024, Date of Accession: 12.12.2024 from https://www.politico.eu/article/ai-chatbots-spread-falsehoods-about-the-eu-elections-report-finds/.

platforms are not just passive channels for information but active agents in shaping electoral discourse. One significant implication of this phenomenon is the growing susceptibility of voters to disinformation campaigns.

6.1. Balancing Algorithmic Governance and Free Speech

While social media companies have implemented content labeling and restrictions, concerns over censorship and selective enforcement remain. Constructing the balance between content moderation and free expression is essential for democratic accountability. In this sense, the data collected in this article indicates that in the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, AI-driven deepfake content and micro-targeting strategies emerged as significant threats to the proper functioning of democratic processes by misleading voters. The rapid dissemination of deepfake-generated content, supported by algorithms, has led voters to make decisions based on inaccurate information. These findings highlight that while algorithms play a role in content curation, their impact on disinformation depends on a combination of platform design, user behavior, and broader sociopolitical factors.

The spread of AI-generated content, such as deepfake videos and manipulated political advertisements, strengthens biases and misperceptions and reduces voters' ability to assess political messaging critically. Furthermore, these digital dynamics have the potential to weaken trust in electoral institutions, as misinformation can create confusion about voting procedures, candidacy positions, and election outcomes.

6.2. Regulatory Approaches to AI-Generated Misinformation

Policymakers must establish clear legal frameworks addressing AI-generated misinformation. Digital platforms should implement clear content moderation policies and disclose how political content is prioritized in users’ feeds. Potential measures might include:

- Transparency mandates for AI-generated content.

- Stronger accountability mechanisms for tech platforms.
- International cooperation to regulate cross-border digital disinformation.

Efforts by digital platforms to reduce disinformation remain an issue, particularly regarding whether they fulfil their ethical responsibilities during electoral processes. Various social media companies have implemented measures such as labelling misleading content or imposing access restrictions to counteract false information. However, such efforts might not be enough to fully prevent the spread of disinformation. Digital platforms rely on algorithms to manage content flows and enhance user engagement, which inadvertently facilitates the rapid dissemination of disinformation. The need for social media companies to play a more active role in fighting disinformation is not only an ethical imperative but also a critical requirement for ensuring the integrity of democratic elections.

6.3. Strengthening Digital Literacy

The research underscores the role of media literacy programs in reducing disinformation's impact.[43] Therefore, educational initiatives must equip voters with fact-checking skills to find their ways through AI-generated content effectively.

Another significant point highlighted by this study is the necessity of digital literacy in reducing the impact of disinformation. In this digital age, the ability of voters to approach online content with a critical perspective serves as a vital defense mechanism against the spread of false information. Digital literacy enhances individuals' skills to question the accuracy of the information they encounter on digital platforms and to recognize disinformation effectively. The implementation of various digital literacy programs will enhance voters' ability to cope with disinformation, making them more informed participants in democratic processes. In this context, reducing the impact of digital disinformation requires

[43] Monica Bulger & Patrick Davison (2018), "The Promises, Challenges, and Futures of Media Literacy", pp. 1-21.

not only individual awareness but also a commitment from social media platforms to operate by the principles of transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

This study reveals the profound influence of smart technologies on behavior in online settings and their critical implications for democratic processes, particularly in the context of U.S. elections. Smart technologies, driven by algorithms and AI, shape online interactions by curating content tailored to user preferences. This mechanism creates echo chambers and ideological silos, putting limits to diverse viewpoints, increasing polarization, and the risk of disinformation. Advanced AI tools such as deepfake technologies and micro-targeting strategies have a high potential to manipulate public perceptions by spreading misleading or fabricated information, raising ethical concerns.

The importance of this study lies in the fact that, in the 2024 U.S. elections, these dynamics become particularly apparent. Algorithmic filtering limits voters to content that matches their beliefs, increasing division and reducing cross-party discussions. Moreover, AI-powered disinformation campaigns, including deepfake videos and micro-targeted political advertisements, have been employed to sway voter behavior, particularly in swing states, where electoral outcomes are decided by narrow margins. These practices not only undermine informed decision-making but also jeopardize the integrity of the electoral process. Therefore, while digital technologies offer opportunities for political engagement, they also introduce challenges related to disinformation, polarization, and electoral integrity. The findings emphasize the need for:

- More precise and thorough methods for studying digital disinformation.
- Fair regulations that protect democratic principles.
- Increased public awareness through digital literacy programs.

In conclusion, especially digital media literacy programs are vital to equipping voters with the skills to critically evaluate online content and recognize disinformation. Simultaneously, digital platforms must adopt transparent and accountable practices to reduce the risks associated with algorithmic curation and disinformation. Ultimately, addressing the challenges posed by digital disinformation requires a coordinated effort among policymakers, technology firms, and the public. Only through these measures can the integrity of democratic systems be preserved in the face of advancing technological capabilities.

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