

Deepfakes in Advertising: The Identity Crisis Reshaping Influencer Marketing

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, June 19, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The advertising industry has always pushed boundaries. From airbrushed magazine covers to CGI-enhanced product shots, we have a long history of bending reality to sell things. Deepfakes are a different conversation entirely.

AI-generated video and image technology has advanced at a pace few of us were prepared for. What started as a niche, unsettling corner of the internet has migrated, quietly and quickly, into the marketing mainstream. Brands are now using AI to replicate the faces, voices, and likenesses of real people to sell products, sometimes with permission, often without. In a world where influencer trust is the entire currency of social media marketing, this should be keeping all of us up at night.

What actually is a deepfake?

The term combines "deep learning" and "fake": AI-generated synthetic media in which a person's likeness is digitally manipulated or fabricated. It first surfaced in mainstream consciousness around 2017, almost exclusively for harmful purposes. By 2022 and 2023, early commercial applications emerged: AI spokespeople, brand avatars, the first influencer deepfakes in paid social. Now, in 2026, it is a crisis hiding in plain sight.

The trust economy and why deepfakes threaten it

Let's be honest about what influencer marketing actually sells. It doesn't sell products, it sells trust, the single most powerful performance signal available to a brand. Every metric depends on the audience believing what they're watching is real, and deepfake advertising exploits that belief systematically.

Imagine a teenager who has followed a creator for three years, trusting their take on skincare, diet, mental health. Now imagine that creator appearing in a paid ad for a brand they've never heard of, speaking words they never said. The teenager has no idea, and the brand gets the conversion. That is not clever media buying. It is a betrayal, particularly for audiences aged 13 to 18, who are statistically more susceptible to influencer-driven purchases. The ASA mandates clear disclosure on paid partnerships, and deepfake advertising blows straight past that

framework, because there is no disclosure for content a creator never agreed to make.

When did this become a brand strategy?

The escalation follows the money. Mid-tier creators charging £2,000 per post in 2020 now quote £10,000, pricing smaller brands almost entirely out of the market. The appeal of deepfake technology to a brand with a £5,000 budget is understandable, since simulating an endorsement at a fraction of the cost makes the ROI compelling. But the question is never "can we do this?" It's "what does this cost us long-term?"

The brand trust problem nobody is talking about

Brand trust, once broken, is extraordinarily expensive to rebuild. The moment consumers learn a brand used a fake version of someone they trust, the damage spreads beyond that campaign, reframing every previous piece of content as "what else was manufactured?" Several brands have faced backlash after being caught using AI spokesperson content without disclosure. The risk is greater still with celebrity-level talent: a deepfake without consent is a legal failure as much as an ethical one, and right of publicity laws in the UK and US are increasingly being tested here.

The platform problem and the question of ownership

Several major platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, have buried clauses in their terms of service granting broad rights to use uploaded content, including user likeness, for AI training. This is the infrastructure that makes large-scale deepfakes possible, and who owns the output remains legally unresolved.

The dilution of influencer marketing as a discipline

If AI can replicate an influencer's identity and authority, what does that do to authentic partnerships? Harriet Poole, Influencer Marketing Director, puts it plainly: "The entire value of an influencer partnership is the genuine relationship between a creator and their audience. The moment you introduce a deepfake into that equation, you're devaluing every legitimate partnership in the market. It is a race to the bottom, and the creators, the agencies, and ultimately the consumers all lose."

The performance data backs her up. Engagement from warm, creator-loyal audiences consistently outperforms cold targeting, while deepfake content, once spotted, suppresses distribution. If a brand can generate a credible deepfake for £500, the logic of a £50,000 partnership starts to wobble, and deepfakes risk the industry's structural integrity.

Are there scenarios where deepfakes are acceptable?

Yes. Where explicit consent has been given, several creators now license their AI likenesses commercially. In entirely fictional AI personas with no claim to be a real person, such as brand mascots. And in post-production contexts where talent has consented, such as AI dubbing into multiple languages. The common thread is consent; without it, the framework collapses.

The future of deepfakes in marketing

The technology isn't going away, but the regulatory environment is shifting. The EU AI Act includes provisions on synthetic media disclosure, the ASA has begun consulting on updated guidelines, and Meta now requires disclosure on AI-generated ads. The smart play is to establish internal ethical frameworks now, ahead of the regulation.

The highest-converting paid social creative is almost always genuine creator content, reaching audiences who already trust that creator. Deepfake content cannot replicate years of audience trust. Consumers are getting smarter and increasingly attuned to inauthenticity. They will clock it, and no amount of paid spend will buy back the goodwill burned.

The brands that win will treat authenticity as a performance asset: investing in real creator relationships, building genuine community, and using AI as a production tool rather than a deception mechanism. The influencer market is expensive. The reputational cost of getting this wrong is more so.

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