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Research Paper

Deepfake: Threat or Opportunity? Creating Trustworthy Hyperreality in AI-Based Marketing-The Malaria Must Die Case

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This research examines whether deepfake -commonly linked to deception or manipulation etc.- can be ethically reframed as a creative, emotionally persuasive tool in AI-based humanitarian marketing. Using the Malaria Must Die campaign as a case study, it analyzes how synthetic media can construct "credible hyperreality," an aesthetic space where simulation supports authenticity, and how transparent deepfake use can convert technological risk into humanitarian opportunity.

Methodology: The research employs Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) grounded in Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic framework. The advertisement was segmented into sequences and analyzed across visual, linguistic, auditory, and cinematographic modes. Sub-modes (framing, salience, information value, gesture, soundtrack, color, deepfake transitions) were coded to reveal meaning-making patterns. The research interprets multimodal composition rather than measuring audience reception.

Results: Three primary narrative modes emerged: (1) ethical simulation, reframing deepfake as moral amplification; (2) polyphonic participation, realized through Beckham's multilingual synthetic performance representing diverse voices; and (3) aesthetic realism, produced via warm palettes, intimate domestic settings, and intersemiotic coherence. Together these modes generate credible hyperreality-an emotionally authentic and ethically framed simulated narrative.

Originality: The research repositions deepfake from a manipulation paradigm toward responsible mediation that can produce emotional authenticity in humanitarian communication. By integrating Baudrillard's hyperreality with multimodal analysis, it offers a novel theoretical lens on synthetic media and demonstrates how deepfake can ethically enhance empathy, solidarity, and global engagement.

Keywords: *Deepfake; Multimodal Discourse Analysis; Hyperreality; AI-based Marketing; Humanitarian Communication; Ethical Simulation.*

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1. Introduction

In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has become an increasingly central actor in creative industries, communication, and social responsibility campaigns. While debates often emphasize its potential dangers -such as misinformation, manipulation, or loss of authenticity (Fagni et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021; Dolhansky et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2021)- AI has also opened unprecedented opportunities for innovation and empathy-driven storytelling. This duality was clearly visible at AI for Good, a United Nations initiative that promotes the ethical use of AI technologies for sustainable development. The summit's 2025 theme, "AI for Humanity" (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2025), highlights how machine intelligence, when aligned with human values, can be mobilized for collective well-being rather than mere technological spectacle. This trend is paving the way for a radical transformation in marketing communications.

Importantly, this transformation extends beyond the creative and humanitarian sectors; it has also begun to fundamentally reshape marketing communications. AI-generated advertising, synthetic influencers, and algorithmic targeting techniques are redefining how brands interact with consumers, paving the way for increasingly personalized, data-driven, and hyper-realistic content. As a result, AI has emerged not only as a technological tool but as a central creative force driving both commercial and social campaigns.Therefore, it is critically important to examine how AI can be directed for 'good purposes' within this transformation.

This research stems from the same motivation: to explore how artificial intelligence, and specifically deepfake technology, can be employed for good within communication practices that increasingly resemble AI-based marketing strategies. The case of Malaria Must Die, a campaign launched in collaboration with David Beckham, represents a milestone in this regard. Although originally released in 2019, the campaign remains a touchstone for contemporary debates on "responsible AI" (Kietzmann et al., 2021), frequently revisited in discussions of ethical communication, digital persuasion, and AI-supported creative production. It stands as one of the first examples of deepfake technology being strategically used to mobilize emotional and moral engagement for a humanitarian cause-a form of social marketing that aligns closely with the evolving logic of AI-enhanced brand storytelling.

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Deepfake technology -an amalgamation of deep learning and synthetic video generation- has often been discussed in terms of its risks. Yet the Malaria Must Die campaign demonstrated that the same technology can also construct trust-based storytelling by amplifying the emotional truth of a message. Through a digitally recreated David Beckham speaking in multiple languages, the campaign generated a sense of global unity in the fight against malaria, emphasizing that authenticity is not only about factual representation but also about affective and ethical resonance. In this respect, the campaign exemplifies how AI-based simulation can enhance audience engagement, much like emerging marketing practices that use synthetic media to increase personalization, inclusivity, and impact. The fact that the campaign was internationally recognized for its narrative structure, visual design, and public impact illustrates that the responsible use of deepfake technology can yield positive communicative outcomes with relevance for both social and commercial marketing strategies.

From a theoretical standpoint, the research situates this phenomenon within Jean Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality (2024), where the distinction between the real and its representation becomes blurred. However, this research adopts a reconstructive interpretation of Baudrillard's critique. Rather than viewing deepfake solely as a symptom of simulation, it is conceptualized here as a mediated opportunity-a space where simulation can be reoriented toward social responsibility, ethical persuasion, and value-driven communication. This shift reflects a broader transformation in media aesthetics and marketing communication: as AI blurs the boundaries between the authentic and the synthetic, the meaning of "real" in storytelling becomes negotiated rather than fixed, and synthetic realism becomes a tool for emotional and symbolic impact.

Building on this premise, the research aims to investigate how deepfake technology participates in the construction of new narrative modes in social responsibility advertising, which increasingly intersects with AI-based marketing communication. Using a multimodal discourse analysis, it examines how Malaria Must Die organizes visual, linguistic, musical, and emotional cues to establish a sense of credibility, urgency, and empathy. By doing so, it seeks to offer a model of responsible AI storytelling that not only aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Development Programme, 2025) but also provides insight into how synthetic media can inform future AI-driven marketing practices. The campaign ultimately demonstrates that technologies capable of deceiving can also be reimagined as instruments for ethical

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persuasion, global engagement, and truth-based advocacy within both humanitarian and marketing contexts.

Within this framework, the research aims to re-evaluate the nature of deepfake technology, which is often discussed in the context of manipulation and ethical violations, within the framework of responsible and transparent usage conditions. In this vein, the research examines the Malaria Must Die campaign as an exceptional example, exploring how AI-based simulation can produce credible and emotionally persuasive narratives in the context of human communication and AI-based marketing. The primary objective of the research is to reveal whether deepfake technology, when used within ethical boundaries, can become a narrative tool that reinforces emotional truth. Within this framework, the research seeks answers to the following questions:

(1) What are the fundamental narrative modes that structure the Malaria Must Die commercial?
(2) How does deepfake technology transform ethical persuasion forms in an advertising narrative aimed at humanitarian goals?

The research follows a multi-layered structure to answer these questions. The first section addresses the creative, commercial, and ethical transformations of deepfake technology in the context of AI-based marketing and humanitarian communication. The second section presents the methodological framework of the research and justifies why Multimodal Discourse Analysis is the most appropriate method for this research. The third section provides a detailed analysis of the Malaria Must Die campaign through visual, linguistic, and auditory modes. The findings section discusses the main narrative modes that emerged from the analysis; the following section relates these findings to the literature on AI ethics, human communication, and AI-based marketing. The conclusion section presents the theoretical and practical contributions of the research, its limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2. Deepfake: Creative, Commercial, and Ethical Transformations

Deepfake is a combination of the terms “deep learning” and “fake”. With this method, anyone can change the face of another person in an image. Not only the voice can be changed but also the image (Chadha et al., 2021). The rapid development of deep learning

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and artificial intelligence technologies has enabled the production of artificially created videos and audio called "deepfake." Deepfake technology has become widespread, especially in recent years. So much so that deepfake can now independently compose original music (e.g., aimusic.co.uk), write new stories (e.g., charisma.ai), create unique drawings (e.g., artaigallery.com), and create videos that mimic real likenesses (e.g., deepfakesweb.com).

This productive capacity enables brands to produce much faster, lower-cost, and personalized materials by transforming content production processes in AI-based marketing applications. Thus, deepfake is not only a technological innovation but also a tool that creates a competitive advantage in creative and commercial communication.

Deepfake technology has had a wide impact in many fields, from advertising to communication, cinema to art. In communication, deepfake videos have been used to re-enact historical events or famous speeches. For example, a deepfake speech by Martin Luther King Jr. is thought to offer important lessons about history and activism to new generations (Ruiz et al., 2020). In the world of cinema, the use of deepfake technology to rejuvenate actors or to continue their roles after their death has become widespread. This allows characters to continue for longer and allows audiences to have nostalgic experiences. For example, after Carrie Fisher's death, it is planned to revive her character Leia Organa in the Star Wars movies with deepfake technology (BBC, 2019). Again, the 2021 movie Roadrunner: A Film About Anthony Bourdain documentary was filmed 37 months after his death and used artificial intelligence to clone and reproduce the voice of the late Anthony Bourdain for three specific lines heard in the film, thanks to the voice e-mail he obtained from his friend, despite having tens of thousands of hours of video footage and audio archive (Rosner, 2021). In the art world, deepfake and artificial intelligence offer artists new forms of expression. Artists can reinterpret classical works using deepfake technology or integrate content produced by artificial intelligence into their works. Another issue is deepfake videos used in the field of politics, which caused a great deal of controversy during the 2020 United States presidential elections. In the videos that manipulate the images of candidates to produce misleading content (Smith, 2020), many deepfake videos were produced, especially on Donald Trump, and this video was banned in the US and Canada (Citron & Chesney, 2018).

These examples demonstrate how deepfakes transform representations, identities, and perceptions of reality, and show that the same transformation is occurring in the field of

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marketing. Brands are using this power of "perceptual reconstruction" seen in the worlds of cinema and art to strengthen storytelling, increase emotional impact, and forge new types of connections with consumers. In this sense, deepfakes align with Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality (2024), wherein the boundaries between the real and the simulated collapse, giving rise to a mediated experience that feels "more real than real." In AI-driven marketing, hyperreal simulations not only replicate reality but also produce emotionally compelling versions of it, shaping consumer perception on symbolic and affective levels.

The widespread and engaging use of deepfake technology has inevitably impacted the marketing, advertising and public relations sectors, all of which are currently undergoing digital transformations. Notably, manipulated advertising practices utilizing digital tools, rather than solely creating content, have become more prevalent with the integration of artificial intelligence and deepfake technologies (Campbell et al., 2021).

What is important here is that brands no longer just produce visual content, but also construct synthetic narratives that shape consumer perception. Deepfake-based campaigns produce a holistic "digital brand performance" from voice tone to facial expressions, thereby creating a stronger emotional impact than traditional advertising.

However, the use of deepfake in creative and commercial contexts also raises significant ethical and authenticity concerns. As consumers increasingly value transparency and trust, advertisers must navigate the fine line between technological innovation and manipulation (Whittaker et al., 2025). The question is no longer whether deepfake can produce realistic content, but whether audiences perceive such synthetic representations as credible and ethically acceptable forms of storytelling. This tension underscores the need for a framework of responsible AI communication, where innovation is guided by ethical imperatives rather than market spectacle.

This situation is particularly critical in marketing, as consumer trust is a fundamental component of brand value. Therefore, deepfake technology, when used correctly, offers brands powerful new narrative opportunities, but when misused, it creates a risk area that can cause serious damage to brand reputation.

In recent years, the emergence of "synthetic influencers" has illustrated how deepfake and AI technologies can transform branding and celebrity culture. Virtual figures such as Lil Miquela or Shudu Gram have collaborated with global brands like Calvin Klein and

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Balmain, blurring the boundaries between human and artificial identities in marketing communication (Moustakas et al., 2020). This development signals a shift toward a post-human aesthetics in advertising, where authenticity becomes performative rather than biological.

Moreover, deepfake technologies enable brands to personalize advertising content at an unprecedented scale. By adapting a celebrity's image or voice to speak directly to individual consumers, companies can create emotionally resonant and tailored experiences (Chi et al., 2023). Such practices reflect a paradigm shift from mass communication to hyper-personalized marketing, where emotional engagement is algorithmically designed. This new form of affective persuasion represents both a creative opportunity and an ethical challenge for advertisers seeking to maintain consumer trust.

These types of personalized simulations reinforce the concept of "emotional technology," the new value proposition of digital marketing, and enable brands to establish one-on-one relationships with consumers.

From a semiotic perspective, deepfake advertising can also be interpreted as a form of simulation that paradoxically produces emotional authenticity. Although the content is synthetically generated, the affective responses it elicits -empathy, nostalgia, or trust- are undeniably real. This paradox illustrates how mediated realities in advertising no longer aim merely to reproduce the real but to evoke a believable emotional truth. Here again, Baudrillard's hyperreality becomes relevant: deepfake-based advertisements function as simulacra that produce their own emotional "truth," regardless of the ontological authenticity of the images being displayed. Thus, deepfakes serve not only as technological artifacts but also as cultural mirrors reflecting contemporary negotiations between authenticity, emotion, and simulation.

For this reason, deepfake technology reshapes consumer experience not only visually but also emotionally and culturally, introducing a new narrative framework for AI-driven marketing. In this context, the Malaria Must Die campaign was chosen as a case study because it illustrates how deepfakes can turn simulation into a tool for ethical storytelling and humanitarian engagement. The campaign further shows that when brands and organizations employ deepfake technology with ethical transparency, they can foster consumer trust and demonstrate that AI-enhanced marketing strategies are capable of aligning social purpose with commercial effectiveness.

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3. Methodology

This research employs Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to examine the Malaria Must Die campaign produced by MalariaNoMoreUK. The choice of this method is grounded in the nature of the object under examination, which is not merely a linguistic text but a complex digital narrative in which visual, auditory, bodily, and technological modalities simultaneously produce meaning. Deepfake-based advertising narratives cannot be adequately understood through a single sign system, as facial expressions, tone of voice, camera movements, editing rhythm, and algorithmic transitions operate together to generate emotional resonance and ethical persuasion. Accordingly, this study adopts a holistic analytical framework to examine how these interacting modalities collectively shape meaning, affect, and ethical positioning within AI-based humanitarian advertising.

Alternative qualitative methods alone cannot provide the analytical depth required for this research. Content analysis, for instance, relies on discursive frequencies and thematic categorization, thereby relegating the visual-aesthetic and sensory dimensions of deepfake technology to a secondary level. Similarly, traditional critical discourse analysis focuses primarily on linguistic texts and offers limited insight into how meaning is constructed through visual and auditory modes. Receptional or audience-based approaches also fall outside the scope of this study, as the research does not seek to measure audience responses but rather to reveal how persuasion is constructed through the text itself.

Within this context, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, grounded in Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic approach, enables the simultaneous examination of how meaning is represented across different modes, how interpersonal relations are established, and how textual coherence is achieved. In technologically mediated narratives such as deepfakes, ethical persuasion emerges not from a single signifier but through intermodal coherence, emotional synchronization, and aesthetic consistency. The holistic perspective offered by MDA thus allows this study to conceptualize deepfake technology not merely as a technical instrument, but as a cultural and ethical mechanism of meaning production.

The commercial has surpassed 800 million views and received the CogX Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Use of Artificial Intelligence for Social Good (Malaria No More UK, 2019), demonstrating both its communicative impact and its recognition as

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a case of "responsible AI use." Consistent with this focus, the aim of the analysis is not to measure audience reception empirically but to interpret the representational, interpersonal, and textual meanings that constitute the campaign's persuasive structure in other words, to examine how the advertisement constructs an illusion of trust through multimodal semiotic strategies.

Discourse is understood here as a sociocultural phenomenon encoded not only in language but also in other representational systems such as visuals, sound, and gesture. Multimodal Discourse Analysis, as developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), extends Halliday's social semiotic model (Taş & Taş, 2018), which identifies three metafunctions of meaning-making: the ideational metafunction, referring to the representation of experience and the logic of events; the interpersonal metafunction, which involves the enactment of relationships between participants such as the advertiser, viewer, or character; and the textual metafunction, concerning the organization of these meanings into a coherent whole.

MDA investigates meaning through the holistic examination of semiotic resources, combining visual, verbal, spatial, and auditory elements (Dash, Patnaik & Suar, 2016; Atalay, 2015). This approach is particularly suited for digital advertisements, where visual, auditory, and emotional elements operate simultaneously to produce persuasion.

A mode is defined as a culturally shaped resource that enables meaning-making encompassing signs such as image, sound, movement, and voice (Kress, 2005). Kress and Van Leeuwen argue that the emergence of digital communication has shifted the focus from unimodal (text-based) to multimodal meaning-making, in which image, gesture, and sound are as central to communication as words themselves.

To operationalize this framework, the analysis of the Malaria Must Die advertisement focuses on three core visual parameters proposed by Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006):

1. Framing: How the advertisement connects or separates its visual and verbal components to construct narrative unity and highlight contrast between Beckham's synthetic and real presence.
2. Salience: How attention is directed through composition, color, gaze, and sound to emphasize credibility and emotional appeal.

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3. Information Value: How spatial positioning (left-right, top-bottom, center-margin) organizes the viewer's perception of what is given versus new, ideal versus real particularly in the shifting tension between the "real Beckham" and the "synthetic Beckham."

Through this multimodal lens, the research interprets how simulation (deepfake) interacts with emotion (affect) to reconfigure the ethics of persuasion in advertising. Rather than aiming to construct a model of audience response, the analysis seeks to articulate the representational logic of responsible AI storytelling-a framework that reveals how emotional engagement and technological integrity can coexist within contemporary advertising practices.

Within the scope of this research, a multimodal discourse analysis of the Malaria Must Die commercial was conducted from Kress and Van Leeuwen's perspective. Basically, all modes (visual, linguistic and auditory elements) in the film were analyzed. In the data collection phase, visual and linguistic modes and sub-modes were identified and categorical coding of the modes of meaning in each sequence was done. In the last stage, Kress and Van Leeuwen's holistic perspective was utilized to make sense of the composition. The modes and sub-modes in which the data were coded are as follows:

Table I: Malaria Must Die narrative modes

Actor's Modes	**Cinematographic Modes**	**Surrealism Modes**
Outfit/Costume	Objects Layout and Modeling	Music Usage
Bodily Symbols/Motifs/Tattoos	Space (Decor) Layout	Metaphor and Metonymy
Physical Movements	Color and Light Modes	Special Effects
Linguistic Indicators: Modes of Speech and Discourse	Camera Movements and Shooting Angles	
Non-linguistic Indicators: Affect Symbols Gesture and Mimics	Shooting Plans	
	Sequences	

Source: Author

The advertising narrative, segmented into sequences based on the specified mode and sub-mode categories, has been elucidated and contextualized through the singular code of semiological meaning carried by the modes. The relationship between this meaning and the overarching narrative modes has been explored. All sub-modes, categorized broadly as visual and linguistic modes, have been interpreted within the framework of the multimodal meaning approach in the construction of the narrative. This approach involves an in-depth analysis of how visual and linguistic elements contribute to the overall meaning and storytelling within the advertisement.

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The commercial, commissioned to Synthesia by MalariaNoMoreUK, a non-governmental organization based in England and Wales dedicated to fighting malaria, utilized the capabilities of the "Artificial Intelligence Video Creator." Synthesia, known for its synthetic content creation, developed a commercial featuring former soccer player David Beckham, who spoke in nine languages to bring attention to the deadly disease malaria (Synthesia, 2025).

Produced by Ridley Scott Associates Amsterdam and R/GA London, the film served as a powerful tool for the Speak Up project, recognized as the world's first voice-over campaign. In the commercial, David Beckham, a longstanding malaria ambassador, addressed world leaders in multiple languages, urging them to listen and take action to combat this deadly disease. The project sought citizens' support in preventing malaria through political means.

The film received widespread acclaim and was featured in various media outlets, earning numerous awards. With over 800 million interactions, the movie and the campaign successfully raised over 14 billion dollars for malaria. The primary objectives of the campaign and the film were to bring attention to malaria and raise awareness among global leaders at the Global Fund Conference. The impact of the commercial was substantial, drawing attention to malaria's devastating effects since the twentieth century and fostering recognition of the disease. Since 2007, April 25 has been observed as World Malaria Day, and the commercial has contributed to more effective campaigns in the last years (Synthesia, 2019).Instead of collecting signatures, the campaign asks people around the world to use the power of their voices to take action by visiting malariamustdie.com and recording the message "Malaria Must Die".

In the commercial, former soccer player David Beckham employs Deepfake technology to make a heartfelt appeal in nine languages to combat malaria. Leveraging video synthesis technology, the commercial showcases Beckham speaking in various languages, starting in English and seamlessly transitioning to eight others. Through the use of video synthesis and Beckham's representation, the audience hears authentic voices of men and women worldwide, including malaria survivors and doctors actively combating the disease, from the UK to China to Nigeria.

Beckham fluently speaks in English, followed by Spanish, Kinyarwanda, Arabic, French, Hindi, Mandarin, and Kiswahili, ultimately concluding in Yoruba, a local Nigerian dialect. The implementation of artificial intelligence video synthesis allows Beckham's

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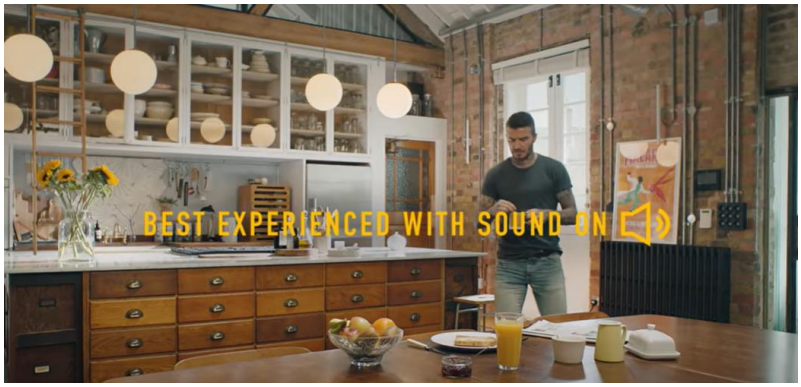
voice to echo the diverse voices of individuals worldwide. Each language and voice is a composite of real voices belonging to doctors and patients engaged in the struggle against malaria. This innovative use of technology amplifies the global nature of the campaign and underscores the urgency of addressing malaria on an international scale.

3.1. Visual modes

The visual construction of Malaria Must Die operates not merely as a representational layer but as an epistemic framework that negotiates authenticity, simulation, and emotional trust. Through a meticulously designed scene, color palette, and compositional framing, the advertisement materializes what "aesthetics of simulation" yet here, simulation is redirected toward an ethical and humanitarian purpose. Rather than blurring reality for deception, the campaign reorients deepfake aesthetics to visualize empathy and shared global responsibility.

The commercial opens with a static, warm-toned interior featuring David Beckham seated at a breakfast table in a minimalist studio apartment. The choice of a domestic, intimate space invokes a truth-effect: a sense of ordinariness that contrasts with the synthetic nature of deepfake imagery. The warm chromatic range -dominated by yellow and orange hues- functions semiotically to elicit vitality, optimism, and civic energy (Tuncer, 2022, p. 14). Historically linked to health symbolism and contagion (Yolcu, 2002, p. 652), the use of yellow in a malaria-related campaign is a deliberate act of semiotic reappropriation: the color of disease becomes the color of collective action.

Figure 1: Malaria Must Die commercial introduction sequence



Source: (Malaria Must Die, 2019)

Beckham's green t-shirt extends this palette, visually anchoring the message of renewal and cooperation. Green, as a signifier of balance and life, establishes affective continuity

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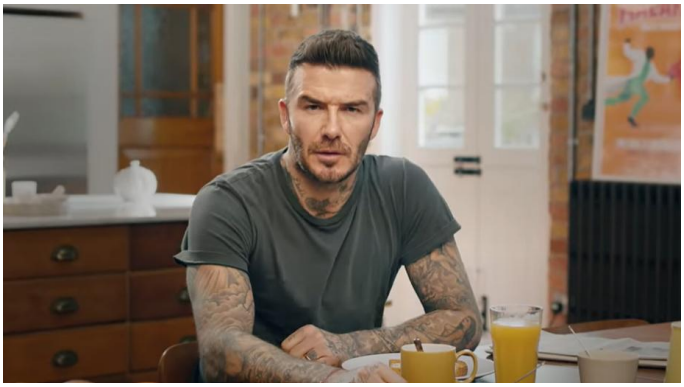
with the campaign's moral dimension transforming the celebrity body into a semiotic bridge between individual empathy and collective mobilization (Tayfur, 2008, p. 122; Yolcu, 2002, p. 656). In this sense, the advertisement employs color dramaturgy not only for aesthetic coherence but also to construct the illusion of moral credibility.

The spatial arrangement of the kitchen further enhances this narrative strategy. The carefully curated decor avoids visual clutter, directing attention to Beckham's gestures and gaze. The presence of an English breakfast serves a dual function: it situates the narrative within the familiar codes of Western domesticity while naturalizing Beckham's celebrity persona as "one of us." By converting a global icon into a relatable everyman, the campaign undermines the alienating spectacle typical of celebrity advertising. This aligns with the campaign's participatory logic if Beckham can "speak up," so can any ordinary citizen.

Figure 2: David Beckham addresses the audience directly



Source: (Malaria Must Die, 2019)

When Beckham begins to speak, the lighting composition shifts subtly. The side-lighting that illuminates his face constructs a symbolic hierarchy reminiscent of religious iconography: Beckham is simultaneously "ordinary" and "transcendent." This ambivalence situates him as a mediated savior-a representative figure who channels the synthetic voices of global citizens through the technological apparatus of deepfake. The magical realism created by this interplay between realism and digital synthesis transforms the advertisement into a site where simulation produces ethical affect rather than deceit.

The direct gaze into the camera -a visual trope of interpersonal metafunction- creates a contract of address, positioning Beckham as both viewer and viewed. Through this gaze, the audience becomes a co-participant in the act of testimony, reinforcing the campaign's performative slogan, "Speak Up." The orange reflection serves as a subtle chromatic echo

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of the campaign's call to action: in the semiotic grammar of the film, orange symbolizes vitality and activation (Tuncer, 2022, p. 15).

Even Beckham's bodily signs are semiotically instrumentalized. The visible wedding ring -strategically aligned with the camera angle- functions as a trust marker, balancing the potential ambiguity of his tattooed body. This visual equilibrium of rebellion and responsibility encapsulates the campaign's affective logic: authenticity emerges not from purity but from transparency within simulation.

The visual language of Malaria Must Die also performs what could be termed a synthetic realism. Deepfake technology, rather than obscuring the real, expands it by allowing Beckham's body to serve as a shared interface for multiple global identities. When his facial features subtly transform to synchronize with diverse linguistic voices -Arabic, Hindi, Mandarin, Yoruba- the spectator witnesses a technologically mediated enactment of global empathy. The deepfake transition, carefully hidden through close-ups and rhythmic editing, becomes a metaphor for interconnected humanity: the real dissolves into the collective.

In this context, the visual design assumes a meta-communicative function. It demonstrates that deepfake, a technology often associated with manipulation, can be redirected to visualize moral universality. The advertisement thus exemplifies what Rubin, Li, and Zimmerman et al. (2025) describe as "AI-generated empathy," in which synthetic representation amplifies, rather than undermines, affective authenticity.

Ultimately, the visual modes of Malaria Must Die synthesize the dialectic between simulation and sincerity. Each semiotic element -color, composition, lighting, and bodily performance-contributes to constructing what could be termed a credible hyperreality. In Baudrillardian terms, this is not a collapse of truth but its aesthetic reconstruction: a mediated ethics of visibility where technology simulates the moral presence of global solidarity.

Beckham's selection as the UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and Malaria Ambassador is consistent with the main message of the campaign and leverages the appeal of celebrity endorsement. The use of celebrities in advertisements is a common strategy to enhance commercial attractiveness, viewer engagement, and message recall (Solak, 2016, p. 258). Beckham, with a storied career in prominent football clubs and currently serving as the president of Inter Miami Football Club, maintains a high level of fame. His involvement

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in the advertisement not only boosts its attractiveness but also enhances persuasiveness and credibility. The use of celebrities in advertising campaigns extends beyond mere appearances in commercials; famous personalities may play integral roles in various aspects of the campaign (İplikçi, 2015, p. 27). Beckham, as the primary figure in the Speak Up campaign, assumes a central role not only in this commercial but also across multiple facets of the broader campaign.

3.2. Linguistic modes

The linguistic architecture of Malaria Must Die operates as the semantic backbone through which deepfake technology acquires narrative coherence and ethical legitimacy. Language here is not merely descriptive; it is performative it mobilizes, enacts, and transforms. From the outset, the campaign employs a language of mobilization, urging citizens to actively participate in the "Speak Up!" initiative, which encourages audiences to record and send their own voice petitions to political leaders. This participatory framework positions speech itself as a political instrument, blurring the line between communication and action.

The commercial opens with an auditory cue a broadcast voice discussing efforts to end malaria. Immediately afterward, David Beckham, seated at a breakfast table, looks directly at the camera and begins a powerful appeal:

"*Malaria is not just any disease. It is one of the deadliest diseases there is. It is said to have killed half of the people who have ever lived. Over fifty billion of us. And it still kills a child every two minutes. But we can end it. We have the knowledge. We have the opportunity. We just need more action*."

The rhetorical structure alternates between declarative and imperative sentences, shifting rhythmically between awareness and urgency. The use of "we" and "our" throughout the monologue builds a collective voice, transforming the linguistic mode into an affective space of solidarity. The speech culminates in the performative appeal:

"*Your voice can help end malaria. Speak up and say that malaria must die. One voice can be powerful, but if we all speak together, they will have to listen. Malaria must die so millions can live*."

This moment encapsulates what Austin would call a performative speech act (Mukhroji et al., 2019) an utterance that does not merely describe change but enacts it. The

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campaign's slogan, "Malaria Must Die," thus functions both as a semantic statement and as a moral imperative.

From the first line, "The best experience is with the sound on", the commercial foregrounds listening as an act of engagement. Sound is not an accessory; it is the symbolic foundation of the campaign's participatory ethos. Through this, the advertisement equates being heard with being human, creating what might be termed an acoustic ethics of attention.

Deepfake synthesis transforms this linguistic performance into a new kind of polyphony. Beckham's digitally generated face and voice merge with recordings of real survivors, doctors, and activists. The transitions between English, Spanish, Arabic, French, Kinyarwanda, Hindi, Mandarin, Kiswahili, and Yoruba embody what "AI-generated empathy." Rather than replacing human authenticity, synthetic voices amplify it each language operating as a metonym of global inclusion.

The use of European languages (English, French, Spanish) aligns with the campaign's institutional target audiences -global policymakers and donors- while the inclusion of African and Asian languages (Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, Hindi, Mandarin, Yoruba) foregrounds the lived experience of those directly affected by malaria. This strategic juxtaposition reproduces what Halliday's term the textual metafunction a hierarchical organization of meaning that balances global address with local authenticity.

Beckham's speech is both intimate and universal. The short, rhythmic phrasing -"We have the knowledge. We have the opportunity. We just need more action"-creates an emotional cadence that mirrors the ticking rhythm of urgency. The reference to "a child dying every two minutes" anchors this urgency in affective realism, transforming statistics into empathy. This linguistic precision converts deepfake's simulation into sincerity what might be described as ethical ventriloquism: technology speaking with the voice of humanity.

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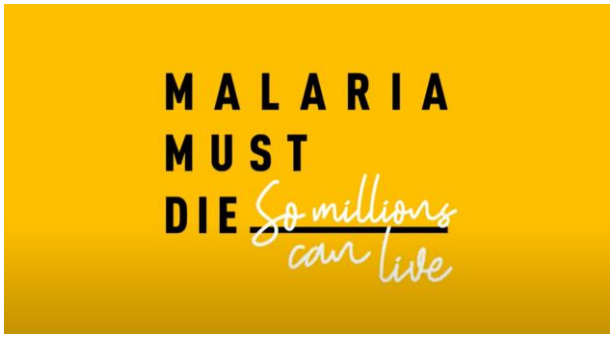
Figure 3: Malaria Must Die commercial final sequence



Source: (Malaria Must Die, 2019)

The final sequence of the advertisement visualizes this linguistic momentum. The poster bearing the slogan "Malaria Must Die So Millions Can Live" appears against a yellow background -signifying vitality and awareness- while the black typography conveys gravity and mortality. The phrase "millions can live" appears at the lower edge, resembling a digital signature tab, linking the act of signing to the act of speaking. In semiotic terms, typography and layout function as extensions of the linguistic act, visually enacting the campaign's participatory call.

This multimodal interplay between sound, speech, and typography reflects Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality, but here simulation is ethically reoriented. The deepfake-generated voice does not deceive; it reconstructs truth through empathy. Beckham's synthetic performance mediates between the "real" and the "simulated," crafting what this research conceptualizes as credible hyperreality: an aesthetic of sincerity achieved through technological artifice.

The ethical implications of this linguistic construction are further underscored by external validation. According to the World Health Organization, malaria caused 247 million infections and 619,000 deaths in 2021 alone (UNICEF, 2025).

By integrating empirical data and direct testimony, the campaign situates its linguistic appeal within the broader discourse of humanitarian advocacy. Beckham's hybridized voice (half-human, half-synthetic) translates that advocacy into audible solidarity.

Ultimately, the linguistic modes of Malaria Must Die reveal how deepfake technology can reconfigure the ethics of communication. Speech, when algorithmically mediated yet affectively charged, becomes both human and post-human a voice of simulation that speaks truth. The advertisement thus transforms language into a moral technology,

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demonstrating that even within a hyperreal environment, sincerity can be engineered, empathy can be amplified, and the artificial can serve the authentic.

Table 2: Analysis of Malaria Must Die

Textual Composition	Description
Framing	**Connection:** The advertisement establishes strong visual and narrative unity by consistently maintaining Beckham's posture, direct gaze, and emotional tone across all sequences. The fixed spatial composition of the kitchen -its uncluttered decor and stable scene- produces a truth effect that counters the artificiality of deepfake. This deliberate stability constructs what "credible hyperreality," where technological simulation serves sincerity rather than deception. **Disconnection:** Intentional frame transitions occur during linguistic shifts. The use of close-ups during deepfake transitions not only conceals the algorithmic seams but also foregrounds intimacy, creating a rhythmic alternation between presence and absence. The shift from external media sound (radio/TV) to Beckham's direct address marks a transformation from mediated awareness to embodied communication, reinforcing his performative authority within the narrative..
Salience	Salience emerges through the synchronized orchestration of visual, auditory, and emotional cues. The warm chromatic palette (yellow-orange hues) evokes vitality, empathy, and collective engagement, visually translating the campaign's humanitarian ethos. Beckham's relaxed gestures -holding a cup, leaning forward- construct an "ordinary hero" persona that humanizes celebrity endorsement. Background details, such as the Malaria poster depicting an African doctor, foreground inclusivity and global solidarity, visually balancing North-South representation. The soundtrack alternates between calm rhythm and tense acceleration, mirroring the oscillation between information and urgency. This multimodal harmony achieves what Kress & van Leeuwen define as intersemiotic cohesion: the alignment of sound, image, and text into a unified persuasive rhythm.
Information Value	The spatial organization of the frame assigns distinct semiotic functions. The left side, occupied by Beckham, signifies "Given" information-trust, familiarity, authority-derived from his real-world identity as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. The right side-the background poster, linguistic overlays, and light source-represents "New" information, introducing the global and collective dimension of the campaign. The upper regions (light, brightness, color) symbolize the ideal-hope, cooperation, and the eradication of malaria-while the lower regions (breakfast table, domestic setting) signify the real and relatable aspects of everyday life. Beckham's central positioning operates as a visual metaphor of mediation: he becomes the ethical interface between human emotion and AI simulation. Each deepfake-driven language transition reinforces this equilibrium, transforming technological artifice into affective realism. The closing slogan, "Malaria Must Die So Millions Can Live", anchors this balance, merging visual composition with the linguistic act of collective advocacy.

Source: Author

4. Results

The analysis identified three principal narrative modes shaping the film's semiotic architecture: (1) Ethical simulation, (2) Polyphonic participation, (3) Aesthetic realism.

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The first mode, ethical simulation, redefines deepfake's ontological premise. Instead of operating as deception, the synthetic representation of David Beckham functions as a medium of moral mediation. Simulation reconstructs reality around a shared ethical intention, generating what can be described as a *credible hyperreality*-a symbolic space sustained by sincerity, responsibility, and humanitarian purpose.

The second mode, polyphonic participation, emerges from the commercial's multilingual structure. Beckham's image and voice are algorithmically reproduced in nine languages, producing a technologically enabled global chorus. This digital polyphony dissolves cultural hierarchies and creates a form of distributed voice that articulates malaria as a collective global issue. Beckham's posthuman presence becomes an interface through which multiple cultural identities and experiences converge.

The third mode, aesthetic realism, is conveyed through visual framing, color palette, and sound design. Warm tones, a domestic setting, and Beckham's calm delivery generate intimacy that counterbalances synthetic fabrication. This intersemiotic harmony-consistent with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework-encourages viewers to experience the message as emotionally authentic despite its artificial construction.

Through these modes, the results reveal that deepfake is mobilized not to simulate truth but to amplify ethical presence, transforming the advertisement from a conventional humanitarian appeal into an emotionally resonant digital narrative.

5. Discussion

The findings highlight that deepfake technology can function as an ethical and creative tool within AI-based marketing when deployed transparently and responsibly. The Malaria Must Die campaign demonstrates how synthetic media can be reframed from a threat model into a communication resource capable of producing empathy, mobilizing engagement, and enhancing global accessibility:

- **Deepfake and the Transformation of Advertising Narrative**

Traditionally, authenticity in advertising has rested on the indexical trace of the real image. Here, authenticity emerges as a *relational effect* grounded in ethical intention, emotional resonance, and narrative coherence. This shift aligns with broader trends in AI-

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driven marketing, where digital simulation and algorithmic personalization reshape how brands construct meaning and build trust.

The campaign's call-to-action -*Speak Up*- extends the narrative beyond the screen, transforming spectators into active participants. This form of civic performativity exemplifies AI's potential to enable participatory storytelling, reinforcing the idea that digital humanitarianism can be both technologically sophisticated and socially grounded.

- **Celebrity Mediation in AI-Based Humanitarian Marketing**

Deepfake allows Beckham's symbolic capital to transcend individual identity and become an affective vessel for collective voices. Rather than speaking *for* malaria-affected populations, the synthetic Beckham speaks *with* them. This reconfiguration demonstrates how celebrity endorsement can be ethically recalibrated through AI technologies-an increasingly relevant concern in commercial influencer marketing as well.

- **AI, Simulation, and Affective Authenticity**

The analysis supports the idea that synthetic content can elicit genuine emotional responses. This paradox-artificial production, authentic reaction-illustrates deepfake's value as a storytelling mechanism. By creating a believable emotional truth, AI-driven simulations challenge traditional boundaries between authenticity, empathy, and representation in both humanitarian and commercial communication.

- **Implications for AI-Based Marketing**

The research's findings align with emerging discussions in AI marketing, indicating that AI-generated narratives can enhance emotional engagement, synthetic media can support more inclusive and globalized communication, and ethical transparency remains essential for sustaining consumer trust. In this regard, the campaign provides a compelling model for responsible AI-driven storytelling that extends beyond public health advocacy to inform brand communication, customer engagement, and purpose-oriented marketing practices.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the present study does not advance a normative endorsement of deepfake technologies as a general marketing practice. Rather, the Malaria Must Die campaign illustrates an exceptional and context-dependent case in which deepfake-based simulation operates under clearly defined ethical conditions, including transparency, informed consent, public legitimacy, and an explicitly articulated

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humanitarian purpose. In the absence of such conditions, similar aesthetic and emotional strategies may be readily appropriated by less responsible practices, carrying significant risks of manipulation, emotional exploitation, and erosion of consumer trust. Accordingly, this research highlights not the universal applicability of deepfake technologies, but the fragility and contextual specificity of ethical simulation in AI-driven communication.

In this respect, the Malaria Must Die campaign should be understood as an exceptional case characterized by high symbolic capital, combining a globally recognized public figure with a widely consensual humanitarian cause. David Beckham's global visibility and established moral legitimacy, together with the institutional framing of malaria eradication, create communicative conditions under which deepfake-based simulation is more likely to be perceived as credible and ethically acceptable. This specificity clearly distinguishes the campaign from conventional commercial applications of deepfake technology and limits the direct transferability of its narrative strategies to broader marketing contexts.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer several cautious guidelines for marketing professionals considering the use of deepfake technologies in communication campaigns. First, ethical transparency should be treated as a non-negotiable principle: The use of synthetic media must be clearly disclosed to avoid deceptive persuasion. Second, informed consent and representational legitimacy are essential, particularly when real individuals or public figures are digitally simulated. Third, deepfake applications should be limited to contexts in which the narrative purpose aligns with broadly shared social values, rather than purely instrumental commercial objectives. Finally, marketers should recognize that deepfake-based storytelling requires strong institutional accountability, as the misuse of such technologies risks undermining long-term brand trust and public credibility.

6. Conclusion

Malaria Must Die marks a significant turning point in the evolution of digital humanitarianism and provides important insights for AI-based marketing strategies. The campaign demonstrates that deepfake technology-when grounded in transparency, ethical purpose, and multimodal coherence-can expand the expressive possibilities of advertising

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by eliciting empathy, mobilizing audiences, and strengthening public awareness. Rather than reinforcing narratives of manipulation, it illustrates how artificial intelligence can serve humanitarian goals and contribute to a heightened sense of collective responsibility, transforming deepfake into a tool of moral amplification that reshapes the relationship between truth, technology, and emotion. From a Baudrillardian perspective, the campaign also exemplifies how hyperreal simulations can be ethically mobilized; instead of collapsing meaning through deceptive imitation, the deepfake operates as a constructive simulacrum that produces a believable emotional truth in service of a humanitarian cause.

This research contributes to synthetic media ethics literature by reframing deepfake not as an inherently deceptive act of simulation but as a form of responsible mediation. Authenticity emerges here as a relational and affective construct produced through the alignment of algorithmic creativity, narrative intent, and intersemiotic harmony. Methodologically, the research shows that multimodal discourse analysis is an effective lens for understanding how AI-generated narratives function as cultural artifacts, revealing how meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic, visual, and auditory modes.

Naturally, the analysis remains limited by its focus on textual and semiotic dimensions. Future research should therefore investigate how audiences interpret and emotionally respond to AI-generated campaigns, explore cross-cultural differences in perceptions of trust and authenticity, and examine how deepfake technologies might operate within commercial AI-driven marketing beyond humanitarian contexts.

Ultimately, Malaria Must Die stands as a prototype for responsible AI storytelling-one in which digital simulation reinforces sincerity, technological innovation aligns with ethical imperatives, and artificial intelligence becomes a meaningful ally in both global health advocacy and the broader evolution of AI-based marketing communication. In this sense, the campaign demonstrates that hyperreal constructions, when transparently and ethically deployed, can strengthen-not weaken-the moral and emotional foundations of contemporary digital communication.

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