

Interpreting Public Perceptions of Artificial Intelligence-Based Video Content on Instagram

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Instagram users understand, evaluate, and interpret artificial intelligence (AI)-generated video content and how such interpretations shape perceptions of authenticity, usefulness, and social risk. Drawing on Social Construction Theory, Perception Theory, and Stuart Hall's Reception Theory, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive design within a constructivist paradigm. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, documentation, and literature review with four purposively selected active Instagram users in Cengkareng, West Jakarta. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, with NVivo supporting thematic coding and visualization. Findings show that users can recognize AI-generated videos by visual anomalies such as unnatural movement, stiff expressions, overly smooth imagery, and implausible objects. Evaluations are ambivalent: AI video is valued for education, entertainment, information, creativity, and promotion, yet associated with misinformation, manipulation, fraud, and declining trust. Interpretation is shaped by platform experience, source credibility, captions, comments, visual realism, and digital literacy. The study underscores the need for transparent AI labeling, critical verification practices, and platform accountability.

Keywords: AI-generated video, artificial intelligence, Instagram, public perception, reception

INTRODUCTION

Advances in generative artificial intelligence have transformed social media from a space that primarily circulates user-produced material into an environment in which synthetic images, voices, and moving pictures can be created rapidly and at increasingly high levels of realism. On Instagram, AI-generated videos now appear within Reels, Stories, feeds, advertisements, educational posts, and promotional content, placing synthetic media alongside conventional audiovisual messages in the same continuous stream of everyday communication. Generative AI can improve the efficiency and creativity of content production, yet the growing realism of synthetic video also intensifies questions of authenticity, misinformation, manipulation, and public trust (Feuerriegel et al., 2024). Park et al. (2024) further demonstrate that users may evaluate AI-generated content positively while simultaneously confronting ethical concerns and difficulty distinguishing machine-generated material from human-produced content. AI-generated video, therefore, constitutes a communication phenomenon as much as a technological one because its social significance depends on how audiences recognize, interpret, evaluate, and circulate the meanings embedded in visual messages.

Instagram is particularly relevant for examining this process because the platform combines highly visual communication, short-form video, algorithmic distribution, interpersonal interaction, and commercial communication within a single media environment. The communicative role of Instagram extends beyond information delivery: visual presentation, narrative framing, interactivity, and repeated exposure can shape perceptions and decisions. In a study of Instagram-based school marketing communication, Fatah and Sidharta (2026) show that Instagram functions as a strategic communication medium capable of forming institutional image and influencing educational decision-making. Although their study concerns school marketing rather than AI-generated content, it illustrates a broader communication mechanism that is also relevant here: Instagram's visual and interactive affordances help construct impressions, associations, and judgments rather than merely

transmitting neutral information. Consequently, when AI-generated video enters this environment, its interpretation is likely to be conditioned by both the properties of the synthetic message and the habitual ways users encounter and assess content on the platform.

The communication problem becomes more complex when visual realism exceeds users' ability to verify what they see. Brüns and Meißner (2024) found that the use of generative AI in social media content can influence perceived authenticity, whereas D'haeseleer et al. (2024) show that source information, verification labels, and image manipulation affect assessments of message credibility on Instagram. Repeated exposure to deepfake material can also alter perceived accuracy and increase uncertainty about digital information (Ahmed, 2023). Such uncertainty is important because audiences do not interpret messages in a vacuum. They draw on prior knowledge, social experience, platform habits, interpersonal discussion, captions, comments, and judgments about account credibility. Research on the social construction of meaning similarly indicates that reality is continuously negotiated through interaction and shared interpretive practices (Rachman et al., 2023). In digital contexts, ambiguity can therefore shift attention from the message alone toward the process through which users make sense of incomplete, conflicting, or difficult-to-verify information.

This problem is increasingly consequential because synthetic videos can serve multiple communicative functions simultaneously. The same technological capacity that enables educational visualization, entertainment, creative storytelling, and low-cost promotion can also be used to fabricate events, imitate public figures, manipulate emotional responses, or support fraudulent claims. Realistic AI-generated video may therefore generate an interpretive tension between utility and suspicion. Users may appreciate creative or informative value while remaining uncertain about provenance and accuracy. Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) demonstrate that synthetic political video can produce deception and uncertainty even when audiences do not fully accept its content as true. In everyday Instagram use, similar interpretive uncertainty can emerge around non-political content when visual plausibility, account credibility, and contextual cues do not provide a clear basis for verification.

Previous studies have examined authenticity, credibility, misinformation, deepfakes, user preferences, and AI-generated content from technological and behavioral perspectives. Less attention has been given to how ordinary Instagram users construct perceptions of AI-generated video by combining visual stimuli, media routines, social experience, credibility judgments, and active reception. This gap matters for communication research because public perception is not reducible to users' ability to identify AI in technical terms. It also concerns how they assign meaning, negotiate benefits and risks, and decide whether content is believable, useful, harmless, or potentially deceptive. The interpretive process becomes especially important as technological improvements reduce visible imperfections that previously helped users identify synthetic content.

Accordingly, this study examines how Instagram users understand and evaluate AI-generated video content, how visual and contextual stimuli shape their perceptions, and how they interpret the benefits and risks of such content in social life and digital communication. The study integrates Social Construction Theory, Perception Theory, and Stuart Hall's Reception Theory to connect three analytical levels: the formation of digital reality through repeated social and media experience, the perceptual processing of visual and contextual stimuli, and the audience's active decoding of media meanings. By bringing these perspectives together, the study positions AI-generated video as an emerging communication phenomenon and contributes to discussions of digital literacy, transparent AI labeling, responsible content production, and platform accountability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory and Concepts

Artificial intelligence-based video content represents an emerging form of digital communication in which computational systems generate or substantially modify audiovisual representations that may resemble people, objects, environments, voices, and events. As these systems become embedded in social media production, the distinction between content creation, mediation, and representation becomes increasingly porous (Duong & Vo, 2025; Shibuya et al., 2025). The communicative significance of AI-generated video lies not only in how the content is produced but also in how audiences encounter it as a message: viewers interpret visual realism, narrative context, source cues, captions, comments, and platform conventions to determine what the video means and whether to trust it. To explain this process, the present study combines Social Construction Theory, Perception Theory, and Stuart Hall's Reception Theory. Together, these perspectives address the social formation of digital reality, the perceptual interpretation of stimuli, and the active decoding of media meanings (Ahmed & Chua, 2023).

Social Construction Theory conceptualizes reality as an ongoing accomplishment produced and stabilized through interaction, communication, and institutionalized meaning. Berger and Luckmann's formulation emphasizes externalization, objectification, and internalization: actors create meanings through social activity, encounter these meanings as apparently objective realities, and subsequently incorporate them into their own understandings. Contemporary scholarship continues to emphasize that institutions and shared realities are socially constructed across levels of interaction (Ocasio, 2023). In digital environments, this process is intensified

by the continuous production, circulation, recommendation, commentary, and repetition of media content. Fathilah et al. (2025) argue that digital technology expands the spaces in which social reality is constructed, enabling mediated representations to become embedded in everyday understanding. In the present study, AI-generated video becomes socially meaningful because users repeatedly encounter it on Instagram, discuss it, compare it with other content, and gradually develop shared assumptions about what AI looks like, what it can do, and how trustworthy it may be.

The theory is particularly useful for examining the normalization of synthetic media. A video initially perceived as unusual or obviously artificial may, through repeated exposure, become a familiar category within users' media routines. Conversely, repeated encounters with manipulated or misleading content can construct AI as a risk category associated with deception. Social construction, therefore, directs attention to the relationship between technological representation and social experience: the meaning of AI video is not contained exclusively within the visual artifact but is produced through platform circulation, user interaction, and accumulated interpretive experience.

Perception Theory explains how individuals select, organize, and interpret sensory and informational stimuli in relation to prior experience, knowledge, attention, expectations, and situational context. Rakhmat, as cited in Hanif et al. (2024), describes perception as the interpretation of information and messages acquired through experience with objects, events, or relationships. In this study, AI-generated video functions as a complex visual stimulus. Users may attend to bodily movement, facial expression, image texture, lighting, object plausibility, voice synchronization, editing patterns, captions, comments, and the credibility of the account that publishes the content (Jin & Tao, 2025). These cues are not necessarily interpreted in the same way by all users. Differences in familiarity with AI, frequency of Instagram use, prior exposure to manipulated media, and verification habits can produce different judgments about whether a video appears realistic, artificial, informative, entertaining, credible, or deceptive (Lao et al., 2026).

Perception is therefore understood here as an active interpretive process rather than a direct reflection of visual reality. This is particularly important for generative video because technological improvements may reduce the reliability of simple visual heuristics. A viewer who previously identified AI through distorted hands or unnatural facial movement may later encounter content without those visible errors. In such circumstances, contextual cues—such as captions, comments, account identity, consistency with known events, and corroboration from other sources—become increasingly important to perceptual judgment.

Stuart Hall's Reception Theory positions audiences as active interpreters rather than passive recipients of media messages. Encoding refers to the construction of messages through representational choices such as visual composition, sound, narration, captions, editing, and genre conventions, whereas decoding refers to the audience's interpretation of those messages within particular social, cultural, and experiential frameworks (Xie et al., 2022). Hall distinguishes dominant, negotiated, and oppositional reading positions. In an AI-generated video, a dominant reading may occur when users accept an educational, entertaining, informational, or promotional message that largely fits the content's preferred frame. A negotiated reading emerges when users acknowledge usefulness or creativity while simultaneously questioning authenticity, ethics, or accuracy. An oppositional reading occurs when users reject the preferred meaning because they regard the content as deceptive, manipulative, fraudulent, or socially harmful.

Reception Theory complements the perceptual perspective by explaining why recognizing a video as AI-generated does not automatically determine the audience's evaluation. A user may correctly identify synthetic content yet still appreciate it as entertainment; another may accept the information but reject the method of representation; a third may distrust the entire message because the use of AI conflicts with expectations of authenticity. Reception is therefore a meaning-making process in which technological awareness, social values, communicative purpose, and perceived credibility interact.

The central concept in this study is public perception of AI-generated video content on Instagram. Public perception refers to the meanings, evaluations, and judgments that users form when encountering mediated information in a shared communication environment. AI-generated video refers to audiovisual material generated or substantially transformed through artificial intelligence systems in ways that may create realistic or stylized representations of people, voices, objects, environments, and events (Shibuya et al., 2025). Generative AI increasingly supports creative production, personalization, and efficiency, while simultaneously raising concerns about provenance, authenticity, intellectual responsibility, and misinformation (Cao et al., 2023). On Instagram, these issues are shaped by platform-specific practices, as content is consumed alongside account identities, captions, comments, engagement metrics, recommendations, and rapid circulation.

Instagram's significance as a perceptual environment is also supported by communication research beyond the AI context. Fatah and Sidharta (2026) show that Instagram-based communication can shape institutional image and influence choice through visual appeal, information quality, credibility, and interaction. The relevance of this finding to the present study is conceptual: Instagram does not merely host content; its visual and interactive architecture provides cues that shape audiences' impressions and judgments. The same architecture can amplify the persuasive value of AI-generated video while simultaneously complicating the assessment of authenticity.

Taken together, the three perspectives establish a layered analytical framework. Social Construction Theory explains how repeated encounters with AI-generated content contribute to a socially shared understanding

of synthetic media. Perception Theory explains how users process visual and contextual cues when deciding what the content represents and whether it appears credible. Reception Theory explains how audiences accept, negotiate, or reject the meanings encoded in AI-generated messages. Their integration allows the study to connect platform experience, perceptual judgment, and audience interpretation rather than treating AI literacy as a purely technical ability.

Research Gap

Previous studies have examined artificial intelligence in social media from multiple perspectives, including content generation, personalization, authenticity, misinformation, ethical evaluation, user experience, and technical detection. Salsabila (2025), for example, discusses the broader impact of AI implementation on Instagram user experience, whereas other research concentrates on the detection or credibility of manipulated content. Studies of AI-generated and deepfake media have also addressed user trust and perceptual accuracy (Ahmed & Chua, 2023; Park et al., 2024; Shibuya et al., 2025). Nevertheless, research remains limited on how everyday Instagram users integrate visual recognition, platform routines, source evaluation, social experience, and interpretive positioning when making sense of AI-generated video (Kojah et al., 2025). Existing research often isolates authenticity, detection, or attitudes, leaving the relationship among social construction, perception, and reception insufficiently integrated.

A second gap concerns the communicative consequences of ambiguity. AI-generated video can be plausible enough to create uncertainty without necessarily producing complete deception. In other communication contexts, ambiguous information requires actors to construct meaning through interpretation, verification, interaction, and contextual judgment. Sidharta et al. (2025), in a study of decision-making under ambiguity in Indonesian social assistance governance, demonstrate the importance of sensemaking, contextual verification, and communication when available information is unclear or incomplete. Their empirical setting differs from social media and AI-generated content, yet the study offers a useful communication insight: ambiguity becomes manageable through active meaning-making rather than passive information reception. This insight strengthens the rationale for examining how Instagram users verify, negotiate, and evaluate synthetic audiovisual messages when authenticity cannot be established immediately.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining how Instagram users understand AI-generated video, how they identify visual and contextual cues, how they evaluate communicative benefits and risks, and how they position themselves toward the meanings conveyed. The contribution lies in connecting the social construction of digital reality with perceptual processing and audience reception within a single qualitative framework. This approach shifts analysis from the question of whether users can detect AI toward the broader question of how they construct a workable interpretation of synthetic media in everyday digital communication.

Framework

The analytical framework links platform experience, perceptual cues, and audience reception. Instagram use provides the experiential context in which AI-generated video is repeatedly encountered; perception operates through the selection and interpretation of visual and contextual stimuli; social construction explains how recurring experiences become shared assumptions about AI and digital reality; and reception explains the audience's dominant, negotiated, or oppositional decoding of content. The research focus, therefore, concerns the construction of public perception as an outcome of interaction among media experience, stimulus interpretation, social meaning, and evaluative reception.

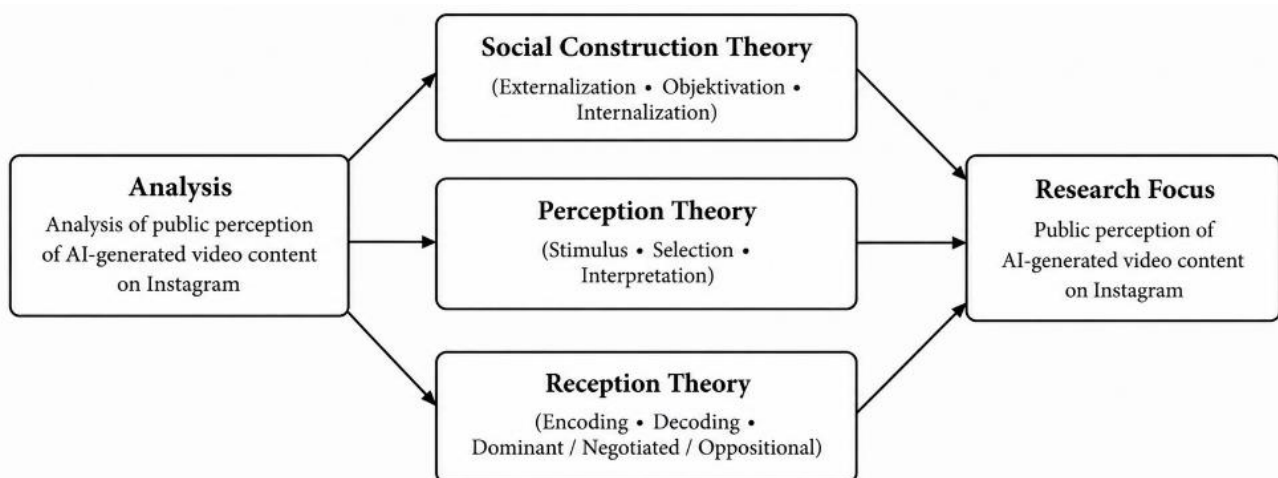


Figure 1. Framework

Source: Processed by researchers based on theoretical concepts (2026)

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach within a constructivist paradigm to understand how Instagram users construct perceptions of AI-generated video content. A qualitative design was selected because the research focuses on meanings, judgments, interpretive processes, and everyday experiences that cannot be adequately reduced to numerical indicators. The constructivist paradigm is consistent with the study's theoretical orientation because it assumes that meanings are produced through interaction between individuals, media experiences, and social contexts rather than existing as fixed properties of the content itself. The study was conducted in Cengkareng, West Jakarta, and focused on active Instagram users who had encountered AI-generated video content during their routine use of the platform.

Four informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their active use of Instagram and prior exposure to AI-generated video. The selection strategy was intended to obtain information-rich accounts from users with direct experience of the phenomenon. The unit of analysis was the informants' perception and interpretation of AI-generated video, including how they recognized synthetic visual characteristics, assessed credibility and communicative value, interpreted potential benefits and risks, and related those judgments to their Instagram usage. The study did not seek statistical representativeness; instead, it aimed to develop an in-depth account of how meaning is constructed across different individual experiences.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to explore informants' Instagram routines, knowledge of AI, visual recognition strategies, credibility assessments, and responses to the social consequences of AI-generated content. Non-participant observation was used to contextualize how AI-related content appears within Instagram's visual environment, while documentation supported the organization of relevant research materials. Secondary data were drawn from scholarly literature on generative AI, deepfakes, perception, reception, digital communication, and social construction.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview material was reviewed iteratively to identify recurring meaning units, categories, and thematic relationships. NVivo was used as an analytical support tool for coding, word-frequency visualization, classification mapping, and relationship mapping; it did not replace the researcher's interpretation. The analysis was guided deductively by the three theoretical perspectives while remaining open to categories emerging from the empirical material, including visual realism, Instagram usage patterns, trust, promotional utility, misinformation, manipulation, and public opinion.

Credibility was strengthened through source and methodological triangulation, as well as member checking. Triangulation involved comparing statements across informants and considering interview accounts alongside observation, documentation, and relevant literature. Member checking was used to ensure that the researcher's interpretation did not substantially misrepresent participants' intended meanings. Throughout the analysis, the researcher maintained a distinction between what informants perceived and what can be objectively established about AI technology. This distinction is essential because the research investigates public meaning-making rather than technical detection accuracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Research Results

The findings indicate that public perceptions of AI-generated video content on Instagram are shaped by the intersection of media experience, knowledge, visual interpretation, credibility assessment, and perceived social consequences. The four informants were active Instagram users who had encountered AI-generated videos in ordinary platform use. Although their backgrounds and purposes for using Instagram differed, all informants had developed practical criteria for recognizing synthetic content and evaluating whether it was useful, entertaining, informative, suspicious, or potentially harmful. Their accounts, therefore, reveal perception as a situated communicative process rather than a uniform response to a technological object.

Across the interviews, the AI-generated video was evaluated ambivalently. Informants associated the technology with creativity, visual attraction, education, information, entertainment, and promotion, while also linking it to questions of authenticity, misinformation, manipulation, fraud, and public deception. These apparently contradictory evaluations were not mutually exclusive. The same informant could appreciate the efficiency or creative value of AI video in one context and distrust it in another. Interpretation depended on the message's purpose, the video's visual quality, the perceived credibility of the account, captions and comments, and the user's prior knowledge and verification habits. The results are presented through NVivo-supported maps and visualizations that organize these relationships without treating the software output as an independent finding.

Presentation of Research Results

Instagram formed the immediate media environment in which all informants encountered AI-generated video. The platform was used for entertainment, information seeking, interpersonal communication, and business or promotional purposes. Reels and Stories were among the most frequently accessed features, making short-form audiovisual content a routine component of participants' media experience. This pattern is analytically important because repeated exposure provides users with a comparative archive: they learn to judge new synthetic videos against previously seen human-produced and AI-generated material. The platform, therefore, functions both as a

distribution channel and as an experiential context in which perceptual expectations are continuously updated.

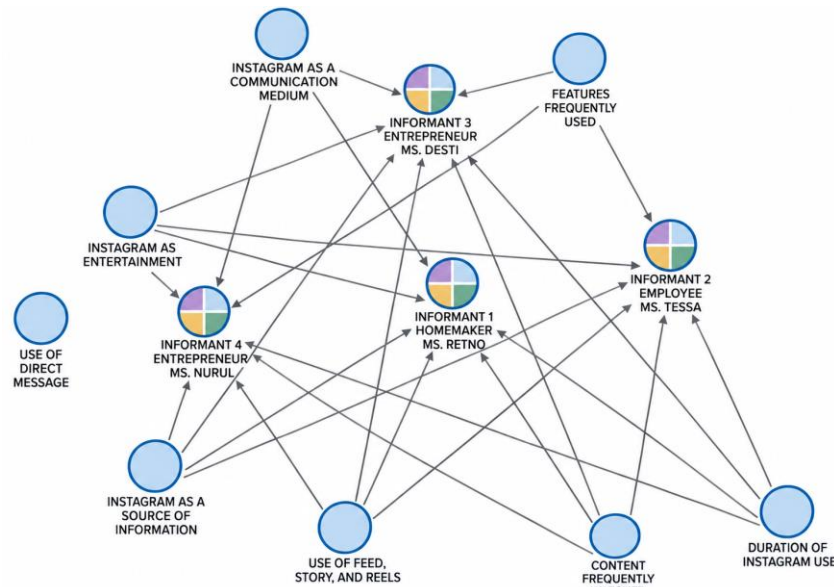


Figure 2: Map of Instagram Usage Patterns Among Informants
Source: NVivo data analysis results, 2026.

Figure 2 maps the relationship between informants and categories, including Instagram as entertainment, a source of information, a communication medium, frequently used features, duration of use, frequently viewed content, and the use of feeds, Stories, and Reels. The network demonstrates that encounters with AI-generated video cannot be separated from broader Instagram routines. Informants who frequently access Reels are more frequently exposed to short-form video, including synthetic content, whereas users who engage with promotional material tend to evaluate AI in terms of visual creativity, persuasive appeal, and marketing utility. The findings also suggest that users' understanding of AI remains primarily experiential rather than technical. Informants generally describe AI as a technology capable of producing videos that resemble reality through computational generation, prompts, or visual engineering. Even without specialist knowledge, they have developed practical categories for distinguishing AI-generated content from authentic recordings.

This experiential pattern reinforces the importance of Instagram as a meaning-making environment. Similar to the role of visual and interactive communication identified by Fatah and Sidharta (2026) in educational marketing, informants in the present study do not evaluate messages based solely on informational content. Visual composition, platform format, source identity, and patterns of interaction contribute to the impression formed around a video. For AI-generated content, these cues become especially significant because users often lack direct access to the production process and must infer authenticity from the message and its context.

Visual indicators are the most immediate basis through which informants attempt to distinguish AI-generated video from authentic recordings. Unnatural body movement, stiff facial expression, overly smooth or unusually perfect imagery, inconsistent details, and implausible objects were repeatedly identified as warning signs. These cues function as perceptual heuristics: rather than technically analyzing how a video was generated, users compare visual details with expectations derived from everyday experience. Yet informants also recognize that such indicators are becoming less dependable as generative technologies improve. The increasing similarity between synthetic and authentic video creates an interpretive threshold at which users must rely more heavily on contextual information and source verification.

Assessments of AI-generated video reveal a dual structure of perceived opportunity and risk. Informants consider AI useful for entertainment, education, information, creativity, and promotion because synthetic video can make messages visually engaging and can lower barriers to content production. At the same time, they do not regard technical sophistication as equivalent to credibility. AI-generated content can be used to fabricate visual evidence, impersonate people or events, create misleading narratives, facilitate fraud, and amplify misinformation. As a result, evaluation depends on more than whether the video appears attractive. Informants consider the publishing account, caption, comments, coherence of the message, plausibility of the depicted event, and the availability of corroborating information.

Analysis of Findings

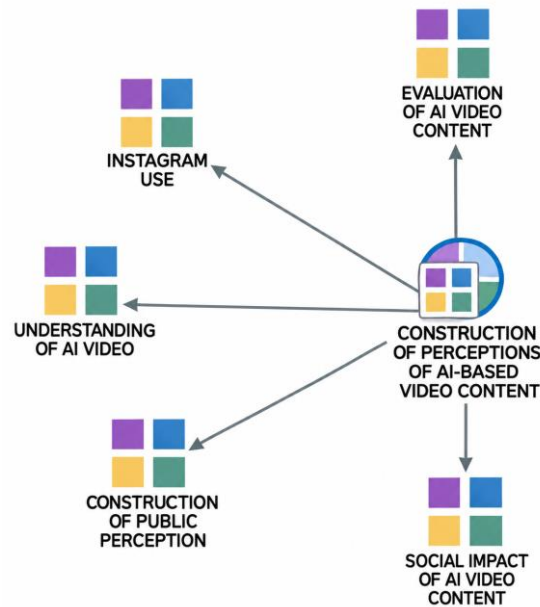


Figure 3: Classification Map of Perceptions of AI-Based Video Content
Source: NVivo data analysis results, 2026.

Figure 3 places the construction of perceptions of AI-generated video at the center of four connected categories: Instagram use, understanding of AI video, evaluation of AI video content, and perceived social impact. The map indicates that perception is not produced from conceptual knowledge alone. Platform routines provide the experiential setting; understanding provides a working concept of AI; evaluation organizes judgments about usefulness, credibility, and authenticity; and social impact extends those judgments toward consequences for others. The centrality of perception, therefore, reflects an interpretive process in which media experience and technological understanding are continuously translated into communicative judgments. The classification map also clarifies that users' assessments are relational. A highly realistic video can be interpreted positively when its educational or creative purpose is transparent, yet the same realism can increase concern when the content presents an unverified event or appears designed to deceive. Similarly, prior experience with Instagram can both increase exposure to AI-generated content and improve familiarity with platform-based verification cues. Perception is thus shaped by the relationship among the message, the platform, the user's experience, and the perceived consequences of believing or sharing the content.



Figure 4: Word Cloud from Interview Data Analysis
Source: NVivo data analysis results, 2026.

Figure 4 visualizes dominant terms in the interview corpus. Words such as "content," "video," "AI," "Instagram," "information," "trust," "understand," "education," "entertainment," "promotion," "visual," "hoax," "society," and "children" point to the substantive concerns that structured participants' accounts. The prominence of "content" and "video" reflects the visual object around which interpretation was organized, whereas "trust," "hoax," "realistic," and "understand" indicate that participants' attention moved quickly from technical novelty to epistemic questions: whether the content can be believed, how it can be recognized, and what consequences may follow from misinterpretation.

The word-frequency pattern should not be interpreted as a measure of importance independent of context; rather, it provides a descriptive entry point for understanding recurring topics in the interviews. Read together with the coded relationship maps, the word cloud suggests that informants discuss AI primarily through four intertwined concerns: practical usefulness, visual realism, information credibility, and social risk. References to education, entertainment, promotion, and information illustrate perceived benefits, while references to trust, hoaxes, deception, and social effects illustrate perceived risks. This co-occurrence supports the finding that audience perception is fundamentally ambivalent rather than simply favorable or unfavorable.

Overall, the findings indicate that public perceptions of AI-generated video on Instagram are complex, contextual, and experience-dependent. Users do not evaluate synthetic media exclusively through technological knowledge. They draw on habitual platform use, information needs, accumulated exposure, visual expectations, source credibility, comments from other users, and individual digital literacy. These factors shape both recognition and reception. The results, therefore, support an interpretation of AI-generated video as a communicative object whose meaning emerges through a combination of representational form, platform context, and audience practice.

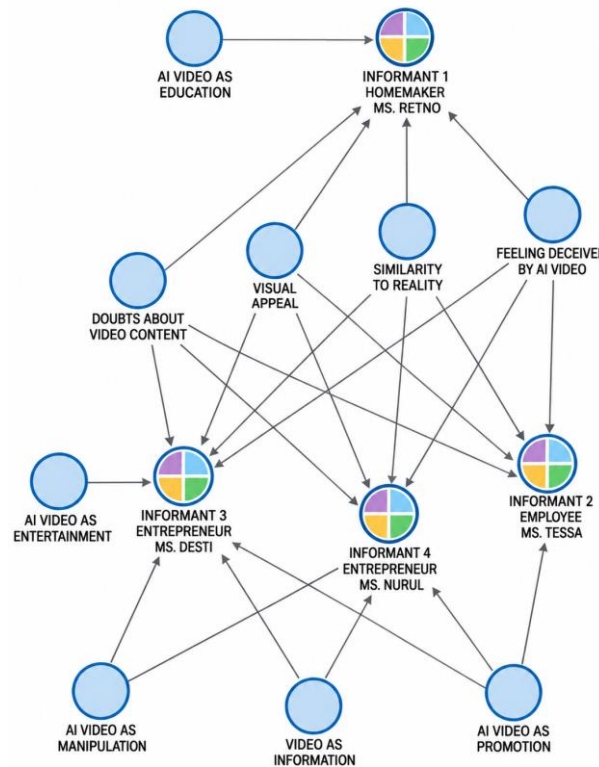


Figure 5: Map of Research Relationships Regarding AI Video Content
Source: NVivo data analysis results, 2026.

Figure 5 shows that assessments of AI-generated video are associated with visual appeal, realism, skepticism toward the content, and the use of AI video for education, entertainment, information, promotion, and manipulation. These relationships demonstrate that informants do not classify content using a single true-versus-false criterion. Their evaluations combine aesthetic form, communicative function, source credibility, message plausibility, and perceived consequences. Visual appeal can enhance attention and perceived usefulness, while high realism can either strengthen engagement or intensify suspicion depending on the context in which the video appears.

The map further suggests that the same affordance can generate opposite interpretations. The capacity to create realistic and engaging video supports education and promotion, yet it also increases the potential for manipulation when synthetic representation is presented without adequate disclosure. This duality explains why users' judgments frequently take a negotiated form: they do not reject AI as a technology, but they place conditions

on acceptable use, including transparency, credible sourcing, and a communicative purpose that does not exploit uncertainty.

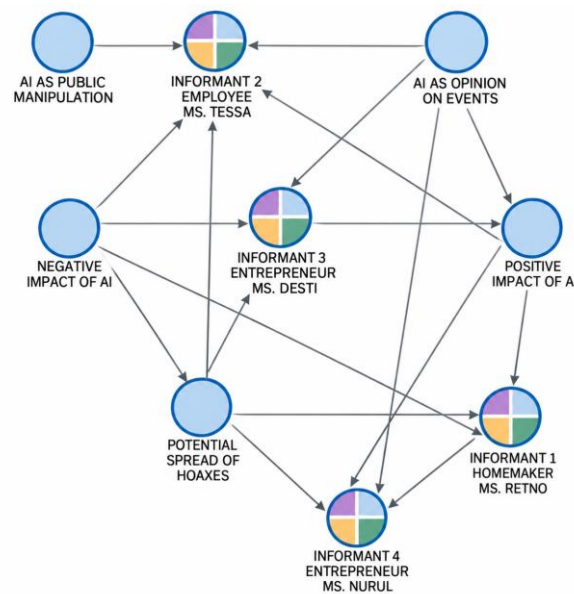


Figure 6: Map of the Impact of AI Video Content on Social Media
Source: NVivo data analysis, 2026.

Figure 6 organizes perceived social consequences around AI as public manipulation, AI as a shaper of public opinion, positive impact, negative impact, and the potential spread of hoaxes. Informants, therefore, perceive AI-generated video not only as a creative production tool but also as a communicative force capable of influencing collective interpretation. A realistic viral video may attract attention and shape opinion before correction or clarification becomes visible, particularly when users encounter it in fast-moving short-form feeds. Positive consequences include easier production of educational material, creative expression, promotional communication, and information visualization; negative consequences include misinformation, manipulation, fraud, uncertainty, and erosion of trust.

Importantly, the interviews also indicate the emergence of more cautious media practices. Informants describe checking the credibility of accounts, reading comments, comparing claims with other sources, and hesitating before sharing uncertain material. These practices resemble a form of everyday sensemaking in which users seek additional context before accepting a plausible but ambiguous message. Sidharta et al. (2025) identify a comparable need for contextual verification and meaning construction in decision-making under ambiguity, although their study concerns public-service governance rather than digital media. In the present setting, the relevant principle is that uncertainty encourages active interpretation and verification when information cannot be taken at face value.

Participants also expect greater responsibility from platforms and content producers. Clear labeling of AI-generated material, accessible provenance information, and stronger detection or reporting mechanisms were perceived as ways to reduce confusion. Such measures would not eliminate the need for digital literacy, but they could provide contextual cues that support more informed audience judgment. Platform accountability and user literacy, therefore, emerge as complementary rather than competing responses to the risk posed by synthetic media.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that public perception of AI-generated video on Instagram is shaped by the interaction among platform experience, visual interpretation, social meaning, and audience reception. From a Social Construction Theory perspective, synthetic video becomes part of digital reality through repeated production, circulation, recommendation, viewing, and discussion. Users learn what AI-generated content is not only from formal knowledge but from recurring encounters with particular visual forms and social narratives surrounding them. Over time, these encounters produce relatively stable expectations—for example, that AI may be creative and useful while also requiring caution because it can imitate reality. The technology, therefore, acquires social meaning through communication practices rather than through technical properties alone.

This interpretation extends research on AI-generated content by emphasizing the platform as a site of perceptual socialization. Park et al. (2024) show that audiences can simultaneously display preferences, evaluations, and ethical concerns regarding AI and human-generated Instagram content. The present findings help explain how such mixed responses develop: repeated exposure allows users to normalize AI as part of the content

environment while also accumulating reasons for suspicion. The resulting perception is not a stable pro- or anti-AI attitude but a context-dependent judgment shaped by communicative purpose and perceived transparency.

Perception Theory clarifies how this social experience is translated into individual judgment. Informants rely first on visually available cues—movement, facial expression, image smoothness, object consistency, and realism—but their assessments expand to contextual cues when visual certainty declines. This finding is consistent with research showing that source characteristics, verification signals, and manipulated imagery affect credibility judgments on Instagram (D'haeseleer et al., 2024). It also resonates with Lao et al. (2026), who emphasize credibility assessment practices among young users confronting AI-generated video. The important point is that perception operates as a layered process: a visual anomaly may trigger suspicion, but credibility is negotiated through the relationship between what is seen and what is known about the source and context.

The findings also reveal a transition from artifact-based detection toward context-based verification. As synthetic videos become more realistic, traditional visual heuristics lose some reliability. Users then depend more heavily on captions, account identity, comments, comparison with credible media, and knowledge of whether an event is plausible. This transition has implications for digital literacy. Training that focuses solely on identifying visible AI errors may quickly become obsolete; critical literacy should also include source evaluation, lateral verification, awareness of platform incentives, and the ability to tolerate uncertainty until corroborating evidence becomes available.

The findings are also consistent with Stuart Hall's Reception Theory, as informants do not uniformly decode AI-generated video. Dominant readings appear when users accept AI content for education, entertainment, information, or promotion and interpret the message largely within its intended communicative frame. Negotiated readings are more prevalent when users appreciate practical benefits while remaining cautious about authenticity, ethical disclosure, or possible misuse. Oppositional readings emerge when AI-generated video is associated with deception, manipulation, hoaxes, or fraud. These positions demonstrate that awareness of AI does not mechanically determine meaning; users may recognize synthetic production and still assign different values to the message depending on context and purpose.

The negotiated position is particularly significant because it captures the central ambivalence of the findings. Informants do not treat AI-generated video as intrinsically credible or inherently harmful. Instead, they formulate conditional acceptance: AI is useful when its function is transparent and socially constructive, but it becomes problematic when realism is used to obscure provenance or exploit audience trust. This pattern suggests that public perception is better understood as an evaluative continuum shaped by context than as a binary distinction between acceptance and rejection.

Taken together, the three theoretical perspectives explain different moments of the same communicative process. Social Construction Theory explains how synthetic media becomes normalized and socially categorized through repeated encounters on platforms. Perception Theory explains how users select and interpret sensory and contextual information. Reception Theory explains how those interpretations become positions of acceptance, negotiation, or opposition toward the message. The integration of these perspectives is the principal theoretical contribution of the study because it connects macro-level digital reality, meso-level platform experience, and micro-level audience interpretation without reducing perception to technological detection.

The two external communication studies incorporated into this analysis further contextualize these findings. Fatah and Sidharta (2026) demonstrate that Instagram's visual and interactive communication can shape perceptions and influence decisions, supporting the view that platform-based perception emerges from more than just content exposure. Sidharta et al. (2025), although working in a different empirical domain, demonstrate that ambiguous situations require active sensemaking, contextual information, and communication to support judgment. Read alongside the present findings, these studies reinforce a broader communication principle: when messages shape consequential perceptions under conditions of incomplete certainty, audiences and stakeholders rely on interpretive cues, social context, and verification practices to construct meaning.

The study, therefore, advances the argument that AI-generated video should be approached as an issue of communicative governance as well as media technology. The risks identified by informants are partly technological, but their consequences are mediated by how content is labeled, distributed, contextualized, and interpreted. Clear provenance cues, responsible creator practices, platform-level disclosure, and audience verification skills can alter the meaning-making environment in which synthetic video is received. Addressing AI-related misinformation consequently requires coordination among users, creators, educators, and platforms rather than relying exclusively on automated detection.

Implications of Findings

Theoretically, the study demonstrates the value of combining Social Construction Theory, Perception Theory, and Reception Theory to analyze synthetic media. This integration shows that public perception is shaped by three interconnected processes: social normalization through repeated digital experience, perceptual interpretation of visual and contextual cues, and active reception of encoded meanings. The framework can support future communication research on deepfakes, virtual influencers, synthetic advertising, AI-generated journalism, and other forms of machine-mediated representation. It also suggests that authenticity should be studied as a communicative judgment rather than exclusively as a technical property of media content.

Practically, the findings highlight the need for digital literacy that moves beyond visual detection toward

contextual verification. Users should be encouraged to examine source identity, corroborate claims across credible outlets, interpret captions and comments critically, and delay sharing when provenance is uncertain. Content creators should disclose meaningful use of generative AI when a synthetic representation could reasonably be mistaken for an authentic recording. Instagram and other platforms can support these practices through visible AI labels, provenance indicators, reporting channels, and systems that provide context without assuming that automated detection will always be definitive. Educational institutions and public communication actors can use the study's findings to design literacy initiatives that address both the opportunities and the social risks of generative media.

The study is limited by its small, purposively selected group of four Instagram users in Cengkareng, West Jakarta. The findings provide analytical depth rather than population-level generalization. The study also examines users' reported perceptions rather than experimentally testing detection accuracy or measuring actual sharing behavior. Future research could compare age groups, occupations, or levels of AI literacy; examine other platforms such as TikTok or YouTube; conduct experimental studies of labeling and source cues; or combine qualitative reception analysis with behavioral measures. Longitudinal research would also be valuable, as users' recognition strategies are likely to change as generative video quality improves.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that public perceptions of AI-generated video on Instagram are shaped by the interplay among repeated platform experience, perceptual interpretation, and active audience meaning-making. Users primarily identify synthetic video through practical visual cues, yet their judgments extend beyond appearance to include source credibility, captions, comments, message plausibility, and prior knowledge. Perception is therefore not a simple act of recognizing whether a video is artificial; it is a communicative process through which users decide what the content means, whether it can be trusted, and what social consequences may follow from accepting or sharing it.

The findings also establish the ambivalent character of audience reception. AI-generated video is valued for education, entertainment, information, creativity, and promotion, while also raising concerns about misinformation, manipulation, fraud, authenticity, and the shaping of public opinion. Social Construction Theory explains how these evaluations become embedded in users' digital reality, Perception Theory explains the interpretation of visual and contextual stimuli, and Reception Theory explains dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings. The study's contribution lies in integrating these processes to show that responsible engagement with synthetic media depends on both individual literacy and the communicative environment created by platforms and content producers. Transparent AI labeling, contextual verification, and critical digital literacy are, therefore, central to sustaining trust as synthetic audiovisual content becomes increasingly realistic and commonplace.

ETHICAL DECLARATION

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