

# The Dark Side of AI-Generated Content: Deepfakes and Consumer Brand Hate

Latifa Mednini <sup>#1</sup>

<sup>#</sup>*Research marketing laboratory, Sfax University*

<sup>1</sup>Latifamednini@yahoo.com

\*Mouna Damak Turki <sup>\*2</sup>

*IHEC Sfax, Sfax University*

<sup>2</sup>damak\_mouna@yahoo.fr

**Abstract**— This work explores the creation of deepfake videos and their effect on consumer brand hate. A qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with twelve consumers was conducted to analyze their reactions to a deepfake video shared on YouTube. The findings reveal that manipulated content can intensify negative emotions such as distrust, skepticism, and resistance toward brands, particularly depending on consumers' prior perceptions and experiences with the brand. The study highlights the significant influence of deepfakes on brand perception, ethical judgments, and trust in digital media, which may ultimately foster or amplify consumer brand hate. From a managerial perspective, the paper provides valuable insights for brand managers and communication professionals by emphasizing the importance of proactive reputation management, media literacy initiatives, and transparent communication strategies to mitigate the risks associated with deepfake content.

**Keywords**—Brand hate, Deepfake videos, Consumer distrust, Qualitative study

## I. INTRODUCTION

Emotions play a central role in motivating human behavior [13]. In the context of marketing, consumers may experience both positive and negative emotions [16]. Negative emotions toward brands received limited academic attention [5; 20]. However, several works have explained the crucial role of emotions in consumer decision-making processes [12]. More recently, brand hate has emerged as an important topic of investigation, especially as consumers increasingly express their dissatisfaction online rather than remaining silent [2]. Referring to an intense negative emotional response that exceeds simple dissatisfaction and may lead consumers to engage in extreme behaviours such as boycotting, avoiding brands, or spreading negative word-of-mouth. For that, consumers increasingly expect companies to offer more than functional benefits, seeking deeper emotional and experiential relationships with brands [8].

The rapid growth of Internet usage and social media platforms has amplified consumer voices and transformed the relationship between consumers and businesses [24]. In reality, the existence of negative emotions such as hate is not the primary issue rather, the challenge for companies lies in ignoring these emotions instead of addressing them effectively [18]. According to the reference [33], hate is a multidimensional emotion composed of anger, disgust, contempt, and fear [30]. The advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) have enabled the creation of highly realistic fake audio and video content. These manipulated media, commonly referred to as deepfakes are produced by digitally altering a person's face or voice to portray actions or statements that never actually occurred [28]. In fact, Deepfakes rely on machine learning techniques and sophisticated algorithms capable of closely imitating authentic recordings [22]. The term “*deepfake*” combines the concepts of “*deep learning*” and “*fake*” [21]. Initially associated with manipulated celebrity videos, deepfakes rapidly expanded to include political figures and other public personalities [6]. These highly realistic but fabricated representations may take the form of videos, images, or audio recordings. In their early stages, deepfakes contained visible imperfections, including unnatural facial movements and

inaccurate lip synchronization, which made them relatively easy to detect. Nevertheless, continuous technological progress has significantly enhanced their realism, creating growing legal and ethical challenges for advertisers [35]. With the widespread adoption of AI technologies, creating fake videos targeting brands has become increasingly accessible. Deepfakes are now widely disseminated across online communication platforms, particularly social media, due to the growing ease of their production and distribution [21]. Existing research has mainly focused on political contexts. For instance, the reference [31] examined how political brand hatred and moral awareness influence voters' willingness to share political deepfake content. Nevertheless, limited research has explored deepfake videos in the context of commercial brands and their potential role in reinforcing consumer brand hate. To address this research gap, the present study aims to understand the influence of deepfake videos on consumer hate toward brands. More specifically, this research seeks to answer the following question: How do deepfake videos reinforce consumer hate toward brands?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, a review of the relevant literature is presented, followed by the research methodology. The paper then discusses the main findings before concluding with the theoretical and managerial implications, as well as recommendations for future research.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### A. Brand hate

Hate is a deeply rooted and universally experienced human emotion, often considered one of the most powerful emotional states [33]. Although individuals may openly express feelings of anger, they rarely admit to experiencing hatred. Instead, they tend to emphasize their rejection of immoral actions rather than acknowledging hostility toward the person responsible. In many situations, individuals suppress or deny hateful emotions due to moral, social, or religious norms that portray hatred as unacceptable (Ben-Ze'ev, 2001). Nevertheless, when social constraints become less restrictive, people may feel more comfortable expressing intense negative emotions such as anger and hate more openly. Drawing on Sternberg's Duplex Theory of Hate, the reference [25] defines brand hate as "*consumers' detachment from a brand and its associations as a result of consumers' intense and deeply held negative emotions such as disgust, anger, contempt, devaluation and diminution*" (p. 432). The reference [33] further provided several important insights into the nature of hate. He argued that hate and love are closely interconnected emotions, as individuals can rapidly shift from one emotion to the other depending on their experiences and the surrounding context. In this sense, feelings of hate may emerge even after a period of admiration or affection toward a person, object, or brand. Moreover, Sternberg emphasized that hate should not simply be understood as the opposite or absence of love. Rather, hate represents a complex and multidimensional emotion that may exist independently or coexist with love, depending on the nature of the relationship and the circumstances involved.

### B. Deepfakes videos

Deepfake technology has emerged as a major area of interest in the field of technology-driven advertising and digital communication. According to the reference [32], online videos may expose users to misleading or manipulated experiences. The term "deepfake" is derived from the combination of "*deep learning*" and "*fake*" [21]. This technology relies on artificial intelligence (AI), deep learning, and machine learning algorithms to merge, replace, or overlay existing images, audio, and videos in order to create synthetic content that closely resembles a real individual [21]. In essence, deepfakes refer to manipulated media generated through advanced AI techniques that present fabricated information in a highly realistic manner [34]. These technologies enable the realistic insertion or replacement of individuals in media content where they were never actually present. As a result, deepfake content can appear highly authentic and may deceive both audiences and institutions by convincingly imitating real-life situations [32; 26].

Deepfake manipulations can be categorized into several common forms. One of the most widespread techniques is face or identity swapping, in which a neural network transfers the facial expressions and

movements of a source individual onto another person's face, creating the illusion that the target person is performing the same actions or speaking the same words. Another technique is facial reenactment, which replicates facial expressions, eye movements, and head gestures from one individual onto another within a video. Lip-syncing or voice swapping is also frequently used; this method modifies the mouth movements of a person in a video to synchronize with a different audio track, making it appear as though the individual is saying words they never actually uttered [28]. In addition, full-body reenactment enables the transfer of body movements and gestures from a source actor to a target individual in the video [10]

### C. Consumer Reactions regarding Deepfake Video Manipulations

Fake content has existed for decades and has long influenced public perception. However, with the rise of the internet and the expansion of social media platforms, misinformation has evolved into more complex and sophisticated forms. A substantial body of research has therefore examined the drivers of fake news dissemination online as well as its broader consequences [31].

One of the potential advantages of deepfake videos in advertising is their ability to overcome language barriers by enabling seamless video translation into multiple languages. Through artificial intelligence, lip movements and facial expressions can be synchronized with translated audio, producing a highly realistic and natural result [21]. This capability allows firms to generate multiple localized versions of a single advertisement from one original recording. For example, a brand ambassador or digital character can deliver tailored messages to different cultural or linguistic audiences [28]. In addition, advertising content can be personalized more effectively to align with individual consumer preferences and marketing objectives, thereby enhancing relevance and engagement.

Nevertheless, prior research has also highlighted the negative implications of deepfake technology. Empirical studies show that deepfakes can generate harmful social effects, including the formation of negative perceptions toward both the manipulated content and the individuals depicted [17]. They have also been associated with a decline in trust toward media and news sources [3; 36].

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research offers a valuable approach for exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups assign to social or human phenomena [11]. Hatred, in particular, is a deeply rooted emotion that is not easily accessible through conscious reflection [9]. Due to the complexity of negative emotions, they are often difficult to capture through structured surveys. Therefore, the use of focus groups was well-suited to the objectives of our study.

### A. Data Collection

For data collection, we conducted an in-person focus group with six participants. A key inclusion criterion was that participants had not previously viewed the video, ensuring unbiased initial reactions. The objective of this study is to understand consumer brand hate and distrust in the age of deepfake videos. For illustrative purposes, Facebook informed *The Washington Post* that a manipulated video of CEO Mark Zuckerberg—appearing to say, “Whoever controls the data controls the future”—would remain on Instagram despite being flagged by fact-checkers as potentially false. Created by artists using footage from a 2017 recording, this deepfake was intended to demonstrate both the persuasive power of synthetic media and the platform's content moderation policies.

Following to the reference [29], the sampling strategy was guided by two main principles: diversification and saturation. First, in line with the reference [27], diversity was ensured across predefined variables to capture a

wide range of attitudes toward the topic. Second, as outlined by the reference [14], data saturation was reached when responses began to repeat and no new themes or insights emerged. This repetition indicated that sufficient depth had been achieved in the analysis. Initially, participants were asked about their perceptions and attitudes after viewing a video, as shown in Appendix 1. Subsequently, they were informed that the video they had seen was a deepfake in order to observe their immediate reactions. The study was conducted through a focus group composed of six individuals who had not previously seen the video.

### B. Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and verbal consent was obtained from all individuals prior to beginning the focus group discussions. Participants were informed about the confidentiality of their data, and anonymity was preserved by assigning pseudonyms to protect their identities.

### C. Data Analysis

Our qualitative data analysis followed a systematic three-phase coding procedure to ensure methodological rigor. We began with open coding, conducting an inductive analysis of the raw textual data to identify initial themes and concepts emerging from participants' responses. These emergent themes often require further theoretical refinement, which guided the transition to axial coding. During this phase, we organized the initial codes into more coherent and conceptually meaningful categories aligned with the research framework. Finally, selective coding was used to integrate and refine these categories, enabling synthesis of the core findings and facilitating comparison across insights.

To enhance reliability, the coding process was carried out independently by two researchers. Inter-coder agreement was then assessed, yielding a consistency rate of 85%, which confirms the robustness and credibility of the thematic analysis. In addition, QDA Miner software was used to support the analysis by providing computational validation through the identification of recurring textual patterns and word frequency distributions (see Appendix 2). The table below presents the main themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis.

Table 1.

CONSUMER RESPONSES BEFORE AND AFTER KNOWING THE VIDEO WAS FAKE

| Time           | Theme                              | Verbatim Example                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Before Knowing | Distrust and Anger                 | <i>I can't believe Zuckerberg would say something like that so openly. It's terrifying to think Facebook has that much control over our data and admits it so shamelessly.</i> |
|                | Perceived Manipulation / Arrogance | <i>This confirms what I already suspected—that they only care about power and control, not about users or privacy.</i>                                                         |

|                      |                                  |                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                      | Call for Boycott / Action        | <i>After hearing this, I don't want to use Facebook anymore. They're clearly abusing our trust and exploiting data for their own gain.</i>       |
|                      | Moral Outrage                    | <i>It's unethical and dangerous for someone in his position to talk about controlling the future through data like it's a business strategy.</i> |
| <b>After Knowing</b> | Surprise and Reflection          | <i>I'm shocked. It felt so real. It really fooled me. I'm now questioning how much of what I see online is even true.</i>                        |
|                      | Brand hate                       | <i>That's manipulative! I was angry at Zuckerberg, but now I'm angry at whoever made this video to spread lies.</i>                              |
|                      | Loss of Trust in Media           | <i>This makes me distrust everything on social media—even legitimate content. It's exhausting to have to fact-check everything.</i>              |
|                      | Concern About Ethical Boundaries | <i>Even though it was made to prove a point, using someone's face like that crosses a line. It's still misleading and harmful.</i>               |

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### A. Before Realizing the Video Was Fake

According to our qualitative findings, participants exhibited diverse reactions to the video featuring Mark Zuckerberg before being informed that it was a deepfake. These responses reflected varying levels of trust and brand perception, and in some cases, early manifestations of consumer brand hate. Some participants initially rejected the video's authenticity, attributing their skepticism to the generally positive perception of Facebook (Meta). One participant stated: *"I can't believe Zuckerberg would say something like that so openly. It's terrifying to think Facebook has that much control over our data and admits it so shamelessly... This is not true, I believe in Meta."* This reaction reflects a degree of brand loyalty that acted as a protective mechanism against negative interpretations. In line with the reference [23], loyal customers play a crucial role in strengthening the customer base and enhancing market share.

In contrast, other participants were more receptive to the video and interpreted it in accordance with pre-existing negative beliefs about the brand. One participant noted: *"This confirms what I already suspected—that they only care about power and control, not about users or privacy."* This statement illustrates prior distrust and skepticism toward the brand, which shaped the interpretation of the deepfake content. Supporting this view, the reference [1] argue that consumers express negative emotions toward brands they dislike, while positive attachment is associated with brand love.

The video also triggered behavioral intentions such as platform avoidance and boycott. One participant expressed: *"After hearing this, I don't want to use Facebook anymore. They're clearly abusing our trust and exploiting data for their own gain."* This shift from negative evaluation to behavioral resistance reflects a key dimension of brand hate. Indeed, prior research suggests that brand hate can lead to strong consumer responses, including complaints, boycott intentions, and retaliatory behaviors [7]. Furthermore, some participants raised ethical concerns regarding data exploitation and power asymmetry. One respondent remarked: *"It's unethical and dangerous for someone in his position to talk about controlling the future through data like it's a business strategy."* Collectively, these findings suggest that deepfake content—regardless of its authenticity—can reinforce or intensify consumer negative emotions, including distrust and brand hate, particularly when it aligns with pre-existing beliefs about the brand.

##### B. After Learning the Video Was Fake

The participants' reactions after learning that the video was fake reveal a complex emotional and cognitive process, offering important insights into how deepfakes can trigger and reshape consumer brand hate.

The first reaction—*"I'm shocked. It felt so real. It really fooled me. I'm now questioning how much of what I see online is even true."*—reflects surprise and introspection. This response illustrates a disruption in trust toward visual media and highlights the perceptual uncertainty created by highly realistic deepfake content. The participant experiences cognitive dissonance, struggling to reconcile their initial emotional response with the revelation that the content was fabricated. Consequently, this leads to a broader questioning of the reliability of online information, suggesting a potential erosion of trust in digital communication channels.

The second response—*"That's manipulative! I was angry at Zuckerberg, but now I'm angry at whoever made this video to spread lies."*—reveals a clear redirection of anger. Initially, negative emotions were directed toward the brand figure (Zuckerberg), but after learning the truth, the anger shifts toward the creators of the manipulated content. This shift highlights consumers' need to assign responsibility and reflects concerns about deceptive practices, whether originating from brands or external actors. The participant perceives the video creation as a deliberate act of manipulation, which intensifies feelings of betrayal. As noted by the reference [4], deepfakes are inherently deceptive, and as the technology evolves, they may become increasingly indistinguishable from authentic content.

The third reaction—*“This makes me distrust everything on social media—even legitimate content. It’s exhausting to have to fact-check everything.”*—expresses fatigue and generalized distrust. Here, the participant extends skepticism beyond the specific video to social media content more broadly. The emotional burden of constant verification leads to cognitive overload and a diminished perception of reliability across digital platforms. This reaction underscores the long-term reputational risks that deepfake content poses not only to brands but also to digital ecosystems as a whole.

Finally, the fourth response—*“Even though it was made to prove a point, using someone’s face like that crosses a line. It’s still misleading and harmful.”*—reflects ethical concern and moral judgment. While the participant recognizes the intended purpose of the video, they nonetheless condemn the method, emphasizing a violation of ethical boundaries. This reaction suggests that deepfakes can trigger moral backlash, reinforcing negative attitudes not only toward brands but also toward actors who produce or legitimize such content. As highlighted in the literature, the realistic manipulation of expressive behavior raises significant ethical concerns, particularly regarding authenticity, as facial expressions are typically interpreted as genuine indicators of internal emotional states [15].

## V. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This paper has several theoretical implications for the literature on consumer–brand relationships. First, our findings contribute to the evolving literature on brand hate by demonstrating that consumer hatred can be triggered, intensified, or redirected through deepfake content, even when the brand is not the direct source of the manipulation. This extends existing theories by introducing synthetic media as a novel antecedent of brand hate, alongside established drivers such as service failures, unethical corporate behavior, and perceived betrayal. Second, this study highlights the dual role of consumer trust in shaping emotional responses. Trust operates both as a protective mechanism—where strong brand loyalty buffers against negative interpretations—and as an amplifier, where pre-existing distrust intensifies negative emotions and reinforces brand hate when ambiguous or manipulated content is encountered. Third, this paper introduces the concept of perceptual uncertainty as a key cognitive outcome of exposure to deepfake content. This contribution advances marketing theory by showing how hyper-realistic synthetic media disrupts epistemic trust in digital communication environments. It highlights a growing challenge for consumers who increasingly struggle to distinguish between authentic and fabricated content, an issue that remains underexplored in consumer research.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of ethical judgment in shaping consumer responses to digital content. Moral evaluations of media manipulation significantly influence emotional reactions, suggesting that consumer brand relationships are not only driven by message content, but also by the perceived legitimacy of how that content is produced. This emphasizes the relevance of integrating moral psychology and consumer ethics into digital marketing frameworks, particularly in contexts where AI-generated or manipulated media is involved.

## VI. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This paper have several practical implications. First, this paper allow brands that must prepare for reputational risks caused by deepfakes, even when not responsible for their creation. This calls for proactive crisis communication strategies, including real-time content verification tools and transparent public responses to mitigate backlash and redirect consumer anger appropriately. Second, platforms like Meta should invest in digital literacy education for users, helping them develop critical media consumption skills. By acknowledging the rise of synthetic media, companies can build credibility and position themselves as protectors of truth, potentially regaining lost trust. Third, the finding of our research noticed that brand loyalty can act as a psychological shield suggests that maintaining consistent, positive brand equity is vital. Trust-building efforts—such as privacy protection, ethical leadership, and transparency—can inoculate brands against the impacts of misleading content. Finally, marketers and campaign designers, especially in cause-related marketing or advocacy, must recognize the ethical limits of using deepfakes—even for awareness. The

backlash shows that manipulated realism may undermine the message and cause unintended ethical alienation of the audience.

## VII. LIMITS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Like all studies, this paper has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research is based on a qualitative approach, which, while providing rich and in-depth insights, limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could therefore adopt a quantitative design to test and validate the proposed relationships on a larger and more diverse sample. Second, cultural factors were not explicitly examined in this study. Dimensions such as individualism versus collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance may significantly shape how consumers perceive and react to deepfake content. Comparative cross-cultural studies could therefore provide valuable insights into differences in skepticism, ethical sensitivity, and tolerance toward synthetic media across contexts. Third, this study does not capture the long-term effects of repeated exposure to deepfakes. Future longitudinal research could investigate how sustained exposure to manipulated media influences consumer trust over time, not only toward specific brands but also toward broader digital ecosystems. Such studies would help determine whether the erosion of trust is temporary, adaptive, or cumulative in nature.

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## Appendix 1.

## PARTICIPANTS PROFILE

| Participants  | Age | Gender | Profession |
|---------------|-----|--------|------------|
| Participant 1 | 24  | Female | Student    |
| Participant 2 | 45  | Male   | Employee   |
| Participant 3 | 32  | Female | Director   |
| Participant 4 | 52  | Male   | Employee   |
| Participant 5 | 41  | Female | Director   |

|               |    |        |                   |
|---------------|----|--------|-------------------|
| Participant 6 | 25 | Male   | Student           |
| Participant 7 | 47 | Female | Responsible of HR |
| Participant 8 | 29 | Male   | Employee          |

## Appendix 2.

## CODING THEMES

The screenshot displays a document editor interface with a transcript of a video and its coding themes. The document is titled "DOCUMENT" and contains the following text:

"I honestly felt betrayed hearing those words come from Zuckerberg. It confirmed every suspicion I had about how Facebook handles our data. It's like they've stopped even trying to hide their abuse of power."

"This video just reinforces how much control they really have. I felt an overwhelming sense of anger—he spoke like someone who thinks he's untouchable, like users don't matter anymore."

"When I heard him say that, I felt a rush of distrust. If this is what their CEO truly believes, then I want nothing to do with that company. They clearly don't have our best interests at heart."

"It's terrifying that someone who runs one of the biggest platforms in the world would talk about data like that. It made me angry and disappointed—how could we let things get to this point?"

"He sounded so cold and calculating, like people were nothing more than data points to manipulate. It was unsettling, and I immediately felt disgusted by the arrogance in his tone."

"The way he spoke about controlling the future using data was extremely disturbing. It felt like he saw himself as a puppet master. That level of arrogance is horrifying."

"This only validates what many of us already think—that Facebook is more concerned about dominating markets and influencing people than protecting our privacy or well-being."

"I listened to the whole clip in disbelief. It was like a dystopian speech. I couldn't believe someone would admit to that kind of manipulation so casually."

"As soon as I heard that, I said to myself, 'I'm done.' I logged into my account just to delete it. If this is what they represent, then I can't be part of it anymore."

"That video made me so uncomfortable that I talked to my friends about quitting Facebook altogether. We can't keep giving our time and data to companies like this."

"After watching that, I felt a responsibility to act. If we just sit by and keep using Facebook, we're enabling this kind of abuse. I don't want to be complicit."

"I've tolerated a lot from social media, but this was the last straw. It's time we boycott these platforms until they're held accountable for what they do with our data."

"There's something deeply wrong with a person in that position talking about controlling people through data as if it's just business. It felt unethical and downright scary."

"It wasn't just disturbing—it was morally offensive. You can't claim to be leading a global community and then talk about people like they're numbers to be managed."

The coding themes are listed on the right side of the document:

- Perceived Arrogance
- Perceived Arrogance
- Perceived Arrogance
- Loss of Trust in Concern About Eth
- Call for Boycott
- Concern About Eth
- Loss of Trust in Me
- Distress and Anger

The left sidebar shows the document structure with sections like "Before Knowing the Video Was", "Moral Outrage", "Distrust and Anger", "Perceived Arrogance or Ha", "Call for Boycott", "After Being Told the Video Was", "Surprise and Reflection", "Brand hate", "Loss of Trust in Media or Pl", and "Concern About Ethical Boun".