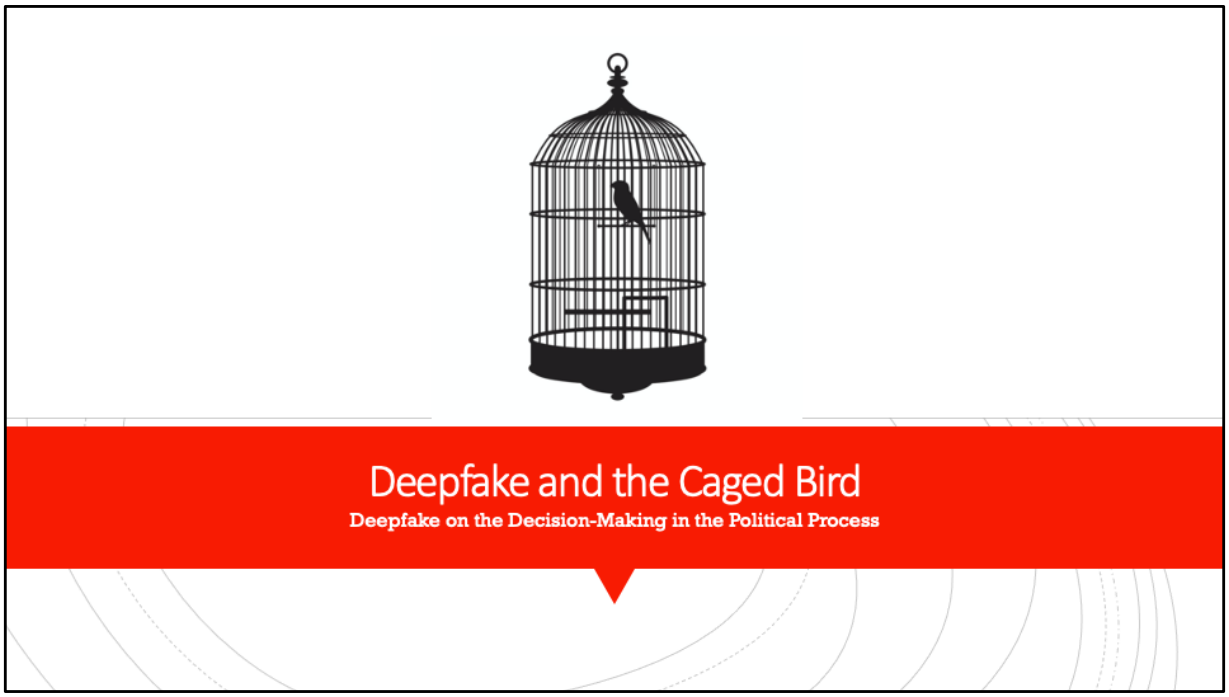
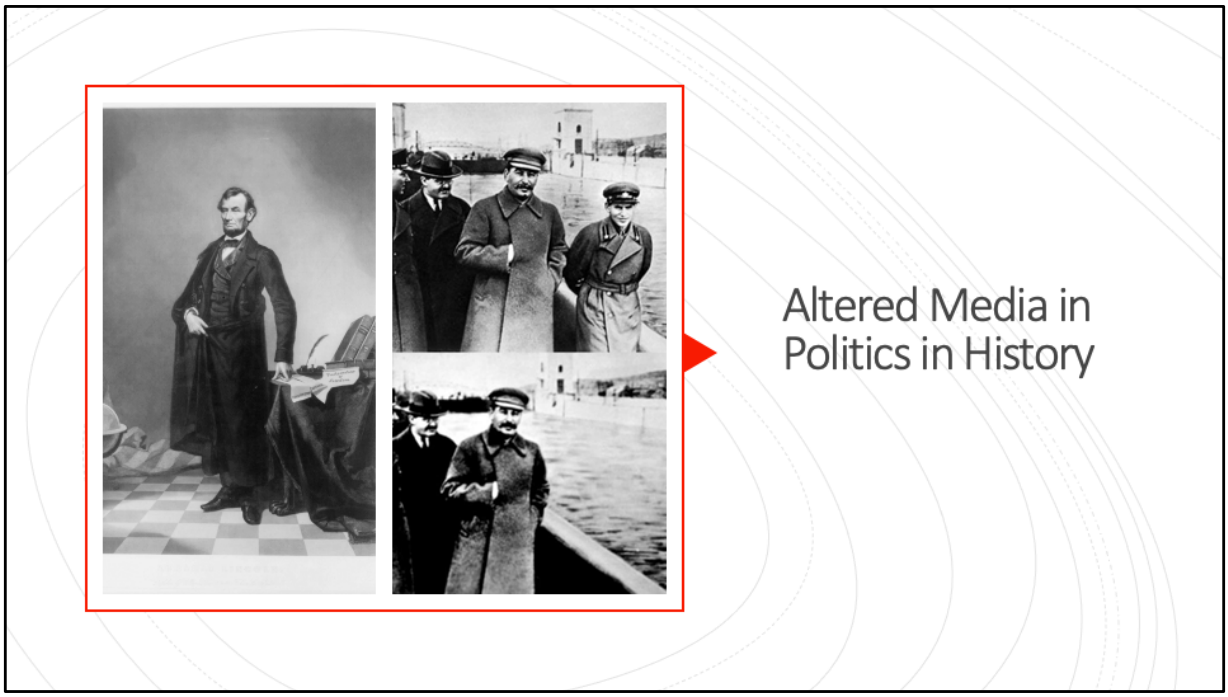


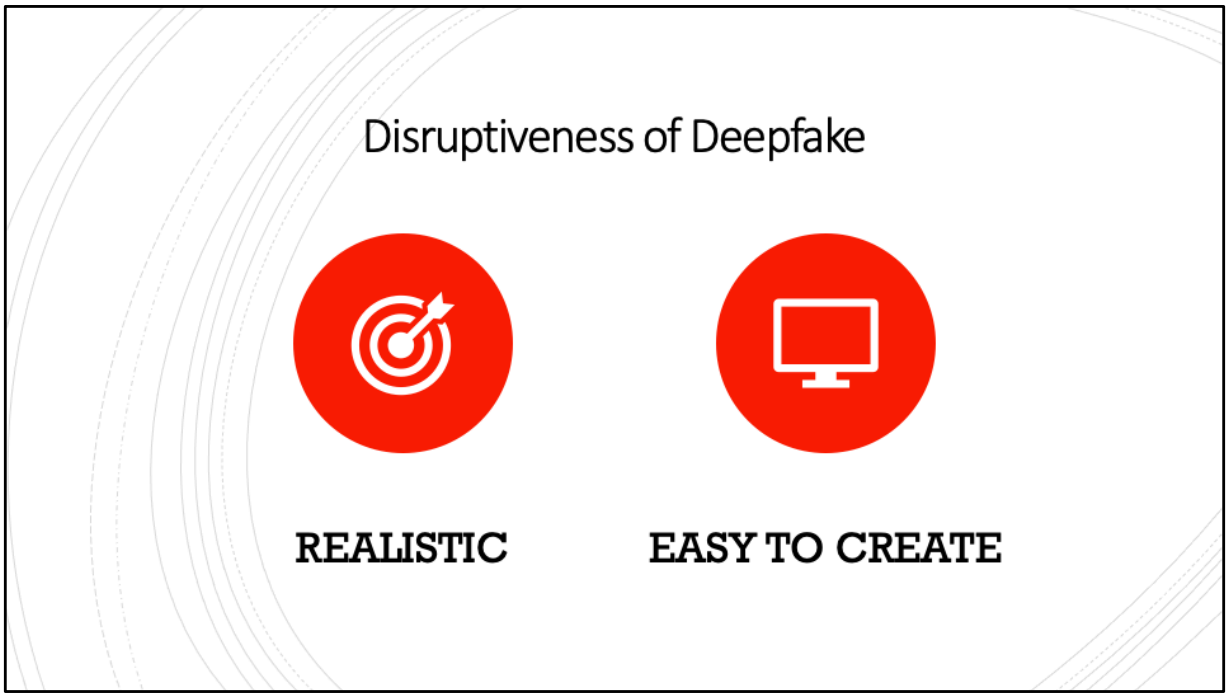
Ladies and gentleman, today I will be presenting on how Deepfake impacts the political decision making process



Altered media has been used in politics throughout history. Here are two examples.

This iconic portrait of Lincoln is in fact Lincoln's head juxta positioned on the body of another politician to make Lincoln appear more majestic.

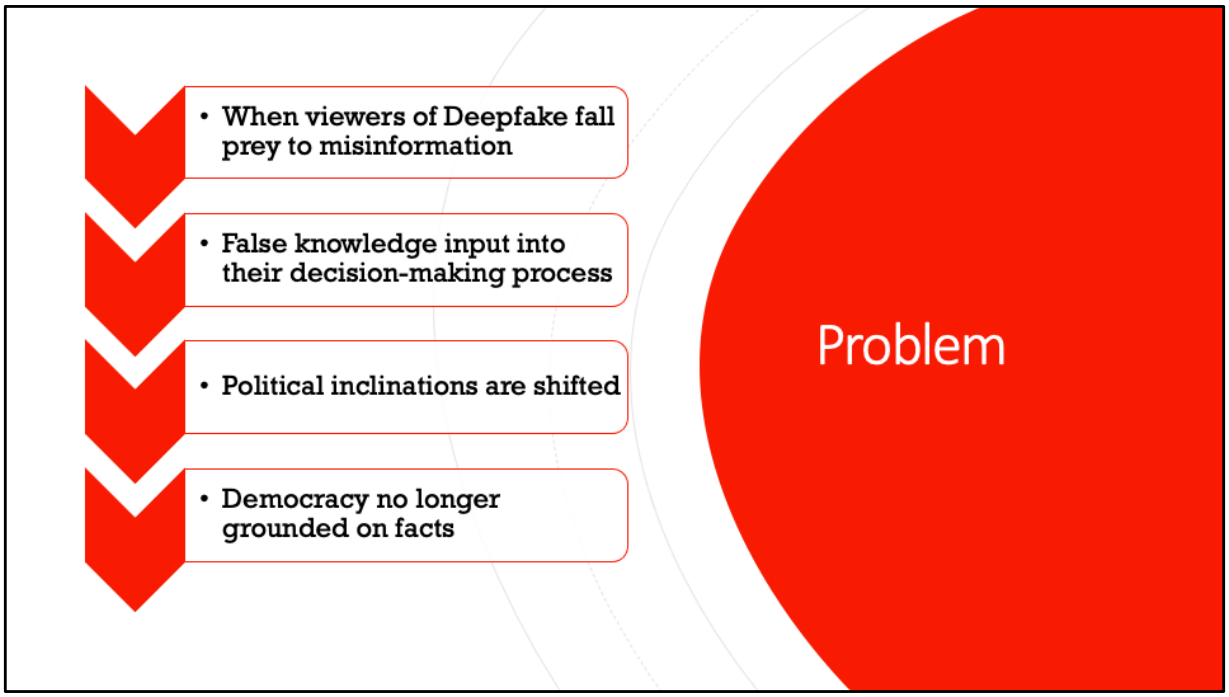
Joseph Stalin was also known for his commitment to erasing politicians out of photographical memory.



What sets Deepfake apart is that it is both easy to create yet its results are so realistic.

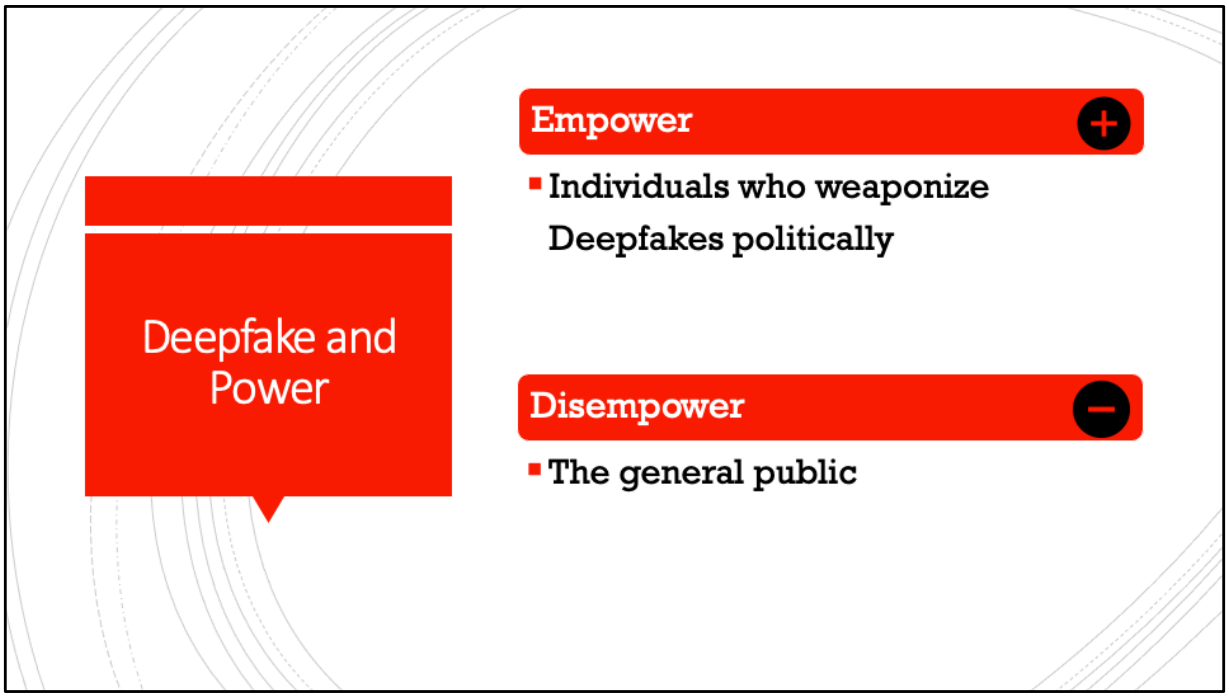
In fact, it is realistic to the point that it is people cannot distinguish it from originally captured photos and videos, allowing individuals to produce faux video evidence on demand to support any claims.

Furthermore, they are so easy to create to the extent that anyone that with a modern computer is able use this tool.



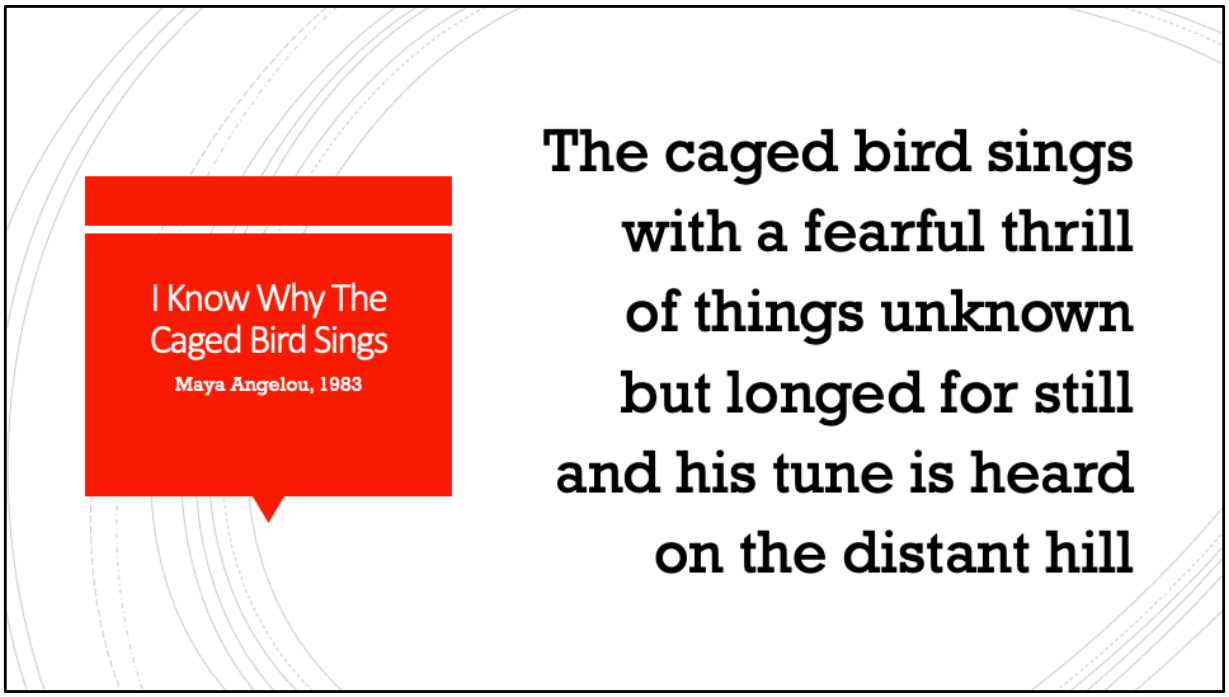
The problem of Deepfake arises when it is used to propagate false narratives.

When viewers of Deepfake fall prey to misinformation,
This false knowledge is input into their decision-making process.
Deepfake can then shift voters' political inclinations, including their choice of vote.
When our political sentiments are based not on facts but on the false narratives of others, the fundamental idea of democracy is at stake.



I will be sharing on how this results in the empowerment of individuals who weaponize Deepfake politically, yet disempowers

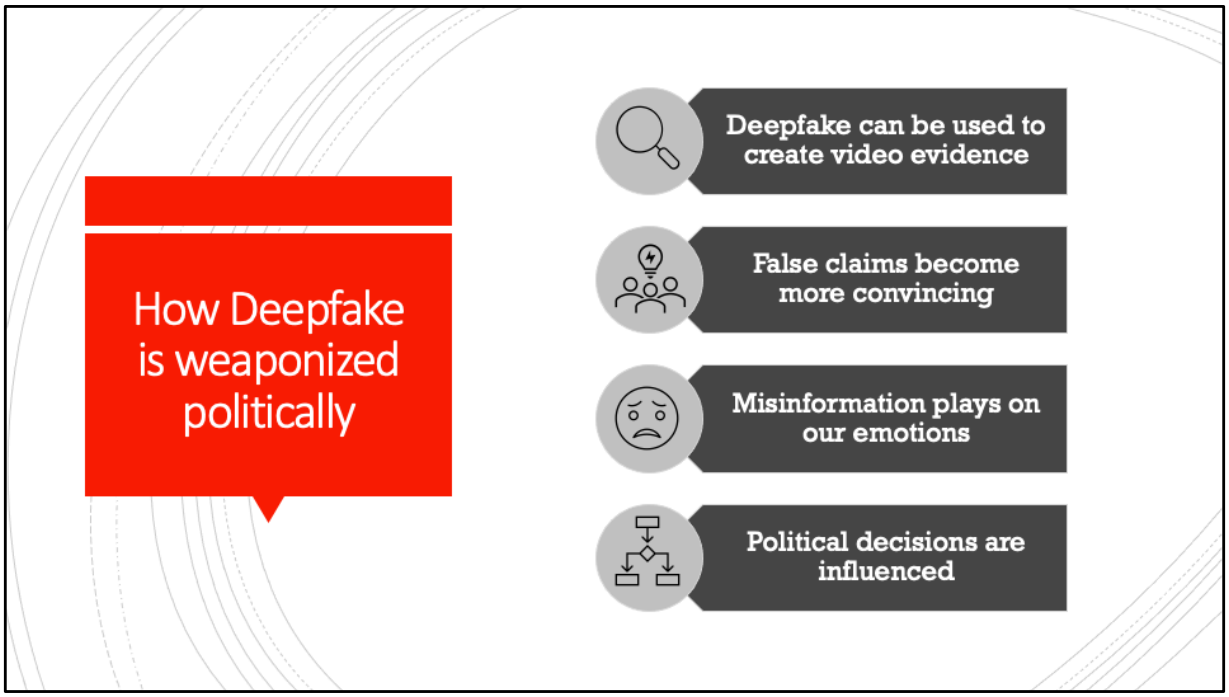
Social media users who view these deepfakes, which , given the high penetration and usage rate of social media, can essentially be generalized to the general public



Maya Angelou wrote I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings to encapsulate the systematic oppression of African Americans during the civil rights era. In her poem, she consistently contrasts freedom and captivity. Themes we can relate to in exploring Deepfake and its structural disempowerment through misinformation.

As such, I will be using this poem as the framework of my presentation, drawing comparisons between the bird in the poem and the general public.

And the caged bird sings with a fearful thrill



Deepfakes can be weaponized politically when they are used to create video evidence to support any claim.

These False claims become more convincing and more people are misled into false narratives.

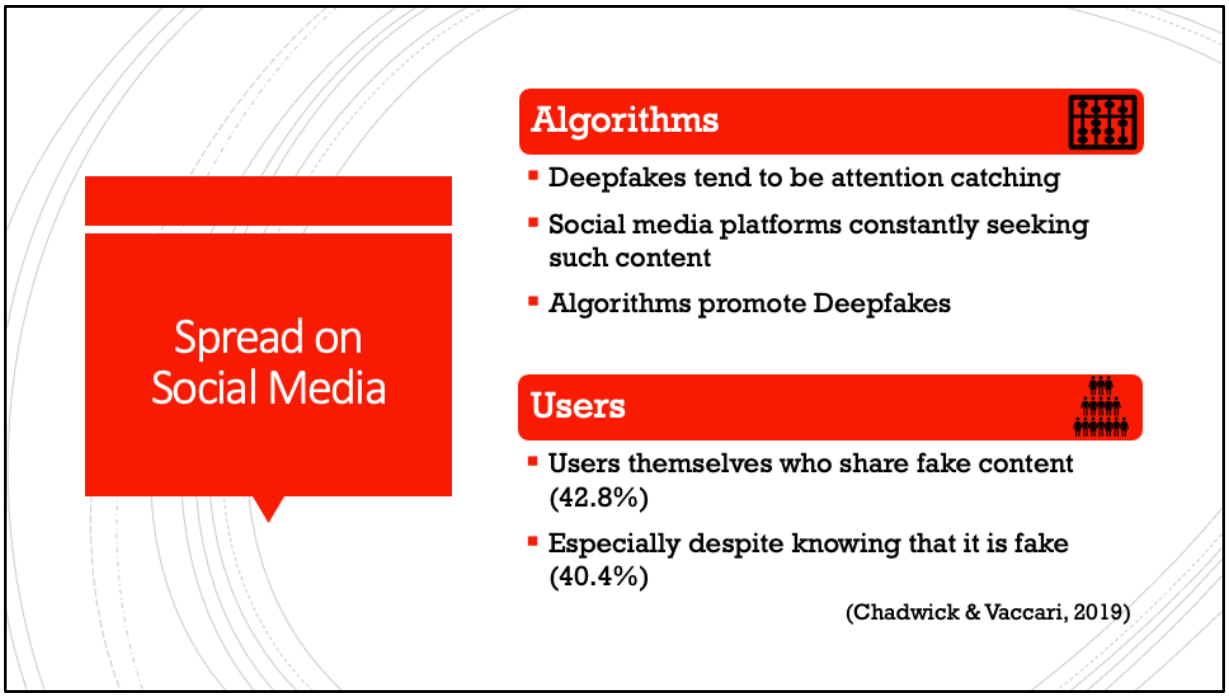
When we fall prey to Deepfakes, we become caged into a chamber of misinformation, misinformation which plays with our emotions.

Emotions like fear and hatred, inciting us to become more fearful and hateful of those different from us and of politicians who do not align with us.

These emotions go on to affect our decision-making process, influencing our political decisions and political actions.

Our voice too, is hijacked into one of fear and hate.

And his voice is heard
on the distant hill

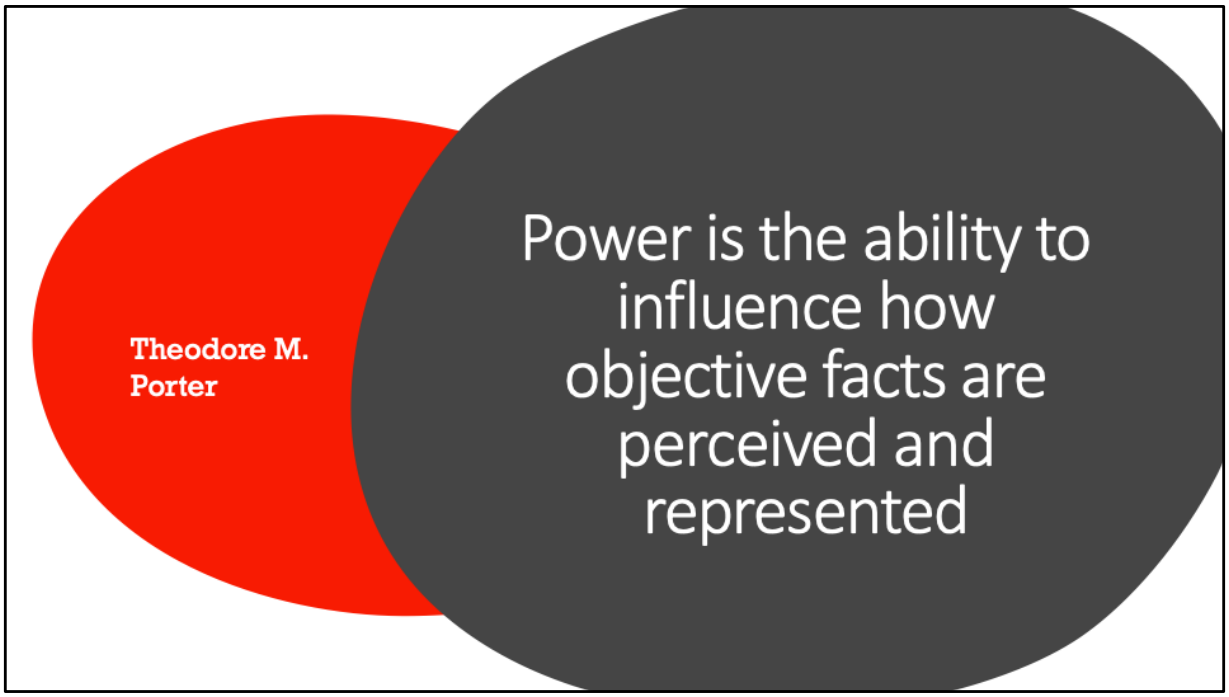


As Deepfake is propagated far and wide through social media, because of both algorithms and users themselves

Deepfakes tend to have an attention catching nature, since to play on our emotions they portray politicians saying something unthinkable or behaving in a scandalous manner.

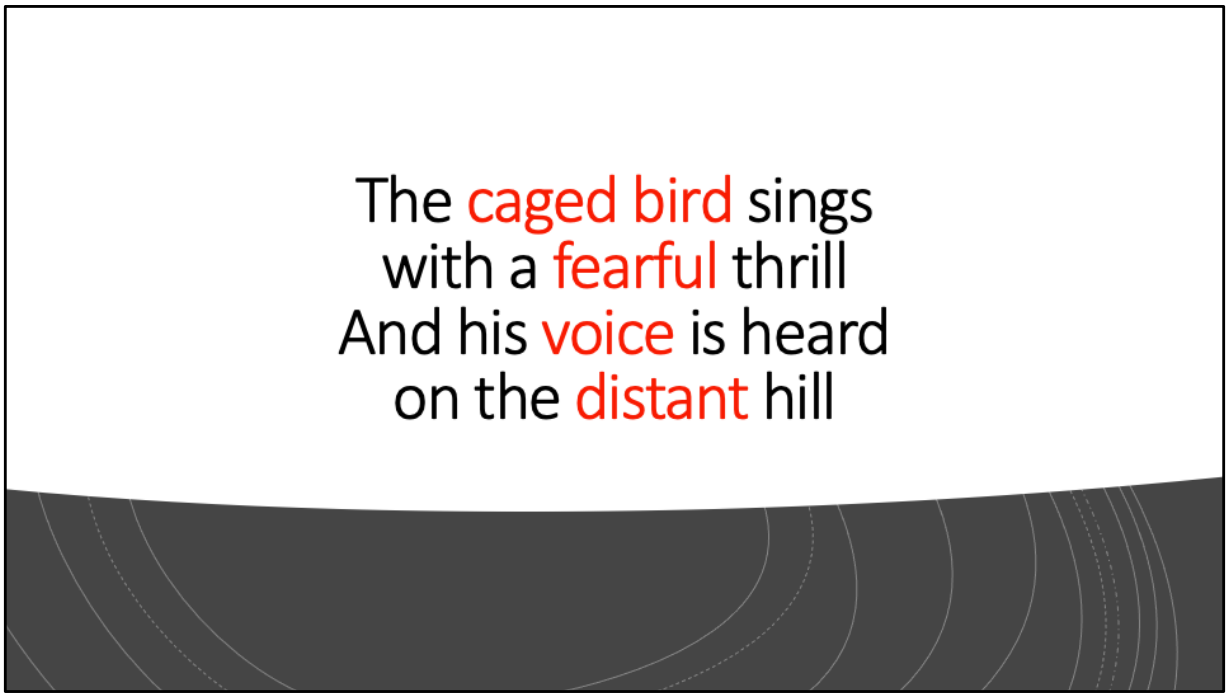
Social media platforms are constantly seeking content that lures user to continue spending time on their platform, and these Deepfakes feed right into their algorithms

Social media users themselves also help to spread Deepfakes when they share the content on their feeds. In a 2019 study in UK, 42.8% of users admitted to sharing inaccurate information with 40.4% of them going on to share misinformation despite knowing that it is fake.

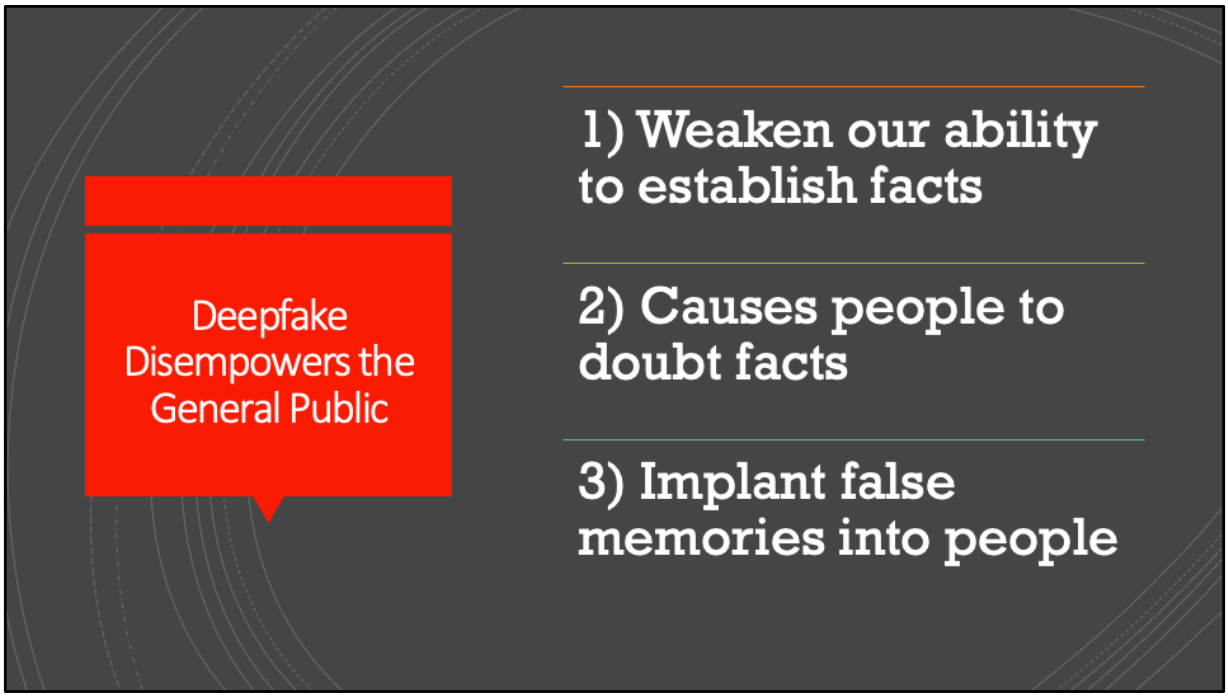


In his book “Trust in Numbers”, scientific historian Theodore M. Porter (1995) outlines one aspect of power as being able to influence how objective facts are represented and perceived.

By shifting how others perceive reality and what is contained within their set of objective facts, those who weaponize these Deepfakes are empowered when they convert others to subscribe to their false narratives.



Like the bird in the poem, people are caged. The cage, in this case, is the misinformation which arises from Deepfakes.
People thus 'sing' with a fearful thrill as Deepfakes prey on their emotions to incite fear and hatred.
Additionally, their fear lead them to share the Deepfakes on social media, resulting in fearmongering and even greater misinformation as social media exacerbates the speed at which these Deepfakes are shared, much like how the voice of the bird is heard on the distant hill



Due to its prevalence on social media, Deepfake disempowers the general public in three ways by …. …. ….

Seeing is believing, and photo and video evidence used to be solid in establishing facts. In fact, it was why General Eisenhower ordered the thorough documentation of the Holocaust, predicting the swaths of holocaust deniers.

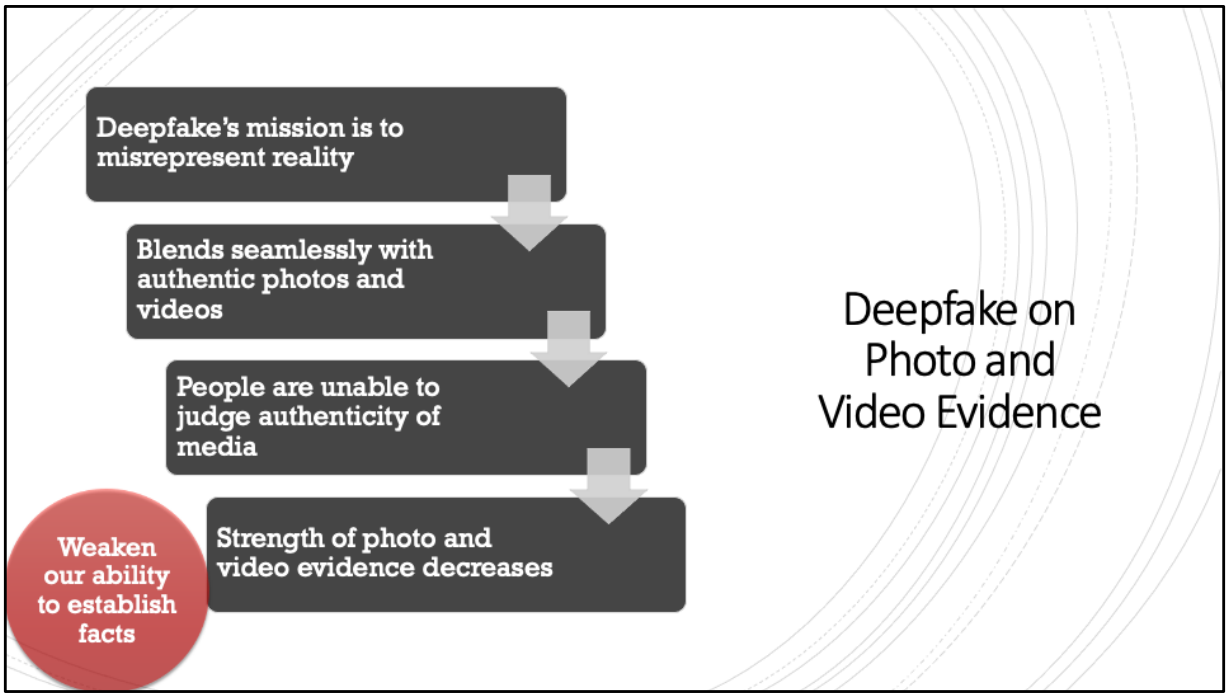
(Forrest Gump, 1994)

(Avenger's Endgame, 2019)

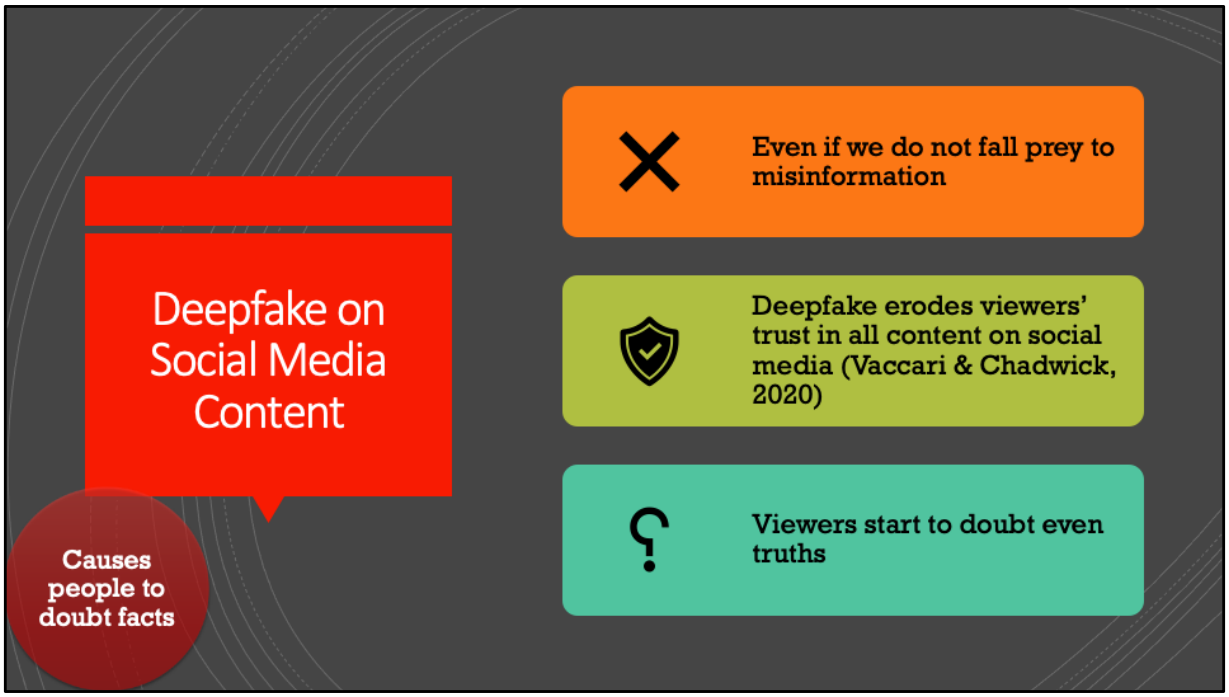
Weaken our ability to establish facts

Distinguishing Fiction from Reality

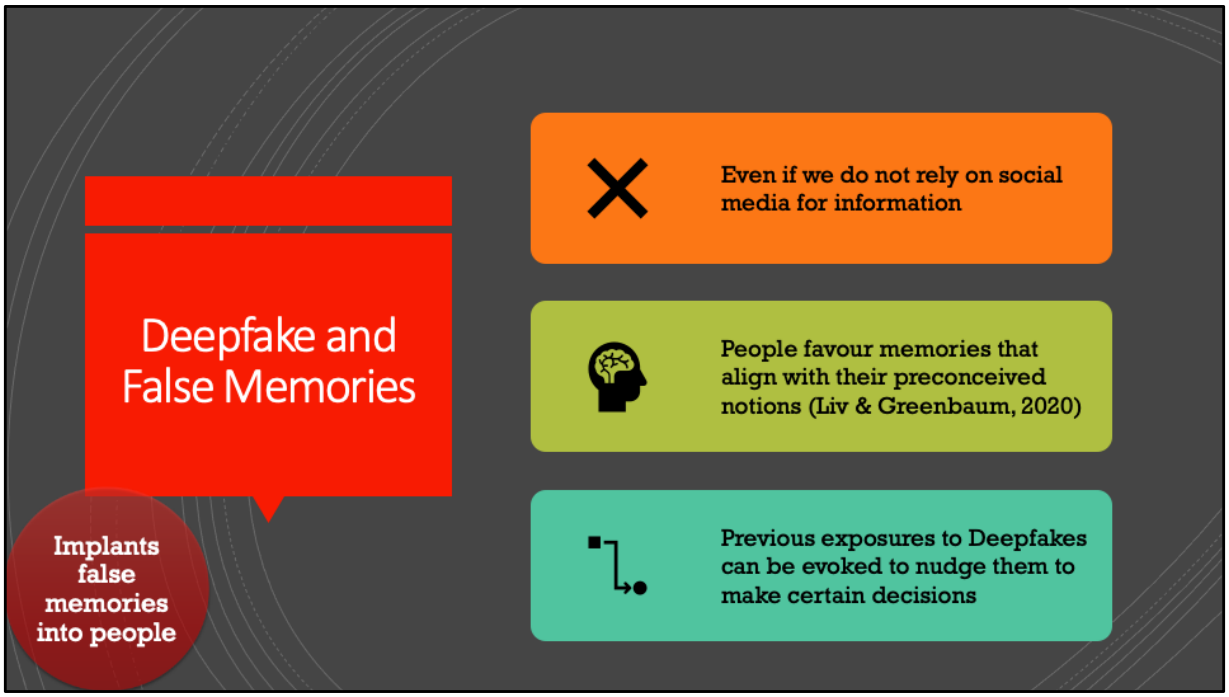
And while video editing technology and altered media was possible in the past for movie studios, they were clearly distinguished from reality, with no malicious intent.



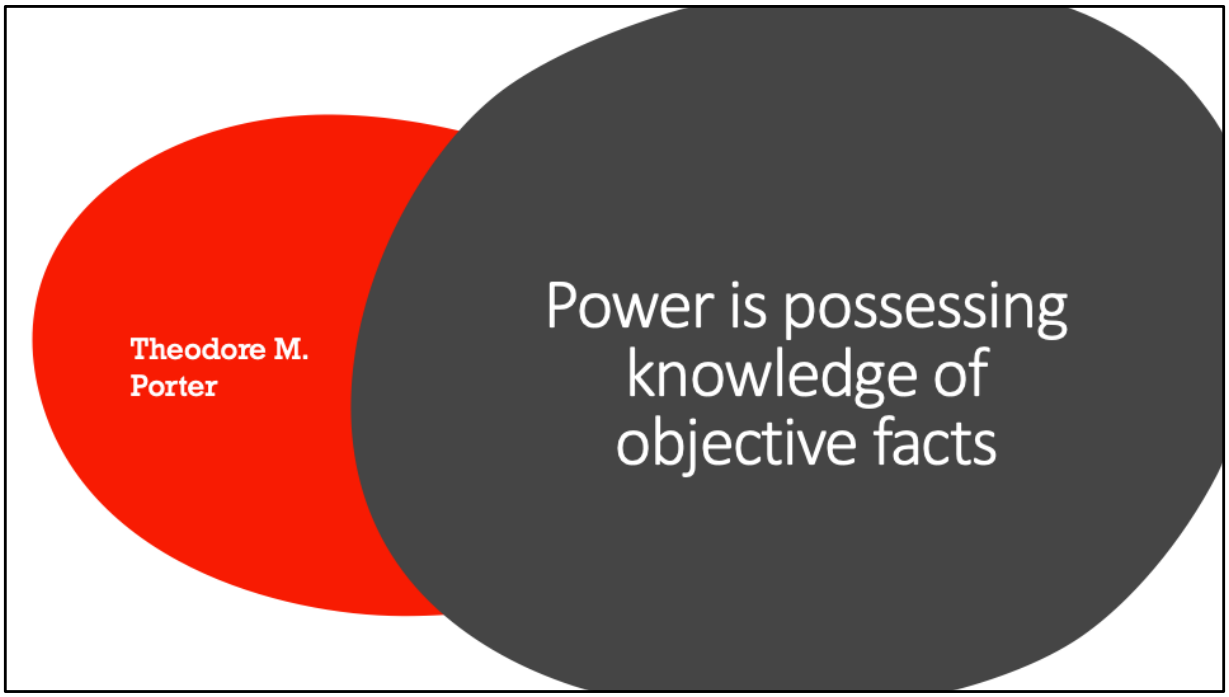
On the other hand, Deepfake's mission is to misrepresent reality. By blending in seamlessly with authentic media, people are less able to judge the origins of a media. When doubt over the authenticity of media increases, the strength of photo and video evidence decreases, and people are less able to establish facts and the general public is less certain of the truth.



Moving on to my second point, It is a common misconception that Deepfake has no effect on us as long as we do not fall prey to them. However, this could not be further from the truth.
Deepfake erodes the credibility of all information viewers come across on social media, including facts. People may begin to doubt important pieces of facts they come across on social media. These especially affects people who rely on social media for political information, who would gradually lose sight of the truth

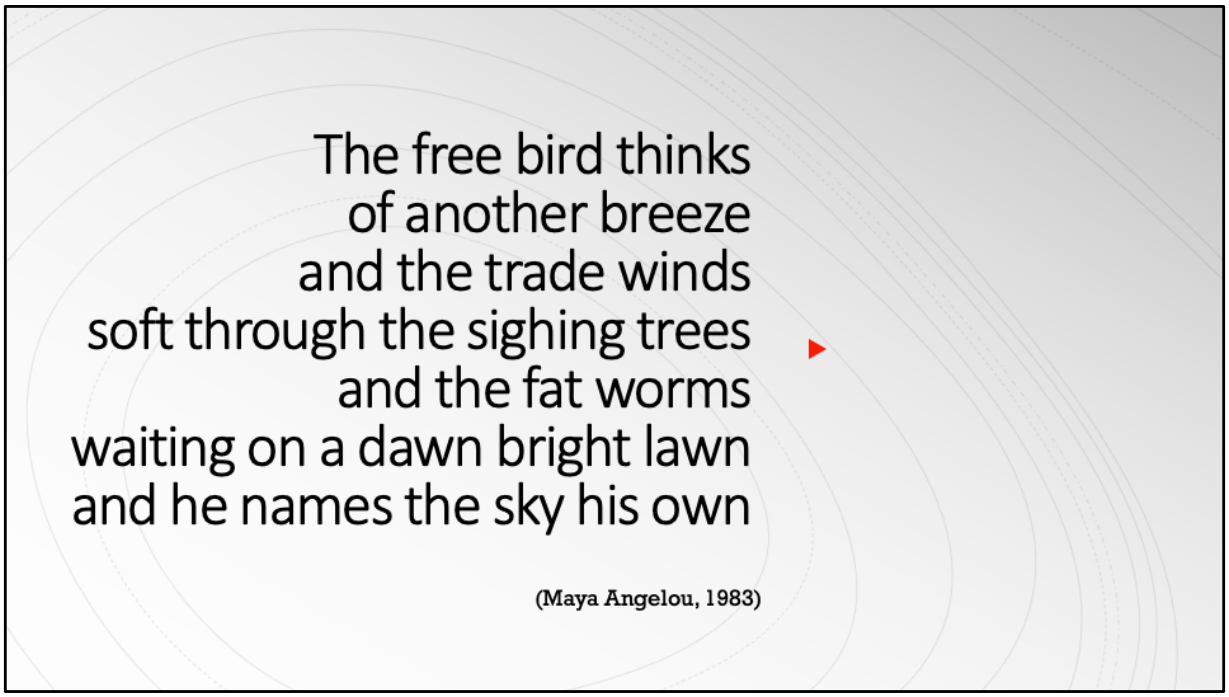


While the erosion of credibility of social media content may not affect those who are not reliant on social media to keep updated, Deepfake can in fact affect all its viewers by implanting false memories into its viewers. Since people favour memories that align with their preconceived notions, Deepfakes that push narratives which align with their preconceived notions can be evoked later on to nudge them to make certain decisions. This includes political ones, an area where people hold strong opinions and ideas despite not having full knowledge of the matter.



Theodore M. Porter outlines another aspect of power in the possession of objective facts. Deepfake causes people to not only be less certain of the truth, but also be more likely to believe lies. The general public is disempowered when Deepfake weakens their ability to ascertain the objectivity of facts, affecting their knowledge of facts.

Thus, like how the bird loses his freedom when his wings are clipped and his feet are tied, people lose their freedom to make their own objective, independent decisions as Deepfakes limit their ability to distinguish fiction from reality.



And ladies and gentlemen, seeing how Deepfake captures us into a chamber of misinformation, it is important for us to wrestle free from this form misinformation and stay a free bird. Thank you.