**Digital media and the banalization of deception**

# Digital media and the banalization of deception

Simone Natale

Suggested citation: Natale, S. (2024). Digital media and the banalization of deception. *Convergence*, https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565241311780

**Abstract**

Theories of deception in digital media often rest on the assumption that deception occurs when something in the process of communication does not work as it should – due to an intention to lie, or to faults and mistakes in the communication process. Such perspectives, however, do not fully account for the more subtle practices by which deception becomes normalized in the very functioning of digital media. This article advances the concept of "banal deception" to describe deceptive mechanisms and practices that are incorporated in the functioning of media technologies, to the point that they appear indistinguishable from the media themselves – in other words, to the point of becoming "banal." Through a range of examples encompassing digital and non-digital media, the article illuminates nuanced mechanisms of deception that are often not understood as such but are integral to people's experiences with media. Banal deception mechanisms applied to media even before digitalization processes, but they are becoming increasingly relevant and ubiquitous due to the automation of communication processes sparked by platform algorithms and AI.

## Digital media and the banalization of deception

Phishing is a method of social engineering whereby a party imitates a trusted source or induces another party to trust, aiming at gaining private information such as credit card data or at obtaining money from the victim. Often undertaken via email or through other digital platforms, these attacks represent a perfect example of deception in digital media, defined as "the intentional control of information in a technologically mediated message to create a false belief in the receiver of the message" (Hancock, 2007: 291). Yet the dynamics of phishing are not restricted to fraud targeting individual users, but should be considered as a much more general phenomenon in contemporary digital platforms. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as Jasmine McNealy (2022) recently argued, can be regarded as large phishing farms at scale: their algorithms and interfaces manipulate users so that they remain unable to know the extent of the platform's personal data collection. Digital platforms, in other words, normalize the exceptional, providing a powerful demonstration of how deception can become a core mechanism embedded in the most fundamental functioning of digital platforms.

Broadly defined, deception involves the use of signals or representations to convey a misleading or false impression (Castelfranchi and Poggi, 1998; Danaher, 2020). Approaches to deception in digital media often rest on the assumption that deception occurs when something in the process of communication does not work as it should – due to an intention to lie, or to faults and mistakes in the communication process (Carmi, 2020). Such perspectives, however, do not account for the more subtle practices by which deception becomes normalized in the very functioning of digital media. In this article, I advance the concept of *banal deception* to describe

deceptive mechanisms and practices that are incorporated in the mundane functioning of media technologies, to the point that they appear indistinguishable from the media themselves – in other words, to the point of becoming "banal." I argue that existing conceptualizations of deception, while still useful and valid to tackle many forms of deception, can be usefully complemented with this notion to illuminate deceptive dynamics that often remain hidden in the folds of everyday media uses, but are becoming more and more central to digital media and platforms.

The proposed concept moves from the acknowledgment that deception is not an exceptional event but rather a constitutional element of mediated communication. Understanding deception as the exception ignores the fact that, as studies in areas such as psychology, philosophy and sociology have shown, deception should not be understood as a deviation from the correct interpretation of events or situations, but as an inherent characteristics of human physiology and psychology (Pettit, 2013) which media technologies draw upon (Hoffman, 2019). For this reason, any attempt to conceptualize deception in regard with media should move from a normalization of its role, acknowledging its centrality without falling in the temptation of an apocalyptical theory that presents media as inherently manipulative or mystifying (Preston, 2020). Through a range of examples that encompass digital-based technologies and practices but also extend to non-digital media, I consider nuanced mechanisms of deception that are usually not understood as such and are integral to the fabric of everyday lives. Although banal deception mechanisms applied to media even before digitalization processes, I argue that they are becoming increasingly relevant and ubiquitous due to the automation of communication processes sparked by platform algorithms and AI (Hepp et al., 2023).

Although the relationship between communication media and deception has recently been the subject of public scrutiny and preoccupation, with phenomena such as disinformation being

indicated among the key challenges for digital societies, relatively little efforts have been made to develop conceptual tools that help understand and further interrogate the relationship between deception and media. While a lively discussion on the notion of deception has been developed in communication theory and social psychology in regard with interpersonal communication (Buller and Burgoon, 1996; Meibauer, 2014), scholars have called for more comprehensive theories that illuminate the uneasy relationship between media and deception (Chadwick and Stanyer, 2022). As authors such as Heffer (2020) underline, there is a need to further interrogate the complexity of the space between truth and lie. This is an important gap, since the ways in which the problem of deception is addressed is likely to inform present and future discussions about the governance of digital media in areas such as disinformation.

I originally proposed the notion of banal deception in regard with AI and human-machine communication (Author Removed) to describe machines that do not pass as humans but still employ anthropomorphizing and other strategies to activate empathy and social behavior in their users – such as the humanized, gendered voices of virtual assistants like Amazon's Alexa and Apple's Siri (Guzman, 2015) and the characterization instilled by designers of companion chatbots such as Replika (Skjuve et al., 2022) or Large Language Models including ChatGPT (Walsh, 2023). Even if such features do not mislead users into exchanging machines for humans, they are designed to stimulate responses that are functional to specific outcomes: users, for instance, tend to respond to voice assistants that simulate female voices in different ways than to male voices (Phan, 2017). Research has shown that Replika users may develop a strong sense of attachment to the chatbot even if they are well aware this is just a software (Pentina et al., 2023). Banal deception, however, can be applied beyond AI to describe dynamics that are relevant to other media forms and technologies. This article broadens the scope of this approach so that it

can be applied as a tool for media and communication theory to address and better understand dynamics that characterize digital media beyond the narrow area of AI. I start by reviewing existing approaches to deception in communication and media studies. Then the article introduces insights developed within other fields, such as the cognitive sciences and philosophy, which serve as an encouragement for media and communication scholars to rethink existing approaches to the problem of deception. I finally outline the relationship between digital media and banal deception and illustrate through a range of examples how they apply to media and communication research.

## Conceptualizing deception in communication and media studies

From the exploitation of the public's gullibility in show business (Adams, 1997; Cook, 2001) to concerns about the application of psychological knowledge to marketing and persuasion (Nelson, 2008), from theories of media effect (Bineham, 1988) to the recent debate about disinformation and fake news (Farkas and Schou, 2019; Wasserman and Madrid-Morales, 2019), the fact that media can be used to deceive or trick audiences has been acknowledged from numerous disciplinary perspectives and in regard with diverse forms of communication. Deception, moreover, emerged as a key issue at the very foundation of communication studies. As the academic study of communication organized in the United States around the study of media effects, the emerging discipline found authority and justification in post-war academia by addressing the problem of how media impacted on the public's opinions and beliefs (Scannell, 2020). As Pooley and Socolow (2013) convincingly demonstrated, one of the key projects leading to the institutionalization of the field in the United States focused on a famous anecdote about media deception: the story according to which audiences of Orson Welles' broadcast *War*

*of the Worlds* panicked, exchanging the content of the radio drama for actual news reporting that the United States was being invaded by aliens. The recognition that media deserved academic and scientific study, therefore, was not only accompanied but even motivated by the suggestion that media could be used for manipulating the public.

The notion of deception that resulted from this early debate wavered between two contrasting approaches. On the one side, the newborn communication studies thematized deception as a potential but still exceptional outcome of exposure to media. According to this view, media could deceive audiences, but only if they were used with manipulating intentions (Scannell, 2020). If scholarly discussions about propaganda and media effects in the following decades largely acknowledged that media's impact was most often nuanced and "weak," the possibility that media lead to deception became the subject of significant preoccupation for the field (Anderson, 2021). In this context, deception was therefore conceptualized as an exceptional circumstance that signaled a malicious or erroneous use of media, precluding the possibility to consider deception as a structural element of media use and consumption. On the other side, the new-Marxist framework that developed within the Frankfurt School characterized media as a vehicle for "mass deception" by which the dominant class maintained its power over the working class (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2020). If this perspective acknowledged a structural link between media and deception, this was encapsulated within an "apocalyptic" view – to paraphrase Umberto Eco (1964) – of media communications, which did not account for the more subtle and normalised roles played by deception in mediated communication.

Notwithstanding the distance between the two traditions, both conceived deception as a situation in which media 'don't work well': due to a manipulative use for communication studies, or to the reproduction of power structures for the new-Marxist tradition. These

conceptualizations reverberate in later disciplinary directions within communication and media studies. British cultural studies took over elements of the approach developed by the Frankfurt School, but posited a more active role of audiences and users and a less prescriptive interpretation of topics such as ideology and the cultural industry (Hall, 1997). For what concerns deception, however, cultural studies did not depart significantly from previous approaches, conceptualizing it, with few exceptions, as the result of a power imbalance in the communication process (Abbas, 1999), notwithstanding the acknowledgement that audiences play an active role in the emergence of deception through the process of decoding and interpreting a message (Hurd and Noller, 1988).

Recent approaches to deception in communication and media studies did not substantially alter the way deception is conceptualized in regard with media technologies and, more broadly, human communication. According to truth default theory, for instance, all humans take up messages as truth by default; however, they might identify hints that trigger them to overcome such default and become skeptical (Levine, 2019). Truth-default theory, which was originally developed to study face-to-face communication but has also been applied to mediated communication (e.g. Clare & Levine, 2019), treats deception as something that emerges in particular situations when the truth is a problem (Levine, 2019) and identifies the norm or default with its absence. In comparison, interpersonal deception theory provides a richer understanding of the relational character of deception, however it has been mainly applied to non-mediated communication and, similarly to truth default theory, connotates deception as the breaking of communicative norms (Buller and Burgoon, 1996). Media theory and history also oscillated between the approaches established by the communication studies and the neo-Marxist tradition, making surprisingly little efforts to question how to define and frame deception. Meaningful

exceptions tended to explore remarkable cases such as the myth of subliminal messages (Acland, 2012), the relationship between media and psychiatric delusions (Sconce, 2019), lie detection technologies (Littlefield, 2011) and the play of deception underscoring the formation of identities in virtual communities (Donath, 1999; Turkle, 1995).

Overall, the most influential conceptualizations of deception privileged a restrictive understanding of deception. They defined the difference between deception and truth in binary terms (i.e., either you are deceived or you aren't) and overwhelmingly understood deception as emerging when communication 'does not work' due to deceiving intents (Chadwick and Stanyer, 2022), to mistakes in communication (Carmi, 2020), or to an inherently manipulative quality characterizing media as an all (MacNamara, 2020; Baudrillard, 1996). Existing concepts and theoretical perspectives, of course, have developed many useful interpretive keys to tackle aspects of the relationship between deception and media (e.g. Hart et al., 2019; Markowitz, 2023). Current approaches, however, can be usefully complemented by novel notions that add further nuances, especially considering that deception is a multimodal phenomenon that accomplishes multiple purposes and encompasses multiple dynamics (Buller and Burgoon, 1996; Markowitz, 2020). What is missing in the debate, in particular, is a perspective that allows to normalize deception in media, embracing the most problematic elements of deception while also recognizing its functional role in the consumption and interaction with media and illuminating the deep ambivalences of users' engagements with digital technologies and platforms (Dynel and Ross, 2021; Phillips and Milner, 2018). As shown in the next section, a similar perspective can be found in approaches in other areas of inquiry, which show how deception is a fundamental component of how people perceive and navigate the world around them.

## Rethinking deception

Scholars in social psychology, philosophy, and sociology have advanced a perspective that does not limit deception to cases such as blatant fraud, lies and trickery. They recognize that deception plays a substantial role in people's lives (DePaulo et al., 1996). Deception is an essentially social phenomenon (Umbres, 2016) central to a range of communicative interactions (Van Dijk, 2006); it can be a resource for people to navigate their everyday experiences (Martin, 2009) and is instrumental to the functioning of political and religious institutions (Gorelik et al., 2011). Moreover, as shown by the long history of illusions in psychology, arts, and spectacular entertainments - from Gestalt psychology to Escher and optical toys – perception and deception are not opposed but closely aligned (Leja, 2004). The possibility of deception is ingrained in the deepest mechanisms of our perception: it is due to the functioning of our senses and of our mind, for instance, that in a movie theatre we see a series of still images as continuous movement, or stereoscopic images as 3D (Rooney et al., 2012).

Throughout the history of psychology, deception was studied not only as a deviation from the correct interpretation of events or situations, but also as an inherent characteristic of human physiology and psychology. The institutionalization of psychology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century built on the discovery that deception and illusion were integral, physiological aspects of the psychology of perception (Pettit, 2013). Scientists understood that deception was important not only to study how people misunderstand the world, but also and especially to study how they perceive and navigate it (Hyman, 1989; Münsterberg, 1910; Triplett, 1900). More recently, philosopher Mark Wrathall pointed out that "it rarely makes sense to say that I perceived either truly or falsely" (2010: 60) because deception is functional to our ability to deal with the external world. Our tendency to identify patterns in visual information

can lead people to see the traits of a human face when it's not there, as numberless experiments and studies on illusion have shown (Gombrich, 1977); yet this liability to deception can also provide an advantage to viewers, for instance when it helps identify a potential danger in our field of vision. Within this line of thought, cognitive psychologist Donald D. Hoffman (2019) has explored how evolution shaped our perception into "useful illusions" that help people navigate the physical world. The possibility, or one could say the capacity of being deceived represents, in this sense, not just a fundamental characteristic of human beings, but something essential to their survival.

Transposed into the debates within communication and media studies, these contributions call for a shift of perspective in approaches to deception. They point to the fact that our perception is so shaped that it is always open to deception, and deception constantly intervenes without breaking the continuity of our ordinary life. Just as deception is a structural, functional element of our ordinary perception (Pettit, 2013; Hoffman, 2019), deceptive mechanisms are essential to the consumption and use of a wide range of media. The recognition of the structural role of deception in human perception leads to the realization that all modern media have emerged within the spaces opened by the limits and affordances of our capacity to fall into deception. The concept of banal deception, in this regard, provides the theoretical and analytical means to characterize deception as an integral component of technical mediation in the modern age. It presupposes a different understanding of human perception that constitutionally leaves space for deception but does not deny the existence of an external reality: our perception, in fact, can "lie" but still accomplish meaningful functions for us (Hoffman, 2019).

All modern media incorporate to some extent banal deception: they exploit the limits and characteristics of human sensoria and psychology to create the effects for which they are

intended and prepared for use. One of the most well-known ideas from Marshall McLuhan's theory is that media are "extensions" of the human (McLuhan, 1964). The usual interpretation is that media change humans at an anthropological level, affecting how individuals access the world as well as the scale or pattern of human societies. There is also, however, another possible interpretation of McLuhan's point: that media are meant to fit humans. Media are envisioned, developed, and fabricated so that they can adapt to their users – in McLuhan's words, to become their extension. In this sense, the key event of media history since the nineteenth century was not the invention of any single new technology, be it photography, the electric telegraph, cinema, television, the computer or the Internet: it was the emergence of the new sciences of the human, from physiology and psychology to the social sciences, which constructed the necessary body of knowledge and epistemological framework for adapting modern media to the characteristics of the human sensorium and intellect.

This applies well to the history of different media. The invention of cinema, for instance, was the result not just of prodigious engineering efforts, but also of decade-long studies about the functioning of human perception. Knowledge about vision, perception of movement and attention was incorporated into its design so that the new medium could provide an effective illusion and entertain audiences around the world (Alovisio, 2013; Doane, 2002). Likewise, sound media from the phonograph to the MP3 were constructed in accordance with models of human hearing. In order to improve capacity while retaining quality of sound, frequencies that are outside the reach of human hearing were disregarded, adapting technical reproduction to what and how we actually hear (Hui et al., 2020). The problem was not so much how an early phonograph cylinder, a vinyl record, or an MP3 sounded in physical terms; it was how they sounded *for humans* (Napolitano, 2022; Sterne, 2012). Although the knowledge of the human

user is always imperfect and often based on a restrictive definition of "humanity" in terms of gender, race and class (Towns, 2020), modern media's adaptation to the sensory and cognitive qualities of their audiences and users is fundamental to their appeal and power. It is banal deception, for example, that makes film appear more "realistic" than theatre (Ortoleva, 2019: 53), even if spectators remain well aware that it is just a play of shadows (Gunning, 1989).

Digital media, in this context, are in a relationship of continuity with earlier communication media. Yet they also bring novel dimensions to the modelling of the human that underpins modern media and banal deception. The automation of communication processes sparked by platforms algorithms and AI have made banal deception integral to digital media platforms, enhancing personalization and at the same time widening the reach of deceptive mechanisms (Thomas, 2018). Computing technologies automated the collection of knowledge about humans, all the way to machine learning and generative AI that generate the ability to simulate communicative behavior through statistical analysis of enormously large masses of data (Esposito, 2022). Moreover, AI represents an extension not just of the human sensorium but also of intelligence and social behavior (Bakardjieva, 2015). Just like cinema was made so that it could fit how human perceive movements, AI-based communication technologies such as Replika or ChatGPT adjust to communicative and social patterns so that they can appear credible interlocutors to users, even if they are incapable of empathy and authentic reciprocity (Author removed). Likewise, generative AI mobilizes deep learning technologies and huge masses of data to reproduce normative structures embedded in established patterns of storytelling and representation so that they can "look right" to readers and viewers (Gillespie, 2024).

## Digital media and banal deception

The word “banal” describes things that are usually dismissed as unimportant. It aims to underline that these mechanisms are often taken from granted, despite their significant impact on media’s uses and appropriations and the fact that they are deeply embedded in our everyday experiences (Billig, 1995; Dinnen, 2018; Hjarvard, 2011). The notion of banal deception, therefore, describes deceptive mechanisms and practices that are incorporated in the affordances of media technologies. This ordinary character is what makes banal deception so imperceptible but at the same time so consequential, contributing to the integration of media technologies into the fabrics of everyday experience and, as such, into the very core of our identity and self. In contrast with more explicit dynamics of deception such as fraud or lies, which occur due to a mistake or an explicit effort results in conveying a misleading or false message (Buller and Burgoon, 1996), banal deception is often indistinguishable from ordinary experience and from the domestication of media into everyday life (Lehtonen, 2003). This also means that banal deception is usually not understood as such, and consequently, it is often left unquestioned.

In media studies, scholars have pointed to the discursive normalization of phenomena such as surveillance (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017) and far-right populism (Krzyżanowski and Ekström, 2022), illuminating how issues that were previously considered exceptional start to be taken for granted and, consequently, less thoroughly scrutinized by news media and in public discussions. The normalization of deception in digital media, however, does not concern discursive formations but the material functioning of media technologies, which make deceptive dynamics integral the functioning of modern media. This implies that banal deception can have (although, as I discuss below, not always has) a potential value for the user or audience. To make a few instances, the fact that film provides a convincing illusion of movement and an effect of realism helps audiences enjoy the spectacle and the fictional plot (Bruno, 2009); the sense of

presence that one develop at distance through telecommunications such as the telephone or a Zoom call allows users to feel a sense of closeness and intimacy with people who are not physically present (Bourdon, 2020; Lee, 2004); the fact that users activate social conventions when engaging with AI voice assistants such as Siri and Alexa makes it easier for them to integrate these tools into domestic environments and everyday lives (Author Removed); and the appearance of authenticity constructed within social media platforms provides users with the gratifying sense of projecting a transparent image of themselves (Hund, 2023; Taddeo, 2023). Being deceived, in such contexts, is not to be seen as a misinterpretation of the user but as a response to specific affordances (Nagy and Neff, 2015) coded into the technology itself.

In fact, banal deception does not understand users and audiences as passive or naïve, but in a more active position. People actively exploit their own capacity to fall into deception in sophisticated ways, for example, through the entertainment they enjoy when they fall into the illusions offered by cinema or television – although their sense of being in control, which users of digital platforms tend to overestimate, is often illusory (Anderson, 2021; Black, 2019). In contrast to classical cinema, whose stars were quasi-divine, unreachable personalities (Dyer, 1998), the celebrities of television and even more pronouncedly of social media are often perceived as reachable and familiar by audiences and users. This sense of closeness and familiarity is facilitated by specific features of these media, as television is integrated within the domestic and private sphere (Chambers, 2016) and social media elicit a prosumer behavior that gives users the illusion of being in a similar position to influencers they follow (Taddeo, 2023; Van Dijck, 2009). The emergence of this feeling of proximity, however, requires the audiences to fill the gap, projecting their own feelings and contributing their own expectations to the construction of an imagined relationship with public personalities.

Another example can be found in voice assistants such as Alexa and Siri. These interfaces leave ample space for the user to imagine and attribute characteristics such as gender, race, class and personality to the disembodied voice or text (Author Removed). They do not present the appearance of the virtual character at a physical or visual level; however, some cues are embedded in the sounds of their voices, in their names and in the content of their exchanges. It is for this reason that, as shown by research about people's perceptions of AI voice assistants, different users imagine AI assistants in different ways, which enhances the perception of technology being personalized to each individual (Depounti et al., 2022; Guzman, 2019).

The idea that deception can also have some value for users – for instance, for users of voice assistants that are able to domesticate more easily the technology thanks to the familiarity invited by the humanlike, gendered voice of the assistants – clashes with negative connotations given to this term. However, as highlighted above, approaches in the physiology of perception (Pettit, 2013), in social psychology (Umbres, 2016) and in cognitive sciences (Hoffman, 2019) demonstrate that the dynamics of deception are necessary and functional to people's capacity to navigate external reality. In a similar fashion, if media did not mobilize the mechanisms of banal deception as an integral component of their functioning, we would not be able to enjoy a cinematic screening or to overlook – even if partially and momentarily – the physical distance that separates us from our interlocutors in an online meeting. Even more evident examples of deception, moreover, do not always bring harmful effects on users and audiences. White lies, for instance, are defined in social psychology as lies that are harmless and may even benefit the deceived part, for instance by not being honest in replying to a friend's question about the quality of the food they offered for dinner (DePaulo et al., 1996; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015).

Yet, it is important to underline that banal deception is not harmless or innocuous. It isn't because deception is "banal" that it cannot have very significant and sometimes worrying effects: structures of power often reside in mundane, ordinary things, and banal deception may bear even deeper consequences for our societies and lives than the most manifest and evident attempts to deceive. The very fact that social media's deception is banalized and thus made indistinguishable from ordinary experience can make it more difficult for users to acknowledge and challenge the lack of transparency of the platforms through which they conduct everyday activities such as social interactions, entertainment, and news consumption (Bucher, 2018; Manzerolle and Daubs, 2021). In the case of AI, the attribution of a gendered voice to virtual assistants such as Alexa helps users familiarize with the artificial voice (Young, 2019), but this risks to reproduce gender stereotypes that attribute ancillary roles to women (Woods, 2018).

Another useful example are deepfakes, an AI-powered technology by which a face in an existing image or video is replaced with someone else's likeness. This might lead viewers to believe that a public figure such a politician has pronounced words that she or he never did (Vaccari and Chadwick, 2020). Although deepfakes are obviously not an example of banal deception, their capacity to lead viewers into deception relies on the same "banal" dynamics that make audiovisual texts convincing to viewers. It is because we are used to assign to photography and videos some degree of reality value that the deceiving potential of deepfakes is so significant. Moreover, as ample studies have shown, the most frequent use of deepfakes to date entails not cases of overt manipulation but more nuanced uses of the technology in areas such as porn (Meikle, 2023). In such contexts, users are stimulated to play along with the illusion, participating in an ambiguous play where users actively seek deception to enhance the effect of realism and excitement (Maddocks, 2020; McCosker, 2022). The banalization of deception that

results from it contributes to blurring the boundaries between truth and lie, and as such has been linked to the climate of uncertainty and the lack of trust in media that facilitates the spreading of disinformation and fake news. As Andrew McIntyre notes, "the widespread production of deepfakes presents a greater issue than simply the bolstering of disinformation campaigns in that it contributes to a social environment in which there is not only an inability to determine authentic from inauthentic but an indifference to authenticity" (McIntyre, 2023: 115). Also in this case, therefore, banal deception is only apparently harmless, and its consequences reverberates in some of the key problems that digital societies need to address, such as disinformation and trust (Capraro et al., 2024).

A similar discourse can be applied to social media platforms as well. The business model of social media is connectivity: a company such as Facebook makes money to the extent users remain connected to the platform, so that they can see and respond to paid advertisements. Thus, in a similar way to how a TV channel employs means such as programming and scheduling to motivate users to continue watching (Barra, 2015), social media companies have developed strategies and tools that motivate users to remain connected. Karppi (2018) mentions for instance how functionalities such as the like button or representational metrics (i.e. metrics that are made manifest to the user, for instance the number of comments or likes, in contrast to operational metrics that may be hidden to users) are meant to stimulate positive emotional reactions that motivate customers to use the platform. These reactions, which Karppi (2018) calls "emotional flows", represent a very apt example of the ambiguity of banal deception: they enhance users' engagement, thereby contributing to the appeal of the platform, but also make it more difficult for users to disconnect from the platform (Treré et al., 2020). Additionally, as Kuntsman and Miyake (2019) underline, these mechanisms create only an appearance of social engagement,

and users may in fact be further isolated by technologies that, despite being called ‘social’ media, are essentially un-social.

The question of intentionality also deserves discussion, as it is often indicated as a defining dimension of deception. Approaches in areas including philosophy and psychology often limit deception to cases when intention of misleading is present, although meaningful exceptions exist (Chisholm and Feehan, 1977), and the same applies to perspectives that interrogate more specifically the relationship between deception and media (Paquin et al., 2022). Identifying intentionality, however, is particularly complicated when digital media are concerned, for at least two main reasons. First, it is difficult and often impossible to track design features and affordances to specific choices made by designers beyond a hypothetical level (Gunkel, 2020). If we accept that deception should be limited to situations where a deceiving part is clearly identified, we risk disregarding the role of deception in design features that have deep implications for user experiences in digital platforms. Second, algorithmic structures imply the presence of human and non-human forms of agency, while the same does not always apply to intentionality, which is problematic to attribute to algorithms as such (Bächle and Bareis, 2022). It follows that the boundaries between intentionality and non-intentionality in digital media are not rigid or fixed, but flexible and nuanced (Chadwick and Stanyer, 2022; Søe, 2021).

This does not mean that intentionality should be overlooked: in areas such as disinformation research, for instance, inquiring intentionality can be instrumental to assign responsibility and thus empower practical efforts to counteract and prevent it (Sander and Tsagourias, 2020). For what concerns banal deception, however, assigning intentionality is often difficult, due to it being woven into the fabric of digital media and their functioning. For instance, the lack of information about decision processes behind the design of commercial

digital platforms means that it might be hard to assess intentionality for the mechanisms that lead users to underestimate the surveillance operations that the platform is programmed to perform (McNealy, 2022). The difficulty to assign and identify intentionality, however, should not jeopardize our capacity to illuminate the role played by banal deception.

Dynamics of banal deception can also be found in generative AI, including Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT. Computer scientist Toby Walsh (2023) noted that one of the design features that made ChatGPT so successful was the choice to let the software utter its responses word by word, as if they were spelled. Although this may appear an insignificant and "banal" detail, it invites a reaction of anthropomorphization with potentially significant outcomes. Indeed, researchers in Human-Computer Interaction have pointed to a range of elements in LLMs that stimulate users to assign personality traits to the software systems (Safdari et al., 2023), and a lively ongoing debate revolves around the question if the technology should be banned from using the first-person singular pronoun, as this may invite misperceptions of the distinction between machines and humans (Shneiderman and Muller, 2023).

Hicks et al. (2024), moreover, recently took up philosopher Harry Frankfurt's conceptualization of 'bullshit' as a mode of communication that is indifferent to truth (Frankfurt, 2005) to argue that ChatGPT is a "bullshit machine" (Hicks et al., 2024: 6). They contend that ChatGPT and other LLMs produce inaccurate and false information – with a phenomenon that is usually described, in sharply anthropomorphic terms, "hallucination" – not because they are malfunctioning but because they are designed to produce text "that *looks* truth-apt without any actual concern for truth" (1). Although Hicks et al. argue that this is different from lying since the AI model has no intention to deceive, this mechanism fits perfectly with the dynamics

highlighted in this paper: the production of deception is automated and banalized by ChatGPT, to the point that the uttering of false information is indistinguishable from the "normal" functioning of the medium.

## Conclusion

From deepfakes to disinformation, from the anthropomorphizing of AI and robots to the circulation of conspiracy theories, the question of how digital media lead to deceptive effects takes more and more space in public debates. Wider theoretical and conceptual tools, however, are needed to consider the complex relationship between deception and media. The article proposed the concept of banal deception as a notion that complements existing approaches by identifying deceptive dynamics embedded within the very affordances of media technologies, to the point that it is difficult to distinguish such dynamics from the essential functioning of these technologies. The point of departure for taking up this perspective is the acknowledgment that considering the banal and the ordinary provides exceptionally fruitful keys to read the social and communicative world we inhabit. As authors such as Michael Billig (1995) and Stuart Hall (1997) have shown us, one of the best instruments to understand and counteract exceptional problems often lie in the identification of subtle and apparently irrelevant elements of social reality.

One of the questions raised by banal deception is the role of the deceived party. While it is important to interrogate the side of the deceiver, this is often made at the expense of a solid inquiry regarding the role of those who are deceived (Umbres, 2016). To understand the dynamics of deception in the digital age, however, the deceived party should not be understood as passive but as an active actor as well. The banality of deception, its everyday and

imperceptible character, provides the opportunity for audiences and users to react flexibly and actively to the deception featured by media technologies, so that the possibility remains open to believe in media and not to believe in them at the same time (Author Removed). Audiences and users can thus be aware that photographs might be altered and photoshopped, that advertisements are meant to lead them to buy things they do not want, that reality shows are performative and scripted, that voice assistant do not understand language in the same sense humans do – indeed, the manipulatory character of modern media has even become the subject of popular narratives and common sense (Acland, 2012).

The notion of banal deception can usefully complement likeminded approaches that have explored the nuanced dynamics of deception as structural component of media engagement. Scholars such as Sherry Turkle (1995) and Judith Donath (1999), for instance, thematized deception since the early development of the Web as a constitutional dimension of the play of identity in online communities. More recently, the literature on social robots and AI has acknowledged that deception is an inescapable component of machines programmed to communicate with humans mimicking the social and cultural dynamics of human communication (Coeckelbergh, 2018; Isaac and Bridewell, 2017; Author Removed). With digital platforms taking up more and more elements of everyday lives and experiences, and with the increasing automation of communication processes (Hepp et al., 2023), the mechanisms of banal deception are becoming more widespread and ubiquitous.

For researchers in communication and media studies, the banalization of deception in contemporary digital media has three distinctive implications. First, approaches in digital media often emphasize the agency of the deceiver at the expense of a more holistic approach that considers multiple actors and dynamics. For instance, research on disinformation usually

distinguishes between disinformation and misinformation in terms of intentionality of the deceiver: disinformation refers to intentional attempts to mislead, while misinformation occurs when no intent to mislead is present (Sander and Tsagourias, 2020). This distinction is problematic not just because it is often impossible to identify and find appropriate evidence of intentionality, but also because it places the role of the deceiver at center stage, neglecting the agency of the deceived part (Munn, 2024) and the role of non-human actors including algorithms, interfaces, and platforms (Finn, 2017). Further research that scrutinizes algorithmic patterns through methods such as walkthrough (Light et al., 2018) can provide deeper insight on how deception is automated in digital platforms and software, while qualitative methods have the potential to unveil the nuances and complexity of users' engagement with banal deception. The systematic investigation of banal deception mechanisms will complement and strengthen work conducted by non-academic organizations such as EU DisinfoLab and SavoirDevenir, that have conducted research aimed at developing monitoring tools to counteract disinformation (e.g. https://crossover.social/), and feed into the media education tradition, where resources have been developed to improve visual literacy tools and the critical decoding of news items (Buckingham, 2013).

Second, the fact that deception is banal to the point of becoming invisible means that it is also more difficult to identify and assess. In fact, one of the consequences of the banalization of deception is that even those who are deceived are usually unaware of the deception. For instance, research has confirmed that social media users often demonstrate significant awareness of the degree of construction and fabrication behind influencers' social media accounts; yet at the same time, they feel a sense of proximity with the influencers they follow, and actively participate in the fiction that social media provides a point of access to their real self (Snyder, 2024; Taddeo,

2023). Influencers believe that they are showing their "authentic" self, even though they adopt practices associated with traditional media companies and PR, such as scrutinising their audience demographics to adjust their branding or hire consultant and managers to manage their public persona (Hund, 2023).

In such experiences characterising engagement with contemporary media, there is an ambiguity that defies binary understandings of deception in communication and media. Do social media users believe or not believe in the authenticity effects of social media platforms? Are they deceived or not by influencers that present promotional contents under the disguise of genuine engagement with commercial products? The problem is also that it is often given for granted that people believe in something – be it the existence of God, the monster of Lochness, or the fact that Osama bin Laden planned the 11/09 terroristic attack – or that they do not believe in it. In reality, as scholars in religious studies have convincingly shown (Walsh-Pasulka, 2005), the boundaries between belief and disbelief are often much more flexible and porous than usually acknowledged. One of the more subtle dynamics of deception in digital platforms, in this sense, is the fact that users tend to feel in control of the experience (Depounti et al., 2022) even though their degree of control is severely limited by platform, algorithmic structures, and corporations that contribute to regulate and define experiences of platform environments (Van Dijck, 2009). In this sense, banal deception can help make sense of one of the deepest ambiguities raised by digital media, which is the fact that users have agency, but at the same time they are subject to the constraints created by digital platforms and by the corporations that govern them.

Third, banal deception should not be seen as opposed to other forms of deception, but as sitting in a continuum with other deceptive dynamics and effects that can be observed in the use of media technologies and are often the subject of analysis in communication and media studies.

Consequently, our capacity to counteract forms of deception such as fake news and online frauds depends also on the knowledge and awareness of the role of banal deception and its outcomes. Studying banal deception helps advance a more nuanced perspective that recognizes that troublesome instances of deception share their roots with the most ordinary and apparently inoffensive uses and interactions with media technologies. Let us take again the examples of film and voice assistants. The same dynamics of banal deception that allow film to create effects of realism and to stimulate audiences to feel emotions during a screening have made film a powerful vehicle for propaganda and manipulation (Eitzen, 1995). For what concerns Alexa or Siri, as shown above, their capacity to employ a voice that sounds like human is functional to their facility of use. However, as Judith Donath (2018) pointed out, the feeling of empathy they inspire might be mobilized for marketing purposes and even in political communication with problematic implications. Existing projects, in fact, already signaled the willingness of tech companies to implement voice assistants that can pass as human, thus going beyond banal deception. Duplex, for instance, was a project for a voice assistant that makes call phones on behalf of users, presented by Google in 2019. This tool was designed so that it could trick interlocutors into believing they are taking to a human, as this would allow the virtual assistant to complete errands such as reserving a place at a restaurant or a hair salon (O'Leary, 2019). While Duplex was sharply criticized and, as a result, Google decided to abandon the project, some of the principles that had been experimented in this context are now being implemented by companies including OpenAI, which recently added voice features to ChatGPT that mimic the imperfections of human speech to make the AI agent even more humanlike (Heaven, 2024). This shows how generative AI's enhanced ability to simulate communicative behavior banalizes deception to the point that subtle cues in communicative interactions with AI software can

encourage users to mistakenly assume that the system is an 'authentic' social partner (Author Removed).

Ultimately, the advantage of adding the notion of banal deception to the toolkit of media and communication theory is a better sensitivity to the dynamic and multifaceted dimension of deception in mediated communication and its deep integration in the everyday experiences of media use. As the editor of a recent special issue on online scams points out, digital platforms can render opaque even the occurrence of the most harmful fraud, since "some patterns are normalized to such an extent that the mechanisms of luring people in can look routine and harmless" (Poster, 2022). Acknowledging and further exploring the banalization of deception is essential to tackle some of the most nuanced but meaningful dimensions that characterise the deep functioning of digital media.

## List of references

Abbas A (1999) Dialectic of deception. *Public Culture* 11(2). Duke University Press: 347–363.

Acland CR (2012) *Swift Viewing: The Popular Life of Subliminal Influence*. Duke University Press.

Adams B (1997) *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Alovisio S (2013) *L'occhio Sensibile: Cinema e Scienze Della Mente Nell'Italia Del Primo Novecento*. Kaplan.

Anderson CW (2021) Fake News is Not a Virus: On Platforms and Their Effects. *Communication Theory* 31(1): 42–61.

Bächle TC and Bareis J (2022) "Autonomous weapons" as a geopolitical signifier in a national power play: analysing AI imaginaries in Chinese and US military policies. *European Journal of Futures Research* 10(1): 20.

Bakardjieva M (2015) Rationalizing sociality: an unfinished script for socialbots. *The Information Society* 31(3). Taylor & Francis: 244–256.

Barra L (2015) *Palinsesto: Storia e Tecnica Della Programmazione Televisiva*. Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa.

Billig M (1995) *Banal Nationalism*. Sage.

Bineham JL (1988) A historical account of the hypodermic model in mass communication. *Communications Monographs* 55(3). Taylor & Francis Group: 230–246.

Black ML (2019) Usable and Useful: On the Origins of Transparent Design in Personal Computing. *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 45(3). SAGE Publications Inc: 515–537.

Bourdon J (2020) From Correspondence to Computers: A Theory of Mediated Presence in History. *Communication Theory* 30(1): 64–83.

Bruno G (2009) Film, Aesthetics, Science: Hugo Münsterberg's Laboratory of Moving Images. *Grey Room* 36: 88–113.

Bucher T (2018) *If... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics*. Oxford University Press.

Buckingham D (2013) *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture*. John Wiley & Sons.

Buller DB and Burgoon JK (1996) Interpersonal Deception Theory. *Communication Theory* 6(3): 203–242.

Capraro V, Lentsch A, Acemoglu D, et al. (2024) The impact of generative artificial intelligence on socioeconomic inequalities and policy making. *PNAS NEXUS* 3(6): 1–17.

Carmi E (2020) *Media Distortions: Understanding the Power Behind Spam, Noise, and Other Deviant Media*. Peter Lang International Academic Publishers.

Castelfranchi C and Poggi I (1998) *Bugie, Finzioni, Sotterfugi: Per Una Scienza Dell'inganno*. Milano: Carocci.

Chadwick A and Stanyer J (2022) Deception as a Bridging Concept in the Study of Disinformation, Misinformation, and Misperceptions: Toward a Holistic Framework. *Communication Theory* 32(1): 1–24.

Chambers D (2016) *Changing Media, Homes and Households: Cultures, Technologies and Meanings*. London: Routledge.

Chisholm RM and Feehan TD (1977) The intent to deceive. *The journal of Philosophy* 74(3): 143–159.

Clare DD and Levine TR (2019) Documenting the truth-default: The low frequency of spontaneous unprompted veracity assessments in deception detection. *Human Communication Research* 45(3). Oxford University Press: 286–308.

Coeckelbergh M (2018) How to describe and evaluate “deception” phenomena: recasting the metaphysics, ethics, and politics of ICTs in terms of magic and performance and taking a relational and narrative turn. *Ethics and Information Technology* 20(2). Springer Netherlands: 71–85.

Cook JW (2001) *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Danaher J (2020) Robot betrayal: a guide to the ethics of robotic deception. *Ethics and Information Technology* 22(2): 117–128.

DePaulo BM, Kirkendol SE, Kashy DA, et al. (1996) Lying in Everyday Life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70(5): 979–995.

Depounti I, Saukko P and Natale S (2022) Ideal technologies, ideal women: AI and gender imaginaries in Redditors’ discussions on the Replika bot girlfriend. *Media, Culture & Society* 45(4). SAGE Publications Ltd: 720–736.

Dinnen Z (2018) *The Digital Banal: New Media and American Literature and Culture*. Columbia University Press.

Doane MA (2002) *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Donath J (1999) Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community. In: Smith M and Kollock P (eds) *Communities in Cyberspace*. London: Routledge, pp. 31–56.

Donath J (2018) The robot dog fetches for whom? In: Papacharissi Z (ed.) *A Networked Self and Human Augmentics, Artificial Intelligence, Sentience*. Routledge, pp. 10–24.

Dyer R (1998) *Stars*. New. British Film Institute. Available at: http://www.loc.gov/catdir/bios/ucal053/98150751.html http://www.loc.gov/catdir/description/ucal042/98150751.html.

Dynel M and Ross AS (2021) You Don’t Fool Me: On Scams, Scambaiting, Deception, and Epistemological Ambiguity at R/scambait on Reddit. *Social Media + Society* 7(3). SAGE Publications Ltd: 20563051211035698.

Eco U (1964) *Apocalittici e Integrati*. [2. Bompiani.

Eitzen D (1995) When Is a Documentary?: Documentary as a Mode of Reception. *Cinema Journal* 35(1): 81–102.

Esposito E (2022) *Artificial Communication*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Farkas J and Schou J (2019) *Post-Truth, Fake News and Democracy: Mapping the Politics of Falsehood*. London: Routledge.

Finn E (2017) *What Algorithms Want: Imagination in the Age of Computing*. MIT Press.

Frankfurt HG (2005) *On Bullshit*. Princeton University Press.

Gillespie T (2024) Generative AI and the politics of visibility. *Big Data & Society* 11(2): 20539517241252131.

Gorelik G, Shackelford TK, von Hippel W, et al. (2011) Culture of deception. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 34(1): 24.

Gunkel DJ (2020) *An Introduction to Communication and Artificial Intelligence*. Polity.

Gunning T (1989) An aesthetic of astonishment: Early film and the (in)credulous spectator. *Art and Text* 34: 31–45.

Guzman AL (2015) *Imagining the Voice in the Machine: The Ontology of Digital Social Agents*. University of Illinois at Chicago.

Guzman AL (2018) *Human-Machine Communication: Rethinking Communication, Technology, and Ourselves*. Peter Lang.

Guzman AL (2019) Voices in and of the machine: Source orientation toward mobile virtual assistants. *Computers in Human Behavior* 90. Elsevier: 343–350.

Hall S (1997) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage.

Hancock JT (2007) Digital deception. In: Joinson A, McKenna K, Postmes T, et al. (eds) *Oxford Handbook of Internet Psychology*. Oxford Univ. Press, pp. 289–301.

Hart CL, Jones JM, Terrizzi Jr JA, et al. (2019) Development of the lying in everyday situations scale. *The American Journal of Psychology* 132(3). University of Illinois Press: 343–352.

Heaven WD (2024) Now you can chat with ChatGPT using your voice. Available at: https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/09/25/1080196/now-you-can-chat-with-chatgpt-using-your-voice/.

Heffer C (2020) *All Bullshit and Lies?: Insincerity, Irresponsibility, and the Judgment of Untruthfulness*. Oxford University Press.

Hepp A, Loosen W, Dreyer S, et al. (2023) ChatGPT, LaMDA, and the hype around communicative AI: The automation of communication as a field of research in media and communication studies. *Human-Machine Communication* 6(1): 4.

Hicks MT, Humphries J and Slater J (2024) ChatGPT is bullshit. *Ethics and Information Technology* 26(2). Springer: 38.

Hjarvard S (2011) The mediatisation of religion: Theorising religion, media and social change. *Culture and Religion* 12(2). Routledge: 119–135.

Hoffman D (2019) *The Case against Reality: Why Evolution Hid the Truth from Our Eyes*. Norton & Company.

Horkheimer M and Adorno TW (2020) The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception. In: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Stanford University Press, pp. 94–136.

Hui A, Mills M and Tkaczyk V (2020) *Testing Hearing: The Making of Modern Aurality*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Hund E (2023) *The Influencer Industry: The Quest for Authenticity on Social Media*. Princeton University Press.

Hurd K and Noller P (1988) Decoding deception: a look at the process. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* 12(3). Springer: 217–233.

Hyman R (1989) The Psychology of Deception. *Annual Review of Psychology* 40(1): 133–154.

Isaac AMC and Bridewell W (2017) White Lies on Silver Tongues: Why Robots Need to Deceive (and How). In: Lin P, Abney K, and Jenkins R (eds) *Robot Ethics 2.0: From Autonomous Cars to Artificial Intelligence*. Oxford University Press, p. 0. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190652951.003.0011 (accessed 28 February 2024).

Karppi T (2018) *Disconnect: Facebook's Affective Bonds*. University of Minnesota Press.

Krzyżanowski M and Ekström M (2022) The normalization of far-right populism and nativist authoritarianism: Discursive practices in media, journalism and the wider public sphere/s. *Discourse & Society* 33(6). Sage Publications Sage UK: London, England: 719–729.

Kuntsman A and Miyake E (2019) The paradox and continuum of digital disengagement: denaturalising digital sociality and technological connectivity. *Media, Culture & Society* 41(6). SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England: 901–913.

Lee KM (2004) Presence, Explicated. *Communication Theory* 14(1): 27–50.

Lehtonen T (2003) The Domestication of New Technologies as a Set of Trials. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 3(3): 363–385.

Leja M (2004) *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp*. University of California Press. Available at: http://www.loc.gov/catdir/bios/ucal052/2003022760.html http://www.loc.gov/catdir/description/ucal051/2003022760.html http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0410/2003022760.html.

Levine EE and Schweitzer ME (2015) Prosocial lies: When deception breeds trust. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 126: 88–106.

Levine TR (2019) *Duped: Truth-Default Theory and the Social Science of Lying and Deception*. University Alabama Press.

Light B, Burgess J and Duguay S (2018) The walkthrough method: An approach to the study of apps. *New media & society* 20(3). SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England: 881–900.

Littlefield MM (2011) *The Lying Brain: Lie Detection in Science and Science Fiction*. University of Michigan Press.

Maddocks S (2020) 'A Deepfake Porn Plot Intended to Silence Me': exploring continuities between pornographic and 'political'deep fakes. *Porn Studies* 7(4). Taylor & Francis: 415–423.

Manzerolle V and Daubs M (2021) Friction-free authenticity: mobile social networks and transactional affordances. *Media, Culture & Society* 43(7). SAGE Publications Ltd: 1279–1296.

Markowitz DM (2020) The deception faucet: A metaphor to conceptualize deception and its detection. *New Ideas in Psychology* 59. Elsevier: 100816.

Markowitz DM (2023) Toward a deeper understanding of prolific lying: Building a profile of situation-level and individual-level characteristics. *Communication Research* 50(1). SAGE Publications Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA: 80–105.

Martin CW (2009) *The Philosophy of Deception*. Oxford University Press.

McCosker A (2022) Making sense of deepfakes: Socializing AI and building data literacy on GitHub and YouTube. *New Media & Society*. SAGE Publications: 14614448221093943.

McIntyre JA (2023) *Authorship and AI: Infinite Production, Automated Communication, and the Illusion of a Post-human Culture*. PhD dissertation. University of Glasgow.

McLuhan M (1964) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McGraw-Hill.

McNealy JE (2022) Platforms as phish farms: Deceptive social engineering at scale. *New Media & Society* 24(7). SAGE Publications: 1677–1694.

Meibauer J (2014) *Lying at the Semantics-Pragmatics Interface*. de Gruyter.

Meikle G (2023) *Deepfakes*. Cambridge: Polity.

Münsterberg H (1910) *American Problems from the Point of View of a Psychologist*. Moffat.

Nagy P and Neff G (2015) Imagined Affordance: Reconstructing a Keyword for Communication Theory. *Social Media and Society* 1(2).

Napolitano D (2022) *La Voce Artificiale. Un'indagine Media-Archeologica Sul Computer Parlante*. Napoli: Editoriale Scientifica.

Nelson MR (2008) The hidden persuaders: Then and now. *Journal of Advertising* 37(1). Taylor & Francis: 113–126.

O'Leary DE (2019) Google'S Duplex: Pretending to be human. *Intelligent Systems in Accounting, Finance and Management* 26(1): 46–53.

Paquin RS, Boudewyns V, Betts KR, et al. (2022) An Empirical Procedure to Evaluate Misinformation Rejection and Deception in Mediated Communication Contexts. *Communication Theory* 32(1): 25–47.

Pentina I, Hancock T and Xie T (2023) Exploring relationship development with social chatbots: A mixed-method study of replika. *Computers in Human Behavior* 140: 107600.

Pettit M (2013) *The Science of Deception: Psychology and Commerce in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Phan T (2017) The Materiality of the Digital and the Gendered Voice of Siri. *Transformations* 29: 23–33.

Phillips W and Milner RM (2018) *The Ambivalent Internet: Mischief, Oddity, and Antagonism Online*. New York: Polity.

Poster WR (2022) Introduction to special issue on scams, fakes, and frauds. *New Media & Society* 24(7). SAGE Publications: 1535–1547.

Preston P (2020) The Social Dilemma: Partial Insights Amidst Fuzzy Frames. *The Political Economy of Communication* 8(2). 76-81.

Rooney B, Benson C and Hennessy E (2012) The apparent reality of movies and emotional arousal: A study using physiological and self-report measures. *Poetics* 40(5). Elsevier: 405–422.

Safdari M, Serapio-García G, Crepy C, et al. (2023) Personality traits in large language models. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2307.00184*. Epub ahead of print 2023.

Sander B and Tsagourias N (2020) The covid-19 Infodemic and Online Platforms as Intermediary Fiduciaries under International Law. *Journal of International Humanitarian Legal Studies* 11(2). Brill Nijhoff: 331–347.

Scannell P (2020) *Media and Communication*. Sage.

Sconce J (2019) *The Technical Delusion: Electronics, Power, Insanity*. Duke University Press.

Shneiderman B and Muller M (2023) On AI Anthropomorphism. In: *The Medium*. Available at: https://medium.com/human-centered-ai/on-ai-anthropomorphism-abff4cecc5ae.

Skjuve M, Følstad A, Fostervold KI, et al. (2022) A longitudinal study of human–chatbot relationships. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 168: 102903.

Snyder SJ (2024) Always-on authenticity: Challenging the BeReal ideal of "being real". *Media, Culture & Society* 46(2). SAGE Publications Ltd: 404–413.

Søe SO (2021) A unified account of information, misinformation, and disinformation. *Synthese* 198(6). Springer: 5929–5949.

Sterne J (2012) *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Taddeo G (2023) *Persuasione Digitale. Come Persone, Interfacce, Algoritmi Ci Influenzano Online*. Guerini Scientifica.

Thomas J (2018) Programming, filtering, adblocking: advertising and media automation. *Media International Australia* 166(1). SAGE Publications Ltd: 34–43.

Towns AR (2020) Toward a Black media philosophy Toward a Black media philosophy. *Cultural Studies* 0(0). Taylor & Francis: 1–23.

Treré E, Natale S, Keightley E, et al. (2020) The limits and boundaries of digital disconnection. *Media, Culture & Society* 42(4). SAGE Publications Ltd: 605–609.

Triplett N (1900) The Psychology of Conjuring Deceptions. *The American Journal of Psychology* 11(4). University of Illinois Press: 439–510.

Turkle S (1995) *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Umbres R (2016) Deception as exploitative social agency. In: Enfield NJ and Kockelman P (eds) *Distributed Agency*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 243–251.

Vaccari C and Chadwick A (2020) Deepfakes and disinformation: Exploring the impact of synthetic political video on deception, uncertainty, and trust in news. *Social Media+ Society* 6(1). SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England: 2056305120903408.

Van Dijck J (2009) Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content. *Media, culture & society* 31(1). Sage Publications Sage UK: London, England: 41–58.

Van Dijk TA (2006) Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse & society* 17(3). Sage Publications London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: 359–383.

Wahl-Jorgensen K (2017) The Normalization of Surveillance and the Invisibility of Digital Citizenship: Media Debates After the Snowden Revelations. 11: 23.

Walsh T (2023) *Faking It: Artificial Intelligence in a Human World*. La Trobe University Press.

Walsh-Pasulka D (2005) "Passion Tickets Bear Mark of Beast!" Otherworldly Realism, Religious Authority and Popular Film. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 11(1): 44–53.

Wasserman H and Madrid-Morales D (2019) An exploratory study of "fake news" and media trust in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. *African Journalism Studies* 40(1). Taylor & Francis: 107–123.

Woods HS (2018) Asking more of Siri and Alexa: feminine persona in service of surveillance capitalism. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 35(4). Taylor & Francis: 334–349.

Young L (2019) 'I'm a Cloud of Infinitesimal Data Computation' When Machines Talk Back: An interview with Deborah Harrison, one of the personality designers of Microsoft's Cortana AI. *Architectural Design* 89(1): 112–117.