



UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

A CAPSTONE REPORT

ON

BLURRING THE LINES: AI, AUTHENTICITY, AND DIGITAL MEDIA

BY

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A REPORT SUBMITTED TO SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN  
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER'S  
IN MEDIA MANAGEMENT

DECEMBER 2025

## DECLARATION

I, Ernells Katernor, do hereby declare that except for references to other people's work which has been duly acknowledged, this work is the result of my own investigation under the supervision of Dr. Benedine Azanu. I also declare that as far as I am aware, this essay has not been presented in whole or part for another degree elsewhere.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This project examines the impact of synthetic media, such as AI-generated images, voices, and videos, on perceptions of truth and authenticity among individuals in Ghana. The main focus of the project is a seventeen-minute documentary film that looks at how a journalist, an educator, and content creators understand altered content and how these understandings affect trust in a digital world that is changing quickly. The documentary "Blurring the Lines: AI, Authenticity, and Digital Media" is the study's method and result. Interviews, observational scenes, and reflective narration in the movie show what Ghanaians who come into contact with synthetic media every day go through in real life. It shows how new kinds of digital manipulation are making it harder for people to figure out what is real by messing with the cultural cues and community values that have always helped them do so.

The documentary gets its background from the report that the movie is based on. It talks about how synthetic media is becoming more popular around the world and why this is a big deal in Ghana, where people often build trust through social networks, shared experiences, and relationships with other people in their community. The report also talks about the theoretical ideas that guided the project, like being able to read and write media and being real. It also talks about how making documentaries was a way to get people to think about things, ask questions, and get involved. The project's goals were to find out how people understand fake media, to look at the responsibilities of storytellers in a world where digital manipulation is common, and to make a movie that can help people talk about how to be media literate. Most of the work was about Ghanaian adults, everyday media, and qualitative storytelling. It didn't involve gathering a lot of data or doing technical analysis. The steps were planning, filming, editing, and sharing the

documentary. The end product is a seventeen-minute movie with things that make people think about its ideas. The project shows that synthetic media is a problem for people as well as for technology. It makes people less likely to believe what they see, how they talk to each other, and how they make sense of the world around them. The project uses movies to show these ideas, which helps people connect with a topic that is both relatable and culturally relevant and is becoming more and more important.

## **INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE**

In recent years, the rapid growth of artificial intelligence has transformed the way information is created, shared, and consumed (Duan et al., 2019). Synthetic media, particularly deepfakes and AI-generated audio or video, has emerged as one of the most disruptive innovations in digital communication (Amerini et al., 2025). While these technologies offer creative opportunities, they also raise serious concerns about authenticity, trust, and ethical responsibility. Globally, the development and dissemination of deepfake technology, powered by artificial intelligence (AI), have generated significant academic and public debate, particularly around ethics, privacy, etcetera. Deepfakes, which use AI to generate hyper-realistic but fake media, can be used to manipulate public opinion, spread misinformation, and harm individuals through the creation of non-consensual content.

Scholars like Chesney and Citron (2019) discuss how these technologies pose serious threats to democratic integrity, highlighting the vulnerability of political campaigns to the spread of synthetic media. Concerns over privacy have also been raised, particularly in relation to deepfake pornography and the non-consensual use of individuals' likenesses for malicious purposes (Lake, 2024). Furthermore, debates in the literature emphasize the need for regulation and governance frameworks to address these challenges. Singh & Dhumane, (2025) argue that while AI technology can have significant societal benefits, it also requires careful oversight, including the development of deepfake detection tools, legal regulations to penalize malicious use, and international cooperation to prevent the misuse of AI-generated content. This approach, combining technology, law, and ethics, has emerged as essential in confronting the challenges posed by deepfakes. Temir, 2020; Iosifidis & Nicoli, 2020; Ahmed, 2025 among others have also warned that manipulated content can destabilize democratic processes, erode confidence in journalism, and create confusion in everyday social interactions.

In Ghana, the media plays a central role in shaping public opinion, and the infiltration of synthetic content into these spaces threatens not only individual judgment but also collective cohesion (Darkwa et al, 2024). Already, examples of manipulated audio and video clips circulating on social platforms have sparked debates, highlighting the urgency of understanding how synthetic media affects perceptions of truth in the Ghanaian context (Agunwa & Cobbinah (2024). For example, during the 2024 election campaign in Ghana, a political controversy arose after a video circulated online purportedly showing Dr. Matthew Opoku Prempeh, the vice-presidential candidate of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), assuring small-scale miners that seized excavators would be returned and that their activities would face no government interference. The footage quickly went viral and sparked intense public debate, given Ghana's longstanding efforts to combat illegal mining (galamsey) and its associated environmental degradation. Environmental activists and civil society organizations expressed concern over the apparent policy implications of the statement, while journalists sought clarification. However, before independent verification could be completed, Dr. Opoku Prempeh's campaign team dismissed the video as doctored, further amplifying public skepticism and highlighting the role of contested digital media content in contemporary political communication (Agunwa & Cobbinah (2024).

While scholars such as Sharma (2025), Kwarkye (2025), and Danso and Hanson (2023) have explored the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in sectors like healthcare, agriculture, education, and financial services in Ghana, there remains a significant gap in research regarding AI's impact on the media industry, particularly in terms of authenticity and digital content creation. While AI has been shown to drive innovation and efficiency in other industries, its effect on media authenticity, especially concerning AI-generated content such as deepfakes and AI-assisted journalism, has yet to be sufficiently studied in the Ghanaian context. As AI technologies continue to evolve, they pose challenges to public trust and the credibility of

digital media, raising critical questions about the intersection of truth and fiction in an increasingly digital world (Feher, 2025). This gap becomes especially pertinent as Ghana's digital landscape grows, but regulatory frameworks and media literacy remain underdeveloped. By focusing on how AI shapes perceptions of truth and authenticity within digital media in Ghana, this study seeks to provide new insights into how AI is blurring the lines between reality and manipulation in emerging economies.

## **BACKGROUND**

Artificial intelligence is transforming media production in powerful and measurable ways. In Ghana, as well as countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and the United States, new AI systems can now generate voices, images, and moving pictures that look and sound convincingly human. Research shows that modern generative models can mimic local accents, reproduce cultural environments, and fabricate realistic speech patterns with increasing precision (Chesney & Citron, 2019). Studies on synthetic media production in Africa reveal that AI tools are being adopted rapidly across West and East Africa, enabling the creation of localized digital characters and believable manipulated audio that can easily blend into everyday communication networks (Westerlund, 2019; Fallis, 2021). The growing influence of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital media manipulation was unmistakably evident in the lead-up to the 2024 elections. A series of fabricated audio recordings emerged online, purportedly featuring secret conversations between the two main presidential candidates, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia and John Mahama. These audios falsely suggested that the candidates had incited violence and planned to exploit ethnic conflicts to manipulate the election outcome. One of the most striking instances involved a fake conversation between John Mahama and an electoral officer, in which they allegedly discussed rigging the elections in the strongholds of the incumbent government (MFWA, 2024).

These incidents underscore the critical role that AI-driven media manipulation plays in distorting public perception, particularly in emerging economies like Ghana, where digital literacy and regulatory frameworks around AI remain underdeveloped. The ability of AI to create realistic yet entirely fabricated content highlights the urgent need to understand its impact on media authenticity and public trust in digital platforms. People replayed the clip, forwarded it to friends, and responded with urgency. Long before journalists and verification teams could intervene, the damage had begun. The synthetic voice had already shaped opinions

and triggered emotional reactions. This single clip demonstrated how quickly manipulated content can slip into public conversation and erode trust in national institutions (Westerlund, 2019).

AI's growing influence raises urgent questions about authorship, authenticity, and responsibility. Deepfake technology is especially concerning because it combines high technical precision with emotional impact. When audiences hear a familiar voice delivering a controversial message, emotional reactions often arrive before scepticism. This makes synthetic misinformation more persuasive and much harder to challenge (Fallis, 2021; Chesney & Citron, 2019). In public life, these challenges carry serious consequences. Elections, governance, and national discourse rely on trust, transparency, and reliable communication. When AI-generated content such as deepfake videos, fabricated audio recordings, or manipulated social media posts circulates widely, that trust becomes fragile. A single manipulated clip can influence public opinion, intensify divisions, or create false narratives that linger long after they are disproven (Temir, 2020). These AI-generated creations reshape the stories people tell about their leaders, their communities, and themselves. When synthetic narratives blend seamlessly with authentic ones, citizens struggle to separate the real from the artificial. The result is a climate of uncertainty where doubt becomes instinctive. People begin to question genuine evidence or dismiss real events as fabricated. This erosion of shared reality threatens social cohesion and collective decision-making (2020).

As AI continues to evolve, society faces an urgent responsibility to understand the technology and its impacts. The same tools that expand creativity also open the door to manipulation and distrust. Individuals and institutions must therefore take active steps to educate the public about the risks of AI-generated media, develop better detection systems to identify fake content, and establish ethical guidelines for AI use. By prioritizing media literacy, strengthening regulatory frameworks, and fostering transparency, we can better navigate the complexities of an AI-

driven world. How do we protect truth in a world where anything can be forged, and everything can be questioned? This documentary will explore how synthetic media is created in Ghana, how it spreads, how it influences public belief, and how individuals and institutions in the country can respond. Through real stories, expert insights, and vivid examples, it will guide viewers through the rising impact of artificial intelligence in Ghana and reveal the urgent need for awareness, resilience, and responsible innovation within the nation.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Aim of the Film**

The overarching aim of this documentary project is to investigate how synthetic media is reshaping perceptions of authenticity and trust in Ghana and to use filmmaking as both a research method and a public engagement tool. The project seeks to demonstrate how documentary storytelling can translate a complex digital issue into a human-centered narrative that resonates with Ghanaian audiences, stimulates critical reflection, and strengthens media literacy across diverse communities.

### **Objectives of the Film**

The documentary aims to investigate how synthetic media, including deepfakes and manipulated content, is created and spread within Ghana and to analyze its impact on public trust and perception. By using real-world examples, expert insights, and human-centered storytelling, the film seeks to raise awareness about the growing influence of artificial intelligence on media, highlighting the risks and challenges it poses to the integrity of public discourse. Furthermore, the documentary will use filmmaking as a tool to promote media literacy, encouraging critical reflection and fostering a broader dialogue on how individuals, institutions, and policymakers in Ghana can responsibly engage with and regulate synthetic media to safeguard truth and trust in digital spaces. In addition, the project will reflect critically on the filmmaking process itself, acknowledging that documentary filmmaking is not neutral. Every creative choice, whether it is camera angle, editing rhythm, sound design, or narrative framing, shapes how audiences interpret truth. These objectives foster reflexivity, allowing the filmmaker to examine how their decisions influence meaning, representation, and authenticity within the documentary.

## **SCOPE OF THE PROJECT**

This project investigates how synthetic media influences perceptions of authenticity and trust in Ghana, using documentary filmmaking as both a research method and a creative medium. The scope is intentionally structured to ensure that the study remains focused, ethically grounded, and achievable within the academic timeline, while still offering meaningful insights into a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

### **Geographical Scope**

The project is situated within Ghana, with a primary focus on urban and peri-urban communities such as Accra and Tema, where digital media consumption is high. These areas provide a rich environment for exploring how people encounter, interpret, and respond to synthetic media. Although the themes may resonate across Africa, the project does not attempt to generalize findings beyond the Ghanaian context. Instead, it prioritizes local voices, cultural nuances, and community-specific experiences.

### **Thematic Scope**

The documentary explores three themes. The first theme examines public perceptions of synthetic media in Ghana. It investigates how ordinary Ghanaians perceive and interpret manipulated content, particularly deepfakes and other forms of synthetic media. The film will explore how people distinguish between real and fabricated visuals, focusing on their ability to identify AI-generated content. Additionally, it will examine how these perceptions influence their trust in the media, political institutions, and social networks. By focusing on how Ghanaians engage with and react to synthetic media, the documentary seeks to highlight the challenges faced by society in distinguishing fact from fiction in an increasingly digital and manipulated world.

The documentary also explores the ethical responsibilities of filmmakers, journalists, and content creators in an age where AI has the power to distort reality. It will examine how these

media professionals navigate ethical boundaries when creating or sharing content, particularly in relation to transparency, accuracy, and fairness. The film will delve into the challenges they face in ensuring that their work does not contribute to misinformation or manipulation. Additionally, the documentary will address the filmmaker's own responsibility in maintaining integrity throughout the production process, ensuring that the portrayal of issues such as synthetic media remains truthful and avoids misleading or biased representations.

### **Methodological Scope**

This project will use qualitative filmmaking methods to explore the complex impact of synthetic media in Ghana. Qualitative filmmaking refers to an approach that emphasizes the exploration of human experiences and social phenomena through visual storytelling. It utilizes non-numerical data, such as interviews, observational footage, and personal narratives, to capture the subjective realities of individuals (Gupta, 2019). Observational filming will capture real-life interactions and reactions to AI-generated content in natural settings, offering authentic insights into how people engage with digital media in their daily lives. Additionally, the project will incorporate sounds and visual metaphors to convey abstract concepts, such as the blending of real and synthetic media, providing a sensory experience that complements the intellectual exploration of the topic. Finally, the documentary will feature reflexive narration and editing, allowing the filmmaker to critically engage with the research process and demonstrate how the creative decisions shape the representation of truth and authenticity in the documentary. These methods are designed to bridge the gap between theory and lived experience, creating a rich, multidimensional narrative that engages both the mind and emotions of the audience.

### **Participant Scope**

The participants in this project will be individuals aged 18 and above who engage with digital media in their daily lives. These include journalist, educator and content creators. These

participants are chosen to provide a diverse range of perspectives on how synthetic media influences public trust and perception in Ghana. The project does not involve minors or vulnerable populations, ensuring that ethical risks are minimized and that informed consent can be obtained from all participants. By focusing on this demographic, the project aims to explore the experiences and insights of individuals who are directly affected by or involved in the digital media landscape, without placing undue risk on more vulnerable groups.

### **Creative Scope**

The documentary centers on real stories, real voices, and real environments to provide an authentic portrayal of the issues surrounding synthetic media in Ghana. It explicitly avoids using synthetic media in any way that might deceive or mislead viewers. Any AI-generated elements included in the film are used transparently and solely for demonstration and educational purposes. The creative boundaries of the project are strictly defined: there will be no staged misinformation, no deceptive editing, and no reenactments that could mislead the audience into accepting fabricated narratives as truth. Additionally, the film is committed to a respectful representation of participants and cultural contexts, ensuring that all voices are portrayed with integrity. Throughout the production process, ethical storytelling remains the top priority, aligning with the project's overarching goal of fostering trust, media literacy, and transparency.

### **Practical Scope**

The project will extend to a range of practical applications, including public screenings, classroom discussions, media literacy workshops, community dialogues, and academic presentations. These platforms will provide opportunities for engaging with diverse audiences and fostering critical discussions about synthetic media and its impact on trust and perception. However, the project does not aim to implement nationwide policy reforms or long-term behavioral interventions. Instead, it seeks to offer valuable insights and recommendations that

can inform educators, policymakers, and media practitioners, helping them develop more effective strategies for addressing the challenges posed by synthetic media in their respective fields.

### **Time Scope**

The time scope of the project covers the period from November 1st to November 30th, during which the filming, editing, and analysis phases took place. Prior to November, research, location scouting, and pre-production planning took place to ensure that the documentary production was ready for execution within this timeframe. The project focuses solely on this one-month period and does not aim to track long-term changes in audience behaviour or the lasting impact of synthetic media beyond the project's duration. The emphasis remains on gathering and analyzing insights within the specified timeframe of the study.

### **Conceptual Scope**

The project is grounded in established theories and principles that guide the exploration of synthetic media's impact. It draws on media literacy theory, which emphasizes the critical evaluation and creation of media content to empower individuals to engage with media in an informed and responsible manner. According to Leu et al. (2004), media literacy involves not just accessing but also analyzing, evaluating, and creating media messages, helping individuals understand their influence on public perceptions and behaviour. The project also incorporates authenticity theory, which examines how people perceive and evaluate the truthfulness of content in the digital age, particularly in the context of synthetic media.

Additionally, the project follows core documentary storytelling principles, ensuring that the narrative is both compelling and ethically sound. While the project does not seek to develop new theories of synthetic media, it applies these established frameworks to the Ghanaian context through creative practice, aiming to provide insights into how global media trends affect local audiences.

## **THEORETICALFRAMEWORK / CONCEPTUAL JUSTIFICATION**

This project is grounded in media literacy theory, which emphasizes the ability to critically access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content. As defined by Leu et al., (2004), media literacy involves not only accessing media but also engaging with it critically to understand its influence on public perceptions and behaviour. In an age where digital manipulation is increasingly prevalent, media literacy is essential for helping audiences navigate the complexities of synthetic media. This theory provides a framework for examining how audiences interpret synthetic media, particularly AI-generated content, and how they distinguish between real and manipulated information (Mihailidis, 2014). The project applies media literacy theory in two keyways. First, it shapes the research by exploring how Ghanaians engage with and interpret synthetic media, especially how such media impacts their trust in digital platforms and institutions. Second, media literacy theory informs the documentary's structure, guiding creative decisions such as interviews, visual metaphors, and sound design. These elements are intentionally crafted to encourage viewers to critically question the authenticity of what they see and hear, and to promote deeper reflection on the role of synthetic media in public discourse. By using media literacy theory as a guiding framework, this documentary does more than just highlight the rise of synthetic media. It serves as a practical demonstration of media literacy in action, allowing viewers to reflect on the broader societal impact of digital content manipulation. The documentary will expose how easily public perception can be shaped by manipulated media, reinforcing the urgent need for critical engagement with digital media. As such, media literacy becomes not just a theoretical concept but a tool for empowering audiences to navigate the complexities of the digital landscape and to protect the integrity of public discourse (Leu et al., 2004; Mihailidis, 2014).

### **Documentary Practice as a Research Method**

Documentary filmmaking serves as a methodological framework for this project, combining both qualitative research and storytelling in a way that written texts alone cannot achieve. Unlike traditional research methods, film allows for the capture of emotion, nuance, and lived experience, providing a more holistic understanding of complex issues like synthetic media. Through interviews, observational footage, and soundscapes, the documentary gathers qualitative data, transforming that data into an accessible narrative that resonates with viewers. The camera acts both as an investigative tool and a storytelling device, allowing for the exploration of themes such as media manipulation and authenticity in ways that are both analytical and emotionally engaging. The use of documentary filmmaking as a research method is supported by existing scholarship in media studies and qualitative research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Gubrium & Holstein, 2012), which argues that film provides a powerful tool for ethnographic inquiry and narrative construction. This dual role of film, capturing both data and storytelling, justifies its use as a legitimate research method. In the context of this project, the documentary does not just present information about synthetic media but translates complex and abstract concepts into human stories, making them more tangible and relatable for a broader audience.

### **Justification for Using Media Literacy Theory**

The combination of media literacy theory with documentary filmmaking creates a robust framework for addressing the challenges posed by synthetic media. Media literacy theory is central to understanding how individuals critically engage with and analyze media content, especially in an era where digital manipulation is becoming more sophisticated. Scholars such as Mihailidis (2014) argue that media literacy is essential for enabling audiences to navigate complex digital environments and discern fact from fiction in an age of information overload. In this project, media literacy theory helps explain how Ghanaians interpret synthetic media

and how this interpretation influences their trust in both media and institutions. This theory also informs the narrative structure of the documentary, guiding creative decisions such as the use of visual metaphors, soundscapes, and interviews that provoke viewers to question the authenticity of what they encounter. The justification for using media literacy theory in this context is grounded in its ability to empower audiences. As Leu et al., (2004) highlight, media literacy is not just about understanding media messages but about creating critical citizens who can actively engage with and question the media they consume. By integrating this theory into the documentary's research and storytelling process, the project does more than inform it seeks to educate viewers. The use of documentary filmmaking to apply media literacy theory allows for a creative exploration of how synthetic media impacts everyday life, encouraging viewers to reflect, question, and engage with the blurred lines between real and artificial content. In combining media literacy theory with documentary practice, this project creates a space where theoretical knowledge meets realworld application, positioning the film as both a research tool and a platform for social impact. It aligns with current scholarly trends in critical media studies, where film is used not only to present information but also to instigate social change and foster deeper media awareness (Mihailidis, 2014). This integration ensures that the documentary remains rooted in rigorous scholarship while addressing the lived experiences of its audience, making it a powerful tool for media literacy in Ghana.

## **METHODOLOGIES/PRODUCTION PROCESS**

This project employs qualitative documentary methods that prioritize interviews and lived experiences. The aim is to capture the emotional and cultural dimensions of AI's impact on the Ghanaian public, making complex issues accessible and relatable to a general audience. In doing so, the documentary presents a nuanced exploration of how synthetic media shapes public perception, emphasizing the personal and communal effects over statistical data. Field

recordings and visual metaphors are incorporated to enhance the authenticity of the narrative, fostering a deeper emotional resonance with the audience. Additionally, the accompanying written report bridges the creative practice with scholarly inquiry, providing an academic context for the visual material (Balogun et al, 2025).

### **Technical Execution**

The technical execution of the documentary plays a crucial role in conveying the themes of authenticity, manipulation, and trust in relation to synthetic media. Throughout the production, various filming techniques were employed to ensure the visual style reinforced these thematic concerns. Close-up shots were used strategically to capture the personal emotions of participants, adding a sense of intimacy and vulnerability, while wide shots were employed to provide broader context, showing how individuals interact with larger media systems in Ghana. This contrast between close-up and wide shots helped to communicate the tension between the individual and society, a central theme of the documentary. Handheld shots were used during interviews to create a sense of immediacy and dynamism, reflecting the real-world urgency of the issues discussed, while stabilized shots in formal settings like classrooms conveyed a more structured, authoritative perspective. The sound design further enriched the production, with ambient sounds recorded in real environments to reflect the authentic background noise of the spaces where interviews and fieldwork occurred. This approach grounded the documentary in Ghanaian reality, providing cultural context, while voiceovers and narrative cues were added to clarify the themes and guide the audience through the complexities of misinformation. In postproduction, careful editing allowed for smooth pacing between interviews and field footage, balancing emotional highs and lows to maintain viewer engagement and encourage critical reflection. Techniques like overlaying blurred imagery symbolized the uncertainty and ambivalence surrounding synthetic media, effectively mirroring the blurring of truth in an age of manipulated content. The overall technical execution ensured that every decision whether

related to camera work, sound design, or to deepen the audience's understanding of the challenges posed by synthetic media and to foster critical engagement with the issue of information manipulation in Ghanaian society.

### **Pre-production**

Pre-production was a critical phase that laid the foundation for the documentary's thematic and narrative structure. Interviews on Ghana's media ecosystem was conducted to understand how misinformation spreads, the factors influencing public interpretation of truth, and the cultural and technological conditions that shape these processes. This research helped refine the central theme of the documentary: the blurred boundaries between real and synthetic media. To further shape the direction of the film, a script was created to map out the visual and narrative trajectory, ensuring a coherent and impactful delivery of the film's message. The interview prompts were carefully crafted to elicit thoughtful and reflective responses from participants, even though we conducted mass interview, we settled on 4 experts in various fields, who shed more light on the subject these participants include a journalist, an educator, and content creators. The names of interviewees are as follows:

Ameyaw Deborah (Journalist), Mark Attah Mensah (Lecturer and AI Researcher, University of Ghana), Dessy Ofori Appiah (Content Creator and IT Professional) and Emmanuel Obuobi Fianko (Tech & AI Content Creator) These participants provided valuable insights into how synthetic media influences their understanding of information. The visual metaphors and sound design elements were planned to reinforce the thematic concerns of uncertainty and manipulation, with imagery such as AI generated visuals and layered sounds symbolizing the challenges in discerning truth in the digital age. Logistical planning was also an essential part of pre-production. Interviews were arranged with a diverse range of participants, and suitable locations were identified to ensure that the documentary's settings accurately reflected the everyday Ghanaian experience. These included computer labs, classrooms, studios and

community spaces where discussions around media, information, and authenticity commonly take place. Technical preparations also played a significant role; equipment such as cameras, microphones, and lighting kits were carefully chosen, and shot plans were created to balance emotional intimacy with context, using closeup shots to capture personal emotions and wide shots to show broader societal influences. Through these meticulous pre-production steps, a clear vision for the documentary was established, providing a structured framework for production and ensuring that the final product would be engaging and thought-provoking for the audience.

### **Production**

The production phase of the documentary was a dynamic and collaborative process, during which the thematic and technical elements established during pre-production were brought to life. Filming took place in real-world settings, with interviews conducted in various environments that reflected the cultural and social contexts of the participants. Production rooms, labs, and studios were chosen deliberately for their relevance to the themes of media, misinformation, and public trust. The camera work was designed to capture both the intimacy of personal experiences and the broader societal implications of synthetic media. Close-up shots were used to emphasize the emotional depth of interviewees, allowing their voices and expressions to connect with the audience, while wide shots placed individuals within the larger context of the media landscape, showing how they navigate the challenges of misinformation. The use of handheld cameras in more intimate settings, such as one-on-one interviews, created a sense of immediacy and engagement, while static, stabilized shots in more formal spaces, such as classrooms or public forums, helped convey authority and structure. Sound was another crucial component of the production, with ambient sounds carefully recorded from the environments to enrich the film's authenticity. The sound design was integrated into the footage to highlight key moments, while layered soundscapes and voiceovers were used to reinforce

the central theme of uncertainty and manipulation. These technical choices worked in tandem to create a visually and emotionally engaging narrative that guided the audience through the complex issues surrounding synthetic media.

Throughout the production process, all decisions were made with the intention of maintaining the documentary's commitment to authenticity, transparency, and cultural resonance, ensuring that the final product would spark reflection, provoke critical thinking, and enhance media literacy in the Ghanaian context.

### **Post-production**

The post-production phase was critical in shaping the final narrative of the documentary and ensuring that the core themes of authenticity, manipulation, and media trust were effectively communicated. During this stage, the raw footage was systematically reviewed and edited, with a focus on creating a cohesive storyline that would engage the audience and enhance thematic clarity. The editing process drew on established practices in documentary storytelling (Coleman, 2025), emphasizing the selection of key interview moments and the arrangement of scenes to maintain an emotional and logical flow. Sound design was another critical element, where ambient sounds, voiceovers, and music were layered to strengthen the emotional tone of the film (Murch, 2001). Transitions between scenes were paced deliberately to balance moments of emotional intensity with reflective pauses, aligning with narrative pacing theories in film (Bordwell & Thompson, 2016), which recommend varied pacing to engage viewers and foster emotional connection. The final colour grading and sound mixing were carried out with a focus on consistency and aesthetic coherence, ensuring that all visual and auditory elements contributed to the documentary's overarching message. The editing process adhered to the principles of authenticity and transparency, ensuring that the real-world experiences shared by participants were preserved and presented with integrity. By grounding these

techniques in established documentary practices and theoretical frameworks, the final product aimed to inform, challenge perceptions, and foster media literacy within the Ghanaian context

### **Emerging Themes from the Film**

The documentary highlights several key themes that emerged from the exploration of synthetic media in Ghana. One of the central themes is authenticity and trust, focusing on how Ghanaian audiences navigate the complexities of distinguishing between real and synthetic content in an increasingly digital landscape. The film highlights how trust is built or undermined through social networks, word of mouth, and shared cultural knowledge. As AI generated media, particularly deepfakes, becomes more prevalent, traditional methods of verifying truth are disrupted, leading to potential confusion and mistrust. This theme explores the impact of synthetic media on public perception and how it challenges the ways communities in Ghana authenticate information. Another significant theme that emerged is ethical responsibility. The documentary explores the obligations of content creators, journalists, and media consumers when it comes to producing, sharing, and verifying AI-generated content. It raises questions about accountability, particularly in a world where synthetic media can spread rapidly and influence public opinion. The film underscores the ethical challenges that arise when content can be used to manipulate or deceive audiences, emphasizing the need for greater awareness and responsibility in the creation and dissemination of digital media.

The theme of media literacy and critical thinking also emerged as a crucial aspect of the film. The documentary emphasizes the importance of education and critical evaluation skills in helping individuals navigate digital spaces. It demonstrates how media literacy empowers audiences to recognize manipulated content, question sources, and make informed judgments about what they consume online. This theme also acknowledges the paradox of media literacy, where increased awareness of synthetic media can sometimes erode trust in authentic content, further complicating the ability to discern truth from fabrication. The film calls for a balanced

approach to media literacy, one that encourages scepticism while promoting trust in reliable sources. Finally, the documentary highlights the role of cultural context and social norms in shaping responses to synthetic media in Ghana. The film explores how local norms, community verification practices, and social cohesion influence how synthetic content is received and interpreted. By grounding the discussion of AI and deepfakes in the realities of everyday life in Ghana, the film emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural contexts into global discussions on digital media and AI ethics. It argues for locally relevant approaches to media literacy and digital responsibility that align with the unique social and cultural dynamics of Ghanaian society.

### **Motifs**

The documentary employs recurring visual and auditory motifs as formal devices that structure how meaning is experienced rather than explicitly stated. Blurred imagery is used to establish a visual rhythm that encourages hesitation and critical viewing, prompting audiences to question images before accepting them as truthful. Layered sound, combining natural voices with digital distortion, creates an atmosphere of mediation and interference, signalling the presence of technological manipulation without overt explanation. The juxtaposition of traditional elements such as kente cloth, stools, and market scenes with smartphones, social media interfaces, and AI-generated visuals anchors abstract digital concerns within familiar cultural settings. Silence is strategically placed during moments of pause or hesitation, allowing ambiguity to linger and giving viewers space to reflect. Collectively, these motifs operate at a sensory level, shaping perception through mood, pacing, and form, and reinforcing the documentary's concerns through experience rather than exposition.

## OUTPUT

The central output of this project is a seventeen- minute documentary film that captures how Ghanaians are experiencing and responding to the rise of synthetic media. The film stands as the main expression of the project's purpose, translating complex ideas about truth, trust, and digital manipulation into a visual story that feels real, relatable, and grounded in everyday life.

The documentary, titled *Blurring the Lines: AI, Authenticity, and Digital Media*, follows a clear narrative path built around the voices of journalists, educators, students, and ordinary media users. Over its seventeen minutes, the film blends interviews, natural soundscapes, and observational scenes to show how people encounter manipulated content and how these encounters shape their understanding of what is real. Instead of relying on technical explanations, the film focuses on human reactions; moments of doubt, curiosity, confusion, and reflection that reveal how synthetic media is quietly influencing daily communication. The story unfolds in familiar Ghanaian settings: studios, markets where conversations flow freely, computer labs where young people debate what they see online, and streets where messages spread quickly through social networks. These environments help viewers understand how deeply media is woven into everyday life and how easily synthetic content can travel through trusted circles.

To help audiences grasp the nature of synthetic media, the film includes simple, transparent demonstrations of how images and voices can be altered. These moments are handled with care, not to shock viewers but to show how subtle manipulation can be. The demonstrations are woven into the narrative in a way that encourages viewers to think critically about what they see, without creating fear or distrust. Throughout the film, the Ghanaian cultural context remains at the center. The documentary pays attention to the social cues, communal values, and shared experiences that traditionally help people decide what feels genuine. By showing

how these markers of authenticity are being challenged by AI- generated content, the film invites viewers to reflect on how truth is negotiated in a world where digital manipulation is becoming more common. The filmmaker's own reflections appear at certain points, offering insight into the creative and ethical decisions behind the project. These moments help viewers understand the responsibility of working with images and stories at a time when the line between real and artificial is increasingly blurred.

Although the documentary is the main output, the process of creating it naturally produces supporting materials that help extend its impact. Short extracts from the film will be available for use in workshops, classroom discussions, and community events. A simple screening guide will accompany the film to help facilitators lead conversations after viewings. A written director's reflection will also be produced, offering insight into the filmmaking process, the challenges encountered, and the choices that shaped the final film. The documentary is intended to be shared widely. It will be screened in universities, media houses, community centers, and other public spaces where conversations about media and digital responsibility are already taking place. It may also be shared online through controlled platforms to reach younger audiences who primarily engage with content on their phones. Beyond its immediate purpose, the film serves as a lasting record of how Ghanaians are making sense of synthetic media at this moment in time.

## **PERSONAL EVALUATION/REFLECTIONS**

The production of *Blurring the Lines: AI, Authenticity, and Digital Media* evolved into a deeply reflective process that extended beyond technical filmmaking into questions of responsibility, judgment, and voice. What began as an investigation into how synthetic media affects public trust gradually became an examination of my own role in shaping meaning through film. As the project progressed, I became increasingly aware that decisions made behind the camera and in

the editing suite were not neutral technical choices but interpretive acts that influenced how authenticity would be perceived by audiences. One of the most significant challenges encountered was negotiating the balance between clarity and ambiguity. While the subject demanded explanation, there were moments when allowing uncertainty to remain was more honest than offering definitive conclusions. Choices such as when to hold a shot, when to introduce silence, or when to allow an interviewee's hesitation to remain uncut required careful ethical consideration. These moments reinforced the realization that documentary filmmaking carries power and that this power must be exercised with restraint and intentionality.

Working within Ghanaian spaces also presented both creative and logistical challenges. Filming in homes, churches, classrooms, and public environments required sensitivity to social norms, time constraints, and participants' comfort. Gaining trust took patience, and adapting to unpredictable filming conditions demanded flexibility. These experiences highlighted the importance of cultural awareness and reinforced the value of listening over directing, especially when engaging with issues that affect public understanding and social cohesion. The production process tested my resilience at multiple stages. Pre-production required sustained planning and research to maintain thematic focus, while production demanded adaptability as schedules shifted and environments changed. Post-production proved particularly demanding, requiring patience and critical distance as complex material was shaped into a coherent narrative. Each phase presented challenges that strengthened my problem-solving skills and deepened my understanding of collaboration, time management, and creative discipline. Ultimately, this project reaffirmed my belief in documentary filmmaking as a tool for education and public engagement. It demonstrated that storytelling is not only about presenting information but about shaping how people think, feel, and question what they encounter. The experience has strengthened my commitment to using film as a medium for dialogue, media

literacy, and community empowerment, particularly within the Ghanaian context where trust, communication, and representation remain deeply interconnected.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To build on these insights, several practical steps are necessary:

**Strengthen Media Literacy:** Media literacy should be integrated into schools and community workshops, equipping citizens, especially young people, with the skills to recognize and resist manipulated content.

**Promote Ethical Guidelines:** Creators and journalists must embrace transparency when using AI tools. Clear ethical standards will help balance innovation with accountability. Expand

**Documentary Practice:** Screenings, discussions, and community dialogues should be used to spark reflection and empower audiences. Documentary filmmaking can become a tool for civic education and cultural resilience.

**Broaden Scope of Future Work:** Future projects should extend to rural contexts to capture diverse experiences of synthetic media. Comparative productions across African countries could deepen understanding of cultural responses.

**Evaluate Long- Term Impact:** Media literacy initiatives and creative interventions should be monitored over time to assess their effectiveness in strengthening trust and resilience.

## CONCLUSION

The journey of producing *Blurring the Lines: AI, Authenticity, and Digital Media* revealed that synthetic media is more than a technical innovation, it is a disruptive force that reshapes how people perceive truth. In Ghana, where trust is often built through family, church, and community networks, the infiltration of synthetic content destabilizes these foundations and creates uncertainty in everyday communication. The production process showed me that technical execution is not simply about capturing images or editing footage; it is about shaping meaning. Choices in framing, sound design, pacing, and colour grading became tools to embody the tension between authenticity and manipulation. By weaving together pre-production planning, intentional filming, and narrative-driven editing, the documentary achieved both emotional resonance and cultural relevance. Ultimately, the project demonstrated that documentary filmmaking can serve as more than storytelling; it can be a form of social intervention. It enriches African cinema by blending creative practice with cultural critique, while also contributing to wider conversations about ethics, media literacy, and resilience in the digital age.

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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX A: Documentary Script

#### Opening Sequence

**Visuals:** Sweeping shots of Accra's lively streets, AI generated content and social media feeds in motion.

**Narration (Voice-over):** "Ghana's digital world moves at lightning speed. But what does it mean when voices, images, and stories might not be genuine? This film investigates how artificial intelligence is blurring the boundaries between truth and fiction and explores its impact on trust, creativity, and society."

#### Scene 1: Authenticity Crisis

**Visuals:** Displays of trending clips, pictures, and synthetic voices over real scenes.

**Narration:** "In 2024, a campaign video circulated online showing Dr. Matthew Opoku Prempeh, the New Patriotic Party's vice-presidential candidate, speaking about small-scale mining. The clip quickly sparked public debate, given Ghana's efforts to combat illegal mining. While the campaign team disputed the video's interpretation, the episode underscored how contested digital content can erode trust even before verification occurs."

**Interviews:** Journalist, Educator, and Content creators

#### Scene 2: Ethical Responsibility

**Visuals:** Creators working on edits, teachers guiding students.

**Narration:** "AI expands creative possibilities, but it also brings ethical dilemmas. Should creators always reveal when their work uses AI? How can journalists balance new technology with responsible reporting?"

**Interviews:** Journalist, Educator, and Content creators

### **Scene 3: Media Literacy**

**Visuals:** Students in classrooms, generated content on TikTok and Facebook.

**Narration:** “Media literacy stands as our first line of defense. However, many, especially the youth, lack the tools to recognize manipulation. Without proper education, misinformation can spread unchecked.”

**Interviews:** Journalist, Educator, and Content creators

### **Scene 4: Cultural Context**

**Visuals:** AI generated content and cultural context

**Narration:** “Trust in Ghana often grows out of community bonds. Yet, synthetic media seeps into these networks, challenging shared understanding and social unity.”

**Interviews:** Journalist, Educator, and Content creators

### **Scene 5: Technical Execution (Behind the Scenes)**

**Visuals:** Footage of editing suites, shifting timelines, audio mixing, and camera operations.

**Narration:** “Even this documentary faces similar challenges. Editing decisions, whether cross-cutting, sequencing, or sound design, influence how viewers perceive authenticity. The filming captures both the intimate details and wider context: close-ups reveal emotion, sweeping shots portray Ghana’s digital world, and background sounds immerse the audience in everyday life.

### **Scene 6: Future Outlook**

**Visuals:** The various uses of AI generated content.

**Narration:** “AI presents both promise and risk. Its role in Ghana’s future hinges on our responses, through learning, policymaking, and creative adaptation.”

**Interviews:** Journalist, Educator, and Content creators

### **Closing Sequence**

**Visuals:** Interviewees highlighted in a montage, original footages of Ghanaian sites, and the national flag of Ghana waving proudly.

**Narration:** “Trust rests on authenticity. As AI transforms the media landscape, Ghana faces the challenge of protecting truth without stifling creative expression. Ultimately, the issue is not solely technological, it is deeply cultural.”

## **APPENDIX B: Documentary Script**

### Documentary Interview guides: Blurring the Lines: AI, Authenticity, and Digital Media

1. What was your reaction the first time you saw or heard synthetic media online?
2. Has this changed the way you trust journalism?
3. Should creators be transparent about using AI?
4. What do you consider the main ethical issues in Ghanaian media today?
5. Do you feel confident that you can spot AI-generated media?
6. Should media literacy with a focus on AI be part of the school curriculum?
7. How do your community connections shape what you believe is authentic?
8. Could synthetic media threaten Ghana's sense of togetherness?
9. Would you describe AI as more of an opportunity or a threat?
10. What protections or regulations would you like to see put in place?