

AI-Generated Media Perception and AI Attitudes among Gen Z: The Mediating Role of Digital Literacy

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of artificial intelligence has had a major impact on the creation and consumption of digital content and especially with the advent of AI-created media. This change is affecting the way youth consumers perceive online information and form their opinion of the artificial intelligence technologies. The current research sought to explore how the world of perception of AI-generated media and the attitude to artificial intelligence among Generation Z are connected. The paper also investigated whether digital literacy mediates this relationship. In particular, the study examined the hypotheses that the capacity of the individuals to critically interpret digital content can be viewed as the reason why their attitudes to AI-generated media shape their attitude towards artificial intelligence. This study incorporated a quantitative correlational research design. The research was performed among 300 Generation Z students of public and private universities in Lahore, Pakistan ($M = 21.95$, $SD = 2.41$). The perception AI-generated media, digital literacy and attitudes towards artificial intelligence were measured using standardized and reliable measure scales. The data were broken down in SPSS version 26 and PROCESS macro by Hayes. Some of the statistical methods used were descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, mediation analysis, independent samples t -tests, and one-way ANOVA to test the relationships between variables and demographic differences. The findings revealed that the attitude towards artificial intelligence among the participants of Generation Z depended on perceptions of AI-generated media significantly. Also, digital literacy was positively related to attitudes toward artificial intelligence statistically significantly. The mediation analysis however showed that media perception as generated by AI did not significantly predict digital literacy. Therefore, the mediating effect of digital literacy was not found in the correlation between AI-generated media perception and opinions about artificial intelligence. According to these findings, despite the fact that digital literacy plays a role in developing positive attitudes towards artificial intelligence, the impact of artificial intelligence media perception on artificial intelligence attitudes is more of a direct relationship and not of an indirect relationship of mediating process. The relevance of this research in practice is found in the fact that, in order to teach young people how to find a critical approach toward emerging AI technologies, it is necessary to reinforce the digital literacy education. The originality of this study will be to investigate the direct correlation between media perception of AI-generated media and attitudes towards artificial intelligence as well as the possibility that digital literacy serves as the mediating variable between Generation Z, which has a high exposure to fast-evolving AI-driven media settings.

Keywords: Digital literacy, Artificial intelligence attitudes, Generation Z, AI-generated media, Media perception.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) is evolving at a very fast pace and has greatly influenced the way information is generated, shared, and consumed in the contemporary digital world. Synthetic images, videos or audio content created by using state-of-the-art machine learning algorithms (Generative Adversarial Networks) is called AI-generated media (Goodfellow et al., 2014; Chesney and Citron, 2019). Compared to conventional digital editing, AI-generated material can closely resemble the actual human expressions, speech, and behavior, and it is becoming harder to realize which ones are authentic and which ones are manipulated media. As much as these technologies present a prospect of innovation in the entertainment, education, healthcare, and communication sectors, they attract major issues of misinformation, authenticity, and trust by the audience (Vaccari and Chadwick, 2020).

AI-generated media perception can be described as the way people perceive and evaluate synthetic digital information and react to it emotionally. The perceptions are influenced by exposure, awareness, technological knowledge and critical appraisal capabilities. In the case of younger generations, especially the ones belonging to Generation Z (those born around 1997-2012), exposure to AI-driven content is common because they spend a lot of time on digital platforms (Twenge, 2023). Even though Gen Z is usually said to be digitally savvy, digital familiarity does not imply the capacity to evaluate manipulated or AI-generated content critically (Guess et al., 2019). The constant exposure to artificial media can alter the way young people judge artificial intelligence in general developing a positive or negative attitude to AI technologies.

Attitudes to artificial intelligence are the general judgments of people about AI, as well as the assessments of its advantages, threats, or ethical consequences, and social influence (Lin and Chen, 2024). Innovation, efficiency, automation and enhanced productivity are associated with positive attitudes whereby negative attitudes may be due to worries of being misinformed, disempowers, ethical abuse and loss of authenticity (Davis, 1989). Because the attitudes determine the technology acceptability as well as behavioral intentions, it is imperative to understand the psychological processes that determine the AI attitudes especially among the young adults who are the main users of the emerging trends in technology.

Digital literacy is very important in this regard. Digital literacy describes a quality of having the capabilities to engage, assess, examine, and produce digital literatures in a responsible and critical manner (Hobbs, 2010; Potter, 2019). More digitally literate people can readily recognize manipulated media, and assess the credibility of content as well as how AI systems work. Critical information processing views suggest that people with more powerful analytical and evaluative abilities are less prone to misleading information on the Internet (Kahne and Bowyer, 2019). Consequently, digital literacy can serve as a psychological instrument that will describe the way in which the perception of media produced by AI is converted into the attitude towards AI.

In the developing world like Pakistan, digital transformation is proliferating at a speed, whereas systematic digital literacy training is small. The youth are turning to the internet as a source of learning, socialization and information technology. Nevertheless, the lack of official education in analyzing digital authenticity can also predispose to fake information and artificial content. The cultural and educational backgrounds can thus determine the way Gen Z will perceive the media generated by AI and the way they form their opinions on artificial intelligence.

Although the global research on AI media and digital literacy is increasing, there is a lack of empirical research on these associations in the Pakistani context. A great part of the literature available has been concerned with western populations in which the digital literacy model, technological penetration, and sociocultural values are very different as opposed to collectivist societies such as Pakistan (Hargittai, 2010). In the lack of local study, it is not possible to determine the consequences of AI-media perception on the formation of AI attitudes in Pakistani youth and whether the digital literacy bridges the gap between these two aspects.

The research question that will be utilized in the current study is the lack of empirical evidence on how perceptions of AI-generated media affect AI attitudes in Generation Z in Pakistan, and whether the digital literacy can explain this relationship. Lacking culturally relevant evidence, policymakers, teachers, and mental professionals may not be able to develop effective interventions that will help to foster responsible AI usage.

The necessity to determine the impact of the emerging AI-driven communication settings in the perceptions and attitudes of young individuals drives this study. The analysis of digital literacy as mediating variable will help advance theoretical discussions on the subject of technology acceptance and digital literacy besides providing practical implications to educational changes and digital awareness. With this knowledge, one can foster critical thinking, responsible use of technology, and moderate attitude towards artificial intelligence in the future generation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The blistering adoption of the technologies of artificial intelligence (AI) has reshaped the digital media environment greatly in recent years. AI-generated products, such as deepfakes, AI-generated images, text that is automated and the synthetic video, have gained more and more traction on social media sites, news outlets, as well as the entertainment industry. Through these technologies, the machines are able to create content that are a lot realistic and are similar to those that are created by human beings. Despite a lot of possibilities to innovate and work more efficiently, AI-generated media evokes multiple questions of misinformation, credibility, and ethical concerns (Floridi et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2023). Consequently, scholars have started examining the manner in which people perceive AI-media and the effects of such perceptions on their attitude towards artificial intelligence technologies.

According to recent research, the perception of AI-generated media is relevant to forming the attitudes of people toward AI technologies. The studies by Schepman and Rodway (2020) have shown that the perception of usefulness, trust, and the risks of AI systems affect the attitudes towards artificial intelligence. In a similar manner, Fast and Horvitz (2021) established that the beliefs that people hold about the capabilities and limitations of AI have a substantial impact on their degree of acceptance and trust of AI-driven technologies. As soon as people see the AI technologies as efficient and trustworthy, they can form positive attitudes to their application and utilization. Generation Z is also the focus of some of the research regarding digital technologies due to their belonging to various age groups, yet they are regarded as being digital natives, as they have been brought up in the environment of digital technologies. The social media, education tools, and entertainment applications often expose members of Generation Z to AI-created media.

Shin (2021) argues that the awareness and the level of knowledge about artificial intelligence technologies of individuals play an important role in the interpretation and evaluation of AI-generated media. When users understand more about AI processes, they will be in a better position to critically analyze AI-generated content as opposed to accepting such content without critical analysis. The concept of digital literacy has become a significant element in the development of perception and attitude towards digital media in people. Digital literacy is defined as the skills to gain access to, assess, comprehend and product digital information

responsibly and efficiently (Ng, 2021). The more digitally literate individuals have the ability to analyze information obtained online and recognize manipulated or AI-generated content. Digital literacy in the context of AI-generated media will allow users to gain an insight into the functioning of this type of technologies and how digital content may be tampered with.

A number of recent studies emphasize the impact of digital literacy in determining misinformation and the manipulated content of the media. Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) also discovered that people who have more robust digital literacy possess a more significant ability to detect deepfakes and other manipulated digital media. In the same way, Guess et al. (2020) also found that the quality of digital literacy is strongly associated with a low probability of people believing or spreading misinformation on digital platforms. Such results indicate that the issue of digital literacy is essential in ensuring that users can critically analyze digital data and are not fooled by artificial content in the media. The impact of digital literacy on the attitude to new technologies like artificial intelligence has also been studied in research.

According to Lee et al. (2023), more digitally literate people are more likely to develop more informed and balanced attitudes towards AI technologies due to the increased knowledge they have regarding the advantages of AI systems and the dangers of the same. Similarly, Shin and Park (2022) established that people have positive critical thinking skills and a better evaluation of AI-generated content when they are digitally literate. The other significant field of study is the connection between the AI-generated media and the trust in digital information among the population. Research has found that the growing influence of AI-created media has the potential to diminish the trust of users in the content of the Internet, especially when people are poorly informed about the technologies of artificial intelligence (Westerlund, 2021).

Under these circumstances, digital literacy must be in place to assist the users in determining the validity of digital information and determining which media is generated by artificial intelligence and which is genuine. According to the recent studies, it is also possible to propose that digital literacy can also mediate the relationship between media perception and the attitude towards technology. The more effectively people are digitally literate, the better they can critically evaluate AI-generated media, which affects the way they view AI technologies and how they have attitude towards them (Lee et al., 2024; Shin, 2021).

Thus, digital literacy might also be significant in defining the correlation between the perception of AI-generated media and the attitude towards the artificial intelligence. Although there is an increased literature on the relationship between artificial intelligence and digital literacy, the nature of perceptions of AI-generated media in terms of its effects on attitudes towards AI among the generational Z via mediating digital literacy has been under-researched. The majority of past research has addressed the attitudes towards AI or digital literacy separately instead of the interconnection of both factors. Thus, the next step is to conduct additional research on the mediation of the relationship between perception of AI-generated media and AI attitudes among Generation Z by digital literacy.

Objectives

To examine the relationship between AI-generated media perception and AI attitudes among Generation Z.
To investigate the relationship between digital literacy and AI attitudes.
To examine the mediating role of digital literacy between AI-generated media perception and AI attitudes among Generation Z.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant relationship between AI-generated media perception and AI attitudes among Generation Z.

H2: Digital literacy will be positively associated with AI attitudes among Generation Z.

H3: Digital literacy will mediate the relationship between AI-generated media perception and AI attitudes among Generation Z.

Figure 1

Proposed Research Model Examining the Relationships among AI-Generated Media Perception, Digital Literacy, and AI Attitudes

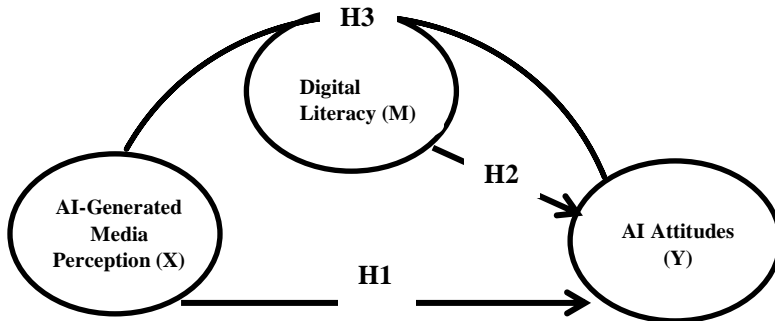


Figure 1 introduces the conceptual model, suggesting that AI-Generated Media Perception has a direct (H1) and an indirect (H3) impact on AI Attitudes of generation Z through Digital Literacy. It also implies that the Digital Literacy is a positive prognosticator of AI Attitudes (H2). The Technology Acceptance Model by Fred Davis (1989) supports H1 by saying that perceptions of technology influence the attitude of users. H2 and H3 are grounded on Digital Literacy Theory by Paul Gilser (1997), and the mediating position of Digital Literacy is attributed by Social Cognitive Theory by Albert Bandura (1986).

METHODOLOGY

The research has a objective to identify the association between the perception of AI-generated media and attitudes towards artificial intelligence (AI) in Generation Z, and to determine whether digital literacy makes a mediator of the relationship between these two concepts in a Pakistani social and cultural setting. The chapter contains the description of the research design and defines methodological procedures. It also outlines the sample, selection, instruments, data collection process, ethical issues, and plan of statistical analysis.

Research Design

The correlational research design was chosen in order to examine the association between AI-generated media perception and AI attitudes, as well as to examine the mediating effect of digital literacy. Correlational research is appropriate in studying naturally existing relationships of variables without controlling them.

This type of design enables researches to establish the strength, direction and nature of the relationships between the variables. The relationships between variables were measured with the help of correlation coefficients.

Positive correlation refers to the fact that as one variable rises, the other one also rises whereas negative correlation implies that as one variable rises, the other one falls (Bhandari, 2023). Digital literacy was investigated through mediation analysis as it was noted whether AI-generated media perception is mediated by AI attitudes.

Sampling Strategy and Sample

The research utilized a non-probability purposive sampling technique whereby the study participants are chosen depending on their relevance to the study goals (Etikan et al., 2016). This methodology was adopted because of the practical limitations which included availability, accessibility, and willingness of the participants.

The study involved 300 participants who belong to Generation Z, aged between 19-28 years, and were enlisted in different universities of Lahore, Pakistan. The sample consisted of the active users of social media (male and female) who had already received the AI-generated content of the media. Screening Questions were also used.

Education, age and gender demographic diversity was taken into consideration to increase the external validity of the results. The respondents were willing to participate in this study and informed consent was given before the data was collected. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed and all participants were given the freedom to withdraw.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

- Generation Z aged between 19-28 years.
- Active social media users.
- Consumption of media that AI generated.
- The fundamental understanding of digital literacy.

Exclusion Criteria

- Those who use AI tools in academic context only.
- Ignorance of the problem of the digital privacy.
- No history of being exposed to any AI-generated content.

Variable Operational Definitions.

AI-Generated media perception.

To what extent do the participants feel exposed to AI-generated videos, images, or audio, as well as how they evaluate the authenticity and effect of such messages (Debroy and Hemmige, 2024).

AI Attitudes

The overall positive or negative judgement of AI technologies, including trust, usefulness, and perception of the risk (Aktay et al., 2024; Kaya et al., 2024).

Digital Literacy

Critical and analytical assessment and contrasting of the information in both real and AI-generated media, including the metacognitive awareness and the practical application of digital tools (Ozel, 2023).

Assessment Measures

Deepfake Media Perception Scale (Debroy & Hemmige, 2024)

The Deepfake Media Scale (DMS), tailored to the AI-generated media content, is a 12-item self-report scale of the exposure and perceptions of the AI-generated media. The ratings will be based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The scores are higher, which means that people have a higher level of perceived exposure and awareness of AI content. Cronbach alpha = 0.802. Examples would be: *There is no credibility in media representations in case of deepfake / AI-generated content that is widely spread.* and *I am worried about the psychological consequences of deepfaking/AI-generated material with celebrities. (confusion, trust problem, emotional involvement, distorted perceptions etc)*

AI Attitude Scale (Aktay et al., 2024)

A 13-item self-report scale with three dimensions, i.e. Benefits of AI, Risks of AI, and AI Usage. The rating was done on a 5-point Likert scale, where a higher score also means more favorable positions regarding AI. Total Cronbach alpha = 0.802; subscales = 0.781, 0.732 and 0.679. Sample question: *I think artificial intelligence can make the lives of people easier.*

Scale of Media literacy Perception (Ozel, 2023)

A 16-item scale assessing knowledge and awareness of digital literacy on three dimensions: Media Effect on Society ($\alpha = 0.82$), Metacognitive Media Awareness ($\alpha = 0.74$), and Use of Media Tools ($\alpha = 0.73$). Overall reliability = 0.86. Factor analysis was used that helped to support construct validity ($\chi^2/df = 2.25$; GPI = 0.95; CFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.046). Sample item: *I am able to receive and to send different files (word documents, photos, etc.), using Internet and social media in a conscious manner.* and *I am able to communicate and express myself in various media tools (mobile phone, computer, etc.)*

Procedure

An ethical permission was granted by the Board of Advanced Studies and Research, Lahore Garrison University. Original authors have allowed the use of standardized instruments. Universities and social media were used to recruit the participants. Informed consent was taken and the participants were informed in regard to the purpose of the study, procedure and confidentiality of the study. The questionnaires were completed in a calm and no-distraction environment either online or through paper. The demographic section was answered first, and then there were AI-Generated Media Perception, AI Attitudes, and Digital literacy. The questionnaires were about 15-20 minutes to fill. Checking of responses was done to ensure that they are complete, and coded to be keyed into the SPSS 26 to be analyzed statistically. The PROCESS macro of Hayes was used to conduct mediation analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The permission was to utilize all the standardized instruments. Data collection was approved by the university authorities. All the participants gave informed consent. Participants had the information on their right to pull out at any phase with impunity. Confidentiality and anonymity had been adopted. The use of data was academic and research-based. Effective referencing and paraphrasing were used in the course of the study.

RESULTS

Table 1

Psychometric Properties of AI-Generated Media Perception, Digital literacy, and AI Attitude Scales

Scale	K	M	SD	Potential Range	Actual Range	α
AI- Media Perception (DMP)	12	47.9	5.07	12–60	28–60	.711
Digital literacy (MLPS)	16	63.8	4.07	16–80	51–77	.643
AI Attitude (AIAS)	13	51.6	4.06	13–65	39–61	.607

Note. DMP = Deepfake Media Perception Scale; MLPS = Digital literacy Scale; AIAS = Attitude toward Artificial Intelligence Scale

The present study measures were suitable in the measurement of the intended constructs of AI-generated media perception, digital literacy, and perceptions of artificial intelligence. Table 1 reveals the descriptive statistics such as mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of all the study variables, and their subscales. The reliability test showed that Deepfake Media Perception Scale had acceptable internal consistency Cronbachs alpha of.71. The Digital literacy Scale also revealed good reliability with alpha coefficient of.64, which portrays a fairly good amount of consistency to assess the perceptions of the participants on digital literacy. In general, the results of the reliability indicate that the instruments employed in the current study have moderate internal consistency to the measurement of the targeted constructs. Thus, the obtained data were deemed as appropriate in the context of some further inferential statistics.

Table 2

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of AI-Generated Media Perception, Digital Literacy, and Attitudes toward Artificial Intelligence among Generation Z

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. AGMP	1	.06	.15*	.13*	.11*
2. DL		1	.52**	.45**	.44**
3. AIA			1	.61**	.75**

Note. AGMP = AI-Generated Media Perception; DL= Digital Literacy; AIA = Attitude toward Artificial Intelligence

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The Pearson correlation study determined the associations between AI-generated media perception (AGMP), Digital literacy (DL), and attitudes towards artificial intelligence (AIA) among the generation Z. It was found that AGMP was positively, but significantly, related to AIA ($r = .15$ $p < .05$); however, it was not significantly correlated to the digital literacy (DL) ($r = .06$ $p = .05$). DL, in its turn, showed a high positive correlation with AIA ($r = .52$, $p < .01$). All in all, the findings suggest that digital literacy has a high correlation with positive AI attitudes, whereas AI-generated media perception has lower correlations.

Table 3

Regression Coefficients of Digital Literacy in the Relationship between AI-Generated Media Perception and Total AI Attitude among Gen Z

		Consequent						
		DL(M)			AIA(Y)			
Antecedents		B	SE	P		B	SE	p
AGMP (X)	A	0.05	0.05	0.27	c'	0.09	0.04	0.02
ML(M)	-	-	-	-	b	0.51	0.05	<.001
constant	I ₁	61.42,	2.24,	<.001	I ₂	14.79	3.56	<.001
$R^2(M) = .004$					$R^2(Y) = .282$			
$F(1, 298) = 1.22$					$F(2, 297) = 58.28^{***}$			

Note: N = 300; AGMP= AI-Generated Media Perception; DL = Digital Literacy; AIA = AI Attitude; c' = direct effect controlling for mediator; b = path from mediator to DV.

The mediation was performed with the help of the PROCESS Macro Model 4 created by Andrew F. Hayes in the IBM SPSS Statistics and the following relationship examined, Digital Literacy (ML) between AI-Generated Media Perception (AGMP) and AI Attitude (AIA) in the Gen Z respondent.

Findings showed that AGMP was not a significant predictor of Digital Literacy ($b = .05$, $SE = .05$, $p = .27$), implying that the overall perception of AI-generated media did not have a significant influence on the degree of digital literacy in persons. The mediator regression was not found to be statistically significant, $F(1, 298) = 1.22$, $p = .27$, and only described a very weak level of variance to Digital Literacy ($R^2 = .004$), which is a very weak explanatory type of AGMP.

Conversely, the regression model predicting AI Attitude was significant, $F(2, 297) = 58.28$, $p < .001$, with a variance of the outcome variable ($R^2 = .282$). The findings revealed that AGMP had a direct impact on

AI Attitude ($b = .09$, $SE = .04$, $p = .02$) which means that the higher the perceptions of AI-generated media are, the more the positive attitudes towards AI technologies.

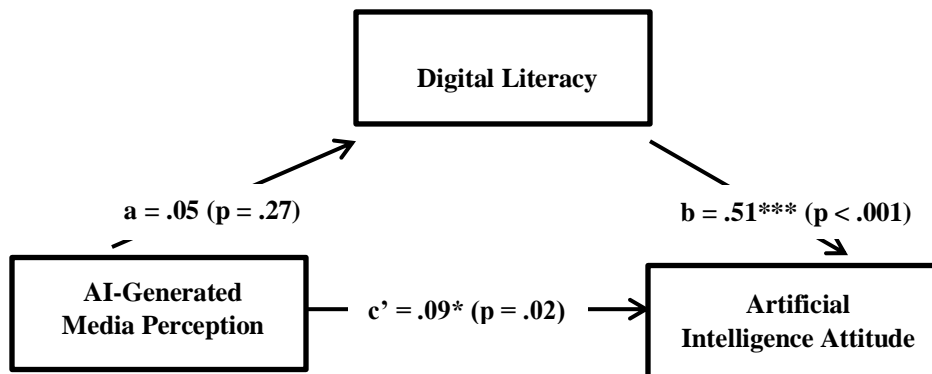
Moreover, the Digital Literacy was observed to be a high and substantial predictor of AI Attitude ($b = .51$, $SE = .05$, $p = .001$), which indicates that more digital literate individuals are more likely to express more positive attitudes towards artificial intelligence.

In order to further evaluate the mediation effect, the bootstrapped indirect effect was tested. The direct effect of AGMP on AI Attitude via Digital Literacy was not significant (Effect = .026, BootSE = .025, 95%) since the confidence interval was not under listing zero. It means that Digital Literacy does not have a significant impact on the relationship between AI-Generated Media Perception and AI Attitude.

In general, the results indicate that although Digital Literacy has a significant influence on determining AI Attitudes, it is not a mediating variable between AI-Generated Media Perception and AI Attitude among the Gen Z. However, the correlation between AGMP and AI Attitude seems to exist mainly in a direct rather than in an indirect relationship via Digital Literacy.

Figure 2

Mediation Model Showing the Role of Digital Literacy in the Relationship between AI-Generated Media Perception and AI Attitude among Gen Z



Indirect Effect ($a \times b$) = .026

Figure 2 represents the mediation model that explored the position of Digital literacy (DL) in the connection between AI-Generated Media Perception (AGMP) and AI Attitude (AIA) amidst Gen Z participants. The findings show that the AGMP to DL (a path) was not statistically significant ($b = .05$, $p = .27$), and this means that AI-generated media perceptions do not have a significant effect on the digital literacy of people.

Nonetheless, the validity of the path between DL and AIA (b path) was positive and very significant ($b = .51$, $p < .001$), which means that increased digital literacy levels have a positive effect on positive attitudes towards AI. As well, the direct impact of AGMP on AIA (c' path) was also considerable ($b = .09$, $p = .02$) which proves that the perceptions of AI-generated media have a direct influence on the development of AI attitudes in Gen Z.

This is despite the fact that the non-significant relationship between AGMP and DL was calculated, although the indirect effect ($a \times b = .026$) is not significant. In general, the results indicate that although

digital literacy is significant in determining AI attitudes, the effect of AI-generated media perception on AI attitudes may be exerted not through a mediating process but directly.

DISCUSSION

The existing research purpose was to investigate the effect of AI-generated media perception concerning digital literacy and AI attitudes on Generation Z, but also to determine whether digital literacy mediated the association between the two.

The results also present significant data on the perceptions of the youth about artificial intelligence and the impact of digital skills on their perception of new technologies. In the first place, the correlation analysis provided that AI-generated media perception was positively correlated with AI attitudes with a fairly weak strength of the relationship. This result helps to prove the hypothesis that how people perceive technological systems may affect their attitudes towards those technologies. This finding is line with the Technology Acceptance Model introduced by Davis (1989), which argues that the perception of usefulness and the ease of use of a given technology is significant in determining the attitudinal and acceptance of technological advancements by users of the technology.

When applied to the context of Generation Z, highly exposed to a digital environment and AI-based media, the attitudes towards the AI-generated content might also lead to the formation of their attitudes towards artificial intelligence. The study has also highlighted the importance of the perceptions of the users in influencing their attitudes towards the AI technologies. As an example, the research studies conducted on the uptake of artificial intelligence devices have concluded that perceived usefulness and perceived benefits of AI technologies have a significant impact on students and their disposition towards working with AI-based systems in educational settings (Chatterjee and Bhattacharjee, 2020). As well, the studies on the engagement of AI with learning technologies among students suggest that knowledge of artificial intelligence and its exposure to students may have a positive impact on their attitude towards artificial intelligence use in educational settings (Celik, 2023).

Second, the results denoted that there is a strong and positive correlation between the digital literacy and AI attitudes. Those who indicated that they had a greater degree of digital literacy also exhibited more positive attitudes to the artificial intelligence technologies. It is not the first time that this observation has been made in line with the Digital Literacy Theory postulated by Gilster (1997) who opines that more digitally competent individuals are in a better position to interpret, analyze and competently interact with digital technologies. The research on the AI literacy suggests that more digitally and technologically competent individuals can be more aware of how artificial intelligence systems operate and critically assess the results produced by artificial intelligence (Ng et al., 2021). These skills can make people more comfortable when working with new technologies, which could lead to the emergence of more positive attitudes to artificial intelligence.

On the same note, studies about AI literacy point to the fact that knowledge and a critical comprehension of AI technologies can assist individuals to evaluate and apply AI systems in the most successful way, which results in a higher acceptance and a more positive attitude to AI applications (Long and Magerko, 2020). Consequently, people more literate in media and AI will have a greater chance of forming a positive attitude to artificial intelligence technologies.

Additionally, the mediation analysis was used to identify the mediation role of digital literacy between perception of AI-generated media and AI attitudes. The results showed that the media perception produced by AI was not significantly related to digital literacy and accordingly the mediation effect of digital literacy was not significant. These findings imply that digital literacy fails to mediate the relationship between

perceptions of AI-generated media and attitudes toward artificial intelligence (Ng et al., 2021). Scholars have also suggested that the element of artificial intelligence literacy entails certain skills, such as the ability to comprehend the way AI systems work, the ability to critically analyze AI-generated products, and the ability to know about the impacts of AI technologies on the society (Ng et al., 2021). Such skills are normally acquired during educational experience and deliberate learning as opposed to passive exposure to technological systems. In like manner, AI literacy studies have stressed that meaningful literacy involves the acquisition of conceptual knowledge and critical evaluation skills that allow people to effectively comprehend and evaluate the use of AI technologies (Long and Magerko, 2020). Thus, the exposure to the AI-created media in itself can affect the perceptions and attitudes of people toward AI but does not always result in the increased digital literacy.

Nonetheless, the findings proved that the perception of AI-generated media directly influenced AI attitudes, meaning that higher the perception on AI-generated media, the more the positive attitude towards AI technologies is determined. These results can be viewed in light of the Social Cognitive Theory created by Bandura (1986) which states that the cognitive interpretation of experiences by individuals has an impact on their attitudes and behaviors. When exposed to AI-generated media, people might become more familiar with AI technologies, thus the positive perceptions and attitudes may be formed as a result. It has also been found that students that are regularly engaged with the AI tools are more likely to develop more positive attitudes towards artificial intelligence because they are more aware and see the technologies as useful (Pellas, 2023; Chan and Zhou, 2023).

On the whole, it can be noted that although digital literacy is a significant contributor to the development of positive attitudes towards AI, it does not substantially contribute to the way in which perceptions towards AI-generated media determine such attitudes. Rather, the connection between AI-generated media perception and AI attitudes seems to be executed through a direct influence, as opposed to an indirect mediating process.

CONCLUSION

In the current research, the authors examined the correlations between AI-generated media perception, digital literacy, and AI attitudes in Generation Z. The results showed that AI-generated media perception is significantly and positively correlated with AI attitudes, which means that perceptions of AI-generated media are among the factors that form attitude towards the artificial intelligence technologies.

It was also found that digital literacy may be considered as a powerful predictor of AI attitudes, thereby indicating that people with high levels of digital competence are more likely to establish more positive attitudes towards AI. Nonetheless, the mediation analysis demonstrated that digital literacy is not a significant mediator of the relationship between AI-generated media perception and AI attitudes because the correlation between AI-generated media perception and digital literacy is not statistically significant.

On the whole, the paper emphasizes the value of digital competencies in attitude formation towards new technologies, as well as shows that the perceptions of AI-generated media affect the attitude toward artificial intelligence in the sample of Generation Z separately.

LIMITATIONS AND STUDY FORWARD

The current study has a number of weaknesses despite the contribution. To begin with, the study was based on self-reported measures, which could result in response bias or socially desirable response. Second, the study is cross-sectional, and it is impossible to make causal interpretations of the relationships between the variables.

The future studies must take into consideration the use of longitudinal research design to understand the causal relationship between AI-generated media perception, digital literacy, and AI attitudes better. Further research can also involve bigger and more heterogeneous samples that would represent cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds to improve the external validity of results. Other plausible mediating or moderating factors in the attitudes toward artificial intelligence that researchers can investigate are digital skills, technological self-efficacy, trust in AI, or critical thinking skills to get a better idea of the psychological forces behind the attitudes toward artificial intelligence.

General Implications

The results of the current research point to the need to empower digital literacy of Generation Z in order to make them more critical in analyzing the AI-generated content. These insights may be used by educators and academic institutions to create programs that would increase digital and digital literacy skills to enable students to interpret and understand AI-generated information better.

The research is also a part of increasing the number of publications on artificial intelligence and digital media in Pakistan. The results indicate that the approach to better digital literacy could facilitate more responsible and informed interaction with AI-driven technologies and could be used as the basis of future studies regarding the psychological and social effects of AI-driven media spaces among young audiences.

Clinical Implications

It also is significant clinically to the study of the psychological impact of AI-generated media on young people. These insights can assist mental health professionals in identifying how the exposure to AI-generated content can shape the perceptions and emotional reactions to the rising technologies.

To enhance the psychological outcomes of misinformation, counselors, and psychologists can include digital literacy awareness in psychoeducational and counseling programs to enable individuals to think critically about information on the Internet and mitigate the possible consequences of misinformation. Joint programs of mental health workers and educators could also contribute to the increase in digital well-being and balanced attitudes towards artificial intelligence in Generation Z.

Conflict of interest and ethical standards.

The author states that he has no conflict of interest when it comes to publishing this study. The study was carried out in observance of ethical standards in research work and there were no unethical research standards like plagiarism, fabrication, and manipulation of data in the study. The study was a voluntary participation and informed consent was sought among all the participants before the collection of data.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

The author was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, data collection, statistical analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation of the manuscript.

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