

# The Capture raises the very real spectre of deepfake video

The need for progress in this area appears to be crucial...



Callum Turner plays the role of Shaun Emery in The Capture (Image: BBC/Heyday Films/Parisa Taghizadeh)

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On Tuesday night the final part of the [BBC's gripping drama](#) The Capture was aired.

It's been a series that has baffled and enthralled both critics and audiences alike with its ending, in particular, dividing opinion.

Central to the plot, though, has been an examination of the working practices of the counterintelligence services and how adept they have become at using video technology.

In the words of the show's writer and director Ben Channan, whilst writing the script he was increasingly conscious of "how much better and faster visual effects were becoming - and how it was possible to manipulate video".

Also aware of the current debates around fake news and facial recognition software, Channan was keen to get his drama broadcast as soon as possible, because he says, he's talking about what's happening right now in the real world.

And in that observation, Channan is undeniably right. As BBC journalist Rory Cellan Jones wrote this week, recently published research shows that there has been a huge surge in the number of "deepfake" (deepfake is a portmanteau of 'deep learning' and 'fake') videos appearing online.

The research, carried out by cyber-security company Deeptrace, found that there were now 14,698 deepfake videos online, compared with 7,964 in December 2018.

Simply speaking, [deepfake videos](#) can be defined as when artificial intelligence technology is used to merge created material onto already existing footage. Thus, there is the opportunity to present content that never actually happened; people can be made to look like they are saying and doing things that they did not do or say.

Quite obviously, this is of great concern to the world's politicians and at present the US government is funding the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency ([DARPA](#)) in its attempt to develop technologies "for the automated assessment of the integrity of an image or video".

The ideal is to produce technology which will "automatically detect manipulations and provide detailed information about how these manipulations were performed".

In the UK, through the [Online Harms White Paper](#) there is a more holistic response to the "prevalence of illegal and harmful content online" and the Government proposes to "establish a new statutory duty of care to make companies take more responsibility for the safety of their users and tackle harm caused by content or activity on their services".

Added to this, both [Facebook](#) and Google appear to be committed to financing research projects into producing technology that can help all users detect when “AI has been used to alter a video in order to mislead the viewer”.

The need for progress in this area appears to be crucial.

[Speaking in September](#), Hao Li, who is professor of computer science at the University of Southern California, said that manipulated images and videos that appear “perfectly real” will be accessible to everyday people in “half-a-year to a year”.

Can you imagine the chaos and confusion of a presidential election where there is the possibility of a “created” Donald Trump competing for space with the real thing?

That maybe a flippant point to make but as [Tom Van de Weghe of Stanford University has pointed out](#), the threats of deepfake are real and imminent: “They can be used to create digital wildfires. They can be used by any autocratic regime to discredit dissidents. They can be used to convince people that a dead leader is still alive. They can generate false statements.”

Problems are exacerbated he argues, in areas where mainstream media is scarce, or where governments are destabilised. In areas, then, where the distinctions between fake and real news are increasingly blurred.

## **The Hundred**

Last week, the Hundred, a new format of cricket launched by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and due to begin in 2020, was criticised by the [Obesity Health Alliance](#) for its association with KP snacks.

Spokesperson Caroline Cerney told the BBC: “Junk food brands sponsorship of popular sporting events is just another way they make sure their unhealthy products take centre stage in children’s minds.”

It doesn’t look good, admittedly. Each of the eight teams in the competition (with names like Welsh Fire, Manchester Originals and Northern Superchargers) will appear in garish strips complete with a KP logo emblazoned on the chest.

At a publicity event recently, England test captain, Joe Root, looked positively comical in his bright yellow coloured kit proudly displaying the logo of Skips – the starchy, prawn cocktail potato-based snack.

The tournaments will take place over the summer holidays and the clear intention is to get more children interested in the sport.

And, of course, there is evidence to suggest that the advertising of unhealthy food-stuffs to children is effective. As [academic Emma Boyland](#) has written, research has repeatedly demonstrated that exposure to unhealthy food advertising has an impact on children's diets.

She writes: "As a result of seeing advertisements for unhealthy foods, children show greater preference for the advertised product, [greater preference for high fat and sugar foods](#) in general and, crucially, eat more."

But this is unlikely to faze either the ECB or KP snacks.

For the ECB, the Hundred represents the chance to breathe some life into a moribund game which outside of the Test arena struggles for live audiences.

The money that KP pays is deemed essential to growing the popularity of the game.

As England international [Kate Cross told the BBC](#), the sponsorship money is essential to the development of the women's game in the UK and to its credit, the Hundred also incorporates a women's tournament.

It is obvious that the Hundred is not to everyone's taste - both in its format and its willingness to embrace commerciality so brazenly.

Indeed, Indian Virat Kohli, one of the world's finest cricketers, has expressed his disapproval and unwillingness to take part, saying: "I feel somewhere the commercial aspect is taking over the real quality of cricket and that hurts me."

But sport sponsorship is a factor of modern sporting life and the Rugby World Cup, currently enthralling everyone from Japan, could not be the size and spectacle that it is without such corporate investment.

That's not to say sporting organisations should be so quick to sell their products to the highest bidder.

The ECB should have recognised the opposition its partnership with KP would engender. Not just from pressure groups, either - images of the aforementioned garish team jerseys cannot appear in the London Underground or buses because of the [city's ban](#) on advertising images and references which promote the consumption of foods high in fat, sugar and salt.

**ALSO BY JOHN:**

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