



AESTHETICS OF DISINFORMATION IN DIGITAL NEWS CIRCULATION

Multimodal Analysis of False Visual Tests

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Visual disinformation Multimodal analysis Evidentiality Recontextualization Deepfakes Fact-checking Composite montages	<i>This study examines the aesthetics of disinformation in news by analyzing 60 fake visual pieces (recontextualized screenshots, composite montages, and synthetic/manipulated content) collected from the Spanish-language digital news ecosystem (2024-2025). Through multimodal analysis, it identifies five recurrent clusters of evidential cues (provenance/authority, news urgency, interface/screenshot, probative pointing, documentality) and text-image anchoring patterns that construct the appearance of evidence. The “aesthetic of proof” operates as an assembly of provenance markers, news design, and reading guides, providing criteria for verification and visual literacy.</i>

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1. Introduction

Research on disinformation in digital ecosystems has grown steadily and consolidated an interdisciplinary field connecting communication, cognitive sciences, platform studies, and data science (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024). In this framework, misinformation is defined as false or misleading information disseminated without necessarily harmful intent, while disinformation is associated with the strategic production or circulation of falsehoods for instrumental purposes (Zeng & Brennen, 2023).

Visual disinformation is understood as a subtype of information disorder in which images or videos—altered, synthesized, or recontextualized—function as persuasive "evidence" to support false or misleading claims (Heley et al., 2022). Given that these pieces combine iconic, linguistic, and contextual resources, multimodal analysis has made it possible to describe how meanings are assembled and how authenticity cues operate in different circulation environments (Wilson et al., 2023).

In journalism and public communication, images have operated as resources of indexicality and proof, but they have also facilitated distortions when integrated into deceptive narratives in scenarios of high informational uncertainty (Brennen et al., 2021).

In recent years, the literature has synthesized that visual disinformation ranges from "cheap" recontextualizations (partial screenshots, crops, caption changes) to complex manipulations and AI-generated synthetic content (Weikmann & Lecheler, 2023). In parallel, research has raised the need for a specific agenda to understand how credibility judgments are formed regarding false "visual evidence" and what perceptual or inferential cues are activated in evaluation (Peng et al., 2023).

From judgment psychology, it has been established that images can modify perceptions of truth by increasing processing fluency and the subjective sense of evidence, even when the visual content is non-probative (Newman & Schwarz, 2024). In an experiment with veracity feedback, Pulm et al. (2024) found that accompanying feedback with non-probative photographs improved discrimination between true and false, although it also biased the tendency to respond "true" in certain evaluation contexts.

On social media, Hameleers et al. (2020) showed that multimodal disinformation can intensify persuasive effects compared to purely textual messages, partly due to its ability to activate affective responses and credibility heuristics.

In the case of deepfakes, Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) observed that exposure to synthetic political videos increased uncertainty and can erode trust, not only in specific content but also in the information ecosystem in general.

At the institutional level, Aljalabneh (2024) warned that the expansion of synthetic content strains verification routines and credibility contracts between media, sources, and audiences, with potential effects on the legitimacy of journalism.

At the technical level, Mirsky and Lee (2022) documented an arms race between deepfake generation and detection, where improvements in realism do not imply equivalent improvements in human identification ability. Furthermore, Rauchfleisch et al. (2025) showed that terminological framing (deepfakes vs. "synthetic media") influences perceptions of reputational threat and attitudes toward regulation, suggesting that the "aesthetics" of the phenomenon are also discursively contested.

Informational interventions on authenticity are also not neutral: Hameleers and Marquart (2023) found that deepfake labels can delegitimize authentic political speeches, creating a collateral suspicion effect that favors plausible denial strategies.

When manipulation is low-fidelity, Hameleers (2024) compared cheapfakes and deepfakes and evidenced differences in emotional and cognitive mechanisms, underscoring that media literacy and analytical thinking mediate susceptibility to visual deceptions of varying complexity. Complementarily, Tonglet et al. (2025) emphasized that out-of-context images constitute one of the most prevalent forms of visual disinformation and require, for refutation, recovering the true context and evaluating the veracity of the caption or associated claim.

In the field of information governance, Wittenberg et al. (2025) evaluated the impact of labeling AI-generated media and showed that its effects on credibility and sharing depend on the design of the warning and the exposure ecosystem, without guaranteeing uniform reductions in informational harm. Even so, warnings can produce a "spillover" of skepticism: Ternovski et al. (2022) showed that informing about the existence of deepfakes can decrease trust in real news and increase generalized doubt, posing dilemmas for preventive communication policies.

On the automated front, Shen et al. (2024) proposed an out-of-context disinformation detection approach that combines chained verification and multimodal signals, reflecting a shift toward architectures that attempt to "reason" about coherence between image, text, and context. At the educational level, Qian et al. (2022) demonstrated that digital literacy interventions can motivate the use of reverse search and verification practices, reducing vulnerability to recontextualized visual pieces that simulate evidence.

At the professional level, Westlund et al. (2024) conceptualized fact-checking as a process of sensemaking and problem-solving under conditions of ambiguity, where visual verification becomes situated work, with time constraints, tools, and inter-organizational coordination. In this sense, Weikmann and Lecheler (2024) documented how journalists and fact-checkers adjust routines in the face of deepfakes between technological expectations, editorial criteria, and practical limits of authentication, showing frictions between technical "solutions" and public legitimacy.

Likewise, Vinhas and Bastos (2022) argued that fact-checking not only corrects claims but also sustains a fragile "consensus reality," making it especially relevant to study how visual evidence is stabilized—or eroded—in public controversies.

In recent work, Vinhas and Bastos (2025) analyzed the "WEIRD" governance of fact-checking and moderation, underscoring that platform policies and visibility regimes condition what is considered legitimate evidence and what is sanctioned as manipulation.

In education, Aljalabneh (2024) identified pedagogical strategies to strengthen critical evaluation of images and videos—reverse search, source triangulation, editing analysis—highlighting that the mnemonic power of the visual can become a vulnerability if aesthetics is confused with proof.

In this article, "news content" is operationally understood as visual pieces that circulated in digital environments explicitly presenting themselves as news, alerts, or evidence ("breaking news," "urgent," "confirmed"), or that imitated recognizable journalistic conventions (headlines, tickers, information panels, logos, typefaces, and interface marks). Therefore, the analysis was not restricted to products published by professional newsrooms, but to multimodal artifacts that claimed news status and activated a reading of "proof" in public circulation.

Together, the available evidence has clarified effects, mediators, and challenges of visual disinformation, but has tended to treat the image as a "support" for falsehood rather than as an aesthetic regime of proof that imitates journalistic formats (screenshots, templates, labels, crops, interface marks) to produce verisimilitude. In particular, the aesthetic dimension by which these pieces present themselves as visual evidence—not just as illustrations—and how this aesthetics articulates authority, urgency, and "documentality" in news and public conversations remains underanalyzed.

The objective of this article is to characterize the aesthetics of disinformation in news through false visual evidence, proposing (1) a conceptual delimitation of the phenomenon as a strategy of visual evidentiality, (2) an analytical typology of its main forms (recontextualized screenshots, composite montages, and synthetic content), and (3) a multimodal reading framework to identify cues of simulated authenticity and their implications for credibility, verification, and contemporary visual culture.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Visual Disinformation and "Evidence" in the News Ecosystem

Disinformation is defined as false or misleading information disseminated with intent (e.g., profit, political influence, or harm), while visual disinformation is characterized by integrating images or videos as the central vector of falsehood or deception, whether by fabrication (e.g., synthetic content), manipulation (montages/editing), or decontextualization (real screenshots or images relocated to another interpretive frame). This distinction is key because the visual component does not merely function as an "accompaniment" to the text: it operates as a proof device, i.e., as a support that aims to close the gap between claim and evidence through a documentary appearance (Hameleers, 2025; Hausken, 2024; Weikmann & Lecheler, 2023).

In recent literature, the study of visual disinformation has consolidated as a subfield with its own problems: (a) its high circulation in platform environments; (b) its ability to anchor narratives in perceptual authenticity cues; and (c) its plasticity to imitate journalistic genres (screenshots, forensic "evidence," information panels, "archive" clips). In particular, research syntheses have proposed treating visual disinformation as a multimodal phenomenon, where credibility emerges from the

interaction between visual content, text, publication context, and provenance indicators (Hameleers, 2025; Weikmann & Lecheler, 2023).

From this framework, "false visual evidence" (screenshots, montages, deepfakes) is not reduced to a technological problem; it is understood as socio-semiotic strategies that mobilize cultural expectations about what counts as evidence in news. Such expectations have historically been formed around the testimonial status of photography and video, but today they are reconfigured by the availability of advanced editing, synthetic generation, and accelerated circulation on platforms (Brennen et al., 2021; Hameleers, 2025; Newman & Schwarz, 2024).

2.2. Visual Evidence, Verisimilitude, and the Crisis of Perceptual Trust

In public communication, the image often operates as an epistemic shortcut: it is assumed that "seeing" approximates "knowing." Research in cognitive psychology has shown that images influence truth judgments, often outside metacognitive awareness, and that their persuasive effect does not depend solely on the image being explicitly manipulated: it can also occur through selection, framing, or recontextualization. Consequently, the risk is not limited to deepfakes; it includes a continuum of visual "evidences" that support unjustified inferences (Brennen et al., 2021; Newman & Schwarz, 2024).

A decisive theoretical point is that the contemporary environment has eroded the assumption that photographic appearance equals recording. Visual realism can be produced by non-indexical means (e.g., AI generation), which shifts trust from the "origin" of the recording to the "quality" of the simulation. In aesthetic terms, this implies that credibility is negotiated through conventions of photorealism and genre (how news evidence "should look"), and not only through provenance guarantees (Hausken, 2024; Newman & Schwarz, 2024).

In parallel, recent philosophical discussion has questioned apocalyptic readings and proposed conceptualizing the impact of deepfakes as a problem of epistemic practices: what verification routines, what thresholds of suspicion, and what attention economies make certain publics accept or reject audiovisual evidence. Thus, the central harm would not only be the persuasion of false content, but the instability of trust criteria (e.g., moving from "seeing is believing" to "nothing is credible"), with consequences for the informational authority of journalism (Habgood-Coote, 2023; Hameleers, 2025).

Finally, vulnerability is not only technical; it is also human. Experimental evidence has indicated that people tend to overestimate their ability to detect deepfakes and bias their judgments toward authenticity ("seeing-is-believing"), which makes the insertion of "visual evidence" into deceptive narratives more efficient. This finding supports the need to analyze visual disinformation as a phenomenon where perception, visual culture, and media context interact (Köbis et al., 2021).

2.3. Social Semiotics and Multimodality as a Lens to Analyze False "Evidence"

To study how "visual evidence" produces credibility, this work draws on social semiotics and the multimodal approach, which understand communication as an articulation of resources (image, typography, color, composition, language, interface) and consider that meaning does not reside in an isolated mode but in its orchestration. In this tradition, visual forms are analyzed as cultural grammars that encode representations, relations (e.g., distance, authority), and textual organization (hierarchies, saliences) (G. Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020).

Applied to news, this lens allows conceptualizing the aesthetics of disinformation as a mimicry of informational codes: labels, lower thirds, "dated" screenshots, supposed metadata, watermarks, apocryphal verification seals, or "live" frames. It is not only about "lying with images," but about constructing verisimilitude through conventions of audiovisual and digital journalism. These conventions are interpretable as multimodal repertoires that disinformation producers reassemble to fabricate an appearance of evidence (Hameleers, 2025; Weikmann & Lecheler, 2023).

From this perspective, the empirical categories of the study (screenshots, montages, deepfakes) can be read as families of semiotic procedures:

- Recontextualized screenshots: displace temporal and situational anchoring, but preserve "registration" marks (interfaces, timestamps, source appearance).
- Montages: combine partial indexicality (real fragments) with editing operations that reconfigure causality and attribution.

- Deepfakes: produce a performative realism (face/voice/movement) that activates expectations of audiovisual authenticity, although the origin is synthetic.

In all three cases, the "proof" is sustained by the convergence between visual resources and narrative frameworks; therefore, multimodality functions here as an integrative lens (not as a sum of variables).

2.4. Authentication on Platforms: Cues, Shortcuts, and Disputes over Credibility

Contemporary credibility is produced in a platform environment, where authenticity evaluation is carried out under time scarcity and information overload. In this context, audiences resort to cues and interpretive shortcuts: source reputation, format consistency, "professional" visual style, presence of links, social interaction, or compatibility with prior expectations. Recent research has described how these shortcuts structure authenticity judgment in online news and, at the same time, open opportunities for credibility engineering by disinformation actors (Gehrke et al., 2025).

In young users, for example, it has been observed that "the authentic" can be inferred from indicators such as narrative coherence, contextual plausibility, and signs of social legitimacy (e.g., who shares it), in addition to features of the visual artifact itself. This reinforces the idea that aesthetics is not decorative: it is part of an authentication regime distributed among content, context, and platform architecture (Gehrke et al., 2025).

A central theoretical implication is that institutional responses (e.g., warnings, labels, media literacy) do not operate in a vacuum: they can produce side effects on trust thresholds. Experimental evidence has shown that informing about deepfakes does not necessarily improve detection and can increase suspicion even of real content, fueling a climate where delegitimization becomes more available as a strategy ("if it can be fake, then I discard it"). This point directly connects with the empirical section of the article, because false "visual evidence" works both through its verisimilitude and the uncertainty it induces (Köbis et al., 2021; Ternovski et al., 2022).

At the normative level, it has been argued that labeling synthetic content constitutes a necessary first step to mitigate epistemic harms, although its effectiveness depends on design, adoption, and trust in the labeler. For this study, that debate is relevant not as a "solution," but as evidence that authenticity has become a disputed dimension of public communication, where aesthetics, technology, and governance intertwine (Fisher, 2025).

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Design and Approach

The study was developed under a qualitative approach and a descriptive-interpretive, non-experimental, cross-sectional design, aimed at characterizing the aesthetics of disinformation in news through the analysis of false visual evidence. A multimodal analysis of visual culture was adopted to examine how different semiotic resources (image, typography, color, composition, interface marks, and anchoring text) were assembled to produce verisimilitude and evidence effects in pieces that circulated as news information.

3.2. Context and Scope

The analysis was situated in the Spanish-language digital news ecosystem during the period January 30, 2024 – November 12, 2025, focusing on content that circulated in platform environments (X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and messaging apps —WhatsApp and Telegram—) and that presented themselves explicitly as "news," "proof," "screenshot," or "evidence" related to public events. Given that the research focused on aesthetic and multimodal conventions, the scope was defined by genres and formats (screenshots, montages, synthetic content) rather than by a single platform or medium.

3.3. Corpus, Unit of Analysis, and Sampling Strategy

The unit of analysis was each piece of visual disinformation understood as a complete multimodal artifact, composed of: (a) the still image or video; (b) the text embedded in the piece (labels, headlines, "seals," marks); and (c) the accompanying text or minimal circulation context (copy, caption, thread, forwarded message) when available and necessary to interpret the anchoring.

The corpus was constructed through intentional and theoretical sampling, seeking maximum variation of formats and evidentiality mechanisms. To support analytical comparability, three operational families of "false visual evidence" were balanced: (1) recontextualized screenshots, (2) composite montages, and (3) synthetic/manipulated content. The final corpus consisted of $N = 60$ pieces, equally distributed across three families ($T1 = 20$, $T2 = 20$, $T3 = 20$), and the size was defined by analytical saturation; additionally, comparability between families was ensured by an equal distribution, i.e., when new pieces ceased to contribute substantially different aesthetic features or multimodal combinations.

Pieces were included that: (a) circulated as news or evidence (explicit mention of "media," "breaking news," "proof," "video," "screenshot," "statement," "report," etc.) or imitated news conventions (headlines, tickers, lower thirds, information "panels"); (b) were verifiable as false or misleading through contrast with public fact-checks, institutional denials, or traceable documentary evidence; and (c) presented minimum quality for multimodal analysis (legibility of embedded text and visibility of interface or composition elements). Purely satirical materials without informative circulation, opinion content without pretension to visual evidence, and duplicates or minimal variants without relevant changes in multimodal resources were excluded.

3.4. Data Sources and Collection and Archiving Procedure

The pieces were collected from: (1) fact-checks and public repositories of fact-checking organizations/observatories —Maldita.es, Newtral, Chequeado, AFP Factual, Colombiacheck, and Verificat—, selected to ensure traceability of the verdict and to recover archived versions of the pieces, (2) digital archives of media and online newspaper libraries to contrast attributions and formats, and (3) circulation platforms to recover publication context when essential to interpret anchoring.

Collection was carried out by: (a) identifying candidate pieces by keywords and tracking from fact-checks; (b) downloading/capturing the most complete available version, preserving sufficient resolution for analysis of typography and interface; (c) recording metadata per piece (date of publication/observation, platform/source, language, topic, associated claim, type of "evidence," attributed provenance, and reference links); and (d) archiving with a unique identifier (ID), storing the artifact, screenshots of circulation context when applicable, and persistent links when available.

3.5. Analytical Instruments and Coding Categories

A multimodal coding matrix (codebook) was developed to operationalize the "aesthetics of disinformation" as a strategy of visual evidentiality. The matrix integrated hierarchical categories with operational definitions and examples, organized into six dimensions: (1) composition and visual hierarchy, (2) typography and embedded textuality, (3) color and news genre indicators, (4) interface and provenance marks, (5) text-image anchoring and probative structure, and (6) indices of simulated authenticity. The categories were designed to identify recurrent aesthetic procedures and their combinations, rather than to quantify frequencies as a central objective.

3.6. Analysis Procedure

The analysis was conducted in six phases: (1) familiarization with the corpus and preparation of analytical memos; (2) pilot coding of a subset of the corpus to refine operational definitions and adjust the codebook; (3) systematic coding of the entire corpus, recording multimodal segments and annotations linked to each code; (4) iterative refinement of categories and construction of piece profiles; (5) elaboration of the typology based on the dominant operation (recontextualization, montage, or synthesis) and the aesthetic repertoire of evidentiality; and (6) internal validation by contrasting typical and borderline cases to ensure conceptual robustness.

3.7. Software and Tools

Corpus management, metadata, and coding were carried out using ATLAS.ti 23 and structured recording tools (spreadsheet and document repository). Codes and analytical memos were preserved through periodic exports for audit trail and backup of decision traces.

3.8. Qualitative Rigor and Traceability

To ensure credibility, the following were applied: codebook calibration through pilot coding, contrast of typical and atypical cases, and minimal triangulation (piece + circulation context when available + verification source/documentary contrast). Minimal triangulation was performed by contrasting (i) the piece, (ii) its circulation context when available, and (iii) the published verification or the original document/source cited by the fact-checker (e.g., statement, original note, complete audiovisual recording). To strengthen dependability, an audit trail was maintained that documented changes in categories and classification rules. To support confirmability, reflexivity memos were used and coding examples were preserved that allowed tracing inferences from data to category. Process consistency was reinforced through iterative internal review of the codebook and discussion of coding criteria when ambiguities arose.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

The work was carried out with publicly available content or content retrieved from verification repositories, applying harm minimization. When pieces included personal data or user identifiers, the working material was anonymized and identifiers were avoided in the manuscript, except in cases of public interest and prior dissemination by verified journalistic sources. The handling of sensitive material was managed through restricted storage and editorial reproduction criteria, seeking compliance with terms of service and applicable regulations.

4. Results

The multimodal analysis allowed organizing the false visual evidence that circulated as news content into a typology of three types (recontextualized screenshots, composite montages, and synthetic/manipulated content). Likewise, evidentiality cues (visual markers that constructed the appearance of proof) and text-image anchoring patterns that guided reading toward specific inferences were systematized. Below, these findings are presented in order: typology → evidentiality cues → text-image anchoring → borderline cases.

4.1. Typology of False Visual Evidence

The classification was based on the main operation through which each piece produced an appearance of evidence (recontextualization, recomposition/editing, or synthesis) and its multimodal configuration (interface marks, typographic resources, composition, and textual anchoring). The following analytical types were distinguished (Table 1):

Type 1 (T1). Recontextualized Screenshots

Pieces classified as T1 corresponded to screenshots or crops that preserved "registration" features (e.g., interface, navigation bars, apparent dates, logos, publication styles), but that were associated with a claim that did not derive from the original context or that depended on an attribution not verifiable in the source shown.

Membership criteria:

(a) presence of screenshot/interface cues (UI, timestamps, platform iconography); (b) claim dependent on attribution to a specific source or context; (c) mismatch between visible content and proposed interpretation (e.g., crop that removes key elements or missing caption).

Internal variation (operational subtypes):

- T1a. Social media screenshots: isolated posts or comments presented as "proof" of facts.
- T1b. Screenshots attributed to media: headlines or "screenshots" of portals/TV with news format.
- T1c. Screenshots of "documents": images of supposed statements, official letters, or reports with letterheads.

Corpus cases (ID, see Appendix A, Table A1):

- ID-T1b-01: cropped screenshot of a supposed headline with media logo + partial date + "Breaking news" label.
- ID-T1a-01: screenshot of a post with cropped username + added text "confirmed".

Type 2 (T2). Composite Montages

T2 pieces grouped heterogeneous fragments through composition (layers, crops, overprints), generating a "proof" by visual recomposition. The montage produced a graphic unit that imitated the aesthetics of a "news panel," "dossier," "probative collage," or "comparative" and concentrated multiple authority signals (logos, seals, labels, quotes).

Membership criteria:

(a) signs of editing/assembly (layers, disparate typefaces, inconsistent shadows, crop edges); (b) production of a visual unit that pretended to "document" a fact/attribution; (c) dependence on labels, seals, or titles to stabilize reading.

Internal variation (operational subtypes):

- T2a. Apocryphal news panels: "breaking news" composition with tickers, lower thirds, and logo.
- T2b. Scene photomontage: insertion or substitution of elements (faces, objects, labels) to support attributions.
- T2c. Collage of multiple "proofs": a plate grouping screenshots, photos, and numbered texts as "evidence".

Corpus cases (ID, see Appendix A, Table A1):

- ID-T2c-01: collage with three numbered crops, arrows, and a header "PROOFS".
- ID-T2a-01: panel with red ticker "URGENT", bold typeface, and imitative channel logo.

Type 3 (T3). Synthetic or Audiovisual Manipulated Content

T3 pieces included content where the appearance of recording was produced through synthesis or audiovisual manipulation (face/voice/movement, sequence reediting, acceleration/cropping, recontextualized audio). In this type, credibility relied both on audiovisual realism and on paratextual resources that framed the material as "leaked," "exclusive," or "proof."

Membership criteria:

(a) audiovisual support or high-fidelity photorealism; (b) signs of manipulation/synthesis reported by external verification or internal inconsistencies (e.g., lip sync, artifacts); (c) claim dependent on audiovisual testimony ("he/she is heard/seen saying...").

Internal variation (operational subtypes):

- T3a. Deepfake: synthetic face/voice substitution in video.
- T3b. Cheapfake: low-complexity manipulation (cropping, speed, misleading subtitles).
- T3c. Audio/sync manipulation: decontextualized audio or voice montage with image.

Corpus cases (ID, see Appendix A, Table A1):

- ID-T3b-01: cropped clip with added subtitles and label "CONFIRMED".
- ID-T3a-01: video with face substitution + overprinted media logo.

Table 1. Typology of false visual evidence and distinctive features

Type	Main operation	Predominant visual cues	Provenance cues	Text-image anchoring	Corpus examples (ID)
T1 Recontextualized screenshots	Disanchoring/recontextualization	Visible UI, timestamps, crops, low resolution due to forwarding	Partial logos, cropped usernames, "screenshot"	Attribution ("according to X"), temporality ("today"), authenticity by "screenshot"	ID-T1a-01, ID-T1b-01, ID-T1c-01
T2 Composite montages	Recomposition/editing	Layers, mixed typefaces, arrows/circles, collage, seals	Apocryphal logos, imitative news panels, supposed letterheads	Interpretive closure ("proof of"), causality ("therefore"), probative enumeration	ID-T2a-01, ID-T2b-01, ID-T2c-01
T3 Synthetic/manipulated	Synthesis/audiovisual manipulation	Photorealism, artifacts, added subtitles, video crops	"Leaked/exclusive", labels, media overprint	Testimony ("he/she is heard/seen"), authenticity by audiovisual recording	ID-T3a-01, ID-T3b-01, ID-T3c-01

Note. IDs refer to the corpus traceability record (Appendix A, Table A1).

4.2. Recurrent Evidentiality Cues and "Aesthetic of Proof"

Multimodal cues that functioned as evidentiality indicators were systematized. These sets derived from the multimodal coding matrix (Section 3.5) and operated as a cross-cutting synthesis of codes observed in six analytical dimensions (composition and visual hierarchy; typography and embedded textuality; color and news genre indicators; interface and provenance marks; text-image anchoring and probative structure; and indices of simulated authenticity). Operationally, the five sets grouped recurrent

combinations of those codes to describe how the appearance of "proof" was constructed across the three types (T1–T3), as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Evidentiality cues (sets, typical resources, and corpus cases [ID])

Set	Operational description	Typical resources	Types where easily integrated	Corpus cases (ID)
Provenance/authority	Attributes legitimacy through institutional or media marks	Logos, letterheads, seals "OFFICIAL", scanned signatures	T1, T2, T3	ID-T1c-01, ID-T2a-01
News urgency	Constructs immediacy and relevance	Tickers "URGENT", "BREAKING", red/yellow, bold	T1, T2, T3	ID-T1b-01, ID-T2a-01
Interface/screenshot	Produces appearance of direct recording	UI, timestamps, icons, bars, "forwarded"	T1 (central), T2 (incorporated), T3 (accompanying)	ID-T1a-01, ID-T2c-01
Probative pointing	Guides attention toward "evidence"	Arrows, circles, zoom, boxes, numbering	T2 (central), T1/T3 (support)	ID-T2c-01, ID-T2b-01
Documentality	Simulates technical/administrative report	File format, tables, headers, "annexes"	T1c, T2c	ID-T1c-01, ID-T2c-01

Note. IDs refer to the corpus traceability record (Appendix A, Table A1).

4.3. Text-Image Anchoring Patterns in the Construction of "Proof"

Recurrent patterns in the text-image relationship (embedded text and/or accompanying text) that fixed interpretation were identified:

- P1. Attributive anchoring (source/authority): text fixed reading by attribution ("according to [media/institution]"), while the image acted as a provenance support (logo, screenshot, letterhead).
Representative cases (corpus IDs): ID-T1b-01, ID-T1c-01.
- P2. Causal anchoring (detail → conclusion): text extracted a strong inference from a pointed visual detail (arrow/zoom), presenting it as conclusive evidence of the claim.
Representative cases: ID-T2b-01, ID-T2c-01.
- P3. Temporal anchoring (immediacy/"happening now"): the piece relied on apparent dates, timestamps, or urgency labels to install immediacy and contemporaneity.
Representative cases: ID-T1b-01, ID-T3b-01.
- P4. Testimonial anchoring (audio/image as statement): text presented the material as direct testimony ("he/she is heard/seen saying..."), reinforced by audiovisual aesthetics and "leak" labels.
Representative cases: ID-T3a-01, ID-T3c-01.
- P5. Expert anchoring (document → verdict): the piece organized elements in "report" format and the text concluded using technical language ("proof," "evidence," "expertise"), relying on documentality.
Representative cases: ID-T1c-01, ID-T2c-01.

4.4. Borderline Cases and Classification Ambiguities (from the corpus)

Cases were recorded in which a piece combined operations from more than one type (see Table A2, Appendix A):

- Hybrid T1↔T2 (screenshot within collage): a screenshot with visible UI was integrated into a composite plate with labels, numbering, and seals, introducing montage features (ID-H-01).
- Hybrid T2↔T3 (news panel + manipulated video): a manipulated clip was framed within a "breaking news" panel with logo and tickers, simultaneously reinforcing documentality and audiovisual testimony (ID-H-02).
- Hybrid T1↔T3 (audiovisual recontextualization): a real video cropped and reinserted with subtitles and an apparent timestamp was presented as evidence of a different event (ID-H-03).

In these cases, the criterion of dominant operation was used for classification: the operation that organized the probative reading (recontextualization, montage, or synthesis/manipulation) was prioritized, leaving the second as a complementary feature in the analytical record.

5. Discussion

5.1. Contribution of the Typology (T1–T3) and its Scope

The findings allow specifying the phenomenon of "false visual evidence" as a regime of verisimilitude that does not depend solely on the technical manipulation of the image, but on semiotic and contextual operations that reconfigure its evidentiary status within news discourse (Lecheler & Egelhofer, 2022). In this line, the T1–T3 typology provides an analytical organization consistent with the need —already identified in the field— to distinguish degrees of sophistication and modal richness in visual disinformation, avoiding reducing the problem to "deepfakes" as a totalizing category (Weikmann & Lecheler, 2023).

In particular, the delimitation of T1 as recontextualization (screenshots and "evidence" out of context) dialogues with empirical evidence that has shown that, in disinformation, images often function as "evidence" even if they are not false in themselves, but rather misattributed or reframed (Brennen et al., 2021). This reading reinforces the relevance of treating cheapfakes as an explanatory nucleus of high circulation and persuasive performance, in contrast to approaches that overemphasize the synthetic due to its technical novelty (Gërguri, 2025). At the same time, the coexistence of T2 (montage/recomposition) and T3 (synthesis/deepfakes) suggests that the field requires integrating, under the same lens, the continuity between low-tech "tricks" and algorithmic generation, understanding disinformation as deception practices that articulate intention, message, and expected effects (Chadwick & Stanyer, 2022).

From an analytical point of view, the performance of the typology is supported by a multimodal approach that allows describing "proof" as an assembly of resources (image, text, interface marks, composition), rather than as an isolated attribute of the visual file (Wilson et al., 2023). This decision is coherent with the social semiotics of the image, to the extent that the evidential function is constructed by design choices (framing, salience, vectors, modality) and by its insertion into recognizable genres and formats (G. R. Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). In that direction, the findings nuance the idea that the synthetic is persuasive due to intrinsic "realism": even when T3 appears, its effectiveness depends on its integration into news conventions and pre-existing credibility frameworks (Brennen et al., 2021).

5.2. Evidentiality Cues and the Aesthetic of "Proof"

The discussion of the observed cues suggests that the "visual proof" operates as a popular forensic aesthetic: a grammar of traces (arrows, boxes, zoom, seals, alert typefaces), accompanied by signs of circulation (screenshots, URL bars, counters, app marks) that function as guarantors of authenticity. This logic aligns with research that has shown that, in digital environments, audiences use evaluative shortcuts based on format, presentation, and provenance cues to decide what to believe and what to share (Ross Arguedas et al., 2024). In that framework, interface marks are not "noise": they can become rhetorical resources that simulate traceability ("this comes from X platform") and turn circulation into proof ("if it circulates like this, it must be real").

At the same time, the findings allow situating evidentiality not only in the promise of "recording" (the photograph as a trace), but in emerging forms of algorithmic photorealism that imitate photographic genres without sharing their indexical conditions. This is relevant because plausibility no longer depends solely on fidelity to the real, but on fidelity to visual conventions of the real (Hausken, 2024). In other words, the aesthetic of proof functions as a cultural technology: a set of socially learned visual expectations that can be instrumentalized both by montages (T2) and by synthesis (T3).

5.3. Text-Image Anchoring Patterns and Interpretive Closure

The findings also show that the "visual proof" is rarely offered open to interpretation: it tends to appear with verbal anchors that reduce ambiguity ("look at the evidence," "here is the proof," "leaked screenshot") and orient inferences in a single direction. This dynamic is consistent with what the literature has pointed out about the epistemic power of images: they can increase the feeling of truth and plausibility even when the content is equivocal, precisely because they facilitate quick and under-deliberative inferences (Newman & Schwarz, 2024). Under this logic, the image does not "prove" by itself; proof is produced in the coupling between image and statement that closes meaning.

At this point, the findings complement studies on manipulation detection: even when audiences attend to visual cues, evaluation depends critically on contextual cues and informational framing, suggesting that the problem is not solved solely with perceptual training ("seeing the error"), but with context literacy ("reading the media scene") (Appel & Prietzel, 2022). Moreover, the public circulation of the deepfake risk can induce a paradoxical effect: increase general skepticism and erode trust even in authentic materials, making the terrain of visual evidence in news more unstable (Ternovski et al., 2022).

5.4. Hybrid Cases and Classification Limits

The presence of hybrid cases (e.g., an authentic screenshot recontextualized and then "reinforced" with graphic additions or micro-edits) suggests that the typology must be understood as a dominant operation and not as mutually exclusive categories. This finding is important because it explains how the same object can migrate from T1 to T2 without losing narrative continuity: the proof is "enhanced" to make it more legible and more convincing, without necessarily going through total synthesis. In this context, labeling and accusation of "deepfake" acquire an additional political function: they not only alert to falsehood, but can become a resource to delegitimize authentic material under suspicion, generating strategic uncertainty (Hameleers & Marquart, 2023).

This point connects with the problem of the liar's dividend: the possibility that accused actors reframe truthful evidence as "manufactured" to evade reputational costs. The literature has documented that the mere availability of the idea "this could be fake" can be mobilized to sow doubt and weaken accountability mechanisms (Schiff et al., 2025). In that scenario, the typology not only orders forms of falsification, but also helps describe regimes of doubt: conditions under which visual evidence loses probative power because the ecosystem interprets everything under suspicion.

5.5. Theoretical and Practical Implications

At the theoretical level, the findings reinforce the idea that "visual evidence" in news is sustained by distributed authenticity: it is not a property of the file, but an effect of assembly between interface marks, news genre conventions, and textual anchors that promise traceability. Consequently, visual disinformation can be conceptualized as a dispute over the conditions of legibility of proof: what counts as evidence, what counts as a source, and what counts as a "recording" on platforms.

At the practical level, the findings suggest three fronts for intervention. First, visual literacy oriented to contextual verification: strategies such as reverse search and provenance tracking have shown potential to reduce credulity toward out-of-context visuals, especially when trained as checking habits and not as isolated "technical" skills (Qian et al., 2022). Second, epistemological strengthening of fact-checking: a perspective that describes verification as situated practice—with limits, risks, and decisions under pressure—allows designing more realistic protocols of "proof" and "refutation" in real time (Suomalainen et al., 2025). Third, redesign of routines and socio-technical alliances: verification functions as problem-solving in platformized environments, so its effectiveness depends on how flows, tools, visibility, and collaboration with platforms are organized (Westlund et al., 2024).

These implications should be read considering operational tensions: when verification adopts breaking news logics, it can incorporate epistemological costs (e.g., simplification of nuances and increased errors under speed), which is particularly critical in visual phenomena of high ambiguity (Steensen et al., 2024). In parallel, the rise of labeling strategies poses a dilemma: warnings can help, but their design matters. Recent experimental evidence suggests that labels focused on the process or on potential harm can produce different effects on beliefs and sharing intentions, forcing informed implementation decisions (Wittenberg et al., 2025). Moreover, "AI-generated" labels can induce generalized skepticism even toward true or human-made content, if not precisely explained what the label means and what degree of automation it implies (Altay & Gilardi, 2024). Finally, from a governance perspective, platforms also tend to manage the problem through forms of "reduction" (lowering circulation, deprioritizing, adding friction) that are not always visible to the public, thereby reconfiguring the terrain of evidence by altering what is seen and what is not seen (Gillespie, 2022). In sum, rather than a single solution, a package of coordinated interventions is emerging: contextual literacy, verification protocols, responsible warning design, and moderation transparency.

5.6 Limitations and Future Lines

As in any qualitative study, the findings must be interpreted within the limits of transferability associated with the delimitation of the corpus, the intentional/theoretical sampling, and the variability of formats and platforms. Likewise, multimodal interpretation requires reflexivity: even with coding rules, there is an inevitably inferential component in the reading of anchors and evidence marks. Future research can extend the scope by comparing countries and languages, incorporating longitudinal designs to observe the evolution of the aesthetic of proof, and triangulating with reception (e.g., interviews or experiments) to assess how different publics interpret the same cues. It would also be relevant to integrate a descriptive quantitative component (counts of features per type) without displacing the interpretive core, to improve the communicability of patterns to professional audiences (journalism and fact-checking).

6. Conclusions

This study has characterized the aesthetics of disinformation in news through the multimodal analysis of false visual evidence, showing that the probative function is constructed through the articulation of visual, paratextual, and contextual resources rather than through the isolated technical manipulation of an image or video. In response to the research question and the general objective posed, the analysis has allowed organizing the phenomenon into an operational typology (T1–T3) —recontextualized screenshots, composite montages, and synthetic/manipulated content— and has described the evidentiality cues that sustain the appearance of recording (provenance marks, news urgency, interface/screenshot signals, probative pointing, and documentality), as well as recurrent text-image anchoring patterns that guide reading toward closed conclusions.

In terms of theoretical contribution, the article has provided a conceptual lens to understand "visual proof" as a multimodal assembly of verisimilitude and distributed authenticity, and has offered replicable analytical criteria to identify how evidence is simulated in formats that emulate journalistic conventions. On the practical level, the findings have reinforced the need for verification and visual literacy strategies centered on provenance, context, and multimodal design (and not only on detecting "editing"), in addition to guiding recommendations for professional routines (journalism and fact-checking) and for the design of warnings/labels that consider how format and textual framing condition authenticity reading. These implications remain transferable to the extent that the analysis describes formal and rhetorical mechanisms observable in pieces that circulate as news, without intending to generalize beyond the scope of the corpus considered.

As limitations, the study has depended on a specific delimitation of the corpus and on selection criteria conditioned by the public availability of materials and their traceability; likewise, multimodal analysis involves interpretive decisions that, although systematized through operational categories, require reflexivity and analytical transparency. Based on this, future research can extend the comparison across countries/languages and platforms, incorporate longitudinal designs to observe the evolution of the aesthetic of proof, and triangulate with reception studies to examine how different publics interpret the same cues. It is also pertinent to complement the approach with a descriptive quantitative component that estimates recurrences of features or distributions by type, without displacing the interpretive core that allows understanding how the appearance of evidence is fabricated in the contemporary news ecosystem.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Corpus traceability record (N = 60): typology (T1–T3), metadata, and dominant aesthetic feature

ID	Type/Subtype	Claim/topic (1 line)	Dominant aesthetic feature (1 line)	Environment	Country/scope	Date (obs.)	Source (FC)	Verification/contrast token	Preservation token	Material	Ethical note
ID-T1a-01	T1a	Screenshot of post recontextualized as "confirmation" of public fact	Visible UI + cropped username + added text "confirmed"	X	LatAm	14/02/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T1a01	ARCH_T1a01	img	anonymous user
ID-T1a-02	T1a	Screenshot of comment presented as "proof" of closure/urgent measure	Isolated comment screenshot + selective highlighting/crop + embedded urgency label	FB	MX	9/03/2024	FC1	VERIF_FC1_T1a02	ARCH_T1a02	img	anonymous user
ID-T1a-03	T1a	Screenshot of thread attributed to "internal source" to support unsubstantiated claim	Thread UI + fragmentation by crop + textual anchor "internal source"	X	ES	22/04/2024	FC2	VERIF_FC2_T1a03	ARCH_T1a03	img	anonymous user
ID-T1a-04	T1a	Screenshot of forwarded message used as evidence of health alert	"Forwarded" indicator / chat + apparent timestamp + alarmist uppercase	WA	PE	3/06/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T1a04	ARCH_T1a04	img	sensitive data anonymized
ID-T1a-05	T1a	Screenshot of story recontextualized as "breaking news" about mass event	Story aesthetics + "breaking news" sticker/overlay + crop without context	IG	CO	18/07/2024	FC5	VERIF_FC5_T1a05	ARCH_T1a05	img	anonymous user
ID-T1a-06	T1a	Screenshot of post with cropped name to support accusation against authority	Crop of name/author + partial UI + superimposed accusatory text	FB	CL	1/09/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T1a06	ARCH_T1a06	img	anonymous user
ID-T1a-07	T1a	Screenshot of chat presented as "leak" of institutional decision	Chat screenshot + "filtered"/forwarded marks + crop of participants	TG	ES	11/01/2025	FC1	VERIF_FC1_T1a07	ARCH_T1a07	img	personal data anonymized
ID-T1b-01	T1b	Screenshot of supposed headline with logo and partial date ("Breaking news")	Media logo + partial date/timestamp + "Breaking news" alert-style label	WEB	ES	28/02/2024	FC7	CONT_FC7_T1b01	ARCH_T1b01	img	no personal data
ID-T1b-02	T1b	Screenshot of "panel" attributed to TV channel with urgency ticker	Urgent ticker + imitative lower third + cropped channel logo/bug	FB	LatAm	6/05/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T1b02	ARCH_T1b02	img	no personal data
ID-T1b-03	T1b	Screenshot of news portal attributed to national media (apocryphal headline)	Portal header + headline typography + cropped URL/key elements	X	MX	12/08/2024	FC2	VERIF_FC2_T1b03	ARCH_T1b03	img	no personal data
ID-T1b-04	T1b	Screenshot of "alert" attributed to media: temporal disanchoring ("today")	Temporal label "today/now" + compressed screenshot + attribution to media without traceability	WA	CO	3/10/2024	FC5	VERIF_FC5_T1b04	ARCH_T1b04	img	no personal data
ID-T1b-05	T1b	Screenshot of note attributed to regional media with cropped URL	Note screenshot + cropped URL/source + partial news layout	TG	AR	17/02/2025	FC3	VERIF_FC3_T1b05	ARCH_T1b05	img	no personal data
ID-T1b-06	T1b	Screenshot of "breaking" attributed to newscast with imitative lower third	Lower third + "breaking" + red/yellow palette + imitative logo	FB	PE	9/05/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T1b06	ARCH_T1b06	img	no personal data
ID-T1b-07	T1b	Screenshot of supposed "official" ranking/data attributed to media	Chart/"ranking" in news format + textual "official" seal + partial media mark	WEB	CL	21/09/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T1b07	ARCH_T1b07	img	no personal data
ID-T1c-01	T1c	Supposed statement with letterhead and scanned signature to support state measure	Institutional letterhead + scanned signature + "OFFICIAL/URGENT" seal	WA	ES	15/03/2024	FC8	CONT_FC8_T1c01	ARCH_T1c01	img	sensitive data anonymized
ID-T1c-02	T1c	Screenshot of "official letter" with "OFFICIAL" seal and irregular numbering	"OFFICIAL" seal + numbering/folio + inconsistent document-type typography	TG	CO	27/06/2024	FC5	VERIF_FC5_T1c02	ARCH_T1c02	img	sensitive data anonymized
ID-T1c-03	T1c	Supposed report with institutional logo and "annex" format	Institutional logo + formal header + "annex" structure	FB	MX	8/11/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T1c03	ARCH_T1c03	img	sensitive data anonymized
ID-T1c-04	T1c	Screenshot of letter attributed to ministry with untraceable signature	Formal letter + signature/"seal" without trace + ambiguous date/letterhead	WEB	PE	2/03/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T1c04	ARCH_T1c04	img	sensitive data anonymized

ID-T1c-05	T1c	Supposed "bulletin" with institutional header and doubtful date	Institutional header + doubtful date/mixed formats + administrative tone	X	AR	14/06/2025	FC3	VERIF_FC3_T1c05	ARCH_T1c05	img	sensitive data anonymized
ID-T1c-06	T1c	Screenshot of "resolution" with multiple seals and inconsistent typography	Multiplicity of seals + disparate typography + appearance of official resolution	FB	CL	5/10/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T1c06	ARCH_T1c06	img	sensitive data anonymized
ID-T2a-01	T2a	Apocryphal "URGENT" panel with imitative logo and lower third	Imitative TV panel + "URGENT" ticker + apocryphal logo/bug	FB	LatAm	30/01/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T2a01	ARCH_T2a01	img	no personal data
ID-T2a-02	T2a	Newscast-style panel with red/yellow palette and "CONFIRMED" label	High contrast red/yellow + bold typography + "CONFIRMED" label	X	ES	7/04/2024	FC1	VERIF_FC1_T2a02	ARCH_T2a02	img	no personal data
ID-T2a-03	T2a	Breaking news panel with bold typography and imitative channel mark	"Breaking news" + imitative channel mark + lower third with closed data	IG	MX	2/07/2024	FC2	VERIF_FC2_T2a03	ARCH_T2a03	img	no personal data
ID-T2a-04	T2a	"ALERT" panel with inserted date and TV-style lower bar	TV-style lower bar + inserted date + "ALERT" label	FB	CO	19/09/2024	FC5	VERIF_FC5_T2a04	ARCH_T2a04	img	no personal data
ID-T2a-05	T2a	"Breaking news" panel with apocryphal logo and supposed authority quote	"Breaking news" + attributed quote + apocryphal logo + newscaster-style composition	WA	PE	10/12/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T2a05	ARCH_T2a05	img	no personal data
ID-T2a-06	T2a	News panel with "OFFICIAL" label and supposed institutional source	"OFFICIAL" seal + invoked institutional source + newscaster aesthetics	TG	AR	18/04/2025	FC3	VERIF_FC3_T2a06	ARCH_T2a06	img	no personal data
ID-T2a-07	T2a	Imitative panel with "data" box and false verification seal	"Data" box + false verification seal/icon + mixed typefaces	X	CL	27/08/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T2a07	ARCH_T2a07	img	no personal data
ID-T2b-01	T2b	Scene photomontage: insertion of object/label to support accusation	Element insertion + inconsistent shadows/edges + explanatory label	FB	ES	5/02/2024	FC1	VERIF_FC1_T2b01	ARCH_T2b01	img	faces anonymized
ID-T2b-02	T2b	Photomontage: substitution of signage with embedded "proof" text	Text/signage substitution + non-integrated typography + "proof" mark	IG	MX	21/05/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T2b02	ARCH_T2b02	img	faces anonymized
ID-T2b-03	T2b	Photo montage with label and arrow "demonstrating" supposed detail	Pointing arrow/circle + conclusive label + focused crop	FB	CO	25/08/2024	FC5	VERIF_FC5_T2b03	ARCH_T2b03	img	faces anonymized
ID-T2b-04	T2b	Composite montage with disparate typographies and inconsistent shadows	Visible layers + disparate typographies + inconsistent shadows	X	PE	28/10/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T2b04	ARCH_T2b04	img	faces anonymized
ID-T2b-05	T2b	Montage of public event with insertion of apocryphal institutional logo	Insertion of apocryphal logo + institutional label + "proof" composition	WEB	AR	2/02/2025	FC3	VERIF_FC3_T2b05	ARCH_T2b05	img	faces anonymized
ID-T2b-06	T2b	Image montage with visible crop and embedded misleading subtitle	Crop edges + embedded misleading subtitle + strong textual anchor	TG	CL	6/06/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T2b06	ARCH_T2b06	img	faces anonymized
ID-T2b-07	T2b	"Before/after" montage with labels and probative circles	Before/after comparison + probative circles + conclusive labels	FB	LatAm	12/11/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T2b07	ARCH_T2b07	img	faces anonymized
ID-T2c-01	T2c	Probative collage: three numbered crops + arrows + header "PROOFS"	Collage with numbering + arrows + header "PROOFS" (dossier)	WA	ES	29/03/2024	FC2	VERIF_FC2_T2c01	ARCH_T2c01	img	anonymous user
ID-T2c-02	T2c	Collage: screenshots + photo + "seals" to stabilize causal interpretation	Mixed collage + seals/labels + causal text that fixes reading	FB	MX	11/06/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T2c02	ARCH_T2c02	img	anonymous user
ID-T2c-03	T2c	"Dossier"-type collage with multiple logos and unattributed quotes	Multiple logos + unattributed quotes + probative dossier design	X	CO	7/09/2024	FC5	VERIF_FC5_T2c03	ARCH_T2c03	img	anonymous user
ID-T2c-04	T2c	Collage with boxes and numbering organizing "evidence" of a claim	Boxes + numbering + "file"-type visual hierarchy	WEB	PE	24/01/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T2c04	ARCH_T2c04	img	anonymous user

ID-T2c-05	T2c	Collage of "documents" with letterheads and expert-style highlights	Letterheads + highlight/zoom + expert structure (annexes)	TG	AR	28/05/2025	FC3	VERIF_FC3_T2c05	ARCH_T2c05	img	sensitive data anonymized
ID-T2c-06	T2c	Collage with interface screenshots + "OFFICIAL" label + closed conclusion	Integrated UI screenshots + "OFFICIAL" seal + final textual conclusion	FB	CL	2/09/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T2c06	ARCH_T2c06	img	anonymous user
ID-T3a-01	T3a	Deepfake: face/voice of public figure in "exclusive" statement	Face/voice substitution + sync artifacts + "exclusive" framing	TT	LatAm	19/02/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T3a01	ARCH_T3a01	video	sensitive face (restricted use)
ID-T3a-02	T3a	Deepfake: video with face substitution + overprinted media logo	Face substitution + overprinted media logo + false lower third	FB	ES	14/05/2024	FC1	VERIF_FC1_T3a02	ARCH_T3a02	video	sensitive face (restricted use)
ID-T3a-03	T3a	Deepfake: statement attributed to authority with sync artifacts	Lip mismatch + texture/artifacts + anchoring "said/confirmed"	X	MX	4/08/2024	FC2	VERIF_FC2_T3a03	ARCH_T3a03	video	sensitive face (restricted use)
ID-T3a-04	T3a	Deepfake: political "announcement" with "CONFIRMED" label and low traceability	"CONFIRMED" label + news aesthetics + signs of synthesis	FB	CO	16/10/2024	FC5	VERIF_FC5_T3a04	ARCH_T3a04	video	sensitive face (restricted use)
ID-T3a-05	T3a	Deepfake: piece presented as "leak" with visible editing marks	"Leaked" frame + visible cuts/editing + facial inconsistencies	TT	PE	26/02/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T3a05	ARCH_T3a05	video	sensitive face (restricted use)
ID-T3a-06	T3a	Deepfake: voice substitution with fixed shot and "OFFICIAL" seal	Synthetic voice + fixed shot + "OFFICIAL" seal for simulated authority	TG	AR	30/06/2025	FC3	VERIF_FC3_T3a06	ARCH_T3a06	video	sensitive face (restricted use)
ID-T3a-07	T3a	Deepfake: clip with imitative channel overprint and synthetic audio	Imitative channel bug + synthetic audio + face artifacts	X	CL	19/10/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T3a07	ARCH_T3a07	video	sensitive face (restricted use)
ID-T3b-01	T3b	Cheapfake: cropped clip with added subtitles that change meaning	Selective crop + added subtitles + certainty/confirmation label	YT	ES	4/03/2024	FC1	VERIF_FC1_T3b01	ARCH_T3b01	video	faces anonymized
ID-T3b-02	T3b	Cheapfake: acceleration/crop + "breaking news" label to generate alarm	Altered speed + "breaking news" + high contrast alert type	FB	MX	1/06/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T3b02	ARCH_T3b02	video	faces anonymized
ID-T3b-03	T3b	Cheapfake: insertion of misleading subtitles onto real video	Misleading subtitles + contextual crop + causal textual anchor	TT	CO	28/09/2024	FC5	VERIF_FC5_T3b03	ARCH_T3b03	video	faces anonymized
ID-T3b-04	T3b	Cheapfake: out-of-context clip with apparent timestamp and textual conclusion	Apparent timestamp + out-of-context clip + closed textual conclusion	X	PE	22/12/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T3b04	ARCH_T3b04	video	faces anonymized
ID-T3b-05	T3b	Cheapfake: sequence reediting + on-screen "PROOF" label	Reediting + "PROOF" label + insertion of probative text	FB	AR	20/03/2025	FC3	VERIF_FC3_T3b05	ARCH_T3b05	video	faces anonymized
ID-T3b-06	T3b	Cheapfake: subtitles + media logo montage to stabilize reading	Media logo + subtitles + news aesthetics to fix interpretation	IG	CL	7/07/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T3b06	ARCH_T3b06	video	faces anonymized
ID-T3b-07	T3b	Cheapfake: selective crop + anchoring text "it is confirmed"	Anchoring text "it is confirmed" + selective crop + visual urgency	TT	LatAm	3/11/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T3b07	ARCH_T3b07	video	faces anonymized
ID-T3c-01	T3c	Decontextualized audio over still image presented as "testimony"	Recontextualized audio + still image + "leaked/filtered" label	WA	ES	18/04/2024	FC2	VERIF_FC2_T3c01	ARCH_T3c01	audio+img	voice anonymized
ID-T3c-02	T3c	Audio attributed to authority mounted onto archive video	Attributed audio + archive video + authority attribution text	FB	MX	23/07/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T3c02	ARCH_T3c02	video	voice anonymized
ID-T3c-03	T3c	Audio/image desync + "leaked" label as authenticity frame	Audio/image desync + "leaked" label + evidence aesthetics	X	CO	7/10/2024	FC5	VERIF_FC5_T3c03	ARCH_T3c03	video	voice anonymized
ID-T3c-04	T3c	Cropped audio + interface screenshots to reinforce "proof"	Interface screenshots + cropped audio + visible timestamp/controls	TG	PE	8/01/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T3c04	ARCH_T3c04	video	voice anonymized

ID-T3c-05	T3c	Recontextualized audio with embedded subtitle and "OFFICIAL" seal	Embedded subtitle + "OFFICIAL" seal + closed attribution	FB	AR	4/05/2025	FC3	VERIF_FC3_T3c05	ARCH_T3c05	video	voice anonymized
ID-T3c-06	T3c	Voice montage over newscaster image to simulate statement	Montaged voice + newscaster background + logo/panel for legitimacy	WEB	CL	29/09/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_T3c06	ARCH_T3c06	video	voice anonymized

Table A2. Borderline/hybrid cases (ID-H-01 to ID-H-03): dominant ↔ secondary operation and traceability metadata

ID	Hybrid (dominant ↔ secondary operation)	Claim/topic (1 line)	Environment	Country/scope	Date (obs.)	Source (FC)	Verification/contrast token	Preservation token	Material	Ethical note
ID-H-01	T2 ↔ T1 (montage dominant; screenshot incorporated)	Screenshot with UI integrated into composite plate with labels/seals to support closed inference	FB	LatAm	15/08/2024	FC4	VERIF_FC4_H01	ARCH_H01	img	anonymous user / possible sensitive data anonymized
ID-H-02	T2 ↔ T3 (panel dominant; audiovisual manipulated)	Manipulated clip framed as "breaking news" with logo/tickers to reinforce testimony and urgency	X	ES	11/03/2025	FC1	VERIF_FC1_H02	ARCH_H02	video	anonymous faces / restricted use if public figure
ID-H-03	T1 ↔ T3 (recontextualization dominant; audiovisual editing)	Real video cropped and reinserted with subtitles/apparent timestamp to attribute different event	WA	PE	12/11/2025	FC4	VERIF_FC4_H03	ARCH_H03	video	minimize harm; do not reproduce identifiers