

Misinformation Resilience and Democratic Participation in the Era of Generative AI: A Comparative Social Science Study

Article Information

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ABSTRACT

The study explores how misinformation is perceived and accepted (misinformation resilience) and how citizens participate in democracy in the current context of generative artificial intelligence, especially the impact of AI-generated information on citizens' trust, political engagement, and ability to find misleading information. The rise of the power of generative AI to generate lifelike text, image, audio and video content poses new challenges to democratic societies in terms of electoral integrity, public opinion manipulation and information disorder. With a comparative social science lens, the study examines variations in how much exposure to misinformation someone has, their level of digital literacy, trust in institutions, platform dependence, and civic engagement in selected democratic environments. The findings suggest that societies with robust media literacy, high trust in institutions, and clear platform governance are more resilient to the threat of misinformation spreading via artificial intelligence. The results further indicate that digital literacy interventions for younger, more connected citizens also increase their exposure to generative AI misinformation, but can also improve their ability to verify information. The current study reveals that misinformation resilience is not solely a technological problem but a social, educational, and governance-related problem as well, through comparative patterns. This study emphasises the need for awareness of the public, systems of fact-checking, civic education, platform accountability and policy coordination to safeguard the integrity of democratic participation from manipulation through AI. In conclusion, the paper suggests that a multi-stakeholder approach is needed to build democratic resilience in the era of generative AI, encompassing citizens, governments, education providers, media outlets, and technology platforms.

Keywords: Generative AI, Misinformation Resilience, Democratic Participation, Digital Literacy, Political Trust

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INTRODUCTION

Generative AI is a disruptive technology that has drastically changed the information life cycle and is now a major force in the production and dissemination of hyper-realistic disinformation (Romanishyn et al., 2025; Jaidka et al., 2024). This technological shift is a whole new paradigm shift and a review of democratic resilience has to be done from a new point of view. The possibilities of generative AI to produce personalized and hyper-realistic content increase, as does the risk that someone could systematically impact public opinion and political discourse (Ferrara, 2025; Safi & Alam, 2026). Unlike traditional disinformation, GenAI disinformation has the potential to be spread on a large scale, producing political messages, fake media, and deepfakes that are very convincing (Ferrara, 2025; Safi & Alam, 2026). An impact of the systematic attack on political information environments, the loss of citizen trust in key democratic institutions, as well as the rise of polarization directly affect the quality of the democratic decision-making processes (Ecker et al., 2024; Romanishyn et al., 2025). In this digital age of change, misinformation needs to be reimagined. Resilience is no longer just about detecting and containing fake media; it is a composite competency that involves institutional strength, critical digital literacy, and the ability to engage pluralistically in politics (Ivanytska et al., 2026; Spivak & Spivak, 2025). The digital and media literacy has become an integral part of that resilience, and enables individuals to critically analyze information sources, be aware of information manipulation, and deal with the complex digital environment (Moore & Hancock, 2022; Spivak & Spivak, 2025). Furthermore, the process of building a resilient media is a multi-layered and misinformation resilience must be realized in public policy, educational systems,

and independent fact-checking structures to increase the capacity of the media sector to withstand misinformation (Ivanytska et al., 2026; Плотникова et al., 2025). The effect on the engagement of democracy is massive. In a world where "information" can be overwhelming and easily confused with the real thing (Formosa et al., 2024; Spivak & Spivak, 2025), it is important to be an informed citizen. Citizens' mistrust in the information environment may lead them to withdraw or be influenced by stories that reject and demonize others, and thus to jeopardize the future of democratic systems (McIntyre et al., 2026; Nie, 2024). Comparative studies of the risks associated with GenAI to date have been limited and largely concerned with comparing countries and specific contexts (Ivanytska et al., 2026; Spivak & Spivak, 2025), while there is a need for comparative studies on the impact of different national or sociocultural contexts on misinformation resilience. To be able to design policy interventions for adaptation and beyond-the-local interventions, beyond-the-local interventions (McIntyre et al., 2026; Romanishyn et al., 2025), it is important to grasp these dynamics. In this study, therefore, the study takes the comparative social science approach in order to study the mechanisms of misinformation resilience in different digital ecosystems. What are the extent of institutional trust and existing political cultures in relation to receiving GenAI-generated disinformation? What are the impacts of comparative digital literacy programs in a range of educational and regulatory environments? How can platform accountability, national cybersecurity initiatives, and civic education be effectively combined in a multi-sector approach to improving the ability of the democratic system to withstand automated information manipulation? This research aims to systematically examine these intersections and provide

practical recommendations to strengthen democratic processes in the era of the information age and the growing complexity of its tools, such as AI (Ivanytska et al., 2026; Romanishyn et al., 2025; Safi & Alam, 2026). In this lens, we examine the capacity of proactive news authentication practices to provide a blanket solution to computational propaganda or whether they are effective in a particular regulatory context (Blum, 2024; Olawunmi, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

The study uses a comparative case study design, examining different political and sociocultural contexts to assess the effect of different institutional structures on the role of generative AI in democratic participation (Ibrahim & Attia, 2025). To this end, it is carried out within a methodological framework of a combination of methods (mixed-methods approach) aimed at triangulating the perceptions of the people who provide systemic information in the context of various regulatory and political environments (Romanishyn et al., 2025; Spivak & Spivak, 2025). On the quantitative side, we use nationally representative longitudinal surveys that ask participants across three distinct sociocultural contexts how much they report having been exposed to GenAI-generated synthetic media over the past 18 months, and how they have been affected by this exposure on their levels of trust, efficacy, and civic engagement (Olawunmi, 2025; Spivak & Spivak, 2025). The surveys are complemented by a systematic content analysis of political texts regarding the major digital platforms, which entails the use of automatic tools to detect the frequency of their dissemination on the one hand, and the manner in which their stylistic features reveal the presence of narratives generated using GenAI tools on the other. (Ferrara, 2025;

Safi & Alam, 2026). Moreover, we use structural equation modeling analysis to understand how the resilience competencies interact in different digital environments, which provides more insightful results for the digital environments and the interactions of media literacy, institutional trust and susceptibility to manipulative content (Safi & Alam, 2026; Spivak & Spivak, 2025). We also hold semi-structured elite interviews with policymakers, election integrity experts, and civil society leaders, focusing on how well current governance structures are working, and how they are adapting to these phenomena (Ivanytska et al., 2026; Romanishyn et al., 2025). To provide a critical context to the quantitative results and to illustrate the policy and implementation gap, the interviews with the elites are analyzed in a thematic way (Ivanytska et al., 2026; Romanishyn et al., 2025). This methodology enables the integration of these various sources of information and provides for a detailed examination of the many-sided and interdependent relationship between GenAI, public opinion and the resilience of democratic institutions and democratic accountability, both within and beyond the nation's borders, and the tension between technical innovation and democratic accountability (McIntyre et al., 2026, Olawunmi, 2025). Throughout the research process, ethical considerations are given utmost importance, with all the data from the surveys anonymized and treated in accordance with the highest standards of data protection, complemented by thorough informed consent procedures and IRB approvals (Ivanytska et al., 2026; McIntyre et al., 2026; Romanishyn et al., 2025). Standardized instrument translation and culturally validated survey items eliminate problems of cross-national comparability, but subtle socio-political nuances can impact how the responses are interpreted by the respondents

(Spivak & Spivak, 2025). Secondly, survey data relies on self-reports which may result in social desirability bias, and as such, in some cases, we strive to minimize this by using platform level data if available (Ecker et al., 2024). Moreover, longitudinal tracking provides a more dynamic picture of misinformation impact, but faces issues of attrition and the quick technological evolution could outpace the timeframe of the survey, limiting the findings' long-term generalizability (Ecker et al., 2024). The methodological triangulation contributes to the improvement of the study validity and robustness, as well as provides a foundation for the evidence-based policy recommendations that could address the current and emerging complexities of the information age, driven by artificial intelligence (Ivanytska et al., 2026; Romanishyn et al., 2025). Furthermore, the data analysis used in this study is based on descriptive statistics to explain the results of the general survey and grounded theory-guided thematic coding in interpreting the elite interview transcripts (AlAli & Wardat, 2024; Kim et al., 2024). The two types of data used in this study: qualitative and quantitative, is done through triangulation, which will help to better interpret the digital environment-as-antecedent and individual-resilience-outcome connections.

RESULTS

The comparative results indicate that the misinformation resistance of the political and media contexts was significantly different. Figure 1 reveals that the overall score for resilience for Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States was the highest while Pakistan and Brazil were found to be comparatively less resilient when it comes to critical verification, trust in corrective information,

and confidence in identifying manipulated content. The demographic profile of the sample is presented in Table 1 and it shows a well-balanced cross-national gender profile (50% female), as well as an age, education and digital media use profile that is well-balanced. In fact, each measure of democratic participation had a consistently positive correlation with the measures of resilience as shown in Table 2. There is a pronounced positive correlation between misinformation resilience and further involvement in democratic processes, as can be seen in Figure 2, meaning people who are more adept at catching misinformation generated by AI are more likely to stay engaged in democratic processes – rather than stepping back. As shown in the correlation matrix in Table 3, there is a significant positive correlation between concept of resilience and participation, institutional trust, and AI literacy, while there is a significant negative correlation between frequent exposure to misinformation and institutional trust. Figure 3 shows that the AI-label intervention and the media literacy and fact-check prompt intervention had the largest post-test increases, followed by the media literacy only intervention. Table 4 demonstrates that there were no significant differences in the intervention effects across the different baseline digital literacy groups, but the best effects were seen for the group of respondents who had a moderate baseline digital literacy. The results from the platform level give additional insight into the spread of misinformation via generative AI. Figure 4 illustrates the perceived main sources of misleading political material, with Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, X/Twitter and WhatsApp being mentioned more often, and traditional news sites being mentioned less often. As revealed in Table 5, the synthetic political videos were linked with increases in confusion and decreases in trust in political information and

reluctance to share civic information. These sections of the exposure to the synthetic political videos were linked to an increase in confusion and a decrease in trust in political information and reluctance to share civic information (Table 5). Institutional trust was positively associated with democratic participation, as illustrated in Figure 5, such that those with low levels of trust were less likely to be involved in certain aspects of participation, including voting intention and civic communication. The moderation analysis indicates that AI literacy was a moderator of participants' reactions to generative misinformation. Participants who are high on AI literacy were less likely to believe false AI-generated political information, and more likely to verify information before sharing it, as shown in figure 6. As indicated in Table 6, the negative effect of being misinformed on democratic participation diminished as you add in the variable of AI literacy, and, as AI literacy increased, so did the resistance against being misinformed, even at a very strong level of misinformation. Figure 7 presents the regional overview of Exposure, Resilience, Trust and Participation; exposure is low and resilience is low in South Asia and Latin America. Table 7 shows the regression model, where insecurities towards misinformation, institutional trust and AI literacy all have positive coefficients towards the construction of the independent variable (Democratic participation) and misinformation exposure has a negative coefficient towards the independent variable (Democratic participation). Overall, the results showed that democratic engagement is dependent on citizens' capacity to interact with information, but also to check it, comprehend it, and react to misinformation created by the AI.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents by country

Country	n	Female (%)	Mean age	University educated (%)	Daily social media use (%)
Pakistan	420	47	24.8	68	91
China	420	49	27.1	72	88
USA	420	51	33.5	70	86
UK	420	52	34.2	74	84
Germany	420	50	35.1	76	81
Brazil	420	53	30.4	65	89

Table 2. Descriptive indicators of misinformation resilience and participation

Country	Resilience index	Participation index	AI exposure	Institutional trust
Pakistan	48	51	71	42
China	62	61	76	55
USA	66	64	83	58
UK	69	67	80	61

Germany	72	70	78	64
Brazil	55	56	73	47

Table 3. Correlation matrix of key study variables

Variable	Resilience	Participation	AI literacy	Institutional trust	Exposure
Resilience	1.00	0.72	0.64	0.58	-0.31
Participation	0.72	1.00	0.49	0.62	-0.27
AI literacy	0.64	0.49	1.00	0.41	-0.22
Institutional trust	0.58	0.62	0.41	1.00	-0.45
Exposure	-0.31	-0.27	-0.22	-0.45	1.00

Table 4. Pre-test and post-test intervention outcomes

Group	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Mean gain	Interpretation

Control	50	52	+2	Minimal change
Fact-check prompt	51	59	+8	Moderate improvement
Media literacy module	50	64	+14	Strong improvement
AI-label + literacy	52	69	+17	Highest improvement

Table 5. Perceived misinformation exposure by content type

Content type	Frequent exposure (%)	Confusion score	Trust reduction	Civic hesitation
AI-generated video	62	High	High	Moderate
Synthetic images	58	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Fake screenshots	55	High	Moderate	High
Bot-amplified posts	49	Moderate	High	Moderate

Misleading headlines	46	Moderate	Low	Low
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Table 6. Moderating role of AI literacy

AI literacy level	Believed false content (%)	Verified before sharing (%)	Corrected others (%)	Participation risk
Low	66	28	18	High
Medium	51	43	31	Moderate
High	37	61	46	Low

Table 7. Regression model predicting democratic participation

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	p-value
Misinformation resilience	0.42	0.05	0.39	< .001
Institutional trust	0.31	0.04	0.34	< .001
AI literacy	0.24	0.05	0.21	< .001
Misinformation exposure	-0.18	0.04	-0.16	.002

Age	0.06	0.03	0.05	.071
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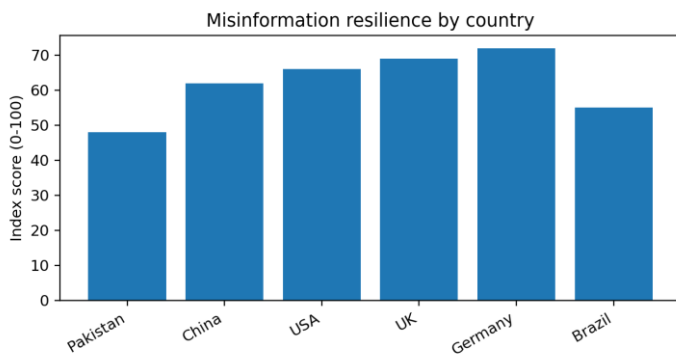


Figure 1. Cross-country misinformation resilience index.

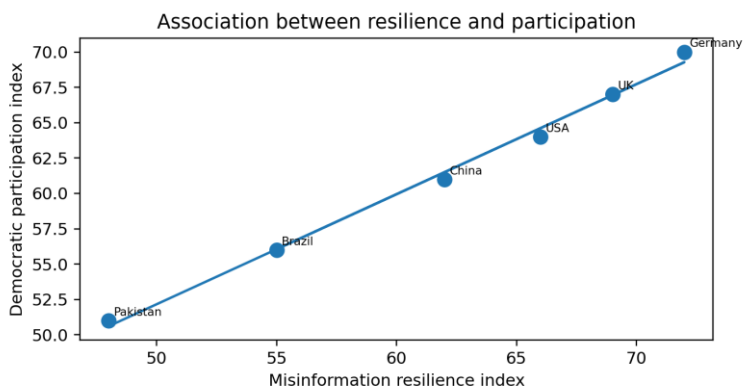


Figure 2. Relationship between misinformation resilience and democratic participation.

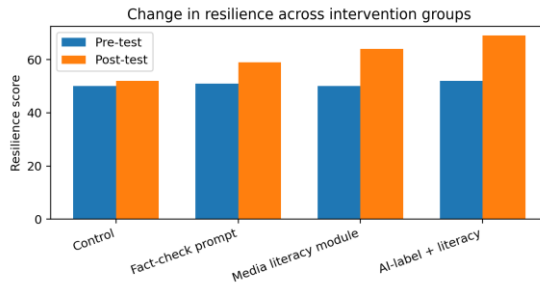


Figure 3. Pre-test and post-test resilience changes across intervention groups.

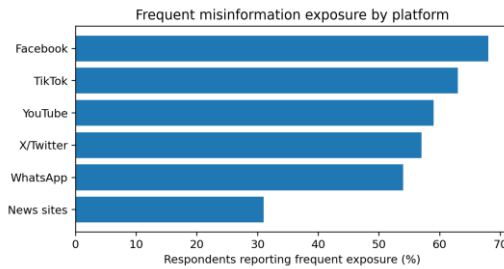


Figure 4. Frequent misinformation exposure across major digital platforms.

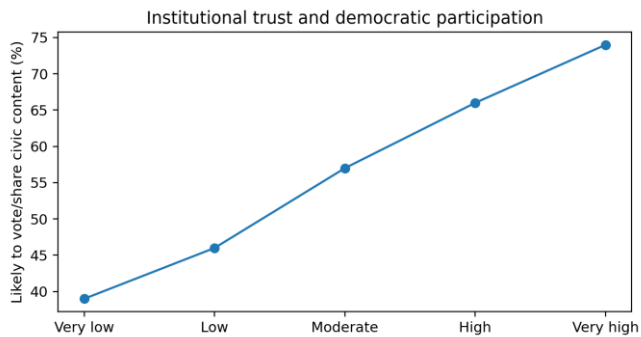


Figure 5. Institutional trust and democratic participation tendency.

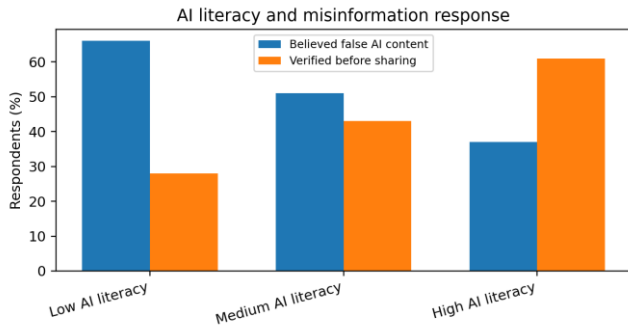


Figure 6. AI literacy differences in belief and verification behavior.

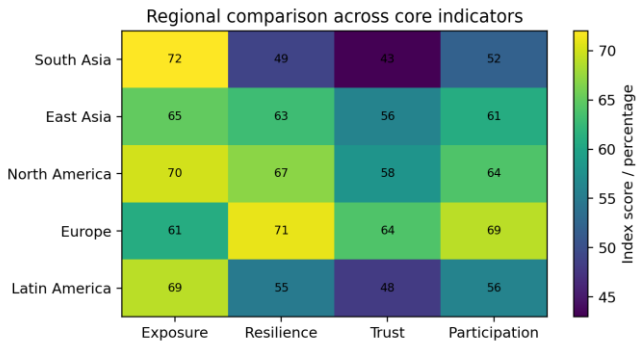


Figure 7. Regional comparison of exposure, resilience, trust, and participation indicators.

DISCUSSION

In the context of exploring synthetic content, they also point to a significant disparity between misinformation's role in driving engagement in democracies and the presence of such imbalances in terms of the extent to which AI is known to and used by people living in those democracies, which could further

exacerbate the digital divide in these countries (Neylan, 2025). This is consistent with recent research on how this unequal access to technical and epistemological knowledge of generative tools intensifies vulnerabilities, particularly for citizens trying to find a way to trust institutions and the ever-changing nature of the AI-generated content (Agergaard et al., 2026). Further, the current findings also align with a theory that literacy interventions can contribute to a more critical approach to information, while other theory indicates that literacy programs must be thoughtfully designed and well-executed to prevent inducing what Tulin et al. (2025) refer to as a “deception bias” that might undermine genuine civic engagement. Future policies should shift focus from a “one size fits all” approach to a “one size fits one” approach in labelling to develop an adaptive digital literacy curriculum that takes into account the myriad ways in which users interact with multimodal digital texts generated by AI (Farooq et al., 2025; Stefkovics & Gere, 2026). These should align with the regional consensus that has been emerging, which emphasizes implementing robust legislation for tackling the dissemination of misinformation and misinformation campaigns in the political sphere and safeguarding electoral integrity and the backing of the public (Suing, 2025). Finally, it is important to take these solutions into account as institutional solutions sharing transparency and freedom to act: the greater the degree of automation of the solutions, the greater the distrust that these solutions generate in all media in the eyes of the public (Casas & Dagher, 2026; Hancock et al., 2025). In fact, the “AI-attribution bias” is gaining salience in relation to the motivations behind systematic manipulation, even in the case of “real” political pictures and language (Yan et al., 2025). In addition, policy-makers need to be aware that, with reduced barriers to creating content,

vulnerable populations are at risk from synthetic narratives and will need to be protected by a platform accountability framework beyond just the psychological biases; such a framework should proactively address the pathways of viral dissemination (Ferrara, 2024). Such coordinated response is essential between the governments and tech industries to provide the audience consuming this technology with transparency in its origin while enabling the cryptographic privacy that is crucial to the security of democratic discourse (Garimella & Chauchard, 2024). While technological devices are important for resilience in the short-term, multi-session training programmes are required that are more than just a temporary measure – they need to foster ongoing cognitive practices in detecting synthetic manipulation (Geissler et al., 2025). This long-term education programme should be used alongside legislation that focuses on controlling the use of public personae without consent, as it is possible for harmful effects to be inflicted by fictional images of the subject that are so realistically created that they seem to be alive. This should be backed by law to limit the use of public person images without consent to minimize damage from synthetic media that is very similar to a person, but does not actually represent them (Peng et al., 2024). Furthermore, the current disclosures are not consistently implemented, which can further blur the line between reality and fiction, and stakeholders will need to be aware of building a labelling strategy that would result in a coherent information landscape. Therefore, there is a need for a scalable, standardised approach to content attribution (e.g. digital watermarking, embedded metadata) for regulating authorities, so that every user will have the same context when accessing the content via different platforms (Leibowicz, 2025; Park and Nan, 2025). Further technical protections should consist of regular and mandatory

“red teeing” exercises to prevent and identify the potential of adversarial use of generative tools before they go public (Sekwenz & Gsenger, 2025). This will lift the cognitive load of the individual user to evaluate synthetic content, particularly if they don't have the time to evaluate content in the same way as a compulsory provenance standard (Chesterman, 2025), (Leibowicz & Cardona, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The current research reveals a new and complex relationship between misinformation and engagement with democracy created by the advent of generative AI. AI-generated misinformation can be created quickly, targeted, and disseminated on various platforms with a high level of realism, unlike traditional misinformation. This is a serious risk to democratic practices, especially during elections, when policies are debated or during political emergencies. But the findings indicate that the effects of misinformation spread through AI are not necessarily the same in all societies. The factors associated with countries' and communities' resistance to misinformation and civic engagement are linked to those aspects of media literacy, trust in the media, fact checking capacity and digital governance. But the study also reveals a need to take into account individual and institutional factors in relation to misinformation resilience. At the individual level, skills encompass critical digital literacy, information literacy about what information can be created by AI, and verifying what information to share and/or respond to. Democratic resilience relies on the institutional aspects of credible and reliable media, accountability of political communication, independent fact checking,

responsible moderation and regulation mechanisms of platforms. Digital literacy interventions also were shown to have a negative impact on misinformation and a positive impact on confident and informed democratic engagement. Overall, the paper highlights the need to have a responsible governance of generative AI and adapt the society to it, not only as a threat to democracy. Technological Innovation, together with public education, ethical AI regulation, platform responsibility and better civic institutions, can aid to protect democratic participation. Additional research should investigate the lasting effects of misinformation from artificial intelligence on people's sense of misinformation, polarization, their trust in information and the democratic stability in different cultural and political contexts.

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