

People and technology: What the fakery?

By [Angie Hattingh](#), issued by [Havas Johannesburg](#)

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What happens when your hobby is using machine learning and publicly available videos to face-swap celebrity faces onto pornstars' bodies? You create an entirely new industry, and that is exactly what Redditor, deepfakes, has done, spawning a new genre of porn called [Deepfake](#).



Pornography has always been on the bleeding edge of mass communication, always finding new ways to reach and entice new markets. Although we know that pornography is scripted, at least we know that the performers are who they say they are. Mostly. Since deepfakes' work hit the virtual shelves, many fake celebrity porn videos have surfaced, making their way onto exposé sites claiming them to be real footage, seriously damaging the reputations of mostly women actors, across the globe.

This technology doesn't end here. Last year, researchers from the University of Washington [released videos](#) of a computer-generated Barack Obama talking to the camera that was indistinguishable from the real person. The obvious implications of this are huge – how on earth are we supposed to know what is real anymore?

Havas' latest Prosumer Report, iLife, which interrogates the evolving relationship between people and technology, uncovers some interesting nuggets. The report quotes that 43% South Africans use social media as their main source of news, a little less than the global measure of 53%. The result is that 47% of South Africans believe that social media is reducing our ability to think critically. In this age of fake news, alternative facts, shorter attention spans and increased 'headline-consumption' of news, the critical ability to distinguish fake news from real news is urgent.

It's not only news and media content that is tripping us up; our online personas are becoming separate entities to our real-life selves. 15% South Africans prefer the person they are or who they project to be on social media to their real selves. Many millennials and GenZ'ers have two accounts per social platform: one for public consumption that projects the person they want to be, and another 'real' and usually private account for their close friends and family. But for those who only have access to the public-facing account, their view of those dual account holders is distorted. 23% South Africans felt that seeing other people's lives on social media made them unhappy about their own lives. Our growing inability to be able to distinguish reality from fiction is deeply affecting how we perceive ourselves and others.

With great strides in robotics and AI, 46% agree that soon robots will be so lifelike that we won't be able to distinguish them from humans. It is clear that we are facing a future in which to distinguish between real and fake will become a crucial skill for everyday living, and trust "will become exponentially more important", iLife, 2017.

Without trust, brands and businesses increasingly miss opportunities to connect meaningfully with people. Globally, 46% would like their fridge to automatically order products they run out of and have them delivered to their homes without being prompted. But 81% worry that their Internet connected appliances will be hacked and 75% worry about them being used for surveillance. In South Africa, we do not have a blanket fear of digital services and products that could potentially invade our privacy. Where that technology can be used for our benefit, we will consider it. 43% said they would like their friends to be able to geo-locate them and a whopping 89% would use it to locate their children at all times.

How our data gets used is the heart of the mistrust. Our smartphones track our locations, record our speech; our smart accessories track our behaviours; and our social media interactions archive our thoughts and feelings. 85% South Africans worry that they do not know what companies are doing with all that data and information. And in contrast to what is highly believed, especially about millennials, 77% millennials interviewed care what companies do with their data, even if they

receive free services and products in return.

So what can brands do to increase trust? Being transparent about how they are using people's data is a step in the right direction, and already implemented by some brands and businesses. Brands and businesses have a responsibility to use the information in ways that are beneficial to the people it belongs to, and beyond that, ensuring that the use of that data has an overall positive impact on communities and the environment. 76% South Africans interviewed believe companies have a more important role than governments today in creating a better future. That is a huge responsibility, and brands have no choice but to accept it and live it. It's the only way they will thrive in a technocentric future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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