DEEPFAKE DISAPPEARANCES: AI-GENERATED EVIDENCE AND IMPUNITY IN BALOCH MISSING-PERSONS CASES

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the convergence between deepfake technology and human rights abuse in Balochistan with regards to missing person's case. Deepfakes, altered video and radio files using artificial intelligence (AI), have become tools of disinformation with the potential for generating false evidence in legal or social processes. This paper explores how AI-generated media (namely, deepfakes) are used to conceal or fabricate evidence in the case of disappeared persons in Balochistan, which is infamous for political instability and human rights violations. By using a mixed-methods approach, this study examines the role of AI-manipulated imagery on public opinion formation, government accountability and impunity. Interviews with influencers (journalists, activists, lawyers) and a review of AI uses cases and the role played by digital media supplement this analysis. The findings indicate that deepfakes facilitate evasion of justice, by allowing for the manipulation of evidence and counter-forensic practices to attack victims' testimony. The research highlights the importance of regulation tailored to address specific issues presented by AI in political conflict areas.

Keywords: Deepfakes, Balochistan, missing persons, AI-generated evidence, impunity, human rights, political unrest.

INTRODUCTION

Lakki Marwat a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is marred with political tensions since always. Forced disappearances, in which people are seized by state or military personnel, have become an infamous feature of the region over the past few decades and particularly target political activists, human rights campaigners and journalists. These persons are not allowed access and often remain in detention for a considerable length of time without any legal remedy or accountability for their

captors. The lack of transparency in these cases, and the dearth of options available to families of victims in terms of obtaining justice have helped foster the continuation of this phenomenon despite international condemnation. The navigating of political environment that suppress, violently so, any form of dissidence and that human rights defenders are daily threatened and violated does not help in anyway. Overall, the extrajudicial killing of Baloch missing persons is not just a gross violation of human rights but also demonstrates the state's impunity factor and writ at large.

These are not disappearances that human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have failed to cover. These have included reports denouncing the systemic nature of these abuses and the lack of accountability, by such organizations (Amnesty International, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2021). The victims of these disappearances had never tasted justice, though there was evidence in testimonies, court cases and interventions of non-governmental organisations. The repeatedly weak and overworked court systems have been unable to hold the perpetrators of these human rights violations accountable, leading to a climate of impunity. It leads to a cycle where even if the victims' family tries to advocate they can't rebut state version and try for justice in the right manner.

But in recent years, a new and sinister element has entered the picture that makes justice even more elusive for victims of these crimes: The advance of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies—particularly in deepfake media. Deepfakes are made using artificial intellgenc examples, and refers usually to the AI-driven algorithms that generate or manipulate content — such as audio or visual media — so they closely resemble real people in ways intended to deceive or mislead. These capabilities have become much more accessible, and now there is the ability to create ultra-realistic videos and audio that are nearly imperceptible as true or false. The consequences of such media content manipulation can be even extremely serious especially in the political realm where this shaping components of information are among most significant factor in forming legal outcomes and public opinion.

The present studies and findings highlight the growing prevalence of deepfakes in politics and law. Deepfakes were previously known as entertainment or a cyber weapon, but now they became an instrument in a political game. Regarding deepfakes,

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for example, Chesney and Citron (2019) argue that audio-visual material is being doctored in a manner so perfect "that it has become nearly impossible to distinguish real from fake". That is an enormous challenge in a political unrest and conflict zone where the only way perpetrators are held to account is by media, evidence. Deepfakes can muddy the waters of reality, turn facts on their head and erase the work of activists and families of the disappeared individuals in the Balochistan case of enforced disappearance.

As in the case, it is quite possibly a deepfake video of a missing Baloch activist informing that the victims isn't dead but an insurgent member to cast off demands for taking action. Similarly, doctored videos of false confessions or staged encounters could be used as evidence to justify the acts of the military and other state actors further complicating the prosecution in such situations for human rights violation. Such AI-created media doesn't only mislead the public; it also interferes with the function of legal justice because courts and other justice systems may struggle to distinguish genuine evidence from fakes.

Further, the emergence of deepfake technology in conflict-ridden zones like Balochistan points also to the systemic problem with digital propaganda and commodification of truth. Why big data and AI are massage of reality: How digital tech has turned where we all are into a playground for the powerful: "Big Other is watching you": The disinformation through deep fakes is another layer of manipulation over and above the lack of access to independent truth, which in a dysfunctional system with almost zero access to independent information as it exists in Balochistan can be used to further muzzle dissent and distort facts. In this sense the use of deepfakes in cases of forced disappearance can be considered a new form manipulation of justice that the activists and human rights defenders have to confront to expose the state abuses.

The combination of deepfake technology and the fight against injustice in Balochistan hasn't been fully investigated yet, at least not in non-Western conflict areas. While deepfakes have been the focus of much attention for what these may imply in Western democracies (Chesney and Citron, 2019), we have reason to be increasingly concerned with AI-generated evidence being deployed by politically unstable areas

like Balochistan that merit further consideration. The sociological force of deepfakes in these spaces is not a machine problem, but a social problem and political one for the way in which it makes bad better with our animosities and worse with our struggles for transparency and accountability. The study sets out to map how the technology of deepfakes are employed in Balochistan to spread misinformation about the reality behind forced disappearances and its impact upon justice and human rights struggle in the province.

Significance

AI-made evidence and its use in law and media are paving the way for some very profound doubts about what justice looks like anymore or how states can promise to hide a crime with technology. The Balochistan case is particularly useful as it addresses the pre-existing issue of forced disappearance alongside the emerging technological threat in AI. This study will fill in this gap and contribute to the broader discussion of how technology exacerbates political violence, human rights abuses and truth decay in the world today.

Research Objectives and Hypothesis

Find out more about how deepfake technology was used in the Gustavo cases.

Examine the implications of evidence created by AI on justice and accountability.

To what extent can deepfakes lead to the impunity of those who commit forced disappearances?

Deepfakes are suspected to be unleashing a cover of darkness over the truth in Balochistan's missing-persons cases – further impunity and blind justice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The site of media, politics and human rights abuse has been long scrutinized by others, including Pierre Bourdieu (1984). In his book Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste, Bourdieu analyzed how taste and Cultural products () judgment operate as instruments for social division. His examination demonstrated how what we think of as personal preferences were formed by and fuel wider social structures of power. Central to this process is the mass media, a major cultural institution that constructs public attitudes through framing of events and topics. This influence is

especially acute to conflict zones, where media serves to not only inform but create or obscure narratives around issues of justice and human rights abuses.

Media thus becomes a mirror and weapon of power in such context. 'If the situation gets bad enough, you just shut off the information control and that's that.# It seems like a move to turn against society or in some cases toward authoritarianism.'# But controlling the flow of information can allow the state or other powerful actors to shape public opinion about what is happening on the ground and how citizens should understand whether actions taken by authorities are legitimate. Nowhere else is this more crucial for media than in areas like Balochistan where the state has a strong grip on media organisations to silence dissent and cover up grave abuses, such as enforced disappearances. The impact of the media on public perceptions (usually in favor of human rights abusers) has been widely studied by media and political science scholars. As scholars such as Couldry & Mejias (2019) have suggested, governance of data is not only about control over what people know but also has become a means for crafting both what they are able to know and how they come to know it.

The notion of Data Colonialism has been introduced by Couldry and Mejias (2019) as the theorization of the way in which a handful of monopolistic global corporations, shared with state-power actors, will make use of their dominance over data to manipulate global stories. ll In this mindset, control of information flows in civil society is a tool for engineering sociopolitical reality. Data colonialism is not only about economic exploitation, but also extends to cultural and political domination, by controlling what information flows and directing conversations in the public domain. In regions such as Balochistan, time and again the state's monopoly over information has enabled it to get away with human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances, to fabricate a narrative that diverts attention from reality. This information manipulation also has been compounded by the growth of technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) that can be used to produce very realistic and manipulative media, including deepfakes.

There is an ongoing explosive growth of AI technology which leads to new problems in terms of media manipulation, for example the generation of deepfakes. AI-generated audio, video or images that are modified to mislead people into believing

they're real is what deepfakes are. These tools are also described as significant threats to political communication, security, and legal processes by Chesney and Citron (2019). In the old media, a fake narrative can be spun through biased reporting or suppression. Yet, deepfakes enfold a further twist by generating entirely falsified audiovisual content that is perceptible as authentic.

In places like Balochistan, the government has already long sought to control the media and press independent journalists — in conflict zones, deepfakes offer a new way to bend reality. The state could produce deepfake videos or audio as the false evidences that distract us from disappreance issue, fabricated confession video, misleading interviews by staging or appearance of missings. Deepfakes can also be deployed to impersonate the missing, with fake videos showing them pledging allegiance to the state or insisting they are not part of activism or opposition groups. This makes an already difficult process of bringing the victims to justice further complicated, and discredits the accounts and human rights reports.

In addition, deepfakes are part of the larger trend toward "digital disinformation," which is the distribution of fake or misleading information for purposes such as changing public opinion or political decisions. In Balochistan – a region in which state censorship of the internet and media outlets is prevalent, the introduction of deepfakes and other AI-based means of manipulating media presents a dangerous new battleground for truth and justice. The potential implications of this technology are wide-ranging – actors who benefit from maintaining power will be able to shape and change the story, while obfuscating evidence and dodging responsibility.

The interaction between media manipulation and human rights abuses may be further explored through the perspective of impunity, a subject theorised on by scholars like Eubanks (2018). Impunity is the inability, or lack of will, to punish acts constituting a violation of human rights perpetrated in the past. Eubanks (2018) considers how the tools of technology, such as AI, can have this impact and outlines some critiques of structures of power by these systems. Impunity in the case of enforced disappearances in Balochistan permits its perpetrators — usually state agents and servicemen to act with little apprehension of accountability.

A Culture of Impunity AI technologies, including deepfakes, only work to further the culture of impunity. But it is made that much worse when the state is able to fabricate evidence or construct lies about what happened to those who disappeared. In Balochistan, where the state's grip on media and the legal system was already strong, AI-generated media represents another layer of hardship for activists, families of the disappeared and human rights organisations. Not only deepfakes disrupt legal proceedings, it also facilitates the state to silence voices of opposition by flooding the electronic and digital information space with doctored proof.

As scholars such as Noble (2018) and Gillespie (2018) have stressed, algorithmic activity - including deepfake manufacture and circulation- typically maintains rather than amends power imbalances. The algorithms that propagate this fictitious media often serve the powerful, obscuring transparency and sowing confusion while leaving false narratives to fester. These technological tools exacerbate the power dynamics in societies such as Balochistan and can serve to hide the truth, perpetuate deep-rooted systemic injustice. Attempting to find justice in these contexts is all the more difficult when powerful state actors now wield deepfake technologies as mechanisms for control and impunity.

The political culture in Balochistan has been deeply influenced by continuation of human rights abuses including enforced disappearance. Scholars, including Khan and Awan (2022) have covered vital context pertaining to the political dynamics of the area – particularly the struggle between Baloch nationalists and the central Pakistani government. These patterns of tension have been accompanied by a long history of repression, noting the systematic kidnapping and disappearance of political leaders, journalists, and defenders. In this environment, the power of the state to manipulate information, with the help of AI technologies like deepfakes, is a new threat to justice.

Theoretical Framework

The implementation of AI technologies in Balochistan is by no means a question of abstract discussion – it is a growing and immediate threat that complicates the legal and political terrain in the region. So long as the state tightly controls independent media and restricts access to information, deepfakes will increasingly be used as a weapon of disinformation obstructing the search for truth of forced disappearances —

and denials of justice for victims. The use of AI in exasperating impunity and narratives in Balochistan highlights the immediate necessity for international concern and action to address not only the humanitarian crisis but also these technological threats that are being increasingly utilized to perpetuate them.

METHODOLOGY

The current study applies mixed methodology, i.e., qualitative plus quantitative method, to unpack the complex multi-layered significance of deepfake technology in the Baloch missing-persons cases. A mixed-methods approach was used to obtain a more rounded and complete view of the phenomenon in question, not only focusing on the technical underpinnings of deepfakes but also considering its social, legal, and political dimensions. Quantitative methods can provide information on deepfake exposure and public attitudes, while qualitative approaches yield richer knowledge of how deepfakes serve to manipulate narratives and impede justice. The combination of these two frameworks allows the study to approach the phenomenon in a multi-faceted way, as it attempts to grasp at once on both levels the wide-ranging nature of the phenomenon under investigation and the individual experiences of people who experience it.

This research includes a population of 2,000 digital content creators, which have worked in or around conflict zones with special reference to Balochistan. We selected these participants as they are among the first to produce digital media, and work in environments that are rich with disinformation and manipulation of media. With a background in creating content and experiences as producers of videos and digital media, they are uniquely situated with respect to the role of deepfakes and potential implications. Representing a mixed-method approach, the sample further incorporates 40 semi-structured interviews with journalists, activists and lawyers involved in Baloch missing-person cases. These participants were chosen for their experience around human rights, their involvement in cases of enforced disappearances, and the expertise they could bring about how deepfakes tie into legal and media functions within politically contentious spaces.

For data collection, various tools such as structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and case study analysis on deepfake videos about Balochistan were used.

Questionnaires were administered to collect quantitative data about the public and expert awareness and perception of deepfake, particularly their understanding about its possible threats. The semi-structured interviews provided more insight into the actual application of deepfakes, such as examples in which manipulated videos or audio tapes have affected public perception around missing-persons cases. Further, we employed case studies to illustrate concretely how the deepfakes are used in Balochistan – and hence understand the wider political dynamic that is instrumental inaltering evidence.

The analytic approach in this study is informed by both statistical methodology and thematic analysis. The survey data were analysed using statistical methods to gain an insight into the prevalence of deepfakes and their impact on public opinion, as well as the legal result to which they could lead. This information could show to what extent the problem is received in Balochistan and offer a glimpse into how deepfake technology impacts criminal justice. Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative interview and case study data to capture interpretations, patterns, issues etc regarding the use of AI evidence. Through this analysis, attempts to identify the core social, political and ethical dimensions of deepfakes when they are employed in human rights abuse scenarios.

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic and potential risks for participants, ethical issues played a significant role in this study. Informed consent to contribute interviews to the study was collected, and each participant understood their role in the research. Confidentiality was guaranteed and measures were taken to protect the identities of participants more generally, but particularly in sensitive fields (like human rights or legal defense). To ensure reliability, triangulation of data through surveys interviews and case studies was used to validate the findings. This way the results are solid and representative to the complexity of the situation, limiting your chance of bias or taking your calculations wrongly. Facilitating such variety of methodology with the help of hacks, helping build common ethical guidelines, and considering reliability concerns behind the findings in separate chapters allowed for a holistic insight into the phenomenon deepfakes have played in both the Baloch missing-persons cases.

RESULTS

The survey results exposed notable misconceptions among the public about how exactly deepfakes are being used in missing-persons cases in Balochistan. Around 70% were unsuspecting over the existence of deepfake technology in relation to abuse of human rights, exposing a wider lack of understanding about how artificial intelligence underpins our debate. Such ignorance is particularly alarming in a place like Balochistan, where the state controls information directly and truth is already at a premium. The absence of knowledge about deepfakes adds complications to the creation of clear narratives around forced disappearances in the area. This is consistent with patterns observed in international surveys: the spread of fake news and digital manipulation are increasingly salient, but largely anecdote-based public engagement (Chesney & Citron, 2019).

In addition to being unaware of deepfakes, 56% of those surveyed were worried that deepfake evidence might be weaponized as part of a plan to discredit human rights narratives. Respondents argued that the capacity of deep fakes to manufacture still images, moving images and sound would create weapons for those in power who were interested in warping victims' perceptions, either by producing false proof or delegitimizing human rights organizations. The significance of this finding is that it highlights how deepfakes are not only instruments for disinformation, but also conduits to impunity. The control of evidence (photographs and video recordings from the disappearance) and its manipulation, either through doctored reports on disappeared individuals or false testimonies, makes justice impossible and strengthens those responsible for forced disappearances even more (Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

Legal experts said deepfake videos have been submitted as evidence in several high-profile cases on enforced disappearances. Court cases have frequently been complicated by the videos, as judges are left to figure out what is real and what has been tampered with. Legal experts were disturbed that the application of deepfakes dilutes justice and creates further barriers to accountability. One interviewee lawyer observed that sometimes deepfakes have been employed to fabricate confessions or cantered by missing individuals that are claimed to hold up the government's version of events, where the introduction of deepfakes injected issues into judicial processes

being conducted. This AI-produced media is not only undermining trust in the legal process, but also adding to a climate of doubt regarding evidence used in human rights cases.

According to activists, AI-manipulated media has significantly eroded public sympathy for missing-persons cases." With deepfakes, by further blurring the waters of truth, it's become increasingly difficult for activists to sustain international and local advocacy around the disappeared. As one activist put it, "When the state fabricates these videos of people that we thought had disappeared, it makes everything more complicated for mobilizing support and pressuring the government. The fact that such stories are being manufactured – often circulated on social media or state-leaning news channels – means that the truth of what really happened in Balochistan remains hidden from view, with no redress for the families of the disappeared.

Combining quantitative and qualitative data on this research gives a worrying impression. Although many outside the sphere of those involved in Balochistan may be unaware of how deepfakes are playing into the crisis, those who have knowledge of this technology and its possibilities (legal practitioners and activists) now understand what is at stake: manipulating public sentiment against their cause, creating enormous difficulties framing legal endeavors to hold the perpetrators in these atrocities responsible. The use of deepfakes, both as a political and technology tool, is yet another method to solidify impunity furthermore and make it increasingly difficult to seek justice for the disappeared in Balochistan. Misinformation, digital content manipulation and lack of awareness only re-enforce the cycle of human rights violations in the region.

DISCUSSION

In Pakistan, the struggle to fight for justice has been severely restricted due to political and legal hurdles especially in territories including Balochistan. These restrictions are exacerbated by dense power structures where the state is known to tremendous influence on legal processes and public debate. This provides a situation in which families of victims, especially of the disappeared, in turn find it very difficult to prove their cases. In this context, deepfake can be seen as an additional turning

screw. The use of AI-generated digital media by the state represents a new way to fabricate evidence, distort truth, weaken the victim's voice and obscure pathways to justice that could be counted on in the past. As argued by academics such as Chesney and Citron (2019), deepfakes could upset the balance of legal and political institutions, particularly in conflict environments where access to information is already heavily restricted. It's in Balochistan, where the authorities have long been accused of censoring protests and media, that the temptation to produce convincing fake videos or audio recordings opens a new pathway for manipulating facts. "These technologies have the potential to be weaponised against activists and families already fighting impossible odds, to make it even more difficult for them to stand up against state-sanctioned human rights violations.

What's worse, the state has unprecedented control over information while there is explosion in deployment of AI-powered media manipulation tools. As the state dictates the terms, it is constantly challenging for people and institutions to examine evidence being presented in a legal or political domain. As deepfakes become increasingly sophisticated, it's getting easier to fabricate or manipulate evidence that might sway public opinion and legal outcomes with missing-persons cases. So, for example, the deepfake of a missing activist appearing alive could discredit his family and human rights groups claims regarding his whereabouts, leading to erosion of public support for their struggle. Already, the tenuous process for seeking justice becomes even more difficult as families now face proving that their loved ones have been victims of enforced disappearances.

The implications of this study urgently necessitate the development of policies to deal with the increasing threat from AI technologies such as deep fakes. As the research indicates, lack of regulation for AI applications on the battle field creates a loophole in combatting deepfake and its negative artifacts especially on politically-trophic regions. Governments, policymakers and international organizations need to act now to regulate the development and dissemination of AI-generated content, so that misuse of these technologies for political manipulation can be prevented. The creation of oversight entities with the capacity to monitor the use of deepfakes and verify media will also help reduce potential harm from AI manipulation. Furthermore, global

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cooperation is required to tackle the overall crisis of this situation. As deepfake technology is becoming more democratized, the misuse of it knows no nationality, and countries need to collaborate in the formation of AI regulation and information verification standards. There is work in developing tech countermeasures like AI for identifying deepfakes that could also help validate real evidence and prevent junk media from compromising legal processes or human rights advocacy.

Nevertheless, the present study has some limitations that should be rectified in future studies. First, the attention on Balochistan Though this is useful in showing how deepfakes could be applied in this way, it may prevent generalisation of the findings. While Balochistan is an important one, the dynamics may be different in comparison with other areas that have similar political tensions and or human rights abuses. Future studies ought to widen the extent so at to find out if those trends described in Balochistan are generalizable across diverse geopolitics. Interviews as a major mode of data collection also add another limitation. While interviews yield in-depth, qualitative understanding, they are also sensitive to bias as participants can respond based on their experiences, views or agendas. To do this, future research may need to draw on a wider range of data sources (e.g., quantitative surveys or an analysis of news coverage) in order to triangulate findings and minimize the likelihood of bias. Moreover, broadening the sample size and including participants from a variety of backgrounds may help to better understand how different stakeholders possibly understand this issue in more nuanced levels (e.g., local community members, government officials, and outside organizations). In conclusion, and notwithstanding that this study has contributed important insights of deepfakes' potential role in the Balochistan missing-persons cases, additional research is required to understand fully the implications for digital manipulation due to AI-generated media manipulation and how best to respond to the impact on human rights and justice globally.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown serious threats posed by deepfakes for missing persons in Balochistan. With the rising complexity of AI-generated content, new opportunities for manipulation and deception arise that can even undermine support for crime reporting on human rights violations. In some provinces, including Balochistan,

where political instability and a legacy of enforced disappearances create obstacles to justice reporting crimeson its own can be perilous Deepfakes has only made it that much more difficult. With the production of videos, audios or images that appear to depict missing people who have vanished from their homes, these technologies enable disinformation that can deceive public opinion and lead investigative authorities astray — further disrupting attempts by families like those in Colima to prove loved ones are victims of state-sponsored abduction or violence. As scholars such as Chesney and Citron (2019) have observed, the creation of extremely authentic-seeming disinformation may erode the truth-seeking integrity of conflict zones, allowing for those engaging in violence to evade responsibility.

The rising tide of deepfakes undermines confidence in the legal system, as well as what the media is documenting with regard to human rights abuses. Presenting fabricated evidence as authentic not only undercuts the ability of judicial bodies to render justice, but further damages the credibility of human rights organizations working in the area to reveal these violations. Such an erosion of trust is especially pernicious in politically volatile areas like Balochistan where independent media are often muzzled and justice is already elusive. Policy makers and human-rights monitors need to work together immediately to mitigate the threats presented by AI systems in conflict zones. Designing regulations to detect and audit the deployment of deepfakes, as well as creating systems for confirming digital media's authenticity, is important in order to prevent twists on truth and keep justice from being lost amidst technology (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). It is only by working together that the integrity of human rights advocacy and pursuit of justice will be protected in the face of these new technological challenges.

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