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The Impact of DeepFake Technology on Women's Participation in Digital Spaces: A Sociological Study in Hyderabad, Sindh

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Abstract

Deepfake technology has raised major questions regarding women's freedom, safety, reputation, dignity, and privacy in online environments. In societies where women's online activity is strongly connected to family honor and expectations, and public image, these worries are especially relevant. This research attempts to examine how women of Hyderabad Sindh views deepfake related risks and how these risks affect their participation on online platforms. A qualitative research approach was used and interviewed 34 women who actively used social media and other online platforms to learn about their opinions and experiences. Trough thematic analysis, their responses were investigated. Eight main themes were found: digital awareness, direct and indirect exposure, online self-presentation, employment decisions, privacy issues, personal protection, institutional trust, and psychological impact. The results suggest many participants were cautious about sharing images, videos, views, and personal information. The impact on career options varied, some research participants wanted to utilize digital spaces to highlight internet abuse, other participants avoided careers requiring a public online presence. Participants, also said they didn't really believe in regulations, platforms, or official reporting methods. They thought that enforcement was poor and responses were typically delayed. The research finds that deepfake dangers can lower women's confidence, visibility, and online freedom even when they have not directly encountered violence. It also shows how fear might affect conduct before any actual deepfake abuse incident takes place. Stronger rules, faster platform responses, public awareness, easy reporting methods, and mental health help are all necessary to help to protect women in digital settings.

Keywords: Deepfake Technology, Women, Digital Participation, Online Harassment, Social Control

Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has fundamentally transformed the way digital content is created, shared and experienced. Amidst these developments, deepfake technology has emerged a as significant concern, as it enables the creation or manipulation of hyper-realistic images, videos and audios. While deepfake technology can have legitimate the applications, its misuse, particularly the creation and dissemination of non-consensual sexually explicit or

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manipulated content has raised serious concerns regarding privacy, dignity, reputation, safety and freedom of expression.

Deepfake related abuse should not be viewed merely as an issue of misinformation or the technical authenticity of content. When an individual's face, voice or identity is manipulated without consent the consequences can extend far beyond digital platforms. Women may face or fear facing reputational damage, emotional distress, fear, social pressure, and restriction on their freedom to participate openly online. In this context, deepake technology can be understood as an emerging form of technology facilitated gender-based violence and image-based abuse.

These concerns are particularly significant within the Pakistani and broader south Asian context, where digital harm intersects with patriarchal norms, familial expectations, and concern regarding honor and reputation, and barriers to reporting abuse. Existing research has documented women's experiences of online harassment, cyber stalking, impersonation and other digital forms of abuse. However, empirical research remains limited regarding how women perceive and respond to risks specifically associated with deepfake technology, particularly in local contexts such as Hyderabad Sindh.

The potential impact of deepfake into limited to women who have directly experienced victimization Awareness of deepfake technology, knowledge of incidents affecting others, and the fear of potential misuse can also influence women's digital behavior. Women may become more cautious about sharing photos or videos, expressing opinion publically, maintaining an online presence or pursuing careers that require a high degree of digital visibility. At the same time they may adopt protective strategies such as making accounts private, limiting personal content, and relying on family or friends rather than formal institutions.

Therefore, the present study examines how women in Hyderabad Sindh perceive the risk associated with deepfake technology and how these concerns influence their participation in digital spaces. The study focuses on women's awareness and understanding of deepfakes, their direct or indirect exposure to associated risks, changes in digital self-presentation and privacy practices, potential impacts in career related decisions, safety, strategies and perceptions regarding existing legal, institutional and platform level responses.

Employing standard social research methodologies, this study centers the voices and interpretations of women. It contributes locally grounded evidence to emerging body of scholarship on deepfake-facilitated exploitation and technology-facilitated gender-based violence. The study argues that deepfake technology can impact women's digital participation not only through direct victimization but also through the fear and anticipation of harm factors that may encourage self-censorship and constrain women's ability to participate freely and confidently in digital spaces.

Problem Statement

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and deepfake technology has created new threats to women's privacy, dignity, reputation, and safety in the digital space. While existing research has examined online harassment and technology facilitated gender-based violence, there has been notably little research into how the fear and perceived risk of deepfake misuse affect women's online participation, particularly in Pakistan and outside major urban centers.

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This study addresses tis gap by examining women's perceptions regarding the risks associated with deepfakes in Hyderabad Sindh. It explores how awareness and fear of potential misuse influence their content sharing habits, online self-presentation, career related decisions and safety strategies. The study also evaluates women's perception of existing legal institutions, and platform level responses to deepfake related abuse.

Significance of the Study

Theoretical significance

This study extends the framework of technology facilitated gender based violence specifically applying it to deepfake abuse in Hyderabad Sindh a context not previously addressed in this literature. It also complicates the prevailing narrative regarding self-censorship. While existing literature largely predicts withdrawal from digital participation in the face of risk, the findings of this study indicate more diverse range of responses, with some women actively pursuing careers involving greater digital visibility to confront these risks. This nuance directly addresses the observation by lazard et al. (2025) that questions of power and gender have frequently been overlooked in favor of purely technical interpretations of deepfakes.

Contribution to local and regional knowledge

By centering the voices of women in a mid-sized city outside Pakistan's major metropolitan research hubs, this study fills a distinct and long standing gap in the literature. It builds upon foundational south Asian research and extends it to a threat AI generated manipulation that earlier studies could not have anticipated. Furthermore, it offers one of the first locally grounded accounts of the mechanisms behind deepfake related fears within the Pakistani socio-culture context.

Practical significance

The findings offer insight that can inform digital literacy programs, safety initiatives, and family- or community-based support structures, since the study's themes — self-protection strategies, reliance on informal networks, and divergent career responses — point directly to where practical interventions are most needed.

Policy significance

Because participants directly raised concerns about the inadequacy of existing legal and platform-level protections, this study provides evidence that can support advocacy for stronger, more responsive legal frameworks and platform accountability — addressing a need Rackley et al. (2021) identify as central to any coordinated response to image-based sexual abuse.

Social significance

Finally, by giving space to the psychological and emotional dimensions of this issue — an area participants themselves flagged as under-addressed — the study lends weight to calls for greater mental health support for those affected, helping ensure the human cost of deepfake abuse is recognized alongside its legal and technical dimensions.

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Objectives

1. To examine how women in Hyderabad, Sindh, perceive and understand the risk of falling victim to deepfake-based abuse, including their awareness of this technology and its potential misuse.
2. Examining how the fear of falling victim to deepfakes affects women`s participation on digital platforms, including their content-sharing habits, willingness to engage in online discussions, and decisions regarding digital careers that requires an online presence.
3. To identify the preventive and protective strategies adopted in response to deepfake threat perceived to confront women and to compare them with coping mechanisms documented in research on digital abuse in South Asia.
4. To examine their perceptions regarding the adequacy of existing institutional, legal, and platform-level safeguards against the harms associated with the deepfakes, within the local context for women.

Literature Review

The rapid growth of generative artificial intelligence has significantly transformed the ways in which online images, audio and videos are created, distributed and interpreted. Deepfakes refer to synthetic or altered media content that can depict a person with remarkable realism saying or doing things they never actually said or did. Although early research focused primarily on the detection of deepfake content and misinformation, recent scholarly research has revealed that sexually explicit deepfakes must also be understood as a gender-based social harm. Lazard et al. (2025) show that power relations have often been overlooked in research because deepfakes have primarily been viewed as an issue of technical trustworthiness. In this study deepfake-facilitated abuse is viewed as a social issue linked to gender inequality, safety, reputation, freedom of expression and participation in digital platforms.

Deepfake Technology as Gender-Based Digital Violence

Technology-facilitated sexual violence refers to act of a sexual violence that are enabled or facilitated by digital technology. These include online sexual harassment, cyber stalking, the non-consensual use or sharing of images, sexual coercion and digital harassment based on gender or sexual orientation (Henry & Powell, 2018). Within this broader framework, non-consensual deepfake images of a sexual nature constitute a particularly severe form of image-based sexual exploitation, as an individual's likeness can be artificially generated, sexually altered and circulated or disseminated without their consent. McGlynn and Rackley (2017) argue that image-based sexual abuse violates an individual's right to dignity, privacy, sexual autonomy amd equality; and the fact that a deepfake image or video is "fake doesn't negate these harms."

Empirical research supports this framing. Flynn et al. (2022) characterized digital altered sexually explicit images as an emerging form of image-based sexual abuse. More recent interviews with victims and perpetrators suggest that abuse involving sexually explicit deeepfake content may be considered commonplace within certain male peer groups. Easy-to-use tools facilitate this practice, while the behavior is downplayed by dismissing the content as merely a 'joke' or claiming that "since it is not real it causes no harm." (Flynn et al., 2025). These findings are

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highly significant for this study because they frame exploitation via deepfakes within the context of social relationships and power imbalances, rather than limiting it solely to technology. Its consequences can be long-lasting and are not limited to just a single post or platform. In a cross-national qualitative study, McGlynn et al. (2021) disruptions in social relationships, persistent fear, isolation and restriction on freedom were identified among women who had been victims of image-based sexual abuse. Deepfake-based abuse can further exacerbate these concerns, as the victim must contend not only with dissemination of an image but also with the doubt and uncertainly regarding whether others will believe the image is a fake.

Deepfakes, Digital Abuse, and the South Asian Context

Special attention is required in the context of South Asian societies, as gender-based digital harms intersect with unequal access to technology, familial surveillance, patriarchal social values and severe reputation damage. A regional study involving women in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh revealed that cyber stalking, identity theft (impersonation), and the disclosure or leaking of personal content were common forms of digital abuse. Participants often relied on informal methods to handle the situation rather than seeking help from online platforms, the police or legal authorities (Sambasivan et al., 2019). These earlier forms of imitation and manipulation constitute a significant basis for te risks that have now been amplified by generative AI. Aksar et al. (2020) provide directly relevant Pakistan-specific evidence. Their interviews reveal that online harassment of women and family-imposed restrictions on their social media activities are influenced by concepts such as “pardah” (seclusion/modesty) and “izzat” (honor). More recently, Ali (2025) documents women's experiences of digital harassment in Pakistan, highlighting issue such as fear, anxiety, shame and barriers to lodging complaints. Overall, these studies indicate that the impact of abuse involving synthetic image extends beyond individual`s safety; it can also affect family relationships, social reputation, education, employment and women’s public presence in Hyderabad, Sindh.

At the regional level, Bansal et al. (2024) examined technology-facilitated gender-based violence in low and middle income countries in Asia and found that women and girls particularly those facing multiple, intersecting forms of social disadvantage are at disproportionally at high risk. They also highlight the limited availability of evidence and the gaps in legal definitions. This reinforces the need for conducting high quality, locally grounded research, rather than assuming that evidence derived from high-income countries can be applied to Pakistan without modification.

Fear, Self-restraint, and Declining Participation

Women`s participation in digital platforms is influenced not only by direct impact but also by the fear of harm and the anticipation of such a possibility. Nadim and Fladmoe (2021) highlighted the gender gap in online harassment and its chilling effect on freedom of expression. For women whose work or professional ambitions require a public profile, online harassment can lead to more cautions expressions, reduced online participation, or ultimately, withdrawal from online activities. Celuch et al. (2024) have also found that the severity and frequency of online harassment, public visibility and being female are factors associated with self-censorship among professionals. The risk of falling victim to deepfakes gives rise to unique kind of threat. A women faces not only the fear of receiving harassing messages but also that apprehension that her face,

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voice, or identity could be manipulated a used in sexual explicit content. This fear can undermine her confidence in posting photos, participating in discussions, creating content, pursuing online jobs that require an online presence. Existing literature has not sufficiently examined this relationship in the context of Pakistan, particularly in areas outside major urban centers. To address this research gap, the proposed study will examine both anticipated harm and reported experiences.

Coping Strategies, Institutional Trust, and Platform Responses

Women adopt practical strategies to deal with risks while online. These include limiting the reach of their online activities, using privacy settings, avoiding the sharing of photos showing their faces, minimizing the disclosure of personal information, blocking suspicious or harassing accounts, and seeking the help from friends or family members. Sambasivan et al. (2019) indicate that women in south Asia often rely on informal networks, as the responses provided at the technological ad institutional levels are considered inadequate. Such strategies can provide protection, but they risk shifting the responsibilities away from platforms and perpetrators and onto women themselves.

Therefore, it is essential to evaluate institutional measures alongside the strategies adopted by individuals. Therefore, the institutional response should be evaluated alongside the approaches adopted at the individual level. Rackley et al. (2021) argue on a coordinated, multi-agency response to image-based sexual abuse is essential one that enables victims to regain agency and control over their situation. Addressing deepfakes with a gender-sensitive response requires effective reporting and content removal mechanism, accessible legal recourse, public awareness, and preventive measures that counter the tendency to normalize non-consensual sexually explicit content. This study seeks to understand how women in Hyderabad access the suitability and effectiveness of these protective measures within their local context.

Research Gap

The reviewed academic literature reveals that deepfake technology has given rise to an escalating form of image-based sexual abuse. However, four significant research gaps remain. The first research gap is the limited direct evidence regarding the extent to which the fear of becoming a deepfake victim defers women from creating content, participating in online discussion, and pursuing professional careers in the digital sectors.

Secondly, there is dearth of empirical research in Pakistan particularly in Hyderabad, Sindh regarding deepfake technology and the digital lives of women.

Thirdly, while existing studies in south Asia provide a broad overview of online harassment and informal coping strategies, they have not systematically examined how women adapt their behaviors and practices in response to the specific threat of an AI generated manipulations.

Fourthly, within the local Pakistani context, women’s confidence in legal, online platform-based and institutional measures against abuse involving deepfakes remains poorly understood. A qualitative sociological study could bridge this research gap by centering women`s perceptions, challenges, adopted strategies and interpretations regarding safety.

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To sum up, Deepfake technology should not be viewed merely as an issue of misinformation or the technical identification of content. When used to create or disseminate the sexually explicit material without a person`s consent, it becomes a form of gender-based digital violence, which can compromise an individual`s self-esteem, safety, reputation and participation in the digital space.

Research on online sexual exploitation, online harassment, and the digital experiences of Pakistani women provides a solid foundation for examining these issues in Hyderabad, Sindh. The proposed study will investigate how women`s perceptions of the potential threat of deepfakes influence their daily online behaviors and choices, while also identifying the social, technological, and institutional conditions are necessary for women`s safer digital participation.

Methodology

Research Design

This study use a qualitative research design situated within an interpretive social framework. A Qualitative approach was selected because the study's central questions namely, how women in Hyderabad perceive the threat of deepfakes and interpret their protective and coping strategies concerns meaning and lived experience, rather than issues that can adequately understood through standardized measurement. This design enables the researcher to prioritize the participant`s own language, reasoning, and interpretations over pre-determined categories.

Study Population and Settings

The study population consisted of women residing in Hyderabad Sindh, who actively use digital and social media platforms. Hyderabad was specifically selected as the study site because it lies outside the major metropolitan centers that dominate existing Pakistani research on digital harassment, thereby enabling an understanding of experiences shaped by a unique local social context.

Sample Technique

Given the sensitive nature of topic specifically being targeted by deepfake, harassment, and digital abuse it was not feasible to reach participants through random or convenience-based sampling methods. Therefore, purposive sampling was initially employed to identify women who met the study's inclusion criteria: active engagement with digital platforms and willingness to discuss their experiences regarding online safety and awareness of deepfakes. Since individuals affected by sensitive issue re often reluctant to come forward, initial participants were subsequently asked to recruit other eligible women, thereby securing additional participants through snowball sampling. This combined strategy balanced the need for participants meeting specific criteria with the practical challenge of finding women willing to speak openly about a stigmatized and personally sensitive topic.

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Sample Size

A total of 34 female participants were recruited an interviewed. Each participant was assigned an anonymous code (R1-R34), which was used consistently during data collection, analysis and reporting to ensure confidentiality.

Data Collection

Data were collected through direct face to face interviews structured around an interview guide comprising open ended questions derived from the study's objectives and research questions. Twenty-six of these interviews followed a consistent open-ended format while eight were conducted in more flexible, semi structured manner which allowed the researcher to explore specific responses in greater depth and pursue emerging lines of inquiry. In both formats, participants were encouraged to respond in their own words and no fixed choice or closed ended items were used. Each interview begins with an explanation of the study's purpose, followed by the obtaining of verbal consent before proceeding.

Data Analysis

The interview responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. This process involved familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes across all the 34 responses, organizing codes into potential themes in relation to the coded data and research questions. This process yielded eight core themes digital literacy and risk awareness, direct and indirect exposure to deepfake related harm, self-presentation, career related decisions making, privacy concerns, self-protective measures, institutional reputation, and psychological impacts which are presented in the findings.

Ethical considerations

Participants in this study were entirely voluntary, and participants were fee to withdraw at any stage without facing any consequences. Given the sensitive nature of the subject, special care was taken to protect the participant's identities. No participant was identified by name at any stage of the research, and respondent codes were used instead of their personal information during analysis and reporting. Participants were also free to decline answering any question they found uncomfortable to discuss.

Data Interpretation

The data was gathered directly from 34 female respondents residing in Hyderabad. Data collection involved two primary methods: four (4) semi structured interviews and 30 open-ended questionnaires. The study used thematic analysis to identify and report patterns within the data.

Theme 1. Digital Literacy & Risk Awareness: The participants are aware of the digital platforms they use, utilizing multiple platforms for diverse purposes such as education, entertainment, communication, and news. There is a general discomfort with sharing personal content because they are informed about digital risks, specifically deepfake technology, which is seen as a real risk. Online sharing is deliberately restricted to opinion or informative content, not personal content.

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Participant R26: "I mainly use WhatsApp for communication, Google for searching Information and social media platforms for keeping me up to-date with news."

Participant R18: "I do not share my own photos and videos, but if someone asks for my opinion based on my personal experience, I am happy to share it while maintaining a firm boundary."

Participant R21: "Yes, I had heard about deep fake technology. I understand it as AI-generated or manipulated photos, videos, or audio that can make someone appear to say or do something they never actually did."

Theme 2. Direct and Indirect Exposure: There is a widespread belief that deepfake technology is a real risk for women in the community. Personal experience with this issue is limited, but there is strong awareness of others — friends, family, or public figures — who have faced it. In some instances, individuals have themselves been victims, while in other cases, they know people who have been victimized.

Participant R21: "I see deep fakes as a realistic risk for women in my community, because fake photos or videos can be created and shared without consent, causing emotional, social, and reputational harm."

Participant R31: "Yes, two of my friends. They become victims by their cousins and boyfriends. They harass and blackmailed them for sexuality."

Theme 3. Digital Self-Presentation: There is an increased caution regarding online presence, with a clear tendency to avoid sharing personal content online. The data indicates a shared practice of not sharing personal photos, videos, or other personal content out of fear.

Participant R27: "I generally avoid sharing photos or videos publicly. Knowing that makes me more careful about sharing my stuff online."

Participant R22: "Yes, I have avoided posting some photos and videos because I worry them could be misused or manipulated without my permission."

Theme 4. Career Decision-Making: When asked about career choices, the findings show diverse perspectives. There are instances where individuals choose digital careers specifically to raise awareness among people about such digital risks. However, a common path is to avoid choosing careers with an online public presence. Additionally, there are cases where individuals were never interested in such careers for reasons unrelated to deepfake concerns.

Participant R29: "Yes if I look into the cases of being harassed, I feel the need to pursue a career as a journalist who should engage into profound research to disclose the facts on social media to raise awareness amongst people."

Participant R4: "Yes due to this Deep fake I avoid to do any online activity."

Theme 5. Privacy Concern: Respondents expressed ongoing worry about their personal content being misused, even when they had taken precautions. This concern shaped their overall wariness about being online.

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Participant R4: “Yes due to this deepfack I avoid to do any online activity.”

Theme 6. Self-Protection Measures: Social media accounts are frequently made private using privacy settings to reduce risk. There is a strong reliance on personal precautions rather than depending on authorities or platforms, and a common approach is to turn to family and friends for advice, who generally advise against sharing personal content online.

Participant R1: "Keeping private accounts not sharing anything which can cause concern."

Participant R3: "Mostly on my own precautions."

Participant R6: "Yes, multiple times and always guided not to share anything personal on social platforms specially ur pics."

Theme 7. Institutional Credibility & Policy Intervention: The findings suggest that existing laws are insufficient to address the issue, leading to a call for stricter laws and policies specifically targeting digital crimes.

Participant R22: "I feel that current laws and platform policies in Pakistan provide some protection, but they do not adequately address deepfake abuse yet. The laws cover many forms of online harassment and digital abuse, but enforcement and quick response still need improvement."

Participant R33: "Strict policies and strong online security for women and rapid actions."

Theme 8. Psychological Impact & Mental Health Advocacy: The findings indicate a critical need to address the mental health impact on victims and how they cope with it.

Participant R3: "The emotional impact on victims should also be given more attention."

Data Findings

The study identifies 8 core themes regarding digital literacy, deepfake risks and institutional policies among participants. The data show that participants are highly aware about digital media. They use it for multiple purposes and also know that they should be careful with their usage. They know about the digital threats. This awareness influences both the direct or indirect exposure within the community and makes them alter their online self-presentation by making their digital accounts private. These concerns make them cautious about their career choices. They have privacy concerns regarding online exposure. To navigate these challenges, they rely on personal self-protection measures. However, the findings suggest a clear gap regarding institutional credibility and policies. Finally, the study points to necessary suggestions to focus on the psychological impacts of victims. Together, all these findings show how deepfake technology impacts women in the digital space.

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Discussion

The participants in this research demonstrated awareness of the risks with digital platforms, particularly deepfake technology, where photos, videos, and other personal information can be manipulated and deliberately used against them. This awareness is the reason they are careful about what they post online. A 2025 study by Lazard et al. highlights that deepfakes should be understood as a form of gender-based violence rather than merely a technical error, as they damage reputation and create safety threats, especially for women.

Participants strongly believe that deepfakes pose a real threat to women in their communities. Many had heard about such threats affecting public figures on social media, while some had family or friends who experienced this directly. This pattern aligns with Sambasivan et al. (2019), who found that women in South Asia often face digital abuse such as fake accounts and harassment etc.

Participants in this study do not share any kind of personal information such as videos or photos due to the fear of deepfake. This reflects Nadim and Fladmoe (2021) describe as a chilling effect, as the people choose to remain silent out of fear of harassment.

When asked about career choices, participants showed mixed reactions. Some were influenced by online threats to avoid careers with more digital or public presence, while others were motivated to pursue careers with a digital presence specifically to raise awareness about such threats. Nadim and Fladmoe (2021) and Celuch et al. (2024) highlight that online harassment leads to reduced participation and self-censorship, particularly among women in public-facing roles who anticipate harm or fear identity manipulation. However, this literature does not account for participants who moved toward greater digital engagement as a response to the same fear, suggesting a more complex relationship between risk perception and career choice than currently documented. This also reflects a clear gap in existing research on this issue in Pakistan, particularly outside major urban centers.

Concerning privacy being observed in the study, as the personal content can be misused this fear limits the sharing of videos or any other personal information and forced them to take privacy measures. McGlynn et al. (2021) finds that victims of image based sexual abuse experience fear and restrict themselves and uncertainty that people will not believe that images are fake.

The personal precautions were taken by making accounts private, they believe in taking privacy measures by themselves rather than relying on platforms. Many also turned to family and friends for advice, who generally suggested the same caution. This aligns with (Sambasivan et al., 2019) findings on coping strategies among south Asian women they believe in informal measures rather depend on legal authorities.

The existing laws are not enough to protect women from digital threats, participants believed there should be strong laws to address such issues. Rackley et al. (2021) argued that the different agencies should work together to address digital threats and help victims. Ali (2025) similarly highlights that in Pakistan, women face significant barriers to lodging complaints against such threats, which shows a clear institutional gap in this study.

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The participants also believe that there is need to address the mental health of deepfake victims there is lacking attention to mental health problems. However existing literature has not sufficiently addressed mental health issues.

Overall, the findings of study and align with existing literature. Particularly regarding self-awareness, informal protective measures and institution distrust. However, the mental health issue is not addressed in existing literature.

Conclusion

This study concludes that deepfake technology has significant social implications for women's participation on digital platforms. The participants used digital platforms for communication, education, news and professional activities. However, awareness regarding the misuse of deepfakes made many of these women more cautious about what they shared online. Photos, videos, opinions, and person information were often restricted, as participants feared their content could be copied, altered, or disseminated without their consent.

The results indicate that indirect information can also still fear. Merely hearing about incidents involving friends, relatives, public figures, or other women was enough to influence online behaviour. Many participants took measures such as keeping their accounts private, limiting their followers, refraining from sharing personal photos, and seeking advice from family and friends. While these steps may offer some immediate protection, they ultimately place the burden of online safety largely on the women themselves. Consequently, women may become less visible on digital platforms, less free to express their opinions, and less willing to participate openly.

The impact on careers choices and decisions was not uniform across all the participants. Some women avoided jobs or professions that require high public visibility or q significant presence on digital platforms, fearing harassment and the misuse of their identities. Conversely, others chose to pursue careers in journalism or others digital fields to raise public awareness and challenge misinformation. This disparity illustrates that women do not all respond to online risks in the same way, for some, fear may lead to withdrawal from online activities, while for others, it can serve as a catalyst to take a more proactive stance against these threats.

Participants also expressed a lack of confidence in existing laws, digital platforms, and official institutions. They felt that current protective measures are inadequate and that the processes for filing and addressing complaints are often sluggish. They called for strict laws, simplified complaint procedures, the rapid removal of harmful content, and enhanced online security. Greater attention also needs to be paid to the emotional and psychological impact on victims, as fear, mental stress, and reputational damage can persist well beyond the digital realm.

Overall, the misuse of deepfakes should be viewed not merely as a technical issue, but as a social and gender related one. It can impact women's confidence, relationships, professional choices, and freedom of expression. Women require clear legal protections, effective institutional responses, responsible digital platforms, public awareness, and readily available emotional support. These measures can help women use digital platforms with greater security, confidence and freedom.

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