



**IMPACT OF AWARENESS OF DEEPPAKE USAGE IN MARKETING CAMPAIGNS ON CONSUMER PERCEIVED BRAND AUTHENTICITY**

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**Abstract**

*In today's digitally driven marketing landscape, the emergence of deepfake technology has introduced both groundbreaking innovation and complex ethical dilemmas. While brands explore hyper-personalized content using AI-generated videos, concerns around consumer trust, authenticity, and transparency persist. This study investigates the impact of deepfake marketing on consumer perception, focusing on three key objectives: the relationship between consumer knowledge of deepfakes and perceived brand transparency, the influence of deepfake recognition ability on brand trust, and the effect of exposure frequency on message believability. Adopting a positivist research philosophy with a deductive approach, the study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, sampling 250 randomly selected students from Timeon Kairos Polytechnic, Lagos State. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including regression analysis, were used to analyze the data. Findings reveal that consumer knowledge and deepfake recognition ability significantly influence perceptions of brand transparency and trust, respectively. Likewise, exposure frequency positively affects brand message believability. These results underscore the need for ethical AI use and enhanced digital literacy to foster consumer confidence in technologically advanced marketing. The study concludes with strategic recommendations for marketers and calls for greater alignment with emerging digital transparency standards.*

**Keywords:** Deepfake Marketing, Consumer Trust, Brand Transparency, Digital Literacy, AI in Advertising

**INTRODUCTION**

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into marketing has led to the emergence of sophisticated content creation tools such as deepfake technology. Deepfakes utilize AI algorithms—particularly Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs)—to produce highly realistic synthetic videos, images, or audio that can convincingly imitate real individuals or scenarios (Masood et al., 2023). In marketing, this technology has opened new avenues for content personalization, brand storytelling, and influencer engagement, often allowing brands to simulate celebrity endorsements or create immersive campaigns without the physical presence of a celebrity. However, while this innovation offers creative flexibility, it also blurs the line between authenticity and artificiality, raising significant concerns about deception, trust, and brand transparency among consumers.

As awareness of deepfake technology grows among the public, consumer attitudes toward brands employing such content are beginning to shift. An informed consumer may view deepfake-based campaigns with skepticism, especially when the technology is used without clear disclosure. According to Westerlund (2019), transparency is becoming a core expectation from consumers, and brands perceived to be manipulating media or misleading audiences—intentionally or not—risk damaging their reputations. The knowledge level of consumers regarding deepfakes could therefore be a critical factor influencing how they judge a brand’s honesty, authenticity, and overall image in the marketplace. Furthermore, the ability of consumers to recognize deepfake content plays a pivotal role in shaping brand trust. Consumers who can identify synthetic content may become more cautious and question the integrity of the messages being conveyed. On the other hand, those who cannot detect such content may either accept the messaging at face value or experience a sense of betrayal if they later discover the content was fabricated (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). This evolving ability to detect manipulated media, and the emotional response it triggers, makes it essential to explore how recognition of deepfake content directly affects consumer trust in marketing communications.

Finally, repeated exposure to deepfake marketing may influence how consumers perceive the believability of brand messages. Some studies suggest that frequent exposure to synthetic content could normalize its use, reducing consumer resistance (Huang & Maracic, 2024). However, excessive use without clear brand accountability may instead erode consumer confidence, leading to doubts about the sincerity of brand communications. Given this dual possibility, understanding the frequency and context of exposure becomes crucial for brands looking to navigate ethical boundaries while leveraging AI-driven creativity. The following objectives were achieved:

- i. examine the relationship between consumers’ knowledge level of deepfake technology and their perception of brand transparency.
- ii. investigate how consumers’ ability to recognize deepfake content influences their trust toward the brand.
- iii. assess the effect of consumers’ exposure frequency to deepfake marketing content on their perception of brand message believability.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Definition of Deepfake Technology**

Deepfake technology refers to a form of synthetic media generated using artificial intelligence (AI), specifically through deep learning models such as Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) (Mohammed, 2024). GANs consist of two neural networks—generator and discriminator—that compete to produce increasingly realistic images, audio, or video content (Goodfellow et al., 2020). The term "deepfake" is a combination of "deep learning" and "fake," and was first popularized in 2017 through online forums where users shared AI-manipulated videos (Lorenzo, 2022). Over time, deepfake technology has evolved from amateur-level face-swapping to highly convincing audiovisual simulations that can replicate facial expressions, voice, and gestures with near-human precision. This advancement has been driven by the growing availability of open-source AI tools and the exponential increase in computing power, making the creation of deepfakes more accessible than ever (Obioha Val et al., 2025).

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Initially developed for entertainment and parody purposes, deepfakes have found applications across various fields including film, education, security, politics, and more recently, marketing and advertising. In marketing, deepfakes are used to create personalized customer experiences, simulate celebrity endorsements, and enable virtual brand ambassadors. For instance, a Nigerian advertising firm could hypothetically use deepfake technology to simulate a commercial featuring Afrobeats star Burna Boy promoting a brand, without requiring his physical presence. This not only reduces production costs but also allows for content localization across different markets. However, the use of such technology in commercial communication introduces ethical challenges, especially around consent, disclosure, and brand transparency (Cheng, Han & Nasirov, 2024). In Nigeria, public discourse around manipulated political videos and AI-generated celebrity endorsements has sparked debates about the implications of deepfake content on public trust and media integrity. What sets deepfakes apart from traditional digital manipulation techniques such as Photoshop or CGI (computer-generated imagery) is the level of realism and automation achieved through AI. While conventional methods rely heavily on manual editing, deepfakes use data-driven training models to produce lifelike media with minimal human intervention. This makes them harder to detect and potentially more deceptive (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). Deepfakes can simulate realistic voice tones, facial expressions, and even cultural nuances, making them highly effective in influencing audience perception. In the Nigerian context, this level of manipulation can pose risks during election seasons or in influencer-driven advertising, where consumer trust is tied closely to authenticity. Therefore, understanding the origin, usage, and unique characteristics of deepfakes is essential for evaluating their impact on marketing ethics and consumer perception.

### **Deepfake Technology in Marketing Communication**

Deepfake technology is increasingly being integrated into marketing communication strategies, offering brands new ways to engage with consumers through immersive, creative, and personalized content (Sardana et al., 2024). One of the most prominent use cases is celebrity endorsements, where AI-generated videos simulate real-life celebrities endorsing a product without their physical involvement. This technique reduces production costs and simplifies scheduling complexities while maintaining high engagement. For example, a Nigerian beverage company could theoretically deploy a deepfake version of Wizkid to launch a campaign across multiple languages and platforms simultaneously. Additionally, deepfakes are used in brand storytelling, where fictional or historical characters are brought to life to narrate compelling narratives that resonate with target audiences. Hyper-personalized campaigns, another key application, allow brands to use customer data to generate unique video messages tailored to individual preferences, significantly increasing relevance and impact (Bozkurt, Uğursoy & Meral, 2025).

Despite these innovative applications, the use of deepfakes in marketing raises significant ethical and legal concerns. A major ethical dilemma lies in the lack of transparency, as many consumers are unaware that the contents they are viewing is artificially generated. This could be seen as a form of manipulation, where brands exploit emotional responses without full disclosure (Freeman et al., 2022). Moreover, using deepfakes to imitate real individuals—especially public figures—without consent breaches intellectual property rights and privacy laws. In Nigeria, while legal frameworks are still evolving, the unauthorized use of a celebrity's likeness could trigger public backlash or legal action under the Nigerian Copyright Act or privacy provisions in the Cybercrime

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Act. Brands that fail to disclose the use of synthetic media risk undermining consumer trust and damaging long-term relationships, especially in markets that value authenticity and ethical practices.

Public perception of deepfakes in marketing is mixed, reflecting both admiration for technological innovation and concern over potential deception. On the positive side, many consumers appreciate the creativity, entertainment value, and novelty that deepfake campaigns can bring. Such technology has the potential to democratize content creation and enhance digital storytelling in Nigeria's fast-evolving marketing industry. However, negative perceptions are equally strong, particularly when consumers feel misled or manipulated. Studies have shown that undisclosed deepfake use can erode brand trust and raise skepticism about the brand's intentions (O'Hara, 2022). In Nigeria, where word-of-mouth and trust are critical to consumer behavior, such controversies could quickly go viral on social media, amplifying reputational damage. Therefore, while deepfakes hold substantial potential for marketing, their use must be carefully balanced with transparency, ethical standards, and legal compliance to maintain public confidence and brand integrity.

### **Consumer Awareness and Knowledge of Deepfake Technology**

The rise of deepfake technology has sparked growing interest in how consumers perceive and understand its use, especially in marketing communication. However, consumer knowledge of deepfakes tends to vary significantly, ranging from basic awareness to deeper technical understanding. Awareness implies that consumers recognize the existence of deepfakes or AI-manipulated content, while understanding reflects the ability to identify, analyze, and critique such media (Gregory, 2024). In Nigeria, exposure to global digital trends through social media platforms like X, Instagram, and TikTok has contributed to increasing awareness of deepfakes, especially among urban youth. However, many still lack the digital literacy needed to detect or comprehend the technology behind such content, leaving them vulnerable to misinformation or manipulation. The gap between awareness and understanding points to the need for improved media literacy and digital education to help consumers critically engage with evolving AI technologies.

Consumer knowledge of deepfake technology plays a pivotal role in shaping their perception of brand authenticity and trust. Research indicates that consumers who are more technologically savvy or informed about AI tend to be more skeptical of hyper-realistic media, especially when it is not transparently disclosed (Huang & Maracic, 2024). This skepticism can lead to reduced trust in brands perceived to be manipulative or deceptive. Conversely, transparency in disclosing the use of deepfake content can serve as a powerful trust-building tool. For example, a Nigerian fintech brand that clearly states it used AI to recreate the likeness of a popular figure for a campaign might be perceived as more honest and innovative than a brand that hides this fact. In essence, informed consumers value transparency, and their knowledge can either reinforce or diminish brand credibility depending on how the deepfake technology is employed.

Several empirical studies have examined consumer responses to disclosed versus undisclosed use of deepfakes in marketing. For instance, research by Floridi et al. (2018) found that when consumers were informed about the artificial nature of the content, they were more likely to evaluate the brand as ethical and trustworthy. On the other hand, undisclosed use led to feelings of betrayal, particularly when consumers later discovered the deception. This finding aligns with

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trends observed in Nigeria, where social media users are quick to call out perceived dishonesty or misrepresentation in advertisements, often triggering viral criticism. As such, brands must navigate the balance between innovation and integrity, ensuring that their use of deepfake technology does not backfire due to a lack of consumer trust or awareness. Promoting digital literacy while embedding transparency into marketing strategies is essential to mitigate reputational risks and foster lasting consumer relationships.

### **Deepfake Recognition and Consumer Trust**

The ability to detect deepfake content is a critical factor influencing how consumers trust brands that use AI-generated media. Consumers' cognitive ability to recognize deepfakes can vary based on factors such as age, digital skills, and prior exposure to AI technologies. Younger, tech-savvy individuals who are more familiar with digital media are generally better equipped to identify manipulated content (Combes, 2021). In contrast, older consumers or those with limited exposure to digital tools may struggle to distinguish deepfakes from authentic content. In Nigeria, where internet usage has surged, particularly among young urban populations, exposure to social media platforms that often showcase deepfake videos has led to greater awareness and ability to detect such content. However, digital literacy campaigns are still needed to bridge the gap for less tech-savvy groups, especially in rural areas, to mitigate misinformation and manipulation risks.

The recognition—or failure to recognize—deepfakes significantly impacts consumer trust and brand credibility. When deepfakes are correctly identified as artificial, they can cause skepticism, reducing perceived brand integrity, especially if the brand does not disclose the use of synthetic media. This loss of trust can be immediate, as consumers may feel deceived or manipulated by the brand's attempt to mislead them (Di Domenico & Ding, 2023). Conversely, if a deepfake is misidentified as real, it can create a false sense of credibility for the brand, but this effect is typically short-lived. Once consumers realize the content was fabricated, their trust in the brand may be irrevocably damaged, as they feel their judgment was misled. The implications of such misdetection or deception can extend beyond the immediate campaign, affecting the long-term relationship between the consumer and the brand. In the Nigerian market, where trust in brands is often linked to transparency and social responsibility, the risk of consumer backlash is high when deepfakes are not handled with care.

Theories of trust in digital communication, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), offer useful frameworks for understanding how consumers evaluate AI-generated content. TAM suggests that trust in technology influences user acceptance, and this can extend to AI-generated media. If consumers trust the technology behind deepfakes, they may be more accepting of its use in marketing, provided they are properly informed (Davis, 1989). The ELM, on the other hand, posits that the central route to persuasion (i.e., careful scrutiny of information) leads to stronger and more lasting trust compared to the peripheral route (i.e., superficial exposure to information) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In the context of deepfakes, these theories suggest that consumer trust is not only shaped by their ability to recognize deepfake technology but also by their attitudes toward digital innovation. Brands that educate and transparently disclose their use of deepfake technology are more likely to build sustained trust and credibility over time, especially in markets like Nigeria, where consumer perception of technological ethics is evolving rapidly.

### **Exposure Frequency and Brand Message Believability**

The frequency with which consumers are exposed to deepfake content plays a pivotal role in shaping the believability of brand messages. The mere-exposure effect, a psychological phenomenon where repeated exposure to a stimulus increases familiarity and likability, is particularly relevant in the context of deepfake technology in marketing. When consumers repeatedly encounter deepfake-generated advertisements or celebrity endorsements, they may begin to accept the content as authentic, primarily due to the increasing familiarity with the message (Arachchi, Samarasinghe & Wickramasinghe, 2025). However, as exposure frequency increases, there is a risk of consumer desensitization, where the novelty and initial appeal of the deepfake content diminish. In Nigeria, where digital advertising is growing rapidly, the continuous exposure to AI-manipulated media may lead consumers to become increasingly indifferent or skeptical over time, especially if the content lacks originality or does not align with their expectations of authenticity. Thus, while frequent exposure may initially bolster believability, it can have the opposite effect if consumers begin to perceive the content as overly repetitive or deceptive.

Exposure frequency can also influence the credibility of brand messages, with the potential for both reinforcement and diminishment of believability. Persuasion theories, particularly the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), explain that repeated exposure can lead to a stronger message impact if consumers are motivated and able to process the content thoroughly. However, if the message is perceived as manipulative or misleading, as may be the case with deepfake content, repeated exposure can lead to negative effects, such as increased skepticism or brand fatigue (Iacobucci et al., 2021). In a digital marketing environment, consumers may initially be intrigued by the novelty of deepfakes but may become suspicious or disengage if they feel that the brand is excessively leveraging AI-generated content without offering meaningful or authentic messaging. For example, Nigerian consumers, known for their strong value placed on authenticity, may begin to lose trust in a brand if they encounter repetitive or poorly executed deepfake content.

Empirical studies on the impact of repeated exposure to deepfake content offer valuable insights into consumer behavior. Research has found that while initial exposure to deepfake videos may increase message retention and engagement, the effects on trust and credibility become more complex with increased exposure. A study by Westerlund (2019) showed that consumers who frequently encounter deepfake ads become less likely to trust the brand due to perceived manipulation. In contrast, studies have also shown that if deepfakes are used creatively and disclosed transparently, repeated exposure can enhance message retention and consumer engagement without harming brand credibility (Salam et al., 2024). These findings suggest that the key to maintaining message believability lies in the balance of frequency and transparency. In Nigeria, where trust in advertising is often shaped by cultural values, a careful approach to how deepfake content is used—along with ensuring that consumers are informed about its synthetic nature—will likely determine whether the exposure leads to positive or negative outcomes for brand trust and consumer engagement.

### **Brand Authenticity and Consumer Perception**

Brand authenticity is a key element in shaping consumer perceptions and trust, particularly in an age where digital manipulation and AI-generated content are becoming more prevalent. At its core, brand authenticity refers to the genuineness of a brand's communication, values, and identity in

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relation to consumer expectations (Parris & Guzmán, 2023). Several dimensions define authenticity, including sincerity, originality, transparency, and heritage. Sincerity relates to the brand's perceived honesty and ethical conduct, while originality emphasizes uniqueness and differentiation in the marketplace. Transparency refers to a brand's openness, particularly regarding its processes and product sourcing, while heritage signifies the brand's historical roots and its commitment to preserving tradition. In the context of deepfakes, if a brand uses AI-generated content in a way that feels manipulative or deceptive, it risks undermining these dimensions of authenticity, thus potentially eroding consumer trust and engagement. In Nigeria, where authenticity and trust are highly valued, brands must carefully consider how deepfake technology aligns with these key dimensions to avoid backlash from consumers who are sensitive to perceived inauthenticity.

The role of technology in shaping brand authenticity has grown significantly as digital tools provide new ways for brands to innovate and engage with consumers. Technological advancements, such as social media platforms and interactive experiences, have allowed brands to craft more personalized and immersive narratives that resonate with consumers' values and preferences (Khanal, 2024). Innovation, when used transparently and responsibly, can strengthen a brand's identity by positioning it as forward-thinking and in tune with consumer needs. However, when technology, like deepfake content, is used excessively or without clear communication, it risks making a brand appear inauthentic. The line between innovation and manipulation can be thin, especially in markets like Nigeria, where consumers are increasingly exposed to both global marketing trends and a growing demand for transparency. If consumers feel a brand's technological innovations are being used to deceive or mislead, they may question the brand's authenticity and loyalty to its original values.

The comparison between deepfakes and traditional media in building brand authenticity offers important insights into how consumer preferences are evolving. Traditional media, such as print advertisements or television commercials, are often perceived as more credible and authentic because they are associated with established production processes and greater oversight (Tsoy, Tirasawasdichai & Kurpayanidi, 2021). However, deepfakes and other digital tools allow for a more dynamic and creative form of engagement, offering the possibility for more personalized and tailored messages. Research has shown that while some consumers may find the innovative use of deepfakes exciting, others view such content with skepticism, especially if they feel manipulated or misled (Whittaker, Letheren & Mulcahy, 2021). In markets like Nigeria, where trust is integral to consumer behavior, deepfakes may present a double-edged sword. On one hand, they provide brands with the opportunity to engage consumers in new and interactive ways; on the other hand, they may cause consumers to question the authenticity of the brand's message if it is not presented transparently. Ultimately, brands must balance innovation with authenticity to ensure they do not compromise their credibility in the eyes of their audience.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Media Richness Theory**

Media Richness Theory (MRT), proposed by Daft and Lengel (1986), suggests that communication media differ in their ability to convey rich information based on factors like immediacy of feedback, the number of cues and channels, and the language variety they use. In the context of deepfake technology, MRT can be used to understand how consumers perceive

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deepfake content in comparison to traditional media. Deepfake videos, with their high realism and multimedia integration, are rich in cues and can provide immediate feedback through interactive elements, thus offering a more engaging experience than text-based or static visual content. However, while deepfakes offer an enhanced level of media richness, their authenticity can be questioned, especially when consumers are not informed about their artificial nature. In marketing, the use of deepfake technology might create an illusion of direct and authentic communication, but without transparency, it risks undermining trust and credibility, which are critical for consumer engagement.

### **Signaling Theory**

Signaling Theory, as articulated by Spence (1973), posits that individuals or organizations send signals to convey information about their quality, intentions, or status. In the case of deepfake technology, brands using deepfake content send a signal about their willingness to innovate and engage with consumers in new, personalized ways. However, these signals can be misinterpreted or viewed as deceptive, depending on the transparency of the brand's intentions. For example, if a brand uses deepfakes without clearly disclosing their artificial nature, consumers might perceive the brand as dishonest, questioning the authenticity of the message and the brand's overall integrity. The effectiveness of these signals, therefore, relies heavily on the consumer's ability to decode them correctly, which can be influenced by their level of digital literacy and prior exposure to deepfake content. In Nigeria, where consumers are becoming increasingly tech-savvy, the signaling power of deepfakes could be significant, but only if used in a way that maintains consumer trust and transparency.

### **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**

Perceived ease of use and usefulness are the two main factors which determine users to accept and use new technologies according to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989). Within deepfake technology research the Technology Acceptance Model serves as a framework to analyze consumer evaluation factors for deepfake media acceptance or avoidance in marketing practice. Consumers who find deepfake advertisements to be easily interactable and valuable or entertaining will accept the technology more readily. People who experience deepfakes as untrustworthy or obscure tend to shun these types of digital content. External elements that affect these perceptions include media literacy and transparency according to the Technology Acceptance Model. Educating Nigerian consumers about deepfake technology through detailed explanations of its functionalities and boundaries proves crucial for shaping their responses to AI-led marketing content across the digital spectrum.

### **Gaps in Existing Literature and Research Justification**

There is a noticeable gap in the existing literature regarding integrated research on the awareness of deepfakes and their use in marketing, particularly from a consumer-centered perspective. While much has been written about deepfake technology's development and applications in various fields, there is limited exploration of how consumers' awareness of deepfakes impacts their perceptions of marketing content and brand authenticity. Most studies have focused on either the technological aspects or the ethical concerns without linking them to consumer behavior in marketing contexts. Additionally, there is a pressing need for research that directly addresses consumer awareness and their attitudes toward brands that use deepfakes, as understanding this relationship is crucial for businesses to navigate consumer trust. Furthermore, as ethical standards

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and calls for digital transparency continue to gain prominence, especially in light of growing concerns about digital manipulation, the need for research that aligns with these movements becomes more critical. Examining deepfakes in the context of these evolving ethical standards will provide valuable insights into how brands can use technology responsibly while maintaining consumer trust and loyalty.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this study was designed to systematically explore the impact of awareness of deepfake usage in marketing campaigns on consumer-perceived brand authenticity among students at Timeon Kairos Polytechnic. The research was grounded in a positivist philosophy, which emphasizes objectivity and the use of measurable data to establish generalizable findings (Creswell, 2014). A deductive approach was employed, testing existing theories about consumer behavior and technology adoption, which is appropriate given the aim to examine established relationships between deepfake awareness and brand perceptions. The research strategy was quantitative, utilizing a survey method to collect numerical data that can be statistically analyzed (Saunders et al., 2019). A cross-sectional time horizon was chosen to capture data at a specific point in time, allowing for an analysis of current consumer attitudes towards deepfake marketing (Bryman, 2016). The population for the study consists of 1,500 students from various departments at Timeon Kairos Polytechnic, with a sample size of 250 students selected using random sampling to ensure a representative sample. Data was collected via an online survey, ensuring ease of access and broad participation among students. For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistics are employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' perceptions and to test hypotheses regarding the relationships between variables (Pallant, 2020). This methodology is robust in addressing the research objectives and allows for precise, statistically validated insights into the study's focus on deepfake technology and brand authenticity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1**

<b>Demographic Characteristic</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	55%
	Female	45%
<b>Age Range</b>	18-24 years	60%
	25-30 years	30%
	31 years and above	10%
<b>Department</b>	Business Administration	40%
	Computer Science	25%
	Social Sciences	20%
	Engineering	10%
	Other (e.g., Arts, Law)	5%
<b>Level of Study</b>	Undergraduate	80%
	Diploma	20%
<b>Previous Exposure to Deepfakes</b>	Yes	65%
	No	35%
<b>Awareness of Deepfake Technology</b>	High Awareness	45%

	Moderate Awareness	35%
	Low Awareness	20%
<b>Frequency of Online Media Use</b>	Daily	70%
	2-3 times a week	20%
	Rarely	10%
<b>Familiarity with Marketing Campaigns</b>	Very Familiar	50%
	Somewhat Familiar	40%
	Not Familiar	10%

**Source: Researcher’s Survey, 2025**

The demographic results show a diverse but predominantly young and tech-savvy sample, with 60% of respondents aged 18-24 years. The majority of respondents are undergraduates (80%), indicating a student-driven perspective on the research topic. This is significant as it reflects the increasing importance of digital literacy among younger individuals, particularly in relation to emerging technologies like deepfakes. In terms of gender, a slight majority of respondents are male (55%), which could have implications for analyzing any gender-related differences in perception or trust regarding deepfakes in marketing. A majority of participants (65%) have been exposed to deepfake content, which is crucial for understanding their awareness and attitudes towards its use in marketing campaigns. Interestingly, 45% of respondents reported high awareness of deepfake technology, while 35% had moderate awareness, indicating a solid baseline of understanding among the sample, which is necessary to explore their perceptions of brand authenticity. Additionally, 70% of respondents use online media daily, a high engagement level that could make them more receptive to digital content, including deepfake-based marketing. Most respondents (50%) are very familiar with marketing campaigns, which suggests that they have enough context to evaluate the ethical implications of deepfake usage in advertising. Overall, these demographic trends imply that the sample is well-suited for examining the intersection of consumer awareness, deepfake technology, and brand authenticity, providing valuable insights into how different levels of exposure and familiarity with digital content may shape attitudes toward brands using such innovative marketing tactics.

**Test of Hypothesis**

**HO1: There is no relationship between consumers’ knowledge level of deepfake technology and their perception of brand transparency.**

**Table 2: Regression Results**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		P-Value
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	
(Constant)	2.510			15.650	.000
Knowledge Level (High Awareness)	.386	0.283	0.283	4.223	.000
Knowledge Level (Moderate Awareness)	.224	0.163	0.163	2.580	.011
Knowledge Level (Low Awareness)	.992	0.065	0.771	1.148	.252
<b>R=.529<sup>a</sup>      R<sup>2</sup>=.279,      Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>=.261</b>					
<b>Anova F=14.65                      P=.000</b>					

**Dependent Variable: Perception of Brand Transparency**

**Source: Researcher’s Survey, 2025**

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The regression results indicate that while there is a moderate correlation ( $R = 0.529$ ) between consumers' knowledge level of deepfake technology and their perception of brand transparency, the relationship is not uniformly significant across all awareness levels. The overall model is statistically significant ( $F = 14.65$ ,  $p = .000$ ), and the  $R^2$  value of 0.279 suggests that about 27.9% of the variation in brand transparency perception is explained by consumers' knowledge level. Specifically, high awareness of deepfake technology significantly predicts a positive perception of brand transparency ( $\beta = 0.283$ ,  $t = 4.223$ ,  $p = .000$ ), and moderate awareness also shows a significant effect ( $\beta = 0.163$ ,  $t = 2.580$ ,  $p = .011$ ). However, low awareness does not significantly influence brand transparency perception ( $\beta = 0.771$ ,  $t = 1.148$ ,  $p = .252$ ). This suggests that consumers with higher understanding of deepfake technology are more likely to appreciate or demand transparency from brands using such tools, likely because they are better equipped to detect authenticity or manipulation. The implication for marketers is clear: educating consumers and maintaining transparency in the use of advanced digital tools like deepfakes can enhance trust among tech-savvy audiences, while failing to do so may alienate or confuse less informed segments, potentially harming brand credibility.

**HO2: Consumers' ability to recognize deepfake content does not influences their trust toward the brand.**

**Table 2: Regression Results**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	P-Value
(Constant)	2.805			14.120	.000
Ability to Recognize Deepfakes (High Recognition)	.410	0.295	3.201	4.501	.000
Ability to Recognize Deepfakes (Moderate Recognition)	.250	0.180	2.531	2.540	.012
Ability to Recognize Deepfakes (Moderate Recognition)	.098	0.070	1.235	1.205	.229
<b>R=.475<sup>a</sup>      R<sup>2</sup>=.226,      Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>=.210</b>					
<b>Anova F=12.31      P=.000</b>					

**Dependent Variable: trust toward the brand.**

**Source: Researcher's Survey, 2025**

The regression results demonstrate that consumer understanding of deepfake content produces statistically important changes in their brand trust in ways that challenge the initial hypothesis. Data collected through the regression analysis demonstrates moderate strength between the variables ( $R = 0.475$ ) leading to 22.6% of brand trust explanation because of consumers' recognition capabilities. Recognition ability demonstrates significant statistical impact on brand trust because the overall model yields  $F = 12.31$  and  $p = .000$ . The statistical results demonstrate how recognition ability strength directly impacts trust because individuals with high recognition perform statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.410$ ,  $t = 4.501$ ,  $p = .000$ ), as do those with moderate recognition capability ( $\beta = 0.250$ ,  $t = 2.540$ ,  $p = .012$ ). However, the repeated third variable (likely an error in data entry for another moderate category) shows no significant influence ( $\beta = 0.098$ ,  $t = 1.205$ ,  $p = .229$ ). People who excel at detecting deepfake content tend to become more wary of brand trust when these companies rely on such technology. This situation emphasizes to marketers

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that ethical behavior must be upheld while developers need to disclose deepfake deployment and establish truthful messaging to maintain trust from consumers particularly those with advanced digital knowledge.

**HO3: Consumers’ exposure frequency to deepfake marketing content does not effect their perception of brand message believability**

**Table 2: Regression Results**

			Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
			B	Std. Error	Beta	T	P-Value
(Constant)			3.210			15.435	.000
Exposure Frequency (High Exposure)			.520	0.322	0.671	5.102	.000
Exposure Frequency (Moderate Exposure)			.310	0.193	0.761	3.402	.001
Exposure Frequency (Low Exposure)			.120	0.073	0.371	1.053	.294
<b>R=.532<sup>a</sup></b>			<b>R<sup>2</sup>=.283,</b>		<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>=.270</b>		
<b>Anova F=16.41</b>			<b>P=.000</b>				

**Dependent Variable: perception of brand message believability**

**Source: Researcher’s Survey, 2025**

The regression analysis examining the effect of consumers’ exposure frequency to deepfake marketing content on their perception of brand message believability indicates a statistically significant relationship. The model shows a strong positive correlation ( $R = 0.532$ ) and an  $R^2$  value of 0.283, which means that 28.3% of the variation in perceived message believability can be explained by how frequently consumers are exposed to deepfake content. The overall model is statistically significant ( $F = 16.41, p = .000$ ), confirming that exposure frequency is a meaningful predictor. Specifically, high exposure significantly influences believability ( $\beta = 0.671, t = 5.102, p = .000$ ), and moderate exposure also has a notable impact ( $\beta = 0.761, t = 3.402, p = .001$ ). However, low exposure appears to have no significant effect ( $\beta = 0.371, t = 1.053, p = .294$ ). These findings imply that frequent exposure to deepfake marketing materials can increase message believability, likely due to the mere-exposure effect, where repeated interaction enhances familiarity and acceptance. However, this also raises concerns about desensitization and manipulation, as consumers may begin to trust inauthentic content simply due to repetition. For marketers, this emphasizes the need for ethical considerations in content strategy and transparent communication to maintain authenticity and avoid misleading audiences.

**Discussion of Findings**

The results of the first hypothesis, which examined the relationship between consumers’ knowledge level of deepfake technology and their perception of brand transparency, indicate a statistically significant relationship for respondents with high and moderate awareness, but not for those with low awareness ( $p = .252$ ). The model shows a good fit ( $R^2 = .279, F = 14.65, p = .000$ ), suggesting that consumers who are more knowledgeable about deepfake technology are more likely to scrutinize brand transparency. This finding aligns with the work of Vaccari and Chadwick (2020), who observed that individuals with greater digital literacy are more critical of AI-driven

content and demand more transparency from brands using such technologies. Similarly, studies by Vasist and Krishnan (2025) support the notion that heightened awareness of digital manipulation tools like deepfakes influences consumer expectations for ethical disclosures. However, these findings contrast with Oeldorf-Hirsch and Chen (2022), who found that knowledge alone does not significantly alter perceptions unless paired with emotional engagement or brand loyalty. Additionally, the result partially disagrees with Powers, Johnson and Killian (2023), who argued that even consumers with limited deepfake awareness can perceive brands as transparent if the brand communicates openly and consistently. Therefore, while the current study reinforces the importance of knowledge in shaping perceptions of transparency, it also reveals that transparency perception may be nuanced and influenced by multiple factors beyond awareness alone.

The findings for the second hypothesis, which investigated whether consumers' ability to recognize deepfake content influences their trust toward the brand, reveal a statistically significant relationship for high and moderate recognition levels ( $p = .000$  and  $.012$  respectively), but not for low recognition ( $p = .229$ ). The regression model shows a moderately strong fit ( $R^2 = .226$ ,  $F = 12.31$ ,  $p = .000$ ), indicating that the ability to recognize deepfakes plays a meaningful role in shaping brand trust. These results support the findings of Mirsky and Lee (2021), who noted that as consumers become more capable of identifying manipulated media, they tend to develop skepticism, impacting how much they trust the message and the messenger. Similarly, Gursoy, Malodia, and Dhir. (2022) found that detection of synthetic media in hospitality marketing significantly lowered consumers' trust, reinforcing the idea that awareness influences interpretation and belief. However, this result contradicts findings by Barfi et al., (2019), who suggested that brand trust is more influenced by brand reputation than consumers' media recognition ability. It also diverges from the work of Giorgi (2017), who emphasized that emotional resonance and consistent messaging can buffer against the negative effects of detected manipulation. Overall, the present study underlines the critical role of recognition skills in moderating consumer trust, particularly in a digital era where deepfakes are increasingly deployed in persuasive communication.

The results for the third hypothesis, which assessed the effect of consumers' exposure frequency to deepfake marketing content on their perception of brand message believability, indicate a significant relationship. High and moderate exposure levels show statistically significant effects ( $p = .000$  and  $.001$  respectively), while low exposure does not ( $p = .294$ ). The regression model demonstrates a strong explanatory power ( $R^2 = .283$ ,  $F = 16.41$ ,  $p = .000$ ), suggesting that repeated exposure to deepfake content increases the likelihood of consumers perceiving brand messages as believable, aligning with the psychological "mere-exposure effect." This finding supports Zajonc's (2001) theory, which posits that familiarity breeds positive affect and believability. Additionally, it resonates with the study by Toma and Hancock (2012), who found that repeated digital exposure to persuasive messages could enhance credibility, regardless of content accuracy. However, this finding contrasts with the work of Friggeri et al. (2014), who reported that overexposure to manipulated content on social media may lead to consumer fatigue and skepticism. Furthermore, it diverges from the conclusions of Lee and Shin (2022), who emphasized that awareness of manipulation diminishes the effectiveness of repeated messages over time. The implications of this study suggest that brands utilizing deepfake content should strategically manage exposure frequency to balance reinforcement with authenticity, as overuse may eventually trigger consumer distrust.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions were drawn from the study:

- i. The study found a statistically significant relationship between consumers' knowledge level of deepfake technology and their perception of brand transparency. Respondents with high and moderate awareness demonstrated a stronger perception of transparency than those with low awareness. This implies that consumer education and awareness significantly influence how transparently they view a brand that uses emerging technologies like deepfakes in its marketing efforts.
- ii. The results also show that consumers' ability to recognize deepfake content significantly affects their trust in brands. Those who could easily identify deepfake content exhibited higher levels of trust when such content was used transparently. However, when recognition is coupled with the perception of manipulation, trust may erode. Thus, brand trust is closely tied to consumers' interpretive skills and the perceived intent behind the deepfake usage.
- iii. There was a strong and significant relationship between the frequency of consumer exposure to deepfake marketing and the believability of the brand message. High and moderate exposure levels were associated with increased message believability, indicating that repetition can positively influence perception. However, the risk of overexposure and potential backlash remains if not managed properly.

Based on the above conclusions, the following suggestions were put forward

- i. Promote Transparency through Disclosures: Brands using deepfake technology in marketing should clearly disclose its use. Transparency enhances brand credibility among digitally literate consumers, as it shows respect for consumer intelligence and aligns with ethical marketing practices.
- ii. Invest in Digital Literacy Campaigns: Companies and educational institutions should collaborate to improve digital literacy. Educated consumers are more likely to interpret deepfake content responsibly and appreciate innovative campaigns, thus fostering a healthier digital marketing ecosystem.
- iii. Strategic Exposure Management: Marketers should carefully manage the frequency of deepfake content exposure. While repetition may increase believability, it should not be excessive to the point of consumer desensitization or suspicion. A/B testing and analytics can help determine optimal exposure levels.
- iv. Build Trust Through Ethical Innovation: Brands should incorporate ethical guidelines when deploying deepfake technology. This includes obtaining consent from individuals portrayed, respecting intellectual property rights, and avoiding misleading narratives that may compromise consumer trust.

### Managerial implications

The findings of this study present critical managerial implications for marketing professionals navigating the rise of deepfake technology. Firstly, the significant relationship between consumers' knowledge of deepfakes and their perception of brand transparency implies that

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marketers must prioritize transparency in disclosing AI-generated content to avoid damaging consumer trust. Brands that attempt to mask the use of synthetic media risk alienating tech-savvy audiences who associate undisclosed deepfakes with manipulation or deception. Secondly, since consumers' ability to recognize deepfakes directly influences brand trust, marketers must strike a balance between innovation and authenticity—ensuring that content maintains human relatability and ethical standards. Thirdly, the positive impact of exposure frequency on message believability suggests that while repetition can boost persuasion, it must be carefully managed to prevent desensitization or overexposure. Altogether, these insights suggest that marketers must invest in ethical guidelines, audience education, and responsible content strategies to harness the creative potential of deepfake technology without compromising brand credibility.

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