

Election Commission Mandates AI Labels to Curb Deepfakes and Protect Fair Elections

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AI Content Labelling Latest News

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** has issued an advisory directing political parties to clearly label all AI-generated or altered videos, images, and audio clips shared online.
- The move follows **growing concerns over the misuse of deepfakes and synthetically generated content** that can distort facts, mislead voters, and disrupt the level-playing field during elections.
- The ECI warned that hyper-realistic AI content, especially that which falsely depicts political leaders making sensitive statements, poses a serious risk to electoral integrity and fair competition among candidates.
- The advisory also specifies standards for label prominence and placement, aligning closely with the draft rules recently proposed by the IT Ministry to curb AI misinformation.
- Calling such technology a “deep threat”, the ECI stressed that the ability of AI-generated content to convincingly mimic truth could mislead the public and undermine trust in the democratic process.

ECI Tightens Rules on Deepfakes: Mandatory Labels, Watermarks, and Disclosure

- The ECI has expanded its earlier directions on **AI-generated and deepfake content** to ensure greater transparency during election campaigns.
- Previously, the ECI had instructed parties to **remove deepfake posts within three hours** of detection and label altered media as **“AI-Generated,” “Digitally Enhanced,” or “Synthetic Content.”**
- Under the new advisory, the ECI now mandates that:
 - Labels or watermarks must cover **at least 10% of the screen area** for visuals or the **first 10% of duration** for audio clips.
 - The label in video content must appear **at the top of the screen**.
 - Each AI-generated item must **clearly name the creator or responsible entity** in its metadata or caption.
 - Parties must **maintain detailed internal records** of all AI-generated materials, including **creator identity and timestamps**, for verification when required by the ECI.
- These stricter norms mark a decisive step to curb **misleading synthetic media** and preserve **integrity in political communication**.

ECI's Deepfake Guidelines Mirror Draft IT Rules on AI Content Labelling

- ECI latest advisory on **AI content labelling** aligns closely with the draft amendments to the Information Technology (IT) Rules, 2021, proposed by the Ministry of Electronics and IT earlier this week.
- While the IT Rules are still in the **draft stage**, they outline similar obligations for social media platforms, including:
 - Requiring **users to declare** if uploaded content is **synthetically generated**.
 - Mandating platforms to use **automated tools or verification mechanisms** to confirm the accuracy of these declarations.
 - Ensuring **prominent AI labels or notices** on all verified synthetic or AI-generated content.
- Non-compliance could result in **loss of “safe harbour” protections**, meaning platforms could be held **legally liable** for hosting unlabelled or misleading AI-generated content.
- The draft rules also define **synthetically generated information** as content that is **artificially created, modified, or altered using computer resources** in a way that appears **authentic or real**.
- Both the ECI and IT Ministry's frameworks share the same goal — **to combat deepfake misuse** and **preserve authenticity and trust** in online and political communication.

AI and Threat to Democracy

- AI while transformative, poses serious risks to **democratic systems**, particularly through **deepfakes, misinformation, algorithmic bias, and voter manipulation**.
- These technologies can distort truth, erode public trust, and undermine free and fair elections.

Deepfakes and Political Disinformation

- AI-generated deepfakes can create highly realistic fake videos or audio, **spreading false narratives about political leaders**.
- During the 2023 Slovakian elections, deepfake audio clips mimicking opposition leaders surfaced just days before voting, potentially swaying voter opinion.

Manipulation of Public Opinion through AI Algorithms

- **AI-driven recommendation systems** on platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and X can amplify polarising or false content, creating echo chambers that manipulate voter perception.
- The Cambridge Analytica scandal showed **how algorithmic profiling and data analytics were used to micro-target voters** during the 2016 U.S. presidential election and Brexit referendum.

Loss of Authenticity in Political Discourse

- AI tools can automate fake news creation, clone voices, and generate speeches, making it harder for citizens to distinguish between real and synthetic communication. This dilutes informed public debate.
- In 2024, AI-generated robocalls mimicking U.S. President Joe Biden's voice urged voters to abstain from a primary election — a clear attempt at voter suppression.

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