TO DEEPFAKE OR NOT TO DEEPFAKE?
AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS ON THE INFLUENCE OF DEEPFAKE ADVERTISING ON BRAND IMAGE IN GREECE

Student Name: Anna Valeria Pelivanidou
Student Number: 708014

Supervisor: Dr. Jinju Muraro-Kim

Media & Creative Industries MA
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

Deepfake technology, a subset of synthetic media, has received increasing scholarly attention for its potential risks and benefits in media production. In advertising, it has been predominantly used for celebrity endorsements, in which a celebrity is seen doing or saying something they never did. The complex nature of the technology have raised questions on whether brands should employ deepfakes in their advertising practices. Given the recent advent of the technology, research on deepfake advertising is limited and lacks in depth. Extant literature has mostly examined deepfakes from a legal perspective, focusing on potential detection methods and exploring their impact on fake news and misinformation. Despite scholarly warnings on the power of deepfake advertising in influencing a brand's reputation, no research has been yet conducted on brand image. Therefore, understanding how consumers perceive and make meaning of brands that produce deepfake celebrity endorsements is essential. Celebrity endorsements have become an increasingly popular strategy in Greece, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, they are considered a "set rule" for brands looking to strengthen their brand image. As the Greek advertising industry is shifting from traditional advertising methods to more accessible and cost-effective AI tools, deepfake technology presents a novel approach to celebrity endorsements. Hence, by carrying qualitative in-depth interviews, the present thesis explores Greek Gen Z perceptions of brand image within the context of deepfake celebrity endorsements.

The findings reveal that consumers generally feel apprehensive about the technology. Deepfake advertising is perceived as inherently deceptive, and consumers expect brands to act ethically by adhering to all necessary legal standards when using it. Disclosure and consent are crucial in establishing brand credibility, and when implemented, they can alleviate concerns and make consumers more receptive to its use. Creative, innovative and personalized applications of the technology were discussed as potential benefits of deepfake advertising, enabling brands to produce unique and engaging content that distinguishes them form competitors and strengthens their brand image. It was further revealed that deepfake endorsers are viewed as less authentic, but authenticity can be enhanced if brands use synthetic endorsers instead of entire deepfake ones. Finally, endorser-brand congruence and celebrity expertise were found to be particularly important in enhancing brand credibility and fostering positive associations with the brand. The thesis' findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of consumer perspectives of deepfake advertising, paving the way for further research and provide advertisers guidance on how to

leverage the technology to optimize their advertising practices, strengthen brand image and minimize consumer concerns.

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1. Introduction

"With immense potential comes ethical dilemmas"

– Sarkhedi (2024, para. 5).

1.1. Background of Study and Research Question

Do you recall when in 2019 Mark Zuckerberg confessed that Facebook was created to manipulate people and announced its permanent deletion? Neither does he. Deepfakes, a recently developed subset of synthetic media, have received increasing scholarly attention for the potential opportunities and threats they present. With the use of deep neural networks, deepfake content can be created with such accuracy that can be highly credible and challenging to distinguish from human-created media (Bateman, 2022, p. 4). Deepfakes are most commonly seen in the form of audiovisual content in entertainment, especially in the film industry, but have also been used for misinformation, fraud and political manipulation. Thus, prevailing public, media and scholarly discussions regarding the technology are filled with concerns and fears for misuse, manipulation and threat to the identity of individuals. Even though the software was used in its early stages predominantly for unethical practices, its usage matured, and its application expanded. Importantly, deepfake technology has garnered increasing attention for its capabilities in the advertising industry. Marketers are now experimenting with creative AI technologies in their marketing campaigns and displaying them across media platforms where consumers can access them quickly and easily (Kietzmann et al., 2021, p.475).

Given the nature of deepfakes, the majority of these advertising campaigns embrace the technology through celebrity endorsements, in which public figures are portrayed saying or doing something they never did (Karpinska-Krakowiak & Eisend, 2024, p. 1). Celebrity endorsements have been proven to hold strong potential in influencing consumer perceptions of a brand's image and eventually, brand equity (Dwivedi et al., 2015, p. 450). Consumers often associate the attributes and built-in image of the featured celebrity figure with the brand, which can result in a favorable brand image. The concept of brand image has long been part of scholarly discussions. However, no set definition has been given and its interpretation is based on the researcher's subjective evaluation and research objective (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990, p. 112). Brand image can be described as the sum of thoughts and feelings formed in a consumer's mind about a brand, after exposure to its activities, such as advertising (Keller, 1993, p.3). Brand image is therefore of increasing importance to marketers, as they strive to foster positive perceptions about the brand through different advertising tactics. These efforts aim to strengthen brand recall, influence

consumer behavior and differentiate the brand from competitors. In the past few years, many brands like Zalando and Cadbury have begun experimenting with the technology in celebrity endorsements (Dagalp, & Södergren, 2023, p. 141). However, laws around deepfakes that ensure the safety and security of individuals have only recently begun to be imposed globally. This has in turn raised questions among both the media and the public, who have consistently advocated for laws that safeguard the identity and personal privacy of individuals.

As with any emerging information technology, there are divergent viewpoints on its application. On one side of the spectrum, the capabilities of synthetic advertising incite numerous challenges. Ethical concerns and legal implications are at the heart of media and scholarly discussions, due to the technology's potential to spread manipulative and misleading content that could falsely imply an ad's authenticity (Diakopoulos & Johnson, 2021, p. 2079). Similarly, many ads featuring deepfake celebrities have taken advantage of their likeness without their permission. This infringement on personal privacy can lead to one's reputational damage and even emotional distress. Scholars have pointed out the potential harm to reputation and weakening of customer relationships that could occur even when a brand incorporates deepfake techniques in an ethical manner (Albahar & Almalki, 2019, p. 2047). On the other hand, deepfakes can be a novel and accessible tool for creative production, especially in the entertainment and fashion industries (Kietzmann et al., 2020, p. 142). By leveraging AI algorithms, advertisers can enhance their creative capabilities to capture audience attention, stand out from competitors and strengthen brand recall (Kietzmann et al., 2021, pp. 475-476).

Nonetheless, deepfake technology is considered to be in its nascent stages and therefore, academic research on consumer impact and its position within the advertising industry is scarce and lacks in depth. Literature on deepfake technology and celebrity endorsements is progressing without a strong theoretical framework. Forming favorable perceptions about a brand and its products is at the core of celebrity endorsements' effectiveness (Malik et al., 2013, p. 118). Still, despite increasing use of deepfake technology in celebrity endorsements and the significance of understanding consumer responses to their integration, extant literature has yet to explore this concept. Scholars have repeatedly highlighted the need for further research in synthetic advertising (Campbell et al., 2021, p. 34), fashion advertising (Nast, 2021) and brand image, as a driver for brand equity (Mustak et al., 2023, pp. 12-13). To address this evident academic and societal gap, the present research aims to answer the following research question: *'How do Greek young adults perceive the brand image of brands that integrate deepfake technology in celebrity endorsements?'*

1.2. Academic Relevance

The relevance of the thesis stems from a gap in extant literature on the subjective evaluations of consumers about deepfake advertising. From an academic perspective, this thesis aims to contribute to existing literature by providing key insights into the intricate perceptions of consumers on deepfake celebrity endorsements and their connection to brand image. Considering that deepfakes are a relatively new phenomenon, research is scarce and lacks depth (Agarwal & Nath, 2023, pp. 15-16). Extant literature has largely focused on the threats posed by deepfakes (De Ruiter, 2021, pp. 1322-1328), fake news (Blitz et al., 2018, p. 59) and detection methods (Appel & Prietzel, 2022, pp. 2-4), with a few exceptions of political and communication science and business (Godulla et al., 2021, p. 76). In the field of marketing, scholars have predominantly examined consumer responses to a deepfake ad's perceived realism (Campbell et al., 2022, p. 34), influence on purchase intention (Sivanthanu et al., 2023, p. 126), and the associated risks and threats (Kietzmann et al., 2021, p. 480). Research on consumer perspectives and responses to deepfake ads has focused on ads that do not disclose the use of deepfake technology. Hence, these studies have investigated consumer perception of realism and ad falsity (Sivanthanu et al., 2023; Campbell et al., 2022). Considering the potential of deepfakes in shaping the future of advertising and the growing inclusion of public figures in promotional campaigns, there is a clear demand for insights into consumer perceptions of deepfake endorsements (Kietzmann et al., 2021, p. 23).

As previously mentioned, the present thesis aims to explore the complex perceptions of Greek consumers. Celebrity endorsements are a highly popular advertising strategy that is increasingly being implemented in the country, due to their effectiveness in influencing consumer behavior and purchase intention, especially among Gen Z (Tzoumaka et al., 2016, p. 314). Greece has seen a steady growth in AI research in the past 40 years, with researchers hoping to provide valuable insights that will assist its integration across industries (Koubarakis et al., 2018, p. 94). To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there has been no study conducted on deepfake technology in Greece. Scholarly perception of deepfakes is nuanced and subject to debate and has been predominantly approached from an unfavorable standpoint (Albahar & Almalki, 2019, pp. 3246-3247).

The academic significance of this thesis is boosted by the absence of scholarly research in Greece on the increasing use of celebrity endorsements and the willingness of marketers to experiment with new forms of advertising. Greece is also a relatively neglected market compared to other European countries. This thesis hopes to add to the conversation by exploring an underrepresented population group that is highly influenced by celebrity endorsements and is slowly seeing the advent of AI in its practices. Considering the rapid expansion of deepfakes, there is an opportunity to explore how synthetic technology could influence consumer perceptions of deepfake celebrity endorsements. Consequently, the present thesis contributes to existing research by exploring the relationship between synthetic advertising

and brand image from the perspective of Greek Gen Z, hoping to uncover valuable insights that stimulate scholarly discussions.

1.3. Societal Relevance

Even though deepfake technology is still in its infancy with a limited number of examples of its integration into advertising practices, it is plausible that the technology will become readily available and eventually pervasive (Hancock & Bailenson, 2021, p. 149). This is especially true in the advertising and entertainment sectors, where audiovisual content is an integral component of their strategies. As a result, both organizations and consumers are not immune to its effects, underscoring the significance of developing a clearer understanding of its dimensions (Mustak et al., 2023, p. 2). Some organizations are already experimenting with deepfake techniques in their marketing campaigns, predominantly within celebrity endorsements, with limited knowledge of consumer receptivity (Whittaker et al., 2021, pp. 205-206). However, this is not the case in Greece.

Both local and multinational companies in the country have proved their preference for celebrity endorsements across industries (Salamoura et al., 2020, p. 877). As previously mentioned, all deepfake celebrity endorsements have been distributed through social media for convenience and accessibility purposes. Social media marketing in Greece has seen a rapid expansion in the past few years, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic (Bogdanou, 2021, p. 18). Additionally, according to the International Trade Administration (2023, para. 1) Greece is expected to achieve a profound digital transformation by 2025. Businesses and marketers in the country are adopting novel tools within digital advertising, gradually moving away from more traditional forms of advertising (Kalaitzis, 2018, para. 13; Parai, 2018, para. 18-19). Specifically, there is a growing interest in celebrity endorsements across industries due to their effectiveness among the public. Hence, the present research aims to provide valuable insights that could be of interest to advertisers in Greece, considering the limited expertise and budgets required to leverage the technology. This can be especially helpful for the Greek market, as brands are still coping after the 2009 crisis, forced to make significant budget cuts to advertising activities (Halkiopoulos, 2016, p.2). Research findings could help advertisers drift from traditional advertising methods and understand whether this new approach could help create a stronger brand image and increase brand recall.

1.4. Thesis structure

The present thesis will be structured into four main sections. The introduction has established the overview of the topic, and the research question has been raised along with the academic and societal implications of the thesis. In the following chapter, the theoretical framework will examine existing literature on synthetic media and deepfake technology and its application and varying perspectives in the

advertising industry, with emphasis placed on the integration of deepfake technology in celebrity endorsements. Finally, the chapter will introduce the concept of brand image and analyze it in relation to extant research findings or assumptions on consumer perceptions of synthetically manipulated advertising.

The methodology section will present the qualitative approach that was selected to answer the research question of the thesis. This chapter will include a detailed description of the data collection procedure, the sampling criteria, the choice of stimulus and an explanation of thematic analysis and the justification for its application. Finally, the methodology concludes with a description of the measures taken for the validity and reliability of the research, as well as all ethical considerations. Subsequent to data analysis, the results section introduces the research findings, supporting quotes and other relevant insights communicated during data collection. In the results chapter, emerging themes and key insights of the analysis will be discussed in relation to existing literature. This section will support or contradict previous research findings and offer new insights that answer the thesis' research question. The final chapter, the conclusion, will summarize the key findings of the thesis, the theoretical and practical implications and its limitations, from which recommendations for future research will be provided.

2. Theoretical framework

The present research focuses on exploring how Greek Gen Z perceive and make meaning of a brand's image, influenced by the integration of deepfake technology in celebrity endorsements. Hence, it is fundamental to develop a holistic overview of deepfake technology and its role in shaping a new future for the advertising industry. This chapter will be divided into three core sections: "Deepfake Technology", "Deepfake Technology and Celebrity Endorsements", and "Brand Image and Synthetic Advertising".

2.1. Deepfake Technology

2.1.1. Synthetic media and deepfakes

Recent advancements in information technology and machine learning have led to the development of artificial intelligence technologies that can be leveraged to create artificially generated media content (Vasist & Krishnan, 2022, p.591). Synthetic media is an umbrella term that encompasses all types of AI-generated or manipulated text, audio, video and images that can be difficult to distinguish from authentic human-created content (Whittaker et al., 2020, p. 91). Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), computer-generated imagery (CGI), and text generation software such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, are only a few of the examples that fall into this category. Synthetic media are the product of deep learning algorithms inspired by biological neural networks that are capable of producing content based on large amounts of audiovisual data (Millière, 2022, p. 1). However, in recent years, with technical advancements in deep generative modeling and increased accessibility in large data sets, approaches to media creation have grown exponentially.

Deepfake technology, a portmanteau of "deep learning" and "fake", is a subset of synthetic media that was first introduced to the public in 2017 by a Reddit user who incorporated the face of a famous actress into adult videos (Jones, 2020, p. 3). Even though the term does not have a set technical definition, it typically refers to "a technology that uses Artificial Intelligence to produce or edit contents of a video or an image to show something that never happened" (Young, 2019, p. 8). Ever since the early stages of its inception, the computer codes used to generate deepfake content became readily available to the public and were quickly employed by hobbyist communities who used it for entertainment purposes (Whittaker et al., 2020, p. 91). The technology has now been expanded to other domains, from politics to communication, fashion and advertising. However, due to the power of deepfakes to fabricate audiovisual content of a person doing or saying something that never happened and presenting it as genuine, they have been largely associated with negative connotations (Fallis, 2021, pp. 625- 627).

Scholars and experts in the field have repeatedly expressed their concerns about the ethical and legal implications of deepfakes, especially in terms of privacy infringement, fraud and the ability to spread misinformation and manipulate public opinion (George & George, 2023 p. 59-60; Whittaker et al., 2020, p. 94-96; Jones, 2020, .p 9-18). Nonetheless, deepfakes should not be reduced to their negative connotations, as they can open up opportunities for high-quality and innovative content in fields such as education, film and advertising (Kalpokas & Kalpokiene, 2022, Chapter 4, p. 35).

2.1.2. How deepfakes are created

Even though deepfake media can be created with more traditional computer-graphic systems, recent scholarly attention has been driven to the underlying mechanisms employed to produce deepfake content, Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) and autoencoders (Nguyen et al., 2022, p. 1). GANs possess the ability to generate novel and high-resolution images that are strikingly similar to the data networks they were trained on. A trained GAN is trained to produce hundreds of synthetic media content in the form of image manipulation, particularly face frontalization (Yin et al., 2020, p.2). Essentially, a generative model is 'inspired by the human brain and organizes the neural network into multiple layers, each layer using different levels of abstraction' (Siggelkow & Terwiesch, 2019, p. 85).

GANs consist of two neural networks that are simultaneously competing to redefine the generated media until it becomes authentic and hard to distinguish from reality (Nguyen et al., 2022, p. 3). The first component essentially operates as an 'artist' by producing synthetic images or audio based on large sets of data (George & George, 2023, p. 59). This is possible due to the input of large amounts of visual material to a computer, which functions as the 'footage' that the network becomes familiar with. In the second step of the process, the discriminator acts as a 'critic' that attempts to evaluate the level of conviction of the generated image (De Ruiter, 2021, p. 1315; Levine, 2020, p. 10). During this stage, the discriminator compares the image to existing material to assess its authenticity. The two neural networks repeat this in-build process until the created synthetic media produced by the generator can no longer be detected as forgery (Jones, 2020, p. 4; George & George, 2023, p. 59). With the proliferation of deep learning algorithms, GANs can examine and learn facial expressions and movements, speech patterns and skin textures and overlay these features onto other media.

2.1.3. Visual deepfake techniques

Deepfake technology is composed of two broad categories; audio and visual deepfakes (Masood et al., 2023, p. 3980). Generating synthetic media content that is difficult to distinguish from reality requires the application of certain manipulation techniques. Even though visual deepfake techniques vary, the most common ones involve; (1) Identity or face swap, (2) attribute manipulation, (3) boy puppetry,

and (4) entire face synthesis.

The most widespread use of deepfake technology is related to face-swap videos, wherein the facial movements of one individual are overlaid onto the features of another person (Bateman, 2022, p. 4). One of the most prominent examples of deepfake videos is when in 2019 former President Barack Obama was depicted making a public service announcement (Fletcher, 2018, p. 455). "We're entering an era in which our enemies can make it look like anyone is saying anything at any point in time, even if they would never say those things", he warns. Something appears to be off with the video, even though the expressions, hand movements and general body language appear to closely resemble Obama. He pauses, his face slightly changes and in an off-character moment he proceeds to say, "President Trump is a total and complete dipshit". He pauses once again finally stating "See, now I would never say these things, at least not in a public address. But someone else would". The video then slowly reveals director Peele Jordan continuing Obama's monologue, showing the real person behind those words. This is a remarkable example revealing the power of face-swap deepfaked videos.

Face-swap or identity manipulation, is the complete replacement of one's facial region by the face of a different source of media (Khoo et al., 2022, p. 3). This is one of the first public approaches to deepfake videos and has now gained significant popularity both among the public and the creative industries. Identity manipulation has been largely put into effect by the film industry, as the technology facilitates the portrayal of actors who are old or even deceased (Tolosana et al., 2020, p. 132). However, as illustrated through the Obama deepfake example, the malevolent purposes for the implementation of identity manipulation can be abundant (Dunn, 2020, p. 20).

Similar to identity manipulation, attribute manipulation involves the modification of facial attributes such as age, gender, hair or skin colour and even adding objects or accessories around that region (Tolosana et al., 2022, p. 15). A widespread example of this deepfake technique can be seen in the increasing usage of FaceApp, a mobile application that is commonly used by the public for face editing (Masood et al., 2023, p. 21). Another common technique for visual deepfakes that is widely employed by the entertainment industry, is entire face synthesis (Dagar et al., 2022, p. 232). Advanced deep learning technology has the power to generate entire images of individuals that may or may not exist in real life. The images are generated with high realism, making the technique a common application choice across industries, especially gaming, advertising and 3D modeling (Masood et al., 2023, p. 19). Finally, body puppetry or reenactment, the video is created by mimicking the facial expressions, head or even body movements of a target actor that functions as a source (Dagar et al., 2022, p. 223). The aim of body puppetry is to create a highly realistic video featuring an accurate impersonation of someone else,

essentially by copying body poses and other movements. Similar to the majority of visual deepfake techniques, thus far we have seen reenactment be incorporated into practices and strategies of creative industries for diverse intents (Rahman et al., 2022, p. 16).

2.2. Deepfake Technology and Celebrity Endorsements

2.2.1. Deepfaked Ads

Advanced AI technologies were first integrated into various practices across the creative industries, including music composition, image editing and narrative production (Campbell et al., 2022, p. 241). However, applications of deepfake technology have begun being integrated in advertising. In 2019 a YouTuber released a reimagined version of Dior's J'adore advertisement which featured popular actor Rowan Atkinson confidently doing a catwalk as a strikingly beautiful woman, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. (Crookedpixel, 2019). The choice of the actor is not meant to produce a realistic example, but rather showcase the capabilities of identity manipulation in a "cringe-worthy" way (Kietzmann et al., 2021, p. 475). Similarly, another user of the popular platform edited the same commercial by overlaying actress Margot Robbie onto the facial region of Charlize Theron, as originally featured (DeepFaker, 2020). The usage of synthetic technology is no longer evident and the commercial looks convincingly real.

FIGURE 2.1. Synthetic manipulation of Dior J'adore's advertisement.

Note. From Kietzmann et al. (2021, p. 475).

Presumably, such videos are released with the intention of creating humor and offering an insight on the technology's capabilities to increase awareness (Campbell et al., 2021, p. 23). In the case of content creators, advertisers and other experts in the field, deepfake techniques hold great potential in facilitating creative practices and encouraging less time-consuming and financially burdensome processes. At the same time, even though deepfake videos possess great potential to drive greater attention to the product or

service, non-disclosure of such practices can deceive consumers and raise ethical concerns (Van Esch & Stewart Black, 2021, p. 199). According to Kietzmann et al. (2021, p. 476), deepfake technology can be a highly influential tool for altering a consumer's behavior towards a brand.

According to IMARC Group, a leading market research company, the global advertising market is expected to reach US$ 978.5 Billion by 2032, with a steady growth rate (CAGR) of 4.6% during 2024-2032 (IMARC, n.d.). Future forecasting and analysis of market trends suggest that AI-powered tools will continue to revolutionize advertising practices and advertisers who embrace these technologies can gain a significant competitive advantage. Consequently, it is essential to explore the capabilities of GANs and machine learning algorithms in transforming creative practices and examine consumer response to such trends (Agarwal & Nath, 2023, p. 19). The technology can be a powerful communication tool that can be used both for creating new opportunities and malicious practices (Whittaker et al., 2021, p. 207). Nevertheless, deepfakes are speculated to influence the paradigm of creative practices and revolutionize the landscape of advertising (Kietzmann et al., 2021, p. 475).

2.2.2. Deepfake Celebrity Endorsements

A celebrity endorser has been defined by McCracken (1989) as "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (p. 310). Celebrity endorsements can influence advertising effectiveness, brand recall, purchase intention, product evaluation and overall consumer behavior (Spry et al., 2011, pp. 898-899; Yang, 2018, p. 389). In fact, celebrity endorsements are one of the most powerful tools in contemporary advertising, due to their ability to influence people in a way no other strategy can (Hennayake, 2017, p. 2297). This is possible due to the transference of certain celebrity qualities to the endorsed brand, especially if the endorser is perceived by its audience as trustworthy and credible (McCracken, 1989, p. 319). If an endorser is used wisely and there is synergy between the celebrity and the brand, then it is possible to stimulate favorable consumer behavior and enhance the image of the brand (Mateen Khan et al., 2019, p. 101). With the rise of deepfakes, advertisers can take advantage of a celebrity's public influence by creating a balance between authenticity and control (Whittaker et al., 2021, p. 211).

Currently, there are very few cases of organizations employing deepfake techniques in their advertising campaigns (Vasist & Krishnan, 2022, p. 603). Nonetheless, tech experts are expecting to see a rise in deepfake usage, especially in fashion advertising (Chitrakorn, 2021, para. 1). Zalando, a European fashion and lifestyle brand, released in 2018 a social media campaign featuring supermodel Cara Delevingne (Agarwal & Nath, 2023, p. 26). With the integration of deepfake technology, it was possible to create 290,000 localized ads across 12 European countries, offering a wide range of alternative shots

and voiceovers relevant to each location with the help of Facebook's ad targeting (Agarwal & Nath, 2023, p. 19). The campaign intended to showcase that the brand's delivery can access even the most remote areas. Its success was evident, with over 180 million views and a striking 54% increase in sales.

This is not the only example of the integration of a deepfake celebrity in promotional strategies. In 2019, famous former footballer, David Beckham, was featured in Malaria No More charity's campaign speaking nine different languages to raise awareness of the "Malaria Must Die Voice Petition" (Zero Malaria Britain, 2019). Through this 55-second video, the actor commences speaking in English and then proceeds to switch to eight different languages, all voiced by real men and women, including survivors of the deadly disease and doctors from around the world (Oakes, 2019, para. 5). As Beckham later stated, "it's great to be involved in something where the tech side of our lives and our world get involved, to be one voice of many different people" (Zero Malaria Britain, 2019, 1:37). Another popular example is Cadbury's commercial featuring Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan (Cadbury Celebrations, 2021). The aim of this production was to help the Mondelez International brand grow its audience reach. The end product was so successful that the business' reach skyrocketed with a staggering 35% in growth, whilst in 2023 Cadbury took the first place in the Creative Effectiveness category at Cannes Lions (Markowicz, 2023, para. 1).

Overall, nearly all advertisements featuring individuals created using deepfake techniques, capitalize on the opportunities created by celebrity endorsers (Westerlund, 2019, p. 43). This indicates the potential of the technology in changing the future of celebrity endorsements, providing advertisers with a new tool to enhance their effectiveness. As Dr Kirk Plangger, a marketing expert at King's College London, said to BBC, "deepfakes will just become part of a normal practice in the advertising industry over the next few years" (Marsh, N., 2023, para. 18). Regardless, the emergence of deepfake techniques in the advertising industry has elicited divergent perspectives and conflicting viewpoints, with many scholars calling for attention to this "significant threat" of our generation (Westerlund, 2019, p. 39).

The advertising scene in Greece has not yet seen the adoption of advanced AI technologies in celebrity endorsements. Celebrity endorsements are a highly embraced marketing strategy in the country, evident from the multitude of social media ads depicting well-known figures promoting a brand's products or services (Loupos, 2023, para. 1-2). In fact, it's considered a 'set rule' for a brand's content marketing, as consumers seem to trust their favorite celebrities more than any other source (Parai, 2018, para. 18-19). Recognizing the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements, advertisers are continually seeking new and innovative tools within digital advertising that shift away from conventional forms of advertising (Kalaitzis, 2018, para. 13). Still, the advertising industry in Greece has yet to experiment with deepfake

techniques, despite its accessibility and potential to elevate the advertising scene.

2.2.3. Deepfakes as a "phantom menace"

Even though the employment of deepfake technology tools might already be highly beneficial for the entertainment industry and especially film, such practices in advertising spark significant concerns among scholars and practitioners in the field (Karpinska-Krakowiak & Eisend, 2024, p. 1). The main source of distress in the industry is concerned with the potential for misinformation and misleading content through celebrity endorsements. To illustrate, there are documented cases of commercials featuring Leonardo DiCaprio or Elon Musk promoting a product or service without their authorization (Coffee, 2022, para. 4-5). This may create false impressions in consumers' minds by being deceived about the ad's authenticity and increase the value of the product (Karpinska-Krakowiak & Eisend, 2024, p. 2). Well-known public figures such as Jennifer Aniston (Hicks, 2024, para. 4), Taylor Swift (Sloane, 2024, para. 1) or Tom Hanks (Hanks, 2023), have all fallen under this category. However, these examples are merely a subset of the broader array of celebrities' faces being used without their permission for marketing purposes. With the accessibility to deepfake media production, the reputation of public figures can be easily damaged if used without their permission (Kwok & Koh, 2021, p. 1800).

Scholars and experts in the field have often described deepfake technology as a "phantom menace" for marketing practices (Whittaker et al., 2021, pp. 205-208). Laws concerning the ethical usage of deepfakes have slowly been implemented around the world, especially in China and the US, in an attempt to regulate its application and provide detection methods for synthetic media content (Kwok & Koh, 2021, p. 1801; Kietzmann et al., 2021, p. 481; Whittaker et al., 2021, p. 208). Nonetheless, legislation does not move at the same pace as technology and there is an increased need for public awareness on the power of AI technology advancements. This implies that unregulated deepfake ads created by agencies with the authorization of all individuals involved allow advertisers to maintain full creative authority over the production and distribution of the content (Kietzmann et al., 2021, p. 481). In fact, generative AI was one of the core reasons leading to the SAG-AFTRA strike in Hollywood (Nolan, 2023, para. 8-9). As the union's national executive director, Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, states that actors 'face an existential threat to their livelihoods with the rise of generative AI technology' (SAG-AFTRA, 2023, 13:27). Undoubtedly, this would be the case in advertising too.

From a consumer perspective, scholarly research has repeatedly highlighted the ethical concerns regarding misrepresentation (Paul & Nikolaev, 2021, pp. 1831-1832; Kwok & Koh, 2021, p. 1800). Consumers tend to rely on audio-visual ads and not investigate further to find information about what is presented to them (Sundar, 2008, p. 76). Providing fake information about a product or service as real can

fool consumers and eventually affect their purchase intention (Sivanthanu et al., 2023, p. 125). Extant literature has highlighted the importance of disclosure in synthetic manipulation to protect audiences (Karpinska-Krakowiak & Eisend, 2024, pp. 9-10). Similarly to legal regulation, disclosure in deepfake advertisements remains largely unaddressed, failing to mitigate concerns among scholars and the public about the potential harm of deepfakes. How will the perception of brands and their products change when the use of deepfake ads becomes more prominent? This is a question that is yet to be explored.

2.2.4. Deepfakes as a new hope for marketing

Despite its controversial reputation, synthetic manipulation has the power to significantly transform e-commerce and advertising in ways that benefit both consumers and businesses (Whittaker et al., 2021, p. 205). Firstly, deep learning algorithms and GANs can foster less time-consuming and financially burdening practices for creative professionals and designers. This is notably beneficial in advertising where funding is often limited and can lead to production restrictions (Campbell et al., 2021, p. 28). Similarly, deepfake techniques enable creative content creation in the industry (Picazo & Moreno-Gil, 2019, p. 18). With the demand for celebrity endorsers, creative video production without the physical presence of a celebrity can be highly flexible and convenient for organizations (Kwok & Koh, 2021, p. 1800). Indeed, a growing number of actors and celebrities are embracing AI-generated advertising with the use of their deepfake versions. For instance, a popular Singaporean model, Jamie Yeo, has signed a deal with a financial technology firm, giving her authorization to use her likeness for marketing purposes (Nolan, 2023, para. 5).

A study by Agarwal & Nath (2023, pp. 17-19) revealed that consumers might be more open and optimistic about the implementation of deepfake techniques in advertising. Even though the technology raises ethical concerns among consumers, it offers new potential in audio-visual content that could be perceived positively (Sivanthanu et al., 2023, p. 130). This is further beneficial for creative professionals who can produce content that replaces the pre and post-production hours in a matter of minutes (Kietzmann et al., 2020, pp. 141-143). Deepfakes featuring celebrity endorsers or products promoted in unique ways can influence consumer behavior and eventually impact purchase intention (Maras & Alexandrou, 2019, p. 257; Lipowski & Bondos, 2018, p. 18). This signifies the opportunity to bring back the so-called "delebs" (dead celebrities) to be featured in advertisements with minimal difficulty (D'Rozario, 2016, pp. 395-396).

The technology has proven to be highly impactful in advertising of events and the creative industries (Agarwal & Nath, 2023, p. 18). A prominent example is the "Dali Lives" exhibition held in the Dali Museum in St Petersburg, Florida (Mihailova, 2021, p. 884; Kietzmann et al., 2021, p. 475). The famous

painter who died in 1989, was seen greeting and interacting with visitors with the aim of promoting the museum and creating memorable experiences (Figure 2.2.). This was possible thanks to the employment of deepfake techniques which generated realistic images of Dali based on archival footage (Kidd & Rees, 2022, p. 219).

FIGURE 2.2. Salvador Lives deepfake at The Dalí Museum.

Note. From Dezeen (2019, 0:27)

Advertisers could take advantage of the technology to create memorable experiences for consumers and evoke emotions that result in positive brand image and brand recall. If the technology is used ethically and creatively with the permission of the individuals involved, it is possible to create positive and memorable experiences and evoke positive emotions (Agarwal & Nath, 2023, p. 19; Whittaker et al., 2021, p. 209). As stated by Kietzmann et al. (2021) "deepfakes are exciting artifacts, as they are interesting, engaging and memorable to most people because of their novelty" (p. 476). Nonetheless, in spite of the potential of deepfake techniques in editing and producing advertisements, extant literature has yet to extensively explore its influence in the industry (Campbell et al., 2022, p. 242).

2.3. Brand Image and Synthetic Advertising

2.3.1   Understanding brand image

The concept of brand image has been defined and interpreted in various ways in scholarly research, leading to incongruence (Lee et al., 2014, p. 2). Due to the lack of a set definition in literature, the concept of brand image is considered "ill-defined" and is dependent on the research's scope (Malik et al., 2012, p. 13070). A prevailing interpretation proposed by Keller (1993, p. 3) describes brand image as the set of associations a consumer develops about the identity of a brand. Nonetheless, the meaning of brand image has been extensively revised over the years, shaped by the subjective interpretation of scholars and the methodological approach of their studies (Table 1). Interpretations of brand image have either focused on

a set of messages and meanings, human-like personality perspective and its attributes or the emotional and cognitive connections formed in consumers' minds about the brand (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990, p. 112).

The concept of brand image is clearly distinct from that of brand identity which is the associations that a brand strives to establish in the mind of the consumer (Aaker, 1996, p. 68). Brand identity derives from the organization, whereas brand image is concerned with how the brand is *actually* perceived by consumers. Managers across industries strive to develop and maintain a strong brand image and build brand awareness and loyalty at a later stage. In essence, by building a strong brand image it is possible to address the concept of brand equity; awareness, perceived quality, image and loyalty (Dehghani, 2013, p. 22).

Organizations that establish high brand equity are more likely to create a competitive advantage, differentiate their products from that of others, cultivate a sense of quality and trust, and drive profitability and growth (Tuominen, 1999, p. 74). In essence, consumers' perceptions of a brand has a strategic role in marketing practices and is often considered by experts as the key driver to a product's long-term success (Roth, 1995, pp. 56-58). The main purpose of advertisers across industries is to influence consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards the brand. The inevitable influence of advertising on consumer perceptions of brand image has been under great scholarly attention, particularly in the case of celebrity endorsements (Chan et al., 2013, p. 168). The personal evaluations developed during exposure to the ad stimulus can directly transfer to brand image, especially affection, due to the presence of the celebrity endorser (Chi et al., 2009, p. 4). Hence, a successful marketing campaign is one that succeeds in positively influencing brand image and consumer behavior (Zhang, 2015, p. 60).

So, how do we discern the intricate facets of consumer's perceptions of a brand's image? According to Keller (2001) brand response is concerned with "how customers respond to the brand, its marketing activity, and other sources of information, that is, what customers think or feel about the brand" (p. 13) and is classified into judgments and feelings. These responses can be influenced by a variety of factors, converse in time and are either classified as positive or negative, moderate or strong. These responses can be the product of various brand activities, such as advertising tactics and a celebrity endorser, and should therefore be continuously examined to drive customer loyalty and higher brand equity in the long term (Lee et al., 2000, p. 63).

2.3.2 Consumer perception of synthetic ads

The dynamics of contemporary advertising practices and consumer responses have been reviewed in scholarly research. Consumer perception of AI in marketing activities can vary and is dependent upon the

brand and its scope of integration (Larva, 2021, p. 24-26). Krafft et al. (2021, p. 138) talked about how consumers are generally concerned about AI and its lack of boundaries, with many describing it as too invasive and uncomfortable. The overall inference is that consumers tend to think negatively about AI and are not acceptive of its application. Interestingly, a study by Chaisatitkul et al. (2024) revealed that consumers regarded AI content to be interesting and appealing, especially after learning that it is AI (p. 142). This was due to the context and purpose of its implementation, as ethical concerns about AI were still present but eased with the disclosure of deepfake use.

Scholarly research on deepfakes has yet to extensively explore the influence of deepfake ads on consumer perceptions, despite its significance for organizations. A study by Sivanthanu et al. (2023, p. 131) on consumer shopping intention revealed that consumers' trust is positively influenced by deepfake ads that portray accurate information about a product or service. Perceived trust is concerned with the level of a customer's beliefs about a brand's quality, security and privacy protection and is a vital driver of brand success (Al-Debei et al., 2015, p. 713). Similarly, according to Campbell et al (2022, pp. 26-27), synthetic manipulated ads that feature creative storytelling are more likely to be trusted and accepted by consumers. Creativity can further enhance the originality, novelty and unexpectedness of an ad and be favorably perceived by consumers. Nevertheless, these studies have focused on consumer perception or behavior based on advertisements that did not disclose the integration of deepfakes.

Campbell et al. (2022, p. 28) suggest that if consumers are aware of an ad's manipulation, the perception of an ad and eventually, the brand itself, may differ. In this case, it is possible that the focus will be shifted from the ad's message and imagery towards the manipulation itself which can make consumers more skeptical of the ad's acceptance (Spielmann & Orth, 2020, pp. 137-142). Manipulation awareness can further make consumers perceive an ad as intentionally misleading or misinformative, aiming to psychologically manipulate them into purchasing goods or services they would otherwise not be interested in (Eze & Lee, 2012, p. 97). On the other hand, the perceived creativity and quality of a manipulated ad may differ if the advertisement is viewed as having a greater underlying value (Campbell, 1995, p. 250). Therefore, how are consumer perceptions formed when disclosure labels are used in manipulated advertising? With the need for increased regulation around deepfakes (Van der Sloot & Wagensveld, 2022, p. 7) and disclosure to avoid deception (Iacobucci et al., 2021, p. 199) and reputation damage for brands (de Rancourt-Raymond & Smaili, 2023, pp. 1070-1071), it is crucial to explore consumer responses to deepfake ads.

Scholars have repeatedly expressed their concerns about deepfakes negatively impacting brand image and its overall reputation, especially if consumers discourage its use (Mustak et al., 2023, p. 6;

Kshetri, 2023, p. 89). After thorough research, it was observed that there is an absence of scholarly work in understanding brand image within this context. Some studies reveal that consumers associate deepfake technology with negative connotations (Whittaker et al., 2021, p. 208) and are biased against AI practices (Yeh et al., 2021, p. 2), whilst others suggest a more optimistic perspective (Agarwal & Nath, 2023, p. 17-19). AI and machine learning algorithms are anticipated to permeate the future of advertising (Vlaeminck, 2023, p. 134). Considering the potential damage to a brand's image and overall reputation, it is fundamental for advertisers to make well-informed decisions when experimenting with this new technology (Kshetri, 2023, p. 89; Vlaeminck, 2023, pp. 274-275).

3. Methodology

As discussed in previous chapters, deepfakes are a relatively new concept and scholarly research on its impact on consumers and organizations has not yet been extensively explored. Considering the rapid growth of deepfake media practices (Mustak et al., 2023, p. 2), the present thesis aims to explore the intricate perceptions of Greek Gen Z of brand image, influenced by the integration of deepfake technology in celebrity endorsements. This section discusses the research design employed and justifies the methodological approach applied.

3.1 Research Design

The objective of the present research is exploratory. Exploratory research is suitable when examining a topic with limited understanding or insufficient investigation to provide new insights and perspectives (Saunders, 2003, p. 322). Exploratory qualitative research was chosen for the thesis as the most appropriate method to gain consumer insights about responses to brand image after exposure to deepfake celebrity endorsements. Qualitative data is appropriate when trying to gain an in-depth understanding of consumer thought processes, perceptions and feelings (McCracken, 1988, p. 17). This is very closely aligned with the scope of the research, as qualitative methods allow more flexibility and thorough insights compared to the sharply defined approach of quantitative methods (Hammarberg et al., 2016, p. 498; Nathan et al., 2018, p.45). Considering the recent integration of deepfake techniques in advertising and that brand image is a concept without a set definition, it is better to apply qualitative methods (Malik et al., 2012, p. 13073). Consequently, in-depth interviews have been chosen as a suitable method for the exploration of the research question. The rationale for this approach is the ability to deeply understand consumers' inner thoughts and emotions and move from what is observed to what is underneath (Levy, 2005, p. 344). The method is not employed with the purpose of generalizing the findings but rather to explore varying perceptions and analyze them (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2011, p. 430).

In-depth interviews function as a "conversation with a purpose" in which the researcher's role leans towards being a co-participant in the process (Webb & Webb, 1975, p. 130). Put differently, semi-structured in-depth interviews allow for a less structured and more personal interview that helps uncover underlying attitudes and feelings. This choice was also motivated by its ability to leave room for previously undiscovered information and uncover valuable insights that can add to the conversation and guide future research.

The method's format gives space further investigation in the event of insufficient responses, by encouraging participants to argue their viewpoints and share their personal experiences (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, p. 209). The probe and follow-up questions are not used to gather precise answers, but to

help participants express themselves on their own terms (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021, p. 1362) and draw out emotional values (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, p. 217). In other words, the interview consisted of both content mapping and content mining questions (Legard et al., 2003). This is especially valuable for the present research due to the lack of scholarly findings on deepfake celebrity endorsements and consumer insights (Campbell et al., 2022, p. 242). Hence, the balance between structure and flexibility was considered suitable for the thesis' method.

3.2 Sampling

The participants were recruited using purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique widely used in research that bases the inclusion of participants on a set of qualities they possess (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 2). This method was followed by various seed snowball sampling, in which multiple initial participants were recruited and later asked to refer to potential interviewees who meet the criteria (Parker et al., 2019, p. 3). Combining the two sampling methods can be highly beneficial, particularly in exploratory qualitative research, as it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the target sample. With snowball sampling, it's possible to easily access specific population groups, whilst purposive sampling ensures that participants fulfill the research criteria, thus, overcoming the limitations of each method (Valerio et al., 2016, p. 2; Noy, 2008, pp. 330-331).

The inclusion criteria of the research was based on age and ethnicity. The rationale for this choice was informed by previous studies on the positive influence of celebrity endorsements on Gen Z (Achmad et al., 2024, p.270; Sun et al., 2022, p. 610). Consequently, it was required that people are between 1997 and 2012. Greek consumers were also selected, due to the increasing use of celebrity endorsements in the country as a highly effective marketing strategy (Tzoumaka et al., 2016, p. 316) and the market's shift towards new advertising strategies that leverage AI technologies (Dekoulou & Trivellas, 2014, p. 339). No prior knowledge of deepfake technology is required. This is supported by McCracken (1989, p. 37), who suggested the recruitment of participants with no special knowledge of the research topic.

A sample set of 17 candidates were approached but eventually, 10 participants agreed to attend the interview. This was due to the time-consuming nature of the chosen method and the period of data collection period, which was close to the exam period in Greek universities. Participants were between the ages of 19 and 27, falling into the age group of Gen Z. In order to encourage participants to express themselves in their own words and avoid potential language barriers, the interviews were conducted in Greek. The pseudonyms and other information of participants can be found in Appendix D.

3.3 Use of stimulus

Concrete examples were necessary to stimulate insightful responses from the participants. This is supported by Barthes (1964, p. 45-48) who underscored the importance of including a visual element as images can be interpreted in various ways due to their polysemy of meanings. Zalando's #whereveryouare campaign on Facebook featuring supermodel Cara Delevingne was used as stimulus during the interviews (Chitrakorn, 2021, para. 1). The campaign took advantage of deepfake techniques to recreate the facial movements of the model and create 290,000 different versions based on the user's location. Participants were shown the videos released by Zalando's partner for the campaign's production, Wonderlandmovies (Infinitizer, n.d.). Snapshots of the stimulus can be found in Appendix A.

The rationale for the choice was based on several factors. Firstly, existing deepfake examples in the industry are scarce, with most of them targeting Indian or other specific populations. Zalando is a European brand delivering to all parts of Europe, including Greece. Even though the campaign did not reach local audiences in 2018, its content is considered relevant, useful and applicable to the local market since similar campaigns may be extended in the future. Secondly, the stimulus serves as a successful example of deepfake endorsement, gaining immense popularity among the public both during and after its distribution, as well as attracting scholarly attention to its effectiveness (Agarwal & Nath, 2023, p. 26). The ad gained over 180 million impressions on social media and the fashion retailer's sales increased by 54%. Despite the need for consumer research on deepfakes and the positive responses to the campaign, there is no research on consumer perceptions using this example. This way the participants were exposed to a real life example of a deepfake celebrity endorsement, helping them develop informed and concrete insights. Finally, the choice of stimulus was based on its short duration, in order not to tire or distract the participants.

3.4 Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted predominantly in person, but also through Zoom video conferencing, for accessibility and time-efficiency purposes, depending on the needs of each participant (Shapka et al., 2016, p. 362). This method fosters a conversationalist approach which encourages participants to give insightful responses (Kazmer & Xie, 2008, pp. 263-264). The interview process was developed through the following steps:

1. Before data collection, the full interview framework was completed and participants were contacted through social media, in which a summary of the thesis topic was provided and a request to participate in the interview.

2. Every interview started by thanking the participants for taking the time to participate in the interview and providing an introduction to the research. This was followed by an ice breaker to

help the interviewees gain more confidence and provide meaningful answers (Kazmer & Xie, 2008, pp. 263-264). Participants were asked for their permission to record the interview. Once the recording started, they were later introduced to their rights and asked for their oral consent to proceed with the interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005, p. 167; Hammersley, 2014, p. 535).

3. After agreeing to the formalities, each interview progressed in accordance with the interview guide and the use of stimulus. The open-ended questions were guided using probing questions formulated using "what", "how" or "why", to uncover meaningful and hidden responses (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, p. 209). The questions were phrased in clear and plain language, to avoid any unknown terminology (Fox, 2009, p.33). The most challenging questions were placed towards the end and were followed by final questions on the topic's discussion, along with a request for any final comments. This step was critical as it leaves space for unexplored answers (Taherdoost, 2022, p. 45; Bolderston, 2012, p. 70). The recorded interviews were between 44 minutes and slightly over an hour.

4. After data collection, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to facilitate the process of data analysis. This was done using TurboScribe, a free online software which assist the generation of audio transcriptions in various languages, including Greek. The transcripts were later reviewed,, adjusted and corrected to eliminate potential mistakes and ensure a clearer structure of the recorded interviews.

3.5 Operationalization

The researcher should establish the direction of the interview based on the research questions raised (Taherdoost, 2022, p. 44). The research question used to the thesis' direction was: '*How do Greek young adults perceive the brand image of brands that integrate deepfake technology in celebrity endorsements?'* In order to answer the research question, the present thesis will be guided by the concept of brand image. As previously discussed, the concept of brand image is ill-defined, and its interpretation is dependent upon the researcher's objective. Even though exploring brand image using qualitative methods can provide valuable insights, it is important to be carefully guided by well-established frameworks. Keller's (2001, pp. 13-16) brand responses directly relate to how consumers perceive and react to a brand's image. As outlined in the theoretical framework, brand image is introduced as the "subjective and perceptual phenomenon that is formed through consumer interpretation, whether reasoned or emotional" (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990, p. 118). Consumers tend to transfer their subjective evaluations and feelings developed during exposure to an ad to how they view a brand (Chi et al., 2009, p. 4). Brand responses refer to how consumers respond to a brand's activities, such as advertising, that help them form a brand's image and

are composed of two main categories; (1) brand judgments and (2) brand feelings.

Interpretations of the two categories were adopted and adapted based on the constructs proposed by Keller (2001, pp. 13-15). This choice was based on their application in scholarly research exploring consumer perceptions of brand image, especially in advertising (Voorveld & Noort, 2014, p. 261; Koll & von Wallpach, 2009, pp. 340-341). The two dimensions often correlate with each other and operate together to form a consumer's overall attitude (Limenski, 2007, p. 16). For this purpose, both cognitive and affective responses must be measured and adapted to fit the thesis topic. Put differently, the two dimensions were adjusted to understand brand image within the context of deepfake celebrity endorsements.

Brand judgments refer to a customer's thoughts about a brand and involve the subjective evaluations of a brand's quality, credibility, consideration and superiority. These constructs were accompanied by follow-up questions that delved into the use of deepfake technology. Quality is the consumer's evaluation of the brand's offerings (Vera, 2015, p. 147), whilst credibility is concerned with how reliable, trustworthy and likable a brand is in the eyes of the consumer (Erdem & Swait, 2004, p. 192). Even though favorable perceptions are essential in understanding brand image, they may be insufficient if consideration and superiority are not present (Keller, 2001, p. 14). These reveal how serious consumers are about engaging with the brand in the future and whether they perceive the brand as being better and more unique compared to competitors (Frazer, 1983, pp. 38-39). The questions exploring consumer's cognitive responses attempted to cover these dimensions. Nonetheless, these subcategories cannot entirely cover the thoughts of each consumer (Keller, 2001, p. 13). Thus, questions that encourage broader perspectives were included.

Brand feelings refer to the emotions that can be generated by an advertisement's content, are either positive, negative or neutral and differ in intensity (Srivastava et al., 2014, p. 34; Keller, 2001, p. 14). When exploring emotional dimensions, it is essential to not limit feelings to certain types but leave space for the broader spectrum of emotional responses. Emotional responses are of great value in understanding consumer perceptions, because emotions occur at the moment of exposure and can influence further ad processes (Yun Yoo & Kim, 2005, p. 21). Consumer perceptions of deepfake technology in advertising have not been extensively explored, creating a demand for the thorough understanding of consumers' thoughts and feelings (Campbell et al., 2022, p. 32). Cognitive responses are more analytic and less automatic than emotional responses (Lemanski, 2007, p. 15). Subsequently, questions exploring emotional responses will be placed at the beginning of the interview guide (Appendix C).

3.6 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was applied during data analysis. Inspired by grounded theory, thematic analysis is a theoretically sensitive approach, commonly applied in qualitative research (Boeije, 2009, p. 112). According to Braun & Clarke (2006), "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). The rationale for its choice was based on its flexibility in identifying meaningful patterns with limited dependence on previous theoretical knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). In thematic analysis, the themes do not *emerge*, as it is often mentioned in research, but the researcher *identifies* themes embedded in data. This highlights the active role of the researcher instead of implying that the themes simply exist in the data and wait to be 'discovered' (Boyatzis, 1998, pp. 6-8; Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80).

This thesis follows Braun & Clarke's (2006, p. 87) six phases of thematic analysis. The process of thematic analysis began during data collection, as the researcher must become familiar with the data set by re-reading, taking notes and constantly reflecting on the transcripts. Becoming highly familiar with the data set assisted the second phase of thematic analysis. During this stage, the data set was analyzed to identify and organize the most relevant parts, by highlighting specific phrases or sentences and assigning them labels (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). The coding process is dependent on the research's approach; inductive (data-driven) or deductive (theory-driven). Even though thematic analysis is considered a typically inductive process, the two approaches can be complementary (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). An analysis of the dimensions comprising brand responses allows the researcher to concentrate on the most relevant parts of the data set, whilst leaving room for further exploration in a flexible and open manner. After creating a long list of initial codes, the analysis was re-focused into creating the first set of themes. This step included the organization of codes into potential sub-themes by finding similarities and discarding codes that do not fit anywhere into a temporary sub-theme to review at a later stage. After creating initial sub-themes, it was essential to formulate the thesis' broader themes. The final core themes provided an answer to the thesis research question.

The next stage of thematic analysis involved two levels of refining the candidate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 91-92). On the first level, themes were refined by recognizing which initial themes possess enough data to support them or which codes are too diverse to be considered a theme. During this stage, all codes under the initial themes were revised to ensure that they were coherent, as the final themes should be distinctly different from each other and not overlap. After ensuring that everything was clear and coherent, the first thematic map was reviewed to confirm whether it was representative of the question. Was every relevant part of the interview compared? Are there any more similarities or differences among codes or themes? Are the generated themes representative of the data set? Do the themes give an answer to the research question? Once themes were created, they were assigned labels to

establish a clearer sense of direction. During this stage it was essential to provide a detailed analysis, including what is interesting about them and how they fit into the broader 'story' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92-93). The complete coding table can be found in Appendix D.

3.7 Validity, Reliability and Ethical considerations

Both concepts of reliability and validity were addressed in the thesis. While these terms are generally applied in quantitative research, qualitative approaches often take these terms into consideration (Glofshani, 2003, p. 601). Qualitative research has been heavily criticized for not providing enough transparency on the analytical procedures and methods employed, often leading to assumptions of researcher bias (Noble & Smith, 2015, p. 34). Reliability refers to the dependability or consistency of the methodological and analytical procedures employed (Franklin & Ballan, 2001, p. 356). To ensure the reliability of findings, transparency on data collection was ensured, along with a description of every step of data analysis. Before officially starting data collection, the interview guide was pre-tested to discover potential pitfalls and weaknesses in the interview guide. After making all necessary changes based on the first pretest, the interview guide was tested again. Three pre-tests were conducted, and the final version was included in the official data collection process. Due to the natural flow of semi-structured interviews, questions were adjusted to fit the flow of conversation with the participants, as well as clarifications to check potential discrepancies. All interviews were later audio-recorded, and the transcripts became available.

Reliability cannot be discussed if validity is not established in research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). A research is considered valid to the extent that it is rigorous, trustworthy, credible, consistent and transferable, or as Noble & Smith (2015) stated, "the precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data" (p. 34). A weakness of qualitative methods is that participants often respond in a way that they would like to be perceived by others. However, to avoid such instances and assist the validity of findings, participants were given the option to use a pseudonym for anonymity purposes and express themselves freely.

Finally, reflexivity was considered, reflecting on the researcher's position and acknowledging potential biases that could influence the research process (Berger, 2015, p. 221). This criterion is crucial in providing valid and reliable findings. In the present thesis, confirmation bias has been taken into consideration. Confirmation bias refers to the tendency to search for and interpret information in a way that confirms preexisting personal beliefs and evaluations about a subject and dismiss information that contradicts them (Peters, 2022, p. 1351). Any subjective evaluations about deepfake technology and advertising were considered to remain objective and not influence the research process.

Finally, it was essential to take into account all ethical considerations while conducting the interviews. Precisely, participants were provided with a written consent form that included all necessary information of the interview process, such as the thesis' purpose, potential risks and their rights (Shaw, 2003, p. 15). Prior to each interview, the researcher reminded participants of their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any point during the interview or deny answering a question they do not feel comfortable with and finally, asked for their permission to record the interview. To ensure all ethical considerations are in place, participants were also asked for their oral consent. Furthermore, maintaining the interviewees' confidentiality and anonymity was indispensable to proceed with the interview (Arifin, 2018, pp. 30-31). Participants were informed that their personal information would not become publicly available and were asked to provide a pseudonym or a fictitious name, to express themselves freely without being concerned about their identity. Indicative examples of pseudonyms are Modestos, Danai and Evangelia. Finally, all interview transcripts, files and other personal information of the participants will be deleted after the thesis' completion, as this provides a more ethical approach in qualitative methods (Aldridge et al., 2010, p. 4-7).

4. Results

The present thesis aims to explore the intricate perceptions of Greek Gen Z on brands that make use of deepfake techniques in celebrity endorsements. Accordingly, analysis was conducted to address the research question: '*How do Greek young adults perceive the brand image of brands that integrate deepfake technology in celebrity endorsements?*' This chapter presents the overarching themes and sub-themes identified during data analysis. To answer the research question, Zalando's deepfake campaign featuring supermodel Cara Delevingne was used as a stimulus, to provide participants with an example of a deepfake celebrity endorsement. Data analysis yielded three core themes; consumer skepticism towards brand credibility, positive brand associations linked to deepfake advertising and consumer skepticism towards deepfake celebrity endorsements.

4.1. Consumer skepticism towards brand credibility

The first theme that emerged from data analysis was that of perceived brand credibility. The role of deepfakes in influencing brand credibility was consistent among all interviewees. Brand credibility is concerned with the extent to which the company is perceived as dependable and trustworthy (Keller, 2001, p. 34). The use of deepfakes in advertising can be a powerful determinant of brand credibility and if not applied carefully, it can cause significant damage to a brand's image and reputation (Diakopoulos & Johnson, 2021, p. 2079). This was clearly observed among participants, who repeatedly stressed the importance of ethics and moral practices throughout discussions. The identified sub-themes that lead to this understanding are: deepfake advertising aims at deception, brands should be ethical, need for disclosure of deepfake use, and importance of endorser's consent.

4.1.1. *Deepfake advertising aims at deception*

The first theme that emerged from discussions on deepfake endorsements was that of deception. Participants were asked to share their subjective evaluations and illustrate their personal experiences. Two interviewees felt neutral, stating that AI technologies have long been of public concern and deepfakes are not a manipulative tactic. Specifically, Modestos (24 year-old, male) believes that the technology holds both benefits and risks, but its use is solely dependent on the source, as with every technology. He believes that no real brand will risk destroying its image by not using it correctly. However, the rest of the respondents felt apprehensive about the technology and skeptical of its application. They expressed their fears, worries and uncertainty about the future of AI, concerned that deepfakes may pervade their personal space. This makes them in turn skeptical about what they post on social media, as they fear that their images could be used without their permission. Participants' arguments can be substantiated by

Krafft et al. (2021, p. 138), who found that people are not positive about AI tools and are increasingly cautious about their role in their lives.

Stefania (23 year-old, female) described deepfakes as "another black mirror episode" and thinks that the technology should be either banned or heavily regulated, as it could lead to an "endless domino of criminal activity and fraud". The most commonly mentioned causes of mistrust were lack of control, security risks, uncertainty for future and lack of transparency. From the interviews, it seems clear that the objective of using deepfakes in advertising is mainly to deceive and manipulate viewers. A significant number of respondents mentioned that all deepfake ads are scams, using the likeness of an actor or singer to manipulate people's purchase intention. They were described as highly unethical and threatening to both the celebrity's identity and the unaware and uninformed people watching them. As Marilena (26 year-old, female) explained:

> Go on Google and search deepfake ads. They are all scams. Why would you, in the first place, show a celebrity in your ad when they were not there? To pretend that they were. And the fact that they don't even mention that it's artificial… I don't even have to explain what this means. It's pretty obvious.

Furthermore, participants believe that deepfake ads are not indistinguishable from reality and often involve cues that do not appear humane. However, this seems to be the case for the younger population who are more informed and aware of AI and can detect deepfakes easily. Some participants stated that the current threat of deepfakes predominantly involves the manipulation of older people, as they often do not possess the knowledge to be more wary. None of them has ever purchased a product after watching a deepfake ad. On the other hand, they explained how the rapid evolution of AI is threatening to change that, as deepfakes will inevitably become more realistic in the future and even informed people will not be able to distinguish them from reality. They believe that some companies might exploit them to create unrealistic or fake content that will influence viewers for their benefit. Half of the respondents also discussed the absence of extensive legal measures for the safety of users. This in turn could make it easier to deceive people with hyperrealistic deepfakes, as people would expect them to be examined before their release on social media. As one respondent (21 year-old, female) stated: "I keep getting these deepfake ads…. I try to report every time I see one. But I remember this one time, after reporting an ad, YouTube replied saying it's not a scam. It's crazy. It's a real problem."

4.1.2. *Brands should be ethical*

The expectation of brands to be ethical in their advertising practices was consistent among all participants. Throughout the interviews, it became clear that participants expect brands to be ethical in

their activities, partnerships and consumers. In a world where AI tools are increasingly implemented in advertising and with consumer concerns about their safety, brands should take measures to increase their credibility. Participants do not trust or support brands that they do not perceive as trustworthy. If a brand extensively uses AI and integrates it in activities that involve their personal data, demand for responsibility is increased. When asked about their perspective on brands using the technology, participants were apprehensive about their use but stated that it could be acceptable if they adhered to all legal provisions. For the vast majority of the respondents, this was described by the clear communication of the brand for the use of any type of misleading content in their advertisements. To be precise, one participant (24 year-old, female) stated that: "…but if it's already being done, then they should inform people somehow. I don't know, maybe state that somewhere before or after the ad. Otherwise that's misleading."

According to the interviews, brands carry responsibility. This was translated into the expectation of brands to not attempt to mislead consumers of the ad's authenticity, even if laws do not fully cover the safety of individuals. This proves that the brand prioritizes building strong consumer-brand relationships and is not simply looking to make a profit. If a brand fails to do so, it will result in a loss of trust, viewing the brand as inconsiderate towards its customers or a lack of consumer preference. Interestingly, some participants mentioned that they would rather support a brand that is highly ethical than one which is not but offers high-quality products. In fact, they admitted that they had either personally boycotted or encouraged others to boycott a company that demonstrated immoral behavior and a lack of ethical conduct. This idea is linked to Treise et al. (1994, p. 68), who explained that perceiving an ad as immoral can lead to a series of negative outcomes for the brand, from decreased purchase intention to even overall rejection. An interesting insight is that more than half of the participants link being unethical in advertising to being unethical in other business practices. Ads are directly linked to consumers and brands should try to differentiate themselves in responsible ways. Otherwise, this lack of responsibility could be seen in other practices, such as sustainability, product safety and social responsibility. This can diminish the trust that they show in the brand. To illustrate, Harris (19 year-old, male) explained:

If a brand has ethics at its core, this will be communicated in everything they do. If they do not care about doing things right at one thing, it will probably be the same in something else. So, I wouldn't trust what they say so much overall.

Interviewees believe that the technology could be beneficial in advertising and entertainment, but the lack of ethical examples makes them skeptical. AI in advertising is increasingly accompanied by consumer concerns about privacy risks and loss of control (Chen et al., 2021, p. 137). Therefore, brands should take this into consideration and approach deepfakes ethically.

After being exposed to the stimulus, discussions on disclosure took place. Despite viewing the campaign with a critical eye, pre-established concerns were alleviated knowing that the brand disclosed the use of deepfake technology. Disclosure in synthetic advertising involves informing viewers that the ad's content has been modified using deepfake techniques (Karpinska-Krakowiak & Eisend, 2024, p. 2). It's unethical and unlawful to avoid disclosure due to its deceptive nature. As expected, the findings support this statement. The fashion retailer's choice to be transparent about the deepfake ad was perceived positively by most interviewees. Disclosure was the most frequently mentioned element influencing brand credibility. Participants described the brand as responsible, informative, and open to its audience. Two respondents felt neutral about disclosure, stating that it is dependent on the extent of its integration and the degree of personal data use. However, increased trustworthiness was also mentioned by the two participants.

The majority of the respondents explained that disclosure signifies the brand's consideration towards public concerns and the importance of consumer awareness. Disclosure of deepfake use is imperative regardless of the type of technique, extent of application or scope of integration. As Yiorgos (23 year-old, male) explained:

> If deepfakes in ads are as realistic as in this example, then it doesn't matter why or how much they've been used. The right thing is to let people know, because, at the end of the day, the result is the same.

Zalando's transparency helps strengthen credibility to the brand. This adds to research assumptions regarding the possibility of correcting public apprehension with the use of disclosure (Campbell et al., 2021, p. 30). However, some participants commented on the lack of explicit disclosure during the automated ad. Even though the brand's transparency was valued by the detailed video explaining the use of deepfake technology in the campaign, they believe that the ad should include a clear statement about AI manipulation to avoid misleading unaware people. This statement would be enough to include the informative element in the ad. In fact, any type of disclosure within the ad was described as a necessity. From the interviews, it was evident that they value transparency, and they expect brands to adhere to that if they use indistinguishable artificial content in their ads. Deepfakes can be used for emotional manipulation or to influence consumer behavior in a way that would not be possible through conventional advertising. Even though transparency in certain cases may hold limitations, it is more trusted than withholding information that directly impacts consumers. Harris (19 year-old, male) believes that the personalized ads would most likely mislead uninformed and unaware viewers by trusting the ad's

authenticity and lead them into feeling unique and recognized by the brand. This idea was shared by Ioanna (25 year-old, female):

> For me, being ethical is the A and Z in an organization… Ethical means being genuine. Someone could, for sure, be very easily fooled if they did not know it was deepfake. So it's important to disclose and not leave people thinking otherwise.

Brands that decide to incorporate deepfake techniques in their advertising practices should always make their use clear to viewers. This is linked to the overall preference for ethical and responsible brands. Forms of disclosure different from that of the stimulus were not extensively mentioned, but the majority of the respondents stated that a clear message or warning of artificial content before or after the ad would be enough to be perceived as disclosure. This can help minimize doubts and concerns about ethics and show more trust in the brand's claims.

4.1.4. *Importance of endorser's consent*

Besides disclosure, the consent of the advertisement's endorser is a powerful driver of brand credibility. This perception was consistent among all interviewees. Deepfake technology in advertising has almost exclusively used the face of public figures who are seemingly endorsing a brand's products or services (Campbell et al., 2022, p. 247). Apart from a few exceptions, the majority of these ads are scams and are created without the permission of the individual depicted. As indicated earlier, this is also what participants have experienced. Permission to use a celebrity's identity is especially important in showing trust in the brand. Brands that take advantage of someone's likeness without their explicit consent are exploiting their identity, intruding on their personal space and showing no respect for the privacy rights and autonomy of individuals. According to the respondents, brands should not claim that a celebrity supports or is a consumer of the respective products if that does not accurately reflect reality. Doing so is considered misrepresentation and is highly unethical.

Modestos (24 year-old, male) explained how respecting the celebrity's privacy by establishing a mutual agreement prior to the ad is fundamental. This belief was shared by most of the respondents. Interestingly, consent signifies power in the hands of the celebrity. By giving their permission, celebrities can determine and control sufficient details about the use of their deepfake versions. Respondents believe that this can safeguard their reputation, avoid defamation and provide a more ethical approach to deepfake advertising. This insight is supported by Kwok & Koh (2021, p. 1800) who illustrated the potential harm to a celebrity's reputation and identity with the unauthorized use of their likeness. A lack of consent is perceived as identity theft and is a cause for permanent distrust towards the brand. For instance, Marilena (26 year-old, female) stated:

When someone gives their permission to use their face in an ad, they also control how this will be used and what they will say. In other words, they have an active role during the process… and make sure that everything is done correctly.

A lack of taking all ethical actions could translate into the brand's broader lack of ethics and broader values. An interesting insight is that some participants believe that this could be transferred to a lack of consent for the use of their personal data. Advertisements often include well-known figures who hold power in influencing public opinion that could cause damage to a brand's reputation. If a brand does not respect the privacy of the celebrity, then the attached risk of using a random person's data is even higher. In particular, Vasiliki (27 year-old, female) said that: "If they did not use the celebrity's consent, it won't be too long until they use my data without my permission. And that's for any kind of data."

4.2. Positive brand associations linked to deepfake advertising

The second theme that emerged from data analysis was the participants' positive brand associations linked to the use of deepfake technology. Keller (1998, p. 93) described brand image as the perceptions and associations formed in the consumers mind about the brand. These associations can reflect brand image in various forms and aspects (Mirzai et al., 2016, p. 56). Through data analysis, four brand associations were identified; innovation, creativity, personalization, and superiority. After exposure to the stimulus, the brand's adherence to ethical standards allowed for greater emphasis on the positive role of deepfakes Overall, it can be inferred that participants are aware of the potential benefits of deepfakes in advertising and could be more receptive if all ethical and legal requirements are in place.

4.2.1. Increased creativity and innovation

Discussions on creativity and innovation in deepfake advertising practices were consistent among all interviews. Respondents view deepfake technology as a new form of AI that has not been extensively integrated into content production. Brands that take advantage of this technology in advertising are viewed as experts in AI technologies, with a strong team of marketers and developers. In particular, some of the participants expressed their interest and curiosity about the lack of deepfake campaigns, considering that the example they saw was released in 2018. This lack of innovation was explained differently among interviews. Causes involved lack of expertise in advanced technologies, preference for traditional advertising approaches, limited budgets and avoiding damage caused by public concerns on AI. Using the stimulus as an example, respondents perceive brands that are ethical and experiment with the technology as forward-thinking and technologically advanced. For some of the interviewees, this was associated with the campaign's high realism. This contradicts prior research assumptions that elucidate

the negative responses linked to ad falsity (Campbell et al., 2021, p. 30). A female respondent, who is 23 and had previously stressed her worries about deepfakes, said:

> It doesn't really bother me if I know that they use it. Cause then, it's like, the same with everything else used in advertisements to win the public's attention. This then shows that they know the technology well and they know how to use it in the right way.

All participants connected innovation to creativity. In this section, the dimensions cited by participants, such as realism, entertainment, and originality are addressed. Respondents expressed their amusement for the campaign's originality. Using deepfakes for novelty can help attract attention and develop positive associations with a brand (Ahmed & Chua, 2023, p.6). This was evidenced by participants who commented on the unique and unexpected way of communicating the message of the stimulus' campaign. Hedonic emotional responses mentioned by participants include enjoyment, surprise, fascination, and amusement. From these qualities, it can be interpreted that if used correctly, deepfakes can enhance the creative element of advertisements. An interesting statement was that of Modestos (24 year-old, male) who said that many artistic masterpieces often make their way through unconventional tools that are initially perceived the wrong way. Within the context of creativity, some interviewees mentioned the possibility of creating content that cannot be realistically produced using traditional advertising methods. For example, Stefania (21 year-old, female) talked about the opportunity to take full advantage and visualize an advertiser's imagination without limitations and create "cool and sci-fi type of scenes". Another participant (Yiorgos, 23 year-old, male) also commented on the potential for creativity, stating that:

> One friend told me that they saw a short film showing Marilyn Monroe and all the James Bond characters some time ago, and they had obviously used deepfakes… Imagine if they used it in an ad. That would be very cool.

Another interesting finding was the fact that many interviewees made an unconscious connection between the advertising and film industries when referring to the creative side of deepfakes. Positive perceptions were often associated with examples of films leveraging the technology for original and creative narratives. To be precise, half of the participants made a reference to a successful deepfake in the film industry. Modestos (24 year-old, male) also referred to a Kendrick Lamar deepfake video in the music industry. This can be explained by the shared dependence of the industries on visual storytelling which can convey messages and evoke emotional reactions through creative narratives. This is reinforced by Campbell et al. (2021, p. 29), who explained that advertisers should invest in creative advertising as a means of capturing the attention of consumers and stimulating positive emotional responses.

4.2.2.   Consumer benefits: personalized experiences

Another sub-theme identified during data analysis was that of using deepfakes for consumer-centric purposes. After exposure to the stimulus, participants were asked to share what they thought was positive about the campaign. The campaign's #whereveryouare message was perceived favorably, especially among female respondents. To illustrate, more than half of the interviewees commented on the brand's purpose for integrating deepfake technology into the campaign. The concepts of inclusivity and accessibility were discussed as potential brand values and were tied to a need for more inclusive initiatives in the fashion industry. For instance, Vasiliki (27 year-old, female) described the brand as considerate and socially responsible, commenting on the opportunity for people in remote places to feel seen and unique by getting messages tailored to their location. Comments on social responsibility were associated with discussions on brand responsibility, ethics and consumer-centric advertising practices. These responses indicate that in a time of public distrust towards deepfakes, apart from the *how* of using deepfakes, the *why* is equally important. One female participant, who is 23 and did not know of the fashion retailer before, explained how deepfakes could be used to create more engaging content:

> I like this example. It's not too much and it's simple. It'd be fun if they also, maybe… used something similar to say it in our accent, or reference something that is part of our culture, or a phrase that only the Greeks use. That'd be interesting to see.

This example ignited conversations on other potential uses of deepfake advertising. Participants were asked to share deepfake advertising practices that they would perceive positively. The majority of the respondents believe that deepfakes should be used for either creative purposes or consumer benefits. The requirement for legal compliance was also referred to within this context. These findings supports previous research that suggest a favorable perception of advertisements with manipulated intent if they are of high quality and regarded as having an underlying value (Campbell, 1995, p. 250). This value can be seen in the form of consumer benefit through relevant ads and unique messages that are specific to each consumer. Some participants discussed personalization within the context of ad overstimulation on social media. For example, Ioanna (25 year-old, female) said:

> Because we all get the same ads again and again and, at the end of the day, maybe it would be more interesting to see something that I would actually pay attention to. For example, it could also be, like… recommending specific products from their store based on my preferences.

On the other hand, some participants were skeptical about personalized ads that are too invasive to their personal data. To clarify, they would be open to receiving customized ads, but that is dependent

on the extent that a brand uses their personal data. As stated in theory, deepfakes in advertising could use face-swapping and other similar techniques to create AI avatars that are identical to users, which could be a highly individualized and desirable opportunity for customers (Whittaker et al., 2021, p. 207). Findings contradict these assumptions, indicating feelings of discomfort in the case of brands having full access to personal data, connected to a need for control over the extent of data processing. Evangelia (23 year-old, female) said that receiving personalized messages based on location would be acceptable, but anything more invasive would make her feel uneasy and more wary of the conditions she accepts whenever she accesses websites or social media.

Participants believe that there is a fine line between using personal information, like age or ethnicity, and personal traits like facial and body features or voice, to create personalized deepfake ads. However, four participants stated that they might be willing to consider such an option in the future, but the technology is too recent for them to be open to this possibility. This is either because they feel somewhat uncomfortable with the idea, or they believe there are not strict enough laws available that safeguard their privacy and identity. As Eleni (24 year-old, female) explained, AI and deepfakes will most likely become part of the new reality, regardless of whether she is open or not to their integration but having full authority over data processing would be enough for her to feel safe.

4.2.3. *Increased brand superiority*

As outlined in theory, positive responses to a brand's marketing activities may be insufficient if the brand does not hold a competitive advantage in the minds of the consumers (Keller, 2001, p. 14). Participants were asked to explain whether the brand of the stimulus offers something different compared to competitors in the industry. From the interviews, the overwhelming majority believe that deepfakes could help brands stand out from competitors. Brands can leverage deepfake techniques that create memorable experiences for consumers and make them perceive the brand as unique and having more benefits compared to others (Mustak et al., 2023, pp. 9-10).

Findings support this statement, as interviewees explained how brands can stand out and be of value to consumers under certain circumstances. If developed correctly, the technology can attract public attention more than conventional ads. People will naturally pay more attention to the ad's content and message, because of their curiosity and amusement of the technology's capabilities. Others claimed that deepfakes could be used to accentuate a brand's values or quality of products or showcase their commitment to finding innovative solutions to existing societal and industry-related problems. Some participants further believe that deepfakes can be used to enhance or ease consumer experiences, increase engagement and build stronger connections to consumers. It is important to mention that all of these

discussions were discussed within the lines of ethical considerations, as prerequisites for positive reception of such practices. To illustrate, Eleni (24 year-old, female) stated that if a brand did not adhere to such standards, she would not consider purchasing from the brand and would inform her friends accordingly. Eleni's belief was shared by Harris (19 year-old, male), who explained: "I wouldn't personally support a brand that is only looking to make money. In the 21st century, it should be the standard that campaigns have that at their core."

Conversely, brands that successfully integrate deepfake technology in their campaigns are more memorable. Danai (21 year-old, female) mentioned that "doing things right" could ease or even change her overall perception of deepfakes and view the brand as being "way ahead of the game". A significant number of the respondents stated that they would remember a deepfake ad or reference it in future discussions on social media or with friends. This type of word-of-mouth was cited by three other participants, signifying the spreadability potential of deepfake endorsements. A female respondent (23 year-old, female), said: "It's not known in Greece, I don't know anyone who has bought any clothes from there. But I think I'll remember it now. It's hard to forget this when it's used [deepfakes]. It's quite unique."

Respondents mentioned that the advertising scene in Greece is behind compared to other countries. They explained this by the lack of expertise, young talent in the industry or a persistence to more traditional forms of advertising. Most of the respondents would like to see similar advertisements in the country. Eleni (24 year-old, female) pointed out that even though she acknowledges its potential, she remains uncomfortable with having deepfakes as part of the content she views on her phone. However, most of the participants believe that deepfake ads could be more entertaining and interesting than traditional advertising, and help consumers receive relevant ads that are of interest to them, rather than watching repeatedly the same generic ads.

As Yiorgos (23 year-old, male) explained, "They could look at this campaign as an example and try to experiment a little bit with something new. Greece could see some fresh and alternative type of ads." This belief was similar to five other respondents who explained that they would be interested in seeing their favorite endorser participate in an unexplored and innovative type of advertisement. Finally, the technology's potential to help small, local businesses that are struggling to survive in the presence of multinational corporations was reported. If approached properly, the technology could help these brands survive and stand out more in the market.

4.3.   Consumer skepticism towards deepfake endorser

In this final section of the research findings, consumer responses to deepfake celebrity endorsers and their connection to the brand are analyzed. Even though participants were positive about the specific campaign, their responses to deepfake endorsers were complex and multifaceted. Generally, it is understood that deepfake celebrity endorsers are considered less genuine and are not the preferred choice of participants. However, findings indicate that their authenticity could be enhanced if deepfakes are used to enhance rather than replace. Finally, endorser-brand congruence and other endorser-related elements were identified as contributors to perceived brand image.

4.3.1.   Deepfake endorsers are less authentic

After exposure to the stimulus, participants were encouraged to share their thoughts on the presence of celebrity endorsers using their deepfake versions. Even though the campaign's authenticity was enhanced by the celebrity's consent and disclosure, respondents expressed their preference for more genuine content. The lack of authenticity was not related to the ad's message but rather to the quality and realism of the endorser. They claimed that it is hard to create deepfake content that is so well-produced that is impossible to distinguish from real life. Some participants shared examples they had encountered on social media and commented on the "uncanny valley" (Yiorgos, 23 year-old, male) element of these videos. Glitches, unnatural body movements, blinking or voice and mouth mismatches were some of the details cited by interviewees that took the human element out of these videos and made them feel uncomfortable. Ioanna (25 year-old, female), who was well-informed about deepfakes mentioned a recent video depicting Kate Middleton announcing her long-term absence from the media: "She doesn't move like a human. Her ring disappears for a second, and everything is insanely still in the background… It was uncomfortable to watch… She was like a robot."

In the case of hyperrealistic deepfakes, they were still characterized as less genuine compared to entirely human-created ads. Respondents commented that the technology, at its core, is meant to alter something that happened in real life by replacing it with a digital version. A notable finding is that authenticity could be enhanced by the extent of their application on the endorser and the degree of perceived realism. For instance, Marilena (26 year-old, female) explained that she would prefer that the celebrity participated in the ad's production and did not simply give the rights to use their likeness. Unless it is a deceased celebrity, their complete absence might suggest that they either do not genuinely support the brand, are simply financially motivated or even lazy, indicating their comfort in granting the rights to their identity for promotional purposes. Some interviewees drew hypothetical scenarios involving their favorite celebrities and commented that if they were entirely portrayed as deepfakes, they would likely feel more distant from the celebrity and less connected to the ad's message.

Some other participants claimed that even though entire deepfake endorsers could be impressive and futuristic if portrayed realistically, partially deepfake endorsers are preferred. They explained this by the fact that if the celebrity has participated in the ad's production, then both the endorser and the ad's message appear more genuine. This finding contradicts assumptions that indicated the possibility for the perception of deepfake endorsers as equal to human endorsers if quality standards are met (Kietzmann et al., 2020, p. 144), and aligns with consumer preferences for more genuine content (Whittaker et al., 2021, p. 211). It further signifies the importance of deepfake technology as a tool that *complements* rather than *replaces*. Modestos (24 year-old, male) explained that the way he feels about a deepfake celebrity is almost entirely dependent on whether they simply granted their rights, or if it involved a "collaborative effort between the celebrity and the computer" for the production of a unique and creative outcome. He referred to an example of a Kendrick Lamar video, in which he used AI to change his facial features with those of famous and well-respected men of colour. Modestos described the video as a masterpiece, which helped him open his eyes wider to the possibilities of AI and believes that if endorsers and deepfake techniques combine, the result could be surprisingly unexpected.

4.3.2. *Influence on brand image is dependent on celebrity-brand congruence*

Celebrity endorsements are successful because of the connections consumers form between them and the brand (Yang, 2018, p. 389). The interviews indicate that deepfake celebrity endorsements could be positively related to a brand's image. Factors influencing this association were described differently among participants. From the interviews, it became clear that celebrity-brand congruence is a significant contributor to brand image. Participants reported that celebrities should fit the image and values of the brand that they are promoting. Harris, a 19-year old, male respondent, explained that he would feel weird if a celebrity he respected were to promote a brand that does not align with what he stands for. He follows Christiano Ronaldo on social media because he admires his work and respects him as a footballer and a person. He believes that every product he has endorsed has been in his area of expertise and fits his overall personality and looks. This supports Mateen Khan et al. (2019, p. 101) who emphasized the importance of choosing a celebrity based on the alignment of attributes and values with the brand.

Through discussions on Cara Delevingne's influence on the brand's image, particularly female respondents who were well-acquainted with the campaign's celebrity explained that her expertise, reputation and personality were important in how they viewed the brand. Some of the respondents who mentioned the importance of fame and expertise, commented on her long career in the fashion industry and her collaboration with unconventional and edgy fashion houses. As Marilena (26 year-old, female) explained: "She's been part of the biggest fashion shows. If the brand of the campaign was something like

Shein, I mean, both bad in quality and unethical, she wouldn't have even considered it."

A celebrity who is admired and well-respected helps build trust in the brand. In the case of deepfake celebrity endorsements, establishing brand credibility is especially important. Participants explained that seeing their favorite celebrity give their authorization to be portrayed as a deepfake, is better than seeing a non-celebrity portrayed in the ad. This can mitigate existing fears and concerns about the technology and make them more receptive to its integration. This finding is especially valuable, as it proves the importance of choosing an endorser that is respected and trustworthy to the public, as illustrated by McCracken (1989, p. 319).

5.   Conclusion

The present thesis aims to explore the intricate consumer perceptions of brands that produce deepfake celebrity endorsements. To provide a clearer direction, the thesis was guided by the following research question: '*How do Greek young adults perceive the brand image of brands that integrate deepfake technology in celebrity endorsements?*' This chapter will present the main research findings identified through data analysis and will provide an answer to the research question. The theoretical and societal implications will be analyzed and finally, the limitations of the thesis will be examined, along with directions and suggestions for future research.

5.1.   Summary of findings

The themes yielded from data analysis demonstrate the complexity of consumer perceptions of brand image within the context of deepfake advertising. The findings are closely aligned with the claims of Kietzmann et al. (2021, p. 476), which clearly indicate that a brand's image can be significantly influenced by the way companies utilize deepfakes in celebrity endorsements. As outlined by Krafft et al., (2021, p. 138), people are generally not accepting of AI and often find its use invasive and uncomfortable. This was evident by the fact that the majority of the participants shared their views on deepfakes and more broadly, on AI, explaining that the technology is permeating their personal space, thus making them feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, it is important to underline that deepfakes are perceived as deceptive in nature and raise ethical concerns (Van Esch & Stewart Black, 2021, p. 199). This belief was consistent among interviews, that described brands that decide to incorporate them in their advertising practices, as attempting to manipulate people into believing its genuineness, trusting the endorser's message and changing their behavior towards the brand. Attempting to deceive consumers or manipulate them in any way can lead to decreased trust and a broader perception of the brand as unethical.

Brands that leverage deepfake technology must ensure its ethical implementation. Participants believe that brands carry responsibility, and they expect this to be clearly demonstrated when they use deepfakes in their ads, even if laws do not yet fully protect the individuals involved. This highlights the need for brands to avoid any practices that could lead to misinformation or misleading content in celebrity endorsements to protect consumers (Karpinska-Krakowiak & Eisend, 2024, pp. 9-10; Paul & Nikolaev, 2021, pp. 1831-1832). Disclosure and consent are significant factors influencing brand image. In fact, they were described as prerequisites for accepting deepfake advertising methods and forming favorable impressions about a brand. A noteworthy finding is that disclosure of deepfake use should be explicitly stated during the advertisement to avoid attempts of manipulation. This signifies the brand's responsibility towards its consumers which can further strengthen brand credibility, as the brand is

viewed as honest and transparent about its practices.

As illustrated by Kwok & Koh (2021, p. 1800), deepfake technology can severely damage the reputation of public figures if used in immoral ways. Findings confirm this statement, as companies should always get the celebrity's consent for the deepfake depiction of a celebrity endorser. As a matter of fact, a mutual agreement should be established prior to the advertisement's production, which allows the endorser to have full control over their image. This contradicts Whittaker et al. (2021, p. 211), who discussed the opportunity for brands to have more control over the depiction of a celebrity endorser. The unauthorized use of a celebrity's likeness or a lack of control from the side of the endorser translates to a lack of respect and creates an overall poor impression about the brand.

On the other hand, concerns about deepfake technology can be alleviated if a company is morally upright towards both the endorser and the viewers, thus making people more accepting of its application. This finding is especially important, as it adds to previous studies on deepfake advertising which raised questions about consumer perspectives when brands abide by all ethical standards (Agarwal & Nath, 2023, pp. 17-19; Sivanthanu et al., 2023, p. 130). Since ethics is the most crucial catalyst influencing brand image, if in place, companies can leverage the technology to create more engaging, creative and original content that can help highlight their strengths and enhance brand image. Examples mentioned about possible deepfake applications in advertising reveal that people would appreciate brands that experiment with new tools for creative or consumer-centric purposes. These findings reinforce the statements of Whittaker et al. (2021, p. 205), who argued that the technology could be used to benefit both businesses and consumers.

Considering the recent advent of deepfakes, brands that create hyperrealistic endorsements are interpreted as cutting-edge and innovative. In alignment with Spry et al. (2011, pp. 898-899) and Yang (2018, p. 389), findings illustrate that participants would be open to brands using deepfakes for the production of original and innovative content. Originality can help increase attention to the brand and strengthen brand recall. This substantiates Kietzmann et al. (2021, p. 476), who suggested that deepfakes in advertising could be beneficial for brands because of their novelty. The stimulus showcased an example of deepfake celebrity endorsements, illustrating how deepfakes can be utilized for increased personalization. This was perceived positively by participants who referred to the overstimulation of ads on social media to explain their appreciation for such initiatives, highlighting the potential for brand consideration and superiority, as crucial elements of brand image (Keller, 2001 p. 14). However, it should be noted that personalization has its limits and the capabilities of deepfakes should not be extended to their personal identity or facial features for advertising purposes. Otherwise, this could result in

participants feeling invaded and at a loss of control, leading to negative impressions about the brand.

These findings exhibit that deepfake technology can have either a detrimental or favorable influence on brand image, depending on the company's approach. Within the context of celebrity endorsements, brands should be careful in their choice of a public figure. As illustrated by McCracken (1989, p. 319), celebrity endorsements are effective due to the transference of their qualities to the endorsed brand, especially if the endorser is considered credible and trustworthy. This is evident by the fact that participants mentioned endorser-brand congruence, expertise in the field and alignment of values as some of the attributes that could enhance brand credibility and overall image. If an endorser is chosen wisely and there is synergy between the celebrity and the brand, then it is possible to stimulate favorable associations with a brand's image (Mateen Khan et al., 2019, p. 101).

Finally, a significant finding was that of a preference for synthetic endorsers over fully deepfake ones. According to participants, brands looking to integrate deepfakes in their advertisements should avoid their excessive and opt for techniques that complements the advertisement. Deepfake celebrity endorsers are viewed as less genuine compared to real ones, an insight that evidences the perspective of deepfakes as deceptive and inauthentic (Whittaker et al., 2021, p. 208). Doing so could lead to a decreased connection to the endorser and the effectiveness of the ad's message, thus decreasing their connection to the brand. This observation challenges the views of Kwok & Koh (2021, p. 1800), who explained the flexibility and convenience of brands in video production processes without the physical presence of the celebrity. Using deepfakes to enhance rather than replace can maintain the human element and increase the ad's authenticity. In turn, this can assist the transference of the endorser's qualities to the brand hence, the formation of favorable brand associations.

In conclusion, the findings of the present thesis underscore the importance of careful and thoughtful decision making regarding the incorporation of deepfake techniques in celebrity endorsements, as they can be critical in influencing perceptions of a brand's image and its overall reputation (de Rancourt-Raymond & Smaili, 2023, pp. 1070-1071). The impact of deepfake technology on brand image is neither inherently positive nor negative. It is purely dependent on the brand's adherence to ethical standards, placing disclosure and consent at the center of consumer expectations. A lack of doing so can result in a damaged brand image, decreased trust, viewing the brand as unethical and even boycotts. If all ethical considerations are in place, participants would favor the incorporation of deepfake techniques for creative, innovative or consumer-centric purposes. This might lead to increased brand superiority and consideration and a broader view of the brand as high-tech, creative, original and dedicated to enhancing consumer experiences.

5.2. Theoretical implications

When evaluating the theoretical implications of the thesis, numerous inferences can be drawn based on the findings. While studies on deepfake technology are not unconventional, there is an evident lack of research on their application and influence on businesses, especially from a consumer perspective (Campbell et al., 2022, p. 242). Studies on deepfake advertising have examined the potential risks (Kietzmann et al., 2021, p. 480), responses to the ad's realism (Campbell et al., 2022, p. 34) and purchase intention (Sivanthanu et al., 2023, p. 126). However, studies on consumer perspectives explore deepfake advertising within the context of non-disclosure, despite the need for ethical considerations and the potential damage to a brand's reputation (Kietzmann et al., 2021, p. 23). The present thesis adds to the conversation by offering new insights that could benefit both local research and broader scholarly discussions. Research findings substantiate the value of previous discussions introduced in the theoretical framework. However, it is worth noting that some findings either contribute to or challenge extant research.

Firstly, despite the evident tendency towards celebrity endorsements, there is a lack of scholarly research on brand image in Greece. Considering the growing emphasis on AI research in the country (Koubarakis et al., 2018, p. 94), and the acknowledged effectiveness of celebrity endorsements, especially among Gen Z (Tzoumaka et al., 2016, p. 314), this thesis adds to the conversation by introducing new insights on AI-generated celebrity endorsements. In the broader scholarly research on deepfake technology, research findings contribute by exploring perceptions of brand image through deepfake celebrity endorsements. Studies on celebrity endorsements exhibit a highly positive effect on brand image (Lomboan, 2013, pp. 793-795; Adiba et al., 2020, pp. 69-70). Nonetheless, given the complexity of deepfakes, the thesis findings' illustrate how perceptions of the technology may influence this effectiveness, as well as which factors need to be taken into consideration in their integration.

Furthermore, disclosure and other ethical considerations in synthetic advertising remain largely unaddressed (Karpinska-Krakowiak & Eisend, 2024, pp. 9-10). Research findings support the significance of companies abiding by ethical standards when using deepfakes, to safeguard their brand image and brand trust. The findings substantiate discussions of previous studies on the likelihood of deepfakes causing severe damage to a brand's image (Albahar & Almalki, 2019, p. 2047) and provide an answer to scholarly hypothesis on consumer responses to deepfake endorsements. The need for full control on the endorser's side contradicts suggestions for creative authority and control of the brand, as proposed by Kietzmann et al. (2021, p. 481). Finally, the present thesis reinforces the findings of Agarwal & Nath (2023, pp. 17-19) and Whittaker et al. (2021, p. 209), who argued that through an ethical

approach to deepfakes, consumers might be more open to brands using the technology for creative production and memorable experiences.

5.3. Practical implications

This thesis holds various practical implications. Celebrity endorsements are an increasingly implemented strategy on social media in Greece and are even described as a 'set rule' for brands across industries. Indeed, a 10% increase in celebrity endorsement visibility has been reported on social media since the Covid-19 pandemic (Bogdanou, 2021, p. 18). According to the International Trade Administration (2023, para. 1) Greece is successfully integrating AI tools and strategies across industries, expecting to achieve a profound digital transformation by 2025. As advertisers in the country are looking to make a shift from traditional forms of advertising towards the use of advanced digital tools, the present thesis provides valuable practical insights into how young consumers in the Greek market respond to brands integrating deepfake technology in advertising. Considering the limited budgets available in Greek companies, experimenting with synthetic advertising could be a feasible and accessible option. The results of the research can be reviewed by brands to produce the best possible outcome through celebrity endorsements, enhance their brand image and stand out from competitors.

Given that deepfake technology is expected to become a standard practice in advertising and reshape the industry's future, advertisers should be informed and well-prepared when employing this technology. Research findings indicate that local audiences are generally wary of deepfakes and expect brands to act ethically towards both their consumers and the endorser when producing deepfake celebrity endorsements. If ethical considerations are in place, advertisers could leverage the technology to create novel and creative content, as originality and tailored experiences are favored by participants. Brands are advised to explore and assess deepfake examples in the film industry, to understand how it could be used for creative storytelling that triggers positive responses among audiences. Furthermore, advertisers could use the technology to create partially deepfake endorsers to maintain the authentic element, enhance the effectiveness of the advertisement and maintain the brand associations that occur with the presence of endorsers.

Brands are further advised to exploit deepfakes to create personalized experiences that feel unique and relevant to consumers, thus generating brand differentiation in a context of ad overstimulation. However, a noteworthy suggestion is that advertisers should not create overly personalized advertisements but use deepfakes wisely to enhance the endorsement's effectiveness. To illustrate, advertisers could replace the facial movements or body language of an endorser to fit the cultural norms of each country. Finally, it is important that brands do not overlook the significance of endorser-brand

congruence. Given that deepfakes are still a new phenomenon and audiences are not accustomed to their integration in advertising, advertisers are encouraged to take into consideration the reputation, trustworthiness and values of a celebrity to mitigate consumer concerns and reinforce brand credibility.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

At this stage, it is valuable to recognize the limitations of the thesis. When conducting research on an unexplored and complex subject, such as consumer perceptions of deepfake technology, there are limitations emerging from the lack of existing theories and studies. By analyzing the insights of 10 Greek young consumers, the present research is preliminary, serving as a pilot for further research. Potentially the most important limitation of the thesis is the limited number of participants. Due to the time period of conducting interviews (close to exam period in Greek universities), along with the time consuming nature of interviews, the researcher was able to collect insights from 10 participants, which is a relatively small sample. Similarly, qualitative in-depth interviews were employed to address the research question. Qualitative research lacks generalizability and therefore findings cannot be representative in larger scale of the sample (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2011, p. 430). Finally, it is worth mentioning that the thesis explores consumer perceptions of brand image within a Greek context. Even though understanding consumer perceptions should be explored among different demographic groups (Sabbir Rahman, 2012, pp. 76-78), findings may not be representative of consumers of other cultures and regions.

Besides the aforementioned limitations, there are opportunities for future research, with the present thesis operating as an introductory research. Firstly, even though in-depth interviews facilitated a thorough exploration of consumer perspectives, future studies could benefit from the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach would encourage the inclusion of a larger sample and enhance the validity of findings. It would further be interesting to examine perspectives of deepfakes and brand image from different ethnicities or age groups. For instance, older people in the country may hold considerable concerns about AI technologies, oppose their implementation in advertising or even entirely reject any instances of personalization. Additionally, considering the need for explicit disclosure of deepfake usage, it would be interesting to examine how different types of disclosures influence both brand credibility and consumer perceptions of the advertisement's deceptive aspects.

Another suggestion would be to compare the effectiveness of partially deepfake and traditional endorsers not only on brand image, but also consumer behavior, word of mouth or purchase intention, as interconnected elements in the complex dynamics of consumer perspectives. It would be interesting to explore whether the authenticity of the synthetic endorser is equal to that of real ones and whether this impacts the transference of attributes to the brand's image. Finally, despite the current limited number of

deepfake celebrity endorsements, in the future, scholarly research in Greece could study the impact on consumer behavior, purchase intention or brand image using the case study of a local deepfake advertisement.

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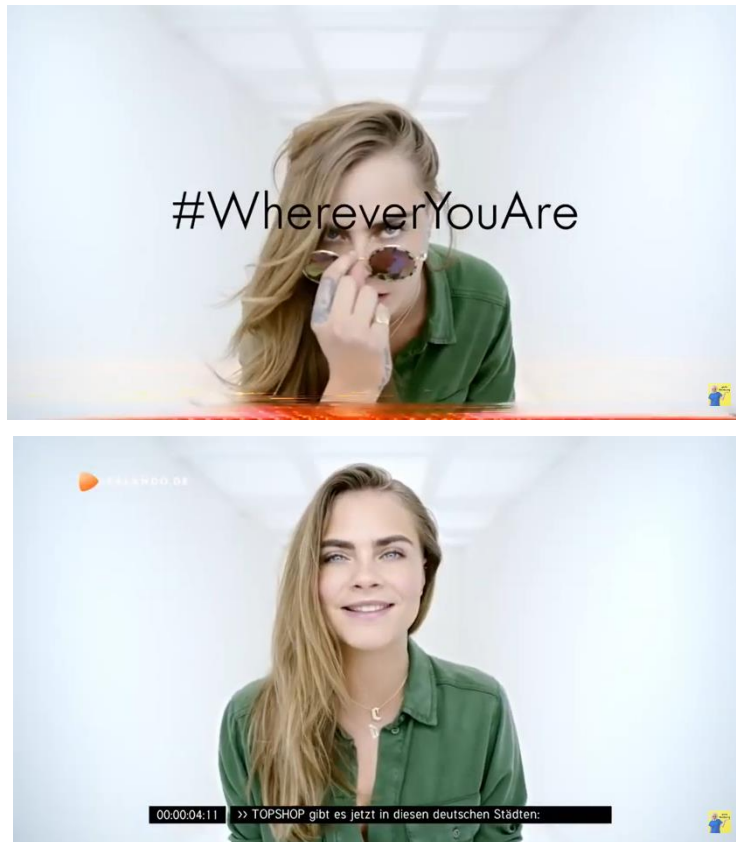setting. *BMC medical research methodology*, *16*, 1-11. https://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12874-016-

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Appendix A – Stimulus

Zalando's #whereveryouare deepfake campaign featuring Cara Delevingne.

https://www.infinitizer.de/en/case-studies/zalando-cara-calavigne/

Appendix B – Consent Form

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Anna Valeria Pelivanidou

708014ap@eur.nl

0030 6940989166

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a master thesis research about deepfake advertising. The purpose of the study is to understand how perceived brand image is influenced by the integration of deepfake technology in celebrity endorsements. Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you agree to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to your subjective evaluations and feelings about brands using deepfake technology in celebrity endorsements after watching a deepfake campaign as an example. Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use an audio recorder for the interview. You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point during the interview.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in the present research. Yet, you are free to decide whether your name or other identifying information is used in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using a pseudonym or more general information, such as you age, gender, etc. I will use the material from the interviews and my observations exclusively for academic purposes.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study is expected to last for approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in the interview, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time

without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact -anonymously, if you wish- the thesis supervisor Jinju Muraro-Kim, kim@eshcc.eur.nl

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form; you may prefer to consent orally.

Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study

Name	Signature	Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name	Signature	Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

Appendix C – Interview Guide

Greek version:

Εισαγωγή:

"Καλημέρα/καλησπέρα, σας ευχαριστώ πολύ για τη συμμετοχή σας σε αυτή τη συνέντευξη. Ονομάζομαι Άννα Βαλέρια, είμαι φοιτήτρια στο Erasmus University Rotterdam και κάνω το μεταπτυχιακό μου στα Media and Creative Industries. Με ενδιαφέρουν ιδιαίτερα οι διαφημίσεις και πώς μπορεί να αλλάξει το μέλλον τους τα επόμενα χρόνια με την άνοδο των deepfakes."

"Η συνέντευξη αναμένεται να διαρκέσει 45-60 λεπτά. Το θέμα της συζήτησης θα είναι η τεχνολογία των deepfakes στις διαφημίσεις, χρησιμοποιώντας ως παράδειγμα την διαφήμιση της εταιρείας ρούχων Zalando, με την Cara Delevingne. Τα deepfakes είναι βίντεο ή εικόνες που έχουν δημιουργηθεί χρησιμοποιώντας τεχνολογία τεχνητής νοημοσύνης για να αντικαταστήσουν τα χαρακτηριστικά του προσώπου ή του σώματος κάποιου με αυτά κάποιου άλλο. Με άλλα λόγια, είναι εφικτό να δημιουργηθεί ένα εξαιρετικά ρεαλιστικό βίντεο με κάποιον να λέει ή να κάνει κάτι που στην πραγματικότητα δεν έκανε ποτέ.»

«Θα ήθελα να τονίσω για μία ακόμη φορά ότι η συνομιλία μας θα παραμείνει αυστηρά εμπιστευτική και θα χρησιμοποιηθεί αποκλειστικά για ερευνητικούς σκοπούς. Επίσης για λόγους ανωνυμίας, εάν το επιθυμείτε, υπάρχει η δυνατότητα να επιλέξετε κάποιο ψευδώνυμο. Εάν συμφωνείτε με όσα έχουν προαναφερθεί, θα σας παρακαλέσω να υπογράψετε το έντυπο συγκατάθεσης. Με την άδεια σας, θα ξεκινήσω την καταγραφή της συνέντευξης.»

Δημογραφικά:

➢ Πόσο χρονών είστε και ποια είναι η καταγωγή σας;

Εισαγωγικές ερωτήσεις:

➢ Γνωρίζετε την τεχνολογία deepfake;

• Ποια είναι η άποψη σας σχετικά με την χρήση της σε διαφημίσεις;

• Γιατί πιστεύετε ότι οι εταιρείες επιλέγουν να χρησιμοποιήσουν deepfakes στις διαφημίσεις τους;

➢ Ποια θα ήταν η στάση σας εάν παρακολουθούσατε μία τέτοια διαφήμιση;

• Εάν θα ήταν αρνητική, τί θα σας έκανε να τις αποδεχτείτε;

- Μπορείτε να αναφέρετε μία διαφήμιση που χρησιμοποιεί την συγκεκριμένη τεχνολογία;

- Ποια είναι η γνώμη σας πάνω σε αυτή;

Χρήση ερεθίσματος

Brand feelings:

➢ Πώς νιώσατε βλέποντας τη διαφήμιση;

- Σας φάνηκε ενδιαφέρουσα ή διασκεδαστική;

- Ποια είναι τα θετικά στοιχεία της χρήσης deepfake;

- Ποια είναι τα αρνητικά της;

- Υπάρχει κάτι που θα αλλάζατε στη διαφήμιση; Παρακαλώ εξηγήστε.

➢ Υπήρξε κάτι που σας έκανε να νιώσετε άβολα ή αμήχανα;

- Τί συνέβαλε σε αυτό;

- Τί δείχνει αυτό για την εικόνα της εταιρείας;

Brand Judgments:

➢ Ποια είναι η εικόνα σας για τις εταιρείες που χρησιμοποιούν deepfakes;

- Θεωρείτε ότι η χρήση deepfake επηρεάζει την αξιοπιστία τους;

- Τί πιστεύετε ότι θα επηρέαζε θετικά την αξιοπιστία τους;

- Αρνητικά;

➢ Ποια είναι η άποψη σας για την Cara Delevingne;

- Τι σας αρέσει ή δεν σας αρέσει σε αυτήν;

➢ Πώς νιώθετε για την απεικόνιση της χρησιμοποιώντας deepfake τεχνολογία;

- Ποια είναι τα θετικά της απεικόνισης της με deepfake;

- Τα αρνητικά της;

- Θα προτιμούσατε να μην ήταν deepfake; Γιατί;

- Πιστεύετε ότι η παρουσία ενός deepfake διάσημου επηρεάζει την εικόνα της εταιρείας;

- Με ποιον τρόπο;

- ➢ Ποια είναι η άποψή σας σχετικά με την ενημέρωση χρήσης τεχνολογίας deepfake στις διαφημίσεις;

  - Είναι ηθικό να χρησιμοποιούμε deepfakes για την απεικόνιση δημοσίων προσώπων;

  - Τί θεωρείτε πως είναι σημαντικό για την απεικόνιση τους στις διαφημίσεις;

  - Τί θα πιστεύατε για μία εταιρεία που δεν τα ακολουθεί;

- ➢ Θεωρείτε ότι είναι περισσότερο ή λιγότερο πιθανό να υποστηρίξετε την εταιρεία έχοντας δει την διαφήμιση;

  - Πιστεύετε πως διαφέρει σε σύγκριση με άλλες;

  - Εάν ναι, με ποιον τρόπο;

Συμπερασματικές ερωτήσεις:

- ➢ Θα θέλατε να δείτε περισσότερες διαφημίσεις όπως αυτή στο μέλλον;

  - Στην Ελλάδα;

  - Με ποιόν τρόπο θα θέλατε ή δεν θα θέλατε να χρησιμοποιηθούν τα deepfakes στις διαφημίσεις; Γιατί;

  - Υπάρχει κάτι που πιστεύετε ότι θα έπρεπε οι οργανισμοί να λάβουν υπόψη όταν χρησιμοποιούν την συγκεκριμένη τεχνολογία;

  - Τί θα γινόταν αν δεν τα έκαναν;

- ➢ Υπάρχει κάτι που θα θέλατε να προσθέσετε;

«Σας ευχαριστώ πολύ που αφιερώσατε χρόνο για να συμμετάσχετε σε αυτή την συνέντευξη και για την συμβολή σας στην πρόοδο της διατριβής μου. Για οποιαδήποτε ερώτηση, φυσικά μπορείτε να επικοινωνήσετε μαζί μου.»

«Σας ευχαριστώ για άλλη μία φορά και να έχετε μία όμορφη μέρα.»

English translation:

Introduction:

"Good morning/good evening, I would like to thank you for taking part in the interview. My name is

Anna Valeria, I am a student at Erasmus University Rotterdam, and I am currently doing my master's in Media & Creative Industries. I am particularly interested in advertising, and how the industry's landscape could change in the upcoming years with the rise of deepfakes."

"The interview is expected to last for approximately 45-60 minutes. The topic of discussion will be deepfake technology in advertising, using the fashion retailer's, Zalando, deepfake campaign with Cara Delevingne as a visual example. Deepfakes are audiovisual content that has been digitally manipulated using advanced artificial intelligence that replace the facial or body features of one person with someone else's. In other words, it is possible to create a highly realistic video depicting someone doing or saying something in reality they never did."

"I would like to emphasize once again that our discussion will remain strictly confidential and will be used exclusively for research purposes. Also, for anonymity purposes, if you wish, you can choose a pseudonym. If you agree with all the above, I will kindly request you to sign the consent form I have sent to you. With your permission, I will begin recording the interview."

Demographics:

➢ Could you please state your age and nationality?

Introductory questions:

➢ What do you know about deepfake technology?

- What is your opinion about its use in advertising?

- Why do you think companies choose to use deepfakes in advertisements?

➢ What would your attitude be if you watched a deepfake ad?

- If negative, what could be done by companies to change this?

- Can you name an ad that uses this technology?

- What were your thoughts about it?

Use of stimulus

Brand Feelings:

➢ How did you feel while watching the ad?

- Did you find it interesting or entertaining?

- What are the advantages of using deepfakes?

- What are the disadvantages?

- Is there anything you would change about the ad? Please explain.

➢ Was there something that made you feel uncomfortable or uneasy?

- What contributed to this?

- What does this say about the brand?

Brand Judgments:

➢ What are your thoughts on brands using this technology?

- Do you think the use of deepfakes affects how credible they are?

- What do you think would positively contribute to their credibility?

- Negatively?

➢ What are your thoughts on Cara Delevingne?

- What do you like or dislike about her?

➢ What are your thoughts on her portrayal using deepfake technology?

- What are the advantages of portraying her using deepfakes?

- The disadvantages?

- Would you prefer it if she wasn't deepfake?

- Why?

- Do you think her presence as a deepfake influences the brand's image?

- In what way?

➢ What are your thoughts on brands informing the use of deepfake technology in their ads?

- Is it ethical to use deepfakes to portray public figures?

- What do you think is important when portraying public figures as deepfakes in advertising?

- What would you think about a brand if they did not follow this?

➢ After watching the stimulus, would you be more or less likely to support the brand?

- Do you think the brand differs compared to others?

- If yes, in what way?

Summary questions:

➤ Would you like to see more ads like this in the future?

- In Greece?

- How would you want or not want deepfakes to be used in advertising? Why?

- Is there anything you think brands should take into consideration when using this technology?

- What would happen if they didn't?

➤ Is there anything you would like to add?

"Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview and for your valuable contribution to the progress of my thesis. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me."

"Thank you once again and have a nice day/evening."

Appendix D – Participants' information

PSEUDONYMS	AGE	GENDER	ETHNICITY
IOANNA	25	Female	Greek
HARRIS	19	Male	Greek
DANAI	21	Female	Greek
MARILENA	26	Female	Greek
MODESTOS	24	Male	Greek
EVANGELIA	23	Female	Greek
STEFANIA	23	Female	Greek
VASILIKI	27	Female	Greek
ELENI	24	Female	Greek
YIORGOS	23	Male	Greek

Appendix E – Coding Tree

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Consumer skepticism on brand credibility	Deepfake advertising aims at deception	Fraud, apprehension, examples of scams, lack of ethical ads, non-disclosure is deceptive, commercial profit/benefits, deception is the objective, uninformed people, able to detect, fear over personal risk, uncertainty for future
	Brands should be ethical	Brands carry responsibility, communication, not aim at deception, showing trust, laws on AI, preference for values, link to other activities
	Need for disclosure of deepfake use	Deepfake ads need transparency, disclosure is trusted, consumers should be informed, emotional manipulation, the brand is open/transparent, honesty, understanding public concerns
	Importance of endorser's consent	Consent is imperative, identity theft, exploitation, deepfakes are intrusive, control over personal identity, reputational risks, respect for privacy of rights
Positive brand associations linked to deepfake advertising	Increased creativity and innovation	Brands as 'ahead of the game', willingness to experiment, efficiency, tech-savvy, originality, entertainment, hedonic feelings, ad is interesting, attention grabbing, opportunities, creativity and narratives

	Consumer benefits: personalized experiences	Using technology for communication, feels relevant, accessibility and inclusivity, consumer-centric, brand-consumer relationships, ad overstimulation, uniqueness, extent of personalization, personal identity, types of personalization
	Increased brand superiority	Memorable, would share with others, curious, stands out, advertising scene in Greece, brand as an example, consideration, traditional advertising
Consumer Skepticism towards deepfake endorser	Deepfake endorsers are less authentic	Preference for authenticity, the 'uncanny valley' of deepfakes, human element, feels uncomfortable, active role of endorser, complement not replace, emotional connection/feels closer, reasons for lack of participation
	Influence on brand image is dependent on celebrity-brand congruence	Congruence is important, modern and unconventional, message, expertise, respect, trustworthiness, positive reputation, personality and charisma

Appendix F – Declaration: Use of Generative AI Tools

Student Information
Name: Anna Valeria Pelivanidou
Student ID: 708014
Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000
Supervisor Name: Dr Jinju Muraro-Kim
Date: 25/06/2024

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools
I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically (1) ChatGPT to help find the synonyms of words, phrase better themes and sub-themes and help translate from Greek to English words I had a hard time remembering, and (2) TurboScribe, a software that facilitated the rapid transcription in the Greek language, in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: [digital signature]

Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

Extent of AI Usage

☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. <u>I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.</u>

Ethical and Academic Integrity

☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was

used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature: ANNA VALERIA PELIVANIDOU

Date of Signature: 25/06/2024