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Deepfake Duality: Navigating the Tension Between Humanitarian Innovation and Political Manipulation

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ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence in the last decade has catalyzed the emergence of synthetic media, particularly deepfakes, marking a significant paradigm shift in digital content production. This phenomenon introduces the "Deepfake Duality," presenting a complex tension between innovative opportunities for creative communication and profound ethical risks. While technical literature regarding deepfake detection is abundant, studies exploring its strategic and ethical implications within corporate and political communication contexts remain scarce. This study aims to address this gap by employing a qualitative multiple case study approach, integrating Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) and Comparative Case Study (CCS). The analysis focuses on comparing two contrasting cases: the global philanthropic "Malaria Must Die" campaign featuring David Beckham and a local political campaign utilizing the digital resurrection of the late President Soeharto. The comparative analysis reveals a stark contrast in strategic effectiveness and public reception. The Beckham case represents the "bright side" of deepfakes, where the technology successfully transcends linguistic barriers and enhances emotional engagement through consensual, socially-driven intent . Conversely, the Soeharto case exposes the "dark side," where post-mortem manipulation for political legitimacy triggers significant public resistance, moral outrage regarding collective memory ethics, and the psychological Uncanny Valley phenomenon . The study concludes that technical transparency, such as AI content labeling, is insufficient to mitigate social risks. Stricter ethical governance and specific regulations regarding post-mortem digital rights are urgently needed to maintain public trust. Ultimately, the future of digital communication relies not on the realism of the technology, but on the moral integrity of communicators in navigating this duality.

Keywords

corporate communication, synthetic media, digital ethics, post-mortem manipulation, AI governance

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INTRODUCTION

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) in the last decade has produced various forms of synthetic media that are increasingly difficult to distinguish from genuine content (Saura García, 2025; Xu et al., 2025). One prominent technology is deepfake, a deep learning-based visual and audio manipulation technique that generates realistic human representations (Khan et al., 2025). The presence of deepfakes marks a significant shift in how society interacts with digital content, opening new avenues for creativity while presenting unprecedented challenges (Birrer & Just, 2024; Xu et al., 2025). This phenomenon urges researchers to review the dynamics of digital communication amid the increasingly sophisticated presence of synthetic media (Saura García, 2025).

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In the context of digital transformation, communication is no longer linear and static but is increasingly influenced by automation and algorithms. Technologies like generative AI are changing how messages are designed, produced, and disseminated (Saura García, 2025). Deepfake is part of the "synthetic media" category (Khan et al., 2025), which has the capability to shape public perception through seemingly authentic human representations. This makes deepfake relevant for discussion in the digital communication domain, especially as it carries significant implications for aspects of credibility and trust, where users may display greater cynicism toward the authenticity of AI-generated news (Liu et al., 2025).

While many previous digital communication technologies focused only on message distribution, deepfakes extend the dimension of message production in a highly personal and immersive manner (Gavran et al., 2025). In the corporate communication environment, companies are now beginning to explore AI's potential for storytelling needs, reputation management, and audience experience personalization. Deepfake is considered capable of creating visual representations adaptive to a company's digital strategy needs, making it a new tool in building relationships with stakeholders.

Theoretically, deepfake offers a number of opportunities for companies to create more innovative communication. This technology enables efficient visual message processing (Gavran et al., 2025) the use of representative figures without geographical boundaries, and the rapid creation of multilingual content. Generative AI enables significant reductions in production time and costs through the automation of routine tasks (Gavran et al., 2025). Such potential suggests that deepfake can support a more adaptive digital communication strategy. Furthermore, research on communication and media psychology emphasizes that realistic visual elements can enhance the audience's emotional engagement. Deepfake technology, capable of replicating facial expressions and vocal intonations in detail, can strengthen the connection between the company and its audience (Xu et al., 2025). In the context of corporate communication, this has the potential to increase the effectiveness of campaigns that rely on the company's visual identity or specific figures in delivering messages.

However, behind these opportunities, deepfake also raises significant ethical challenges (Xu et al., 2025). The technology's power to manipulate reality presents risks of misuse (Manggala et al., 2025), such as the spread of disinformation (Birrer & Just, 2024), privacy violations (Khan et al., 2025), and identity manipulation. When deepfakes are used without clear regulation and control, the content can blur the line between fact and fabrication, thereby undermining the foundation of trust that is central to communication. In the corporate sphere, this risk has serious consequences, including a negative impact on social trust and economic consequences for organizations (Abraham et al., 2025). The social risks of deepfake are also increasing as its technical capability surpasses the public's detection capacity (Sharma et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2025). Deepfakes are not only used for commercial or entertainment purposes but also in criminal acts such as identity theft and the distribution of non-consensual explicit content (Xu et al., 2025). This condition shows that the technical capability of deepfakes often evolves faster than its safeguard mechanisms. This imbalance creates a gap that can endanger both society and companies (Sharma et al., 2025).

In the corporate communication context, this threat can escalate into a crisis if deepfake content is used to damage a company's reputation (Abraham et al., 2025). Synthetic videos featuring company executives making false statements, for instance, can trigger public misperception and significant economic impact (Abraham et al., 2025). This indicates that deepfake is not just a creative technology but also a disruptive factor that companies must anticipate through more mature risk governance and crisis communication strategies. On the other hand, deepfake regulation is still evolving and lacks a established global framework (Birrer & Just, 2024). The absence of ethical standards and regulations makes the practice of using deepfake susceptible to public misinterpretation, especially when not accompanied by transparency. Therefore, the urgency of developing AI governance becomes an aspect that needs attention in deepfake research (Sharif et al., 2025), and effective oversight and enforcement of existing rules are crucial (Birrer & Just, 2024).

Academically, research on deepfake technology is still dominated by technical perspectives (Birrer & Just, 2024), such as the development of detection algorithms (Khan et al., 2025; Sharma et al., 2025). Conversely, social and communication studies on deepfake are relatively limited (Birrer & Just, 2024). Not many studies explore how this technology affects communication practices,

audience reception, the process of meaning-making, or ethical dynamics within organizational and corporate contexts. Specifically, studies concerning the utilization of deepfake in corporate communication are still very rare. Most research focuses more on political issues, digital security, and disinformation. The lack of comprehensive studies on deepfakes in corporate communication indicates a significant research gap to be filled, especially since there are gaps in our knowledge about deepfakes (Birrer & Just, 2024).

The main issue that emerges is the uncertainty of the extent to which companies can utilize deepfake without posing risks to their credibility. On one hand, the technology can enhance efficiency and creativity, but on the other hand, it can generate public doubt if not well-managed. This uncertainty signals the need for deeper academic study, as well as the importance of more empirical research to assess the feasibility of regulation (Birrer & Just, 2024). The urgency of this research also stems from the practical need for companies to establish responsible digital communication governance. Without a thorough understanding of the opportunities and risks of deepfakes, companies are vulnerable to making unwise communication decisions that negatively impact audience relations. This reinforces the need to systematically examine the deepfake duality (Gavran et al., 2025).

Based on this context, this study aims to comprehensively understand the opportunities and risks of using deepfake in corporate digital communication. This research examines the ethical implications and governance challenges that arise when deepfake technology is integrated into communication strategies. This effort is expected to provide a stronger theoretical foundation regarding the role of deepfake in the modern corporate communication sphere (Gavran et al., 2025). Thus, this background confirms the existence of a research gap regarding the deepfake duality in corporate communication, namely the lack of in-depth study reviewing this technology from the perspective of opportunities, risks, and ethical implications in a balanced manner. This gap raises academic questions about how deepfake should be understood and utilized in digital communication. Therefore, this research is essential to provide a critical and constructive understanding of deepfake technology in the context of increasingly digitalized corporate communication.

The necessity for this study is further highlighted by the ongoing debate concerning the feasibility of regulating deepfakes. Policymakers face a dilemma: regulating too aggressively might stifle the potential for beneficial, cost-saving AI applications, but insufficient regulation risks amplifying existing societal harms like non-consensual content and disinformation (Birrer & Just, 2024; Xu et al., 2025). Current academic literature suggests that deepfake technology, while not entirely introducing new regulatory problems, dramatically amplifies pre-existing ones (Birrer & Just, 2024). Therefore, by analyzing concrete case applications in corporate communication, this research contributes empirical data essential for assessing the need for and the nature of effective regulatory frameworks, moving the conversation beyond mere alarmism.

The research specifically addresses the conceptual gap between technological acceptance and societal impact. While models like the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) have been used to analyze user perception toward the ease of use and utility of deepfake technology (Manggala et al., 2025), these models often overlook the broader ethical and governance challenges faced by the deploying organization. Specifically, the relationship between a user's AI self-efficacy and their cynicism toward synthetic content suggests that transparency from the organization is paramount (Liu et al., 2025). By framing the study around the "Deepfake Duality," this research seeks to bridge the micro-level acceptance analysis (TAM) with the macro-level organizational governance and ethical decision-making, providing a comprehensive framework for corporate strategists.

This investigation is crucial for informing future academic agendas. Current research has identified that public discussion on deepfakes is polarized, often centering on two main themes: Culture and Entertainment (positive sentiment) versus Legal and Ethical Impacts (negative sentiment), particularly regarding abuse in adult content (Xu et al., 2025). However, the specific dynamics within the corporate communication field, where reputation is directly linked to financial outcomes and stakeholder trust, remain underexplored. This study, by systematically analyzing the opportunities and risks in this high-stakes environment, serves as a foundation for subsequent empirical research, particularly in developing organizational best practices, setting ethical guidelines, and advancing the AI governance literature within the private sector (Sharif et al., 2025).

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative multiple case study design to examine the utilization and implications of deepfake technology in corporate digital communication strategy. This design specifically integrates Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) and Comparative Case Study (CCS). The objective is to deeply analyze how two different deepfake videos, the David Beckham campaign (representing marketing/global) and the Soeharto video (representing political/local) construct messages, meaning, and ethical challenges. This qualitative approach adheres to an interpretive framework, where videos are treated as social documents that can be read through their narrative structure, social context, and communicative intentionality, consistent with the goal of qualitative research to interpret and explain social reality (Beuving & de Vries, 2015). The primary unit of analysis in this study are two publicly published deepfake case studies:

1. The David Beckham deepfake campaign for Malaria Must Die, and
2. The Soeharto deepfake video in the Indonesian political context.

The selection of these two cases was conducted through purposive sampling to ensure specific comparative characteristics: one focusing on global communication opportunities, and another highlighting the risks of manipulation in a local/political context, thereby effectively examining the deepfake duality. Data observation is conducted non-participatorily, where the researcher only observes and analyzes the audiovisual material and audience responses that have been published openly on digital platforms.

Primary data collection is carried out through QDA of the audiovisual material of the two deepfake videos (visual elements, narration, and presentation style). Secondary data is used as supporting evidence to enrich the understanding of the social context, including the thematic analysis of Public Sentiment (audience comments) and supporting documentation from various sources. This thematic sentiment analysis does not use complex automated classification models, but is treated as contextual audience feedback which clarifies how the public perceives and responds to the use of deepfake (Han et al., 2025; Prova et al., 2025). Data analysis is conducted systematically through the application of QDA for in-depth document interpretation and CCS for case comparison. The Comparative Case Study applies the principle of constant comparison (Beuving & de Vries, 2015) to dissect how message structure and social context influence the interpretation of the deepfake duality. To ensure validity and reliability, the research implements the strategy of Source Triangulation, comparing QDA findings from audiovisual documents, CCS results, and Public Sentiment data. Furthermore, Thick Description is used to present context-rich analytical results, allowing readers to deeply understand the ethical and strategic implications arising from the use of deepfake in modern communication.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings in the "Malaria Must Die" – David Beckham Deepfake Video

This campaign video features David Beckham speaking in nine different languages (English, Spanish, Kinyarwanda, Arabic, French, Hindi, Mandarin, Kiswahili, Yoruba) to convey a global message regarding the urgency of ending malaria. Through deepfake techniques, Beckham's face is adapted to appear natural while speaking each language. The video's narrative emphasizes the deadly impact of malaria, a call for global action, and the launch of a voice petition to urge world leaders to take more serious action toward malaria eradication. The video concludes with the "Malaria Must Die" slogan and a call to sign the digital petition.

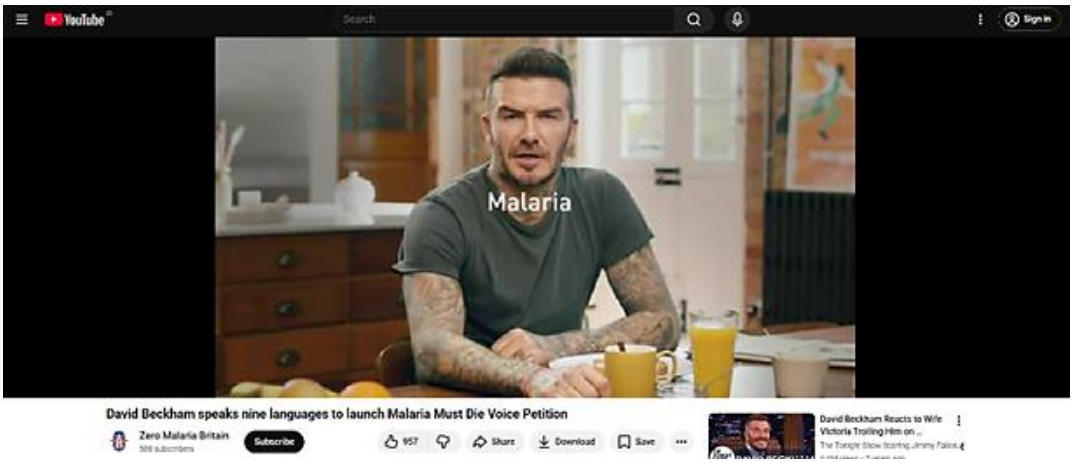

Figure 1. Screenshot of David Beckham's "Malaria Must Die" deepfake video (*Source*: Zero Malaria Britain, 2019)

The campaign video "Malaria Must Die, So Millions Can Live," released on April 9, 2019, through the Zero Malaria Britain YouTube channel, is part of a global effort to raise awareness and mobilize the public toward malaria eradication. While the channel has a niche audience with 588 subscribers, the video succeeded in reaching a wider public with 313,733 views, indicating that the campaign garnered significant attention beyond its core follower base. The video also recorded 957 likes, demonstrating a strong level of public appreciation for the campaign's message and presentation format.

Tabel 1. Multilingual transcript of David Beckham's deepfake video

Time	Languange	Original Text	English Translations
0:05	English	Malaria isn't just any disease. It's the deadliest disease that's ever been.	—
0:12	Spanish	Se dice que ha matado más de la mitad de la población que ha existido.	It is said to have killed more than half the population that has ever lived.
0:16	Kinyarwanda	Miriyoni mirongo itanu muri twebwe.	Fifty million of us.
0:19	Arabic	وما زالت تقتل طفلاً كل دقيقتين.	And it still kills a child every two minutes.
0:22	French	Mais nous pouvons y mettre fin. Nous savons comment, nous en avons la possibilité.	But we can put an end to it. We know how, we have the possibility.
0:27	Hindi	हमें और अधिक कार्रवाई की जरूरत है।	We need more action.
0:29	Mandarin	我们需要让世界领导人关注。	We need to make world leaders pay attention.
0:33	Kiswahili	Hivyo tunazindua kampeni ya sauti.	Therefore, we are launching a voice petition.
0:37	Yoruba	Ohun wa le ba wa ri opin malaria.	Our voice can help us see the end of malaria.
0:40	English	Speak up and say, malaria must die…	—

Source: Researcher Data, 2025

General findings from the audiovisual analysis of David Beckham's "Malaria Must Die" campaign demonstrate the strategic use of deepfake technology to maximize social and global communication impact. This analysis highlights three key aspects:

1. Leveraging Deepfake to Overcome Linguistic Barriers: The campaign effectively demonstrates the potential of deepfake technology in breaking down language barriers. By featuring David Beckham speaking fluently in nine different languages (English, Spanish, Arabic, French, Mandarin, etc.) (Table 1), the video creates a deep personal connection with audiences from various regions. Technically, the natural adjustment of Beckham's facial and mouth movements (lip-sync) to the multilingual narrative ensures that the message regarding the urgency of

malaria eradication is conveyed seamlessly, reinforcing message credibility through a visually authentic global figure.

2. Persuasive Communication Strategy: The video utilizes global celebrity appeal combined with technological innovation to launch a voice petition and call for global action. A strong narrative emphasizes the deadly impact of malaria, amplified by the dramatic multilingual presentation. The use of deepfake here is intended to be non-malicious and pro-social, asserting that this technology can serve as an ethical tool in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and public mobilization.
3. Viral Effect and Audiovisual Reach: Although the video was uploaded to a YouTube channel with a small core subscriber base (588 subscribers), it succeeded in reaching over 300,000 views (313,733 views). This significant reach indicates that the use of ethical and engaging deepfake innovation holds strong attention-grabbing power, proving the effectiveness of deepfake as a strategic asset for generating a viral effect and increasing the visibility of corporate/organizational digital communication messages.

Following the analysis of the message structure and audiovisual aspects of David Beckham's deepfake video, the next stage is to examine how the content is received by the public. Public sentiment data extracted from the video's comment section serves as supporting evidence and essential contextual audience feedback, enabling the researcher to map the polarity of collective reception regarding the use of deepfake for philanthropic purposes. Unlike sentiment research that focuses on automatic classification or quantitative prediction, this analysis is thematic and interpretative; it is employed to enrich the understanding of the social context rather than for statistical prediction (Han et al., 2025; Prova et al., 2025). Public response is crucial as it reflects the tension between appreciation for innovation (opportunity) and rising audience cynicism toward synthetic content (risk), particularly as their self-efficacy in detecting AI diminishes (Liu et al., 2025). Consequently, this analysis aims to uncover the "complex sentiment structure" (Prova et al., 2025) accompanying the duality of the Beckham deepfake case. The analysis was conducted on 52 audience comments, which were subsequently classified into three categories: Positive, Negative, and Neutral. The results indicate sentiment polarization, with the Neutral category being the most dominant, followed by Positive and Negative with nearly equal proportions.

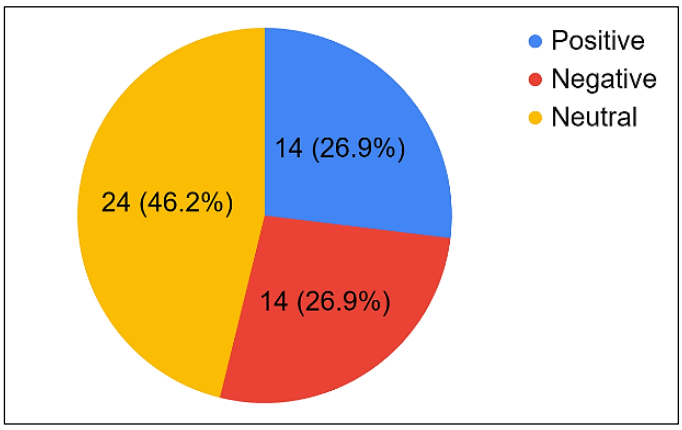

Figure 2. Sentiment analysis of David Beckham's Deepfake video (*Source*: Researcher Data, 2025)

The sentiment analysis indicates that although the Neutral category dominates (46.2%), the strong polarization between Positive (26.9%) and Negative (26.9%) sentiments reflects a divided audience response and underscores the existence of deepfake duality (Xu et al., 2025). Through a qualitative thematic analysis of YouTube user comments, three main themes emerged to illustrate how the public interprets and responds to the campaign.

1. Appreciation of Innovation and Campaign Support (Positive)

   This theme reflects audience admiration for technological innovation as well as support for the malaria eradication campaign. Many users provided enthusiastic responses, viewing deepfake technology as creative, surprising, or inspiring. For example, @TechNinja_23 wrote, "*Awesome*

shit... Mind blown… Hats off to the developers…", while @GlobalAidSupporter stated that the visual synchronization appeared very convincing, noting, "*Looks so legit*." Moral support for the campaign also emerged from accounts such as @Health4All, who wrote "*Malaria Must Die!*" and "*Nice deepfake*." These comments indicate that a portion of the audience values deepfake as an effective communication tool, particularly for social purposes and global health advocacy.

2. Technical Criticism and Technological Discomfort (Negative)

   The second theme highlights negative responses regarding technical aspects and video production quality. Some audience members detected visual or audio flaws and responded with quite sharp criticism. @SharpEyeStudio commented on the inconsistency of visual details: "*Left side beard is not accurate*." A similar sentiment was expressed by @HindiNative101, who rejected the dubbing quality: "*Voice of a 9-year-old girl while speaking Hindi*." Even @FrenchVoiceCritic assessed the French voice as sounding implausible: "*The French vocal is just ridiculous*." Other comments, such as from @RealityCheck_89, explicitly stated disbelief: "*This video is fake*." Meanwhile, @DeepfakeHater wrote, "*deep fake, shit*." This theme illustrates that some audiences experience technological discomfort, where slight flaws in the deepfake can trigger strong negative reactions.

3. Ethical Concerns and Future Threats (Neutral)

   The third theme relates to audience anxiety regarding the ethical and social impacts of deepfake technology. Although this video is used for humanitarian purposes, some users continue to question its long-term consequences. @TruthSeeker_2040 wrote, "*This will cause serious problems with fake news*." Concerns regarding voice data misuse emerged from the account @PrivacyGuardian, which alleged: "*This sounds like an AI company trying to gather information on people's voices*." Meanwhile, @LingExpert highlighted the potential threat to specific professions: "*Deepfake will leave linguists jobless*." These concerns align with literature findings regarding the social and ethical risks of deepfake technology (Birrer & Just, 2024), indicating that this technological innovation remains perceived as problematic, regardless of its usage context.

These findings reinforce the QDA results: the audience contextualizes the Beckham video within the framework of deepfake duality, where the same technology can elicit appreciation for innovation while simultaneously evoking anxiety regarding its potential misuse. The high prevalence of neutral sentiment likely suggests that a segment of the audience is ambivalent or more focused on the technological novelty rather than ethical issues. Overall, the public response to this video demonstrates that deepfake technology, while effective for social campaigns, remains situated in a landscape fraught with tension between creative opportunities and future ethical risks.

Case Analysis: David Beckham and the "Deepfake Duality" Paradox

Message Construction Through the Lens of Synthetic Media The "Malaria Must Die"

This campaign featuring David Beckham is not merely a standard public service announcement video, but a manifestation of what digital communication theory terms Synthetic Media, media generated or manipulated by algorithms to create realistic representations. In this video, the core message is simple: the global urgency to end malaria. However, the delivery strategy is highly complex. The production team utilized a global authority figure (Beckham) and "borrowed" his face to narrate the message in nine different languages, ranging from Spanish and Kinyarwanda to Mandarin.

Theoretically, this strategy leverages AI capabilities to create hyper-personalization without geographic limitations (Abisha et al., 2025). Whereas in traditional communication a figure would have to learn foreign languages or rely on stiff dubbing, deepfake technology enables visual synchronization that makes Beckham appear as though he is a native speaker of these languages. The goal is clear: to build deeper emotional engagement with local audiences in various parts of the world or a strategy that, according to literature, can strengthen the connection between a corporate message and its audience. The video's success in reaching over 313,000 viewers on a channel with only 588 subscribers proves that the novelty of this technology possesses a strong attention-grabbing power to viralize social messages.

The Tension Between Realism and the Uncanny Valley

Despite the campaign's noble objectives, its technical implementation evokes the psychological phenomenon known as the Uncanny Valley or a feeling of discomfort that arises when human simulations look nearly real but possess disturbing minor flaws (Gorlini et al., 2023). In the analysis of audience comments, it is evident that this illusion of realism was not fully successful. Some audiences detected striking inconsistencies, such as Beckham's voice in Hindi sounding like a small child or the French accent being deemed ridiculous.

These audiovisual flaws are not merely technical issues; they trigger audience resistance. When lip-syncing or voice intonation is imperfect, the viewer's focus shifts from the "humanitarian message" to a "technological critique." This is confirmed by comments labeling the video as "deepfake shit" or simply "fake." In the context of communication theory, this type of noise indicates that while deepfake offers production efficiency, it remains vulnerable to audience skepticism, which can degrade message credibility if the execution is not flawless.

Deepfake Duality: The Tug-of-War Between Innovation and Ethics

The core of this case lies in the concept of Deepfake Duality: the tension between creative opportunity and ethical risk (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2024). Audience sentiment data shows an interesting polarization: 26.9% positive responses are evenly matched by 26.9% negative responses, while the majority (46.2%) remain neutral. The group responding positively views this technology as a brilliant innovation. They appreciate deepfake's ability to transcend language barriers for philanthropic goals, with comments such as "*Hats off to the developers*." This reflects technology acceptance where utility is considered more important than concerns over manipulation.

However, deep ethical concerns or cynicism regarding content authenticity also emerge (Verma, 2025). Even though the video is for charity, audiences remain wary of the precedent it sets. Comments such as "*This will cause serious problems with fake news*" or fears that the technology is being used to "gather information on people's voices" demonstrate that the public is aware of the dark side of this technology. They worry that the same technology used to save lives from malaria could, in the future, be used to deceive the public.

1. Appreciation Theme (Positive - 26.9%): Audiences admire the technological innovation and support the campaign's noble cause.
    a. Comment Example: "*Awesome shit... Mind blown... Hats off to the developers...*" (Admiration for technological development).
    b. Comment Example: "*Synthesia will change everything*" (Optimism regarding the future of technology).
    c. Comment Example: "*Malaria Must Die! Nice deepfake*." (Support for the campaign message).
2. Technical Doubt Theme (Negative/Neutral - Dominant): Criticism arises when technical quality (particularly voice) is perceived to reduce realism or trigger the uncanny valley effect.
    a. Comment Example: "*Voice of a 9-year-old girl while speaking Hindi*" (Voice inconsistency).
    b. Comment Example: "*The French vocal is just ridiculous*."
    c. Comment Example: "*Left side beard is not accurate*" (Visual flaw).
3. Ethical Concerns Theme (Negative - 26.9%): Despite the charitable context, audiences remain anxious regarding the potential future misuse of this technology (slippery slope).
    a. Comment Example: "*This will cause serious problems with fake news*" (Fear of disinformation).
    b. Comment Example: "*This sounds like an AI company trying to gather information on people's voices*" (Data privacy issues).
    c. Comment Example: "*Deepfake will leave linguists jobless*" (Threat to professions).

The David Beckham case serves as a perfect example that in the realm of corporate digital communication, deepfake is a double-edged sword. It offers unprecedented scalability and message personalization, yet its reception is fragile. Audiences do not only judge the "content of the message" but also judge the "medium." The benevolence of the campaign's goal (eradicating malaria) does not

automatically eliminate public anxiety regarding a potential digital dystopia where reality and manipulation are increasingly difficult to distinguish.

Findings in the Soeharto Campaign Deepfake Video – Golkar Party (2024)

This Soeharto deepfake video was published on January 8, 2024, through the Instagram account @erwinaksa.id, a political account with 110,000 followers, 2,722 posts, and a strong focus on campaign content. The video garnered a very high level of interaction, with 95,000 likes and 558 comments (540 scraped), demonstrating an engagement performance significantly exceeding the average for the account's posts. This metadata indicates that the video achieved a broad reach and elicited an intense public response, ranging from support to criticism, particularly due to the appearance of Soeharto, a highly sensitive figure in Indonesia's political memory.

Figure 3. Screenshot of the Soeharto campaign deepfake video by the Golkar Party (*Source*: Instagram @erwinaksa.id, 2024)

The official description in the post asserts that the video was "created using AI technology," a statement serving as a form of transparency regarding deepfake usage. The lengthy caption accompanying the video emphasizes narratives of national hope, the continuity of the nation's struggle, and a call to vote in the 2024 General Election. This message associates the figure of Soeharto, through visual and audio manipulation with the rhetoric of development, stability, and nostalgia for the New Order era. Thus, the caption metadata indicates that deepfake technology is utilized to construct moods, images, and strategic emotional associations for political communication needs. The video uses hashtags such as #ErwinAksa #ea #soeharto, clarifying its connection to the account owner's political personal branding. The public nature of Instagram's metadata format, including publication time, interaction counts, and descriptive context, provides a structure that enables analysis of how deepfake functions as a tool of visual persuasion within the digital campaign landscape. This metadata also indicates that the video is positioned as political content disseminated prior to the election, making it relevant for analyzing the relationship between deepfake, collective memory, and public support mobilization in the digital space.

Tabel 2. Transcript of the Soeharto campaign deepfake video

Time	Original Text	English Translation
0:00	(Musik patriotik/mars dimulai)	(Patriotic/march music begins)
0:04	Kita sudah membuktikan!	We have proven it!
0:05	Bahwa kita dapat menciptakan negara ini menjadi suatu negara yang adil dan makmur.	That we can build this country into a just and prosperous nation.
0:11	Saudara-saudara sekalian.	Fellow citizens.
0:13	Oleh karena itu...	Therefore...
0:14	...Marilah bersama-sama kita maju terus!	...Let us move forward together!
0:17	Kita tegakkan cita-cita Proklamasi 17 Agustus 1945!	Let us uphold the ideals of the Proclamation of August 17, 1945!
0:23	Golongan Karya!	Golongan Karya! (Functional Group Party!)
0:24	(Sorak sorai massa)	(Crowd cheering)

0:26	Saudara-saudara!	Fellow citizens!
0:27	Ingat!	Remember!
0:28	Ingat!	Remember!
0:29	Pilih nomor dua!	Choose number two!
0:31	(Sorak sorai massa dan musik semakin kencang)	(Crowd cheering, music intensifies)
0:35	DUA!	TWO!
0:36	(Sorak sorai, musik mencapai klimaks)	(Cheering, music reaches climax)
0:39	(Musik latar terus berlanjut)	(Background music continues)
0:42	Kita sudah punya tekad yang bulat!	We already have a firm determination!
0:44	Yang tidak akan mempan digoyahkan oleh siapapun juga!	One that cannot be shaken by anyone!
0:48	Bahwa kita akan meneruskan pembangunan nasional!	That we will continue national development!
0:53	Kita akan melanjutkan perjuangan kita!	We will continue our struggle!
0:56	Melaksanakan pembangunan nasional ini!	To carry out this national development!
1:00	(Sorak sorai massa)	(Crowd cheering)
1:01	Dengan penuh kesungguhan!	With full seriousness!
1:03	Dengan penuh kejujuran!	With full honesty!
1:05	Dengan penuh tanggung jawab!	With full responsibility!
1:07	Sesuai dengan Pancasila!	In accordance with Pancasila!
1:09	Sesuai dengan Undang-Undang Dasar 1945!	In accordance with the 1945 Constitution!
1:13	Sesuai dengan Garis-garis Besar Haluan Negara!	In accordance with the Broad Outlines of State Policy!
1:17	Yang kita susun!	Which we drafted!
1:19	Yang kita terima!	Which we accepted!
1:21	Demi kesejahteraan seluruh rakyat Indonesia!	For the welfare of all Indonesian people!
1:26	(Sorak sorai massa)	(Crowd cheering)
1:27	Saudara-saudara!	Fellow citizens!
1:29	Dalam pelaksanaan pembangunan nasional ini,	In implementing this national development,
1:33	kita tidak boleh lengah!	we must not be careless!
1:36	Tidak boleh menyimpang!	We must not deviate!
1:39	Kita harus waspada!	We must stay vigilant!
1:41	Waspada!	Vigilant!
1:42	Waspada terhadap setiap hal!	Vigilant toward everything!
1:45	Yang akan mengganggu jalannya pembangunan nasional!	That may disrupt the course of national development!
1:49	Yang akan merusak cita-cita Proklamasi 17 Agustus 1945!	That may undermine the ideals of the Proclamation of August 17, 1945!
1:55	(Sorak sorai massa)	(Crowd cheering)
1:57	Kita sudah buktikan!	We have proven it!
1:59	Selama ini!	All this time!
2:00	Kita sudah dapat mengatasi semua gangguan!	We have been able to overcome all disturbances!
2:03	Semua rongrongan!	All infiltrations!
2:05	Semua tantangan!	All challenges!
2:07	Yang datang baik dari dalam maupun dari luar negeri!	That came from within and outside the country!
2:13	Kita buktikan!	We have proven it!
2:15	Bahwa kita adalah Bangsa yang Pancasilais!	That we are a Pancasila nation!
2:18	Bangsa yang taat kepada Undang-Undang Dasar 1945!	A nation obedient to the 1945 Constitution!
2:23	Dan kita selalu dapat mengatasi semua kesulitan!	And we can always overcome any difficulty!
2:27	(Sorak sorai massa)	(Crowd cheering)
2:28	Saudara-saudara!	Fellow citizens!
2:29	Sekali lagi!	Once again!
2:31	Marilah kita tunjukkan kekompakan kita!	Let us show our unity!
2:35	Persatuan kita!	Our togetherness!
2:37	Untuk menuju Indonesia yang adil dan makmur!	To achieve a just and prosperous Indonesia!
2:42	Pilih nomor dua!	Choose number two!
2:44	(Sorak sorai massa)	(Crowd cheering)

2:45	DUA!	TWO!

Source: Researcher Data, 2025

The Soeharto deepfake video re-presents the image of the deceased former President of the Republic of Indonesia, placing him directly within a high-stakes political communication context. Qualitative analysis of its visual and audio elements indicates a strong political intention, the use of historical symbolism as a persuasive tool, and significant ethical and epistemological risks.

1. Figure Identity and the Use of Post-Mortem Image

   This video utilizes a digital representation of a deceased figure, a practice categorized in digital ethics studies as a form of post-mortem non-consensual manipulation, due to the absence of consent from the represented party. Soeharto's image as a historical figure carries significant ethos weight, authority, nostalgia, and political legitimacy, thus its use in deepfake form is intended to borrow symbolic legitimacy to support contemporary political narratives. This strategy aligns with the findings of Birrer & Just (2024), stating that the use of deceased public figures in deepfakes falls into the highest ethical risk category due to its potential to exploit collective memory and public emotion for specific ends.

2. Message Structure and Propagandistic Intentionality Narratively

   This video is clearly structured as a political message, unlike philanthropic or educational content such as in the Beckham case. The engineered speech flow combines Soeharto's rhetorical style with explicit calls to vote for specific candidates, demonstrating strong propagandistic intentionality. This illustrates the phenomenon described by Saura García (2025) as the synthetification of public opinion, namely the use of synthetic content to shape public perception as if originating from an authentic source. By mimicking Soeharto's distinct speech style and intonation, the video attempts to link past stability with present political choices, thereby strengthening its persuasive effect.

3. Technical Quality and the Uncanny Valley Effect

   Technically, the video attempts to achieve a level of hyper-realism through facial and voice reconstruction. However, imperfections in lip synchronization, voice intonation, and facial expressions produce the Uncanny Valley effect or a feeling of discomfort when something appears nearly real but feels wrong. These slight incongruities, as also reflected in public response, reinforce the perception of the video as manipulative. Furthermore, such audiovisual engineering contributes to the amplification of disinformation, reinforcing concerns raised by Abraham et al. (2025) and Liu et al. (2025) regarding the erosion of public trust in visual evidence and increased societal vulnerability to digital manipulation.

Sentiment analysis of the Soeharto deepfake video serves as a critical component in understanding how the public responds to the use of synthetic technology within a sensitive political context. Unlike the David Beckham case which focused on a humanitarian campaign, this video presents a digital reconstruction of a deceased Indonesian former president explicitly used in a contemporary political campaign narrative. The combination of post-mortem image, New Order political symbolism, and the 2024 Election context makes audience reaction more emotional, polarized, and laden with moral weight. Therefore, public sentiment analysis does not merely record positive or negative responses, but also reveals societal moral expectations regarding digital political communication and ethical boundaries deemed inviolable.

Comment data collected from the Instagram post shows that the audience is not merely judging technological aspects, but explicitly responding to the social, political, and ethical values contained within the video. The sharp polarization in public sentiment clarifies that deepfakes are not uniformly accepted; public acceptance relies heavily on who is being faked, for what purpose, and in which sociopolitical context. Consequently, the sentiment processing of this video provides a broader picture of the social risks of deepfakes, including how this technology can trigger collective moral rejection, political suspicion, and historical nostalgia exploited for specific interests.

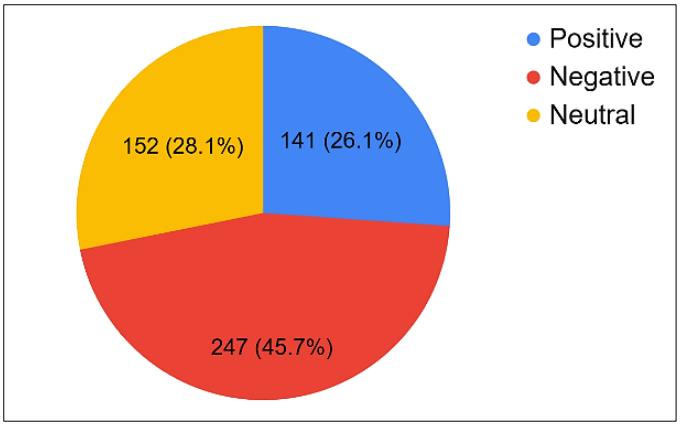

Figure 4. Results of the sentiment analysis of the Soeharto deepfake video (*Source*: Research Data, 2025)

Thematic analysis of public comments indicates that the Soeharto deepfake video elicited a highly polarized response, with Negative sentiment dominating (45.7%). This polarization is not only related to the deepfake technology itself but is also triggered by the context of its use in a political campaign and the ethical sensitivity regarding a deceased historical figure. Ethically nuanced comments appeared strongly; for instance, users like @indra** and @bodat** condemned the video as an immoral act: "*You immoral fool, Mr. Suharto is already deceased yet you still use him for campaigning*." These criticisms demonstrate public rejection of the exploitation of post-mortem images as a political persuasion strategy. Political rejection was also very apparent, indicated by comments from @agung**, who sarcastically noted that certain parties were "*So afraid of losing... even the dead are brought to life*," as well as calls to report the video by several users like @rahma**, who wrote, "*Raise your hand if you have reported this video*." Some users even responded with discomfort due to visuals resembling horror or manipulation; for example, a comment by @eki** described it as a "horror-comedy genre," reflecting a strong uncanny valley effect consistent with the findings of Birrer and Just (2024) that deepfakes of deceased figures trigger higher social resistance.

On the other hand, Neutral sentiment (28.1%) primarily emerged from users focusing on technical aspects or the political context without providing explicit moral judgment. Several comments showed curiosity about the technology, for example, user @daffa** wrote, "*It's AI technology, bro*," or @saitama** who asked, "*Is AI technology the beginning of Edo Tensei jutsu?*" linking the video to pop culture references. Others commented on the political context of the video, such as @nina** and @bagus**, who responded to the speech content or campaign atmosphere without touching upon ethical issues. This pattern suggests that a portion of the audience is more interested in discussing technological mechanisms or the political meaning of the content rather than the moral issues of deepfake usage itself.

Meanwhile, Positive sentiment (26.1%) was divided between nostalgia for the figure of Soeharto and explicit political support. Users like @andi** wrote, "*Miss Mr. Harto, Alfatihah for him...*" while @maya** wrote, "*Miss President Soeharto*," confirming how the representation of political figures through deepfake can trigger collective memory and historical nostalgia. Political support also appeared from accounts like @prbw** or @gibran** mentioning candidate pair names, for instance, "Prabowo Gibran," indicating that for some audiences, the use of deepfake is considered legitimate or even effective as a campaign tool. These findings are consistent with literature stating that deepfake acceptance relies heavily on affective closeness and the political preferences of the audience.

Case Analysis: The Soeharto Deepfake and the Politics of "Digital Resurrection"

1. Post-Mortem Politics: Resurrecting Memory for Legitimacy

   The Soeharto deepfake case in the 2024 Election marks a controversial new chapter in Indonesian political communication: the practice of digital resurrection or the reviving of deceased figures. Unlike David Beckham who actively participated, this video engineers the figure of former President Soeharto, who holds immense historical weight, to serve as a virtual

campaigner. Narratively, the video is designed to effectuate a transfer of symbolic legitimacy. In the video transcript, this simulated Soeharto figure does not merely speak on generalities, but explicitly commands: "*Vote for number two!*" and "*Remember! Golongan Karya!*". This strategy attempts to manipulate the public's collective memory, linking past stability (the "just and prosperous nation" narrative) with present electoral interests. This is a concrete example of the synthetification of public opinion, where public opinion is shaped through a synthetic reality borrowing authority from the past (Splichal, 2022).

2. The Ethical Clash: Between Nostalgia and "Perpetual Sin"

   The most critical aspect of this case is the ethical violation that triggered extraordinary public resistance. The dominance of negative sentiment (45.7%) indicates that the majority of the audience rejects the use of deceased individuals (post-mortem image abuse) for practical politics. In Indonesian culture, which upholds the sanctity of death, this act is deemed to cross moral boundaries. Public comments reflect this anger vividly. Many users assessed this action as unethical and an exploitation of the deceased, who could not provide consent (non-consensual). For instance, the account @ahmadsansan421 commented sharply, "*You immoral fool, Mr. Suharto is already deceased yet you still use him for campaigning*." Theological terms even appeared in this discourse, such as the comment from @ristianiikah calling it a "*Terrifying Dosa Jariyah*" (perpetual/ongoing sin), as well as concerns regarding family permission as expressed by @rmdhn.1605: "*Have you asked permission from the extended CENDANA family????*". These reactions confirm that for the Indonesian public, technology must not violate norms of decency toward the deceased (Wahyuni, 2020).

3. The "Edo Tensei" Phenomenon and the Uncanny Valley

   Audience response to the technical aspects of this video birthed a unique pop culture phenomenon. Instead of being amazed, many audience members likened this technology to "Edo Tensei," a forbidden jutsu in the anime Naruto, used to resurrect the dead into fighting puppets. This metaphor appeared repeatedly, for example, by @faisalrprawira, who briefly wrote: "edotensei", or the rhetorical question from @lianakrawain: "Is AI technology the beginning of edo tensei jutsu?" The use of this term is highly relevant to the Uncanny Valley theory. The audience experienced psychological discomfort or a "creepy" feeling seeing a deceased figure "live" again but with mouth movements and expressions that were not entirely natural. This discomfort was reflected in the comment by @pura.pura_bahagia, who described the video as belonging to the "*Horor Komedi Genre*", or @abdurrachman_j, who felt "*This is really terrifying*." This proves that AI realism can backfire; the more it tries to look real, the more it triggers fear and rejection if the context is inappropriate (Engel-Hermann & Skulmowski, 2025).

4. Polarization of Collective Memory: Longing vs. Trauma

   This case illustrates how deepfakes reinforce polarization in society (Deepfake Duality). On one hand, for nostalgic supporters, the video successfully activated memories of the New Order era perceived as stable. Positive sentiment (26.1%) was filled with comments of longing and prayer. The account @akangleo.workspace, for example, wrote: "*Miss Mr. Harto, Alfatihah for him...*", and @fauzibajawa responded with the iconic phrase: "*Enak jaman ku to,,*" ("Wasn't it better in my era?"). For this group, the virtual presence of Soeharto is a reminder of the "Father of Development" figure.

   However, the video also resurrected historical trauma and political cynicism. For the resistant group, Soeharto's "resurrection" was interpreted as the return of an authoritarian regime. Cynical comments such as "*Rising again Mr. Harto*" from @mj.satriosport or strong rejections linking this to democratic regression show that the collective memory regarding Soeharto is not monolithic. This deepfake failed as a unifying tool; instead, it acted as a catalyst widening the divide between those longing for the past and those rejecting it (Misra et al., 2024).

The Soeharto Deepfake case provides an important lesson that in political communication, technical prowess cannot replace ethical sensitivity. Although technically innovative, this campaign

stumbled upon the social norms of Indonesian society regarding respect for death. As seen in the public comments, when technology violates these sacred boundaries, the resulting response is not merely political criticism, but deep moral and theological judgment.

Navigating Deepfake Duality: Between Humanitarian Innovation and Political Manipulation

The findings from these two cases provide strong empirical evidence to confirm and, in some aspects, challenge existing academic literature regarding synthetic media. First, these findings strongly support the theory of Deepfake Duality proposed by Gavran et al. (2025) and Xu et al. (2025), which states that this technology operates on two poles: creative opportunity and ethical risk. The David Beckham case confirms literature suggesting that deepfakes can "transcend geographic boundaries" and enhance message efficiency. The positive audience response praising the innovation ("Synthesia will change everything") aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), where perceived usefulness drives technology acceptance.

However, findings from the Soeharto case provide evidence that broadens our understanding of audience resistance. Previous literature from Birrer and Just (2024) highlighted the risk of disinformation. Yet, comment data in the Soeharto case indicates that public rejection is not merely a matter of "truth vs. falsehood" (fact), but rather "moral propriety." The emergence of terms like "Dosa Jariyah" (perpetual sin) and the "Edo Tensei" metaphor proves that local audience resistance is deeply influenced by cultural and religious values aspects often overlooked in Western technical studies. This underscores that transparency (labeling "AI generated") is insufficient to quell public anger if the content violates social norms. The dynamics between the Beckham and Soeharto cases vividly map two distinct faces of this technology:

1. Deepfake as a Communication Innovation Tool (The Bright Side)

   Deepfake proves highly effective when used as a utilitarian tool to solve communication logistics problems. In the Beckham case, the technology succeeded in eliminating linguistic barriers. Instead of relying solely on subtitles, audiences in Africa, China, or the Arab world could feel a personal connection because Beckham appeared to speak directly in their native languages. This effectiveness was achieved due to:

   a. Clear Intent: The goal was philanthropic (non-malicious).
   b. Subject Consent: Beckham is alive and actively participating, ensuring no violation of individual autonomy.
   c. Focus on the Message: The technology served as a "bridge" for the message, not the message itself.

2. Deepfake as a Source of Risk and Distrust (The Dark Side)

   Conversely, deepfake turns dangerous when it enters the realm of emotional and historical manipulation without consent (non-consensual). The Soeharto case illustrates the danger of the synthetification of public opinion, where past authority figures are "brought to life" to legitimize contemporary political agendas. The danger lies in:

   a. Uncanny Valley Effect: Technical imperfections (robotic voice, stiff expressions) trigger fear and revulsion, as seen in comments labeling it "horror comedy."
   b. Violation of Collective Memory: Using deceased individuals is deemed unethical (post-mortem abuse). This triggers mass cynicism, where audiences feel the technology is being used to deceive or manipulate, as reflected in the comment, "*So afraid of losing... even the dead are brought to life*."

The findings from this comparative study carry contrasting strategic implications for communication practitioners. For the corporate and social campaign sectors, deepfake technology proves safe and effective to adopt, provided the motive is transparent and ethical. As seen in the Beckham case, using synthetic figures for production efficiency, language localization, or hyper-personalization is acceptable to the public and can even create a positive viral effect. The primary condition is full permission (consent) from the featured subject, ensuring the technology is viewed

solely as an innovative bridge to convey humanitarian or service messages, not as a tool of manipulation.

Conversely, the implications for political communication indicate significantly higher risks. Using deepfake to "resurrect" figures, especially the deceased, to garner electoral votes tends to backfire, damaging candidate credibility. The public views this strategy as a form of insecurity and moral degradation. Instead of gaining sympathy, politicians employing this method face mass cynicism as they are perceived to be exploiting collective memory and violating the sanctity of death. This confirms that in politics, technical sophistication cannot replace authentic human connection; emotional manipulation through AI only widens the chasm of voter distrust.

From an ethical and policy perspective, this analysis highlights the urgency of regulation that goes beyond mere content labeling obligations. The Soeharto case proves that technical transparency—such as attaching an "AI generated" label is insufficient to mitigate public outrage if the content transgresses social norms. Therefore, a new legal framework is needed that specifically regulates post-mortem digital rights to prevent the exploitation of images of the deceased without the consent of family or heirs. Furthermore, public digital literacy must be enhanced, not limited to the technical ability to detect fake videos, but also the critical ability to question the ethics behind their creation.

Ultimately, this research positions deepfake as a major disruptor in the digital trust ecosystem. The future of communication will not be determined by how realistically AI technology can mimic humans, but by how wisely communicators manage moral integrity in its usage. Organizations that fail to balance technical innovation with ethical sensitivity will be trapped in a trust paradox, where the technology intended to bring them closer to their audience creates resistance and moral rejection that is difficult to repair.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that deepfake technology in digital communication possesses a fundamental dual nature, referred to as "Deepfake Duality," where the technology functions as a double-edged sword offering innovative opportunities while simultaneously presenting significant ethical risks. Public acceptance of this technology is not uniform; rather, it is highly contingent upon the context of usage, the purpose of creation, and the status of the subject being simulated. Broadly speaking, deepfake proves to be an effective and appreciated tool when employed for humanitarian purposes with clear subject consent, yet transforms into a threat triggering strong rejection when utilized for political manipulation, particularly involving deceased figures. This stark contrast is evident in the comparison between the David Beckham and Soeharto cases. In the Beckham case, deepfake represents the "bright side" of innovation, capable of transcending language barriers and creating personal global connections. The public tends to accept this technology due to its philanthropic nature and the presence of consent from the living subject. Conversely, the Soeharto case represents the "dark side" of the technology, triggering public resistance and dominant negative sentiment. The attempt to "resurrect" a deceased figure for electoral interests is perceived as a severe ethical violation, a manipulation of collective memory, and a trigger for psychological discomfort or the Uncanny Valley effect which local audiences termed the "Edo Tensei" phenomenon.

These findings also underscore that technical transparency, such as merely labeling content as "AI-generated," is insufficient to mitigate public outrage if the content contravenes social norms and sacred cultural values. Audience resistance in the political case is not merely a matter of factual truth, but of moral propriety, where the exploitation of post-mortem imagery is regarded as "Dosa Jariyah" (perpetual sin). Therefore, this study recommends the necessity of a new legal framework governing post-mortem digital rights to prevent the misuse of images of deceased figures. As a strategic implication, organizations and companies are advised to exercise extreme caution in navigating the utilization of synthetic media. For the corporate sector, deepfake adoption is safe provided the motives are ethical, transparent, and consensual. However, for political actors, the use of this technology has the potential to backfire, damaging credibility and widening the chasm of voter distrust. Ultimately, the future of digital communication will not be defined by how realistically

AI technology can mimic humans, but by how wisely communicators maintain moral integrity in its application.

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