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Study on the Impact of AI-Generated Videos on Human Emotional Well-Being (Specifically for YouTube Channels)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of AI-generated videos published on YouTube channels on human emotional well-being. As AI tools increasingly automate scriptwriting, narration, and visual production, the research problem addressed is how AI-generated videos affect viewers' emotional well-being, focusing on emotional authenticity, empathy, and self-reported psychological states. A mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches was employed. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 150 respondents selected through stratified quota sampling (50 from each of the Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara districts of Sri Lanka's Western Province), supplemented by semi-structured interviews with eight residents selected through purposive sampling. Two AI-driven YouTube channels, Aura Play and Sri Lankan Footprint, were used as case-study sources. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS; qualitative data were analyzed thematically. It was hypothesized that AI-generated videos negatively affect emotional well-being. Findings indicate that such videos often lack the emotional depth and authenticity of human-created content, reducing emotional connection and contributing to fatigue, digital mistrust, and compulsive viewing behavior among viewers. Survey results showed that 74 percent of respondents found AI-generated videos less emotionally genuine than human-made videos, 68 percent trusted their information less, 64 percent felt mentally tired after consecutive viewing, and 81 percent preferred that channels clearly label AI-generated content. Interviews with eight residents revealed three themes: authenticity fatigue, emotional flattening, and awareness without avoidance. Younger respondents were especially drawn to fabricated-event content. The risks appear to stem less from AI technology itself than from engagement-driven commercial incentives, pointing to the need for clear labelling, platform accountability, and media literacy education, particularly for younger viewers.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The rapid evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally reshaped how video content is conceived, produced, and distributed. On platforms such as YouTube, AI-generated videos ranging from synthetic voice narration to fully automated avatars, scripts, and visual sequences have become increasingly common. These tools allow individual creators and small production teams to publish content at a scale and speed that would previously have required substantial human resources. Text-to-video generators, voice synthesis engines, and large language models now allow a single operator to script, narrate, edit, and publish a video with only minimal manual intervention. While this transformation has clear advantages in terms of efficiency, cost, and scalability, its emotional consequences for the millions of viewers who consume such content remain comparatively underexplored.

This study investigates the impact of AI-generated videos published on YouTube channels on human emotional well-being. Two AI-driven YouTube channels, referred to in this study as Aura Play and Sri Lankan Footprint, were used as the primary case-study sources because they were among the channels with the highest subscriber counts within their respective content categories at the time of the research. The central research problem guiding this study is: how do AI-generated videos on YouTube affect human emotional well-being? This question is situated within a broader debate about the role of automation in media production and its downstream psychological effects on audiences.

Although prior research has examined the broader implications of AI in media production and consumption (Sundar, Waddell and Jung, 2015), there remains limited empirical data on how viewers emotionally respond specifically to AI-generated content on platforms such as YouTube. Several open questions motivate this research. First, do AI-generated videos reduce or increase empathy among viewers, given that Anthropomorphized AI content can alter perceptions of trust and connection (Waytz, Heafner and Epley, 2014). Second, does such content trigger discomfort or negative affect due to perceptions of manipulation or inauthenticity, a phenomenon conceptually related to the “uncanny valley” effect first described in the context of robotics (Mori, MacDorman and Kageki, 2012). Third, might AI-generated content instead enhance emotional well-being by offering greater accessibility, creativity, and novelty, as suggested in research on empathic and emotionally responsive media technologies (McStay, 2021).

YouTube's distinctive blend of entertainment, education, and emotional storytelling makes it a particularly suitable platform for examining these questions. Unlike more tightly curated media environments, YouTube hosts an extremely diverse range of AI-assisted content, from educational explainer videos to sensationalized news-style compilations, allowing researchers to observe emotional effects across multiple genres and production styles within a single ecosystem. This research therefore examines the emotional and psychological effects of AI-generated video content on YouTube, with particular attention to emotional authenticity, viewer empathy, self-reported well-being, and the behavioral patterns associated with sustained exposure to such content.

1.2. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its focus on a rapidly growing but underexamined category of digital content. As generative AI tools become more accessible and less costly to use, the volume of AI-generated video content on platforms such as YouTube is likely to increase substantially in the coming years, making it increasingly important to understand the psychological and emotional consequences of sustained exposure to such content before it becomes fully normalized within everyday media consumption. Unlike studies that focus primarily on the technical capabilities or commercial performance of AI-generated content, this study centers the experience of the viewer, treating emotional well-being as a legitimate and measurable outcome worthy of dedicated empirical attention.

This study is also significant for its focus on the Sri Lankan context specifically. Much of the existing literature on AI and media well-being originates from Western research settings, where cultural attitudes toward technology, authenticity, and emotional expression may differ meaningfully from those found in South Asian societies. By focusing on viewers in the Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara districts, this study contributes locally grounded evidence that can inform Sri Lankan media literacy initiatives, platform policy discussions, and future academic research within the region, while also offering a case study that may be of comparative interest to researchers examining AI-generated content in other developing digital media markets.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the existing literature on AI in video content creation and its documented effects on engagement and emotional well-being. Section 3 outlines the mixed-methods research design, sampling strategy, and data analysis procedures. Section 4 presents the key findings from the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. Section 5 discusses these findings in relation to the existing literature. Section 6 concludes the paper, Section 7 offers recommendations for content creators, platform designers, and future researchers, and Section 8 outlines the limitations of the study.

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2. Literature Review

This section reviews existing scholarship relevant to the study in six parts. It begins with a general overview of AI-generated content and audience engagement, before examining research on sentiment, emotion, and visual cues in AI-assisted media, AI's role in emotional support and well-being, and AI applications within educational YouTube content. The section then outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the present study and concludes by identifying the specific research gap this study addresses.

The integration of artificial intelligence into video creation has transformed YouTube content, offering highly personalized and engaging viewing experiences (Mishra, Sengupta, Biswas, Kumar and Coussement, 2025). AI-generated videos often enhance viewer engagement and can positively influence emotional well-being by providing entertainment, education, and a sense of social connection (Hussain, Khan and Malik, 2024). These videos leverage natural language processing and generative models to create content intended to resonate emotionally with audiences, thereby increasing satisfaction and perceived value (Jelodar, Paulius and Sun, 2019). At the same time, emerging studies highlight potential negative consequences of AI-generated video content for emotional well-being. The artificial nature of emotions conveyed by AI systems can lead to a form of emotional dissonance, in which viewers feel disconnected from, or manipulated by, the content they consume (Gavrilenko and Zinchenko, 2024). Overexposure to AI-curated content has also been associated with anxiety, reduced attention span, and addictive viewing behaviors that may harm mental health over time (Meghana, 2024). In addition, AI-driven personalization risks reinforcing filter bubbles that limit exposure to diverse viewpoints, which can negatively affect emotional resilience and overall well-being (Hussain, Khan and Malik, 2024).

2.1. AI-Generated Content and Audience Engagement

Hussain, Khan and Malik (2024) explored how ChatGPT-related content influenced audience engagement on YouTube. Analyzing 100 ChatGPT-focused videos with a combined total of 65 million views, the researchers used VidIQ, TubeBuddy, and SocialBlade APIs and compared these videos with 200 other videos from the same creators. Employing one-way ANOVA, multigroup structural equation modelling, and descriptive trend analysis within a Uses and Gratifications (U&G) framework, the study found that AI-related content attracted disproportionately higher engagement than other content types, and that this effect was less dependent on subscriber count than expected, with smaller channels often gaining more views and new subscribers from AI-themed videos. This suggests that novelty and topical relevance, rather than channel authority alone, drive engagement with AI content.

George (2023) examined how AI-driven product recommendation systems could be enhanced through analysis of YouTube comments, applying a Convolutional Long Short-Term Memory (CLSTM) algorithm for sentiment analysis. The model achieved an accuracy of 89 percent in identifying user emotions from comment text, demonstrating that viewer-generated text data can be a reliable proxy for emotional response, a methodological insight that reinforces the value of examining viewer sentiment as an indicator of emotional well-being.

Mishra, Sengupta, Biswas, Kumar and Coussement (2025) explored how generative AI, and GPT-4 in particular, could be used to model the drivers of YouTube video success by analyzing 1,055 videos related to three popular smartphones published between 2021 and 2023. Semantic metrics extracted from video transcripts and comments outperformed traditional engagement metrics in predicting video success, underscoring the growing sophistication with which AI tools are used not only to produce content but also to optimize it for audience engagement.

2.2. Sentiment, Emotion, and Visual Cues in AI-Assisted Content

Meghana (2024) provided a comprehensive review of sentiment analysis techniques applied to YouTube comments, noting that although deep learning and natural language processing have improved analytical accuracy, challenges remain in handling multilingual comments, contextual nuance, and subtle sentiment cues. Feldges, Liebig and Weiland (2024) examined how thumbnail design, particularly the use of human faces expressing emotion, influenced video popularity, finding that 72 percent of top-performing videos in 2020 featured human faces and that negative emotional expressions in thumbnails were associated with higher view counts. This indicates that emotional cues, whether genuine or synthetically produced, are a significant driver of viewer attention on the platform, which has direct implications for how AI-generated content is designed to capture and retain audience interest.

Yogeshkannah, Prem, Pooranachandiran and Viyash (2024) developed a multilingual sentiment analysis framework for YouTube educational videos, aimed at assessing emotional tone across languages to support content creators and educators in improving the emotional and pedagogical quality of online learning material. Fiser, Pascual and Sanchez (2025) conducted a biometric and self-report study comparing the emotional impact of AI-generated versus human-composed music in audiovisual media. Eighty-eight participants viewed videos accompanied by human-created music, AI-generated music produced from detailed keyword prompts, and AI-generated music produced from simpler emotional prompts. Both AI conditions produced greater pupil dilation than the human-composed condition, and AI-generated music with detailed prompts was associated with higher blink rates and skin impedance, indicating heightened attention and cognitive load,

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while human-composed music was rated as more emotionally familiar. This suggests that while AI-generated content can capture attention effectively, it may not replicate the emotional familiarity associated with human-created work, an insight directly relevant to the emotional dissonance reported by participants in the present study.

2.3. AI, Emotional Support, and Well-Being

Hu, Ho and Wong (2025) examined whether the emotional benefits of venting to an AI system differed from venting to a perceived human responder, even when the underlying responses were held constant. In a pre-registered experiment with 279 participants, both AI-assisted and perceived human-assisted venting conditions produced comparable reductions in stress and loneliness and comparable increases in perceived social support, suggesting that AI-mediated emotional support can, under some conditions, approximate the benefits of human interaction. Soomro (2025) examined the dual role of AI in workplace and daily-life contexts, noting that while AI can enhance well-being through automation, personalization, and support for engagement, it simultaneously introduces challenges such as AI-related anxiety, privacy concerns, and ethical risks stemming from biased decision-making, drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model and sociotechnical theory to frame a balanced approach to AI-human interaction.

Mishra (2025) investigated the influence of AI companions such as virtual assistants, chatbots, and social robots on loneliness and emotional health in urban nuclear families, finding that while AI companionship could offer emotional support and alleviate isolation, it also raised concerns about emotional dependency and the authenticity of human-AI relationships, questioning whether such technologies genuinely fulfil emotional needs or merely simulate connection. This tension between simulated and genuine emotional connection is central to the present study's investigation of AI-generated YouTube content.

2.4. AI in Educational and Learning-Oriented YouTube Content

Beyond entertainment content, AI tools have also been applied to enhance educational engagement on YouTube. Tadpatri, Shree, Manjunath and Ahmed (2024) proposed a system that converts YouTube videos into summarized notes, answers user queries about video content, and generates assessments using LLAMA-2 and T5 models trained on the RACE and SQuAD datasets, aiming to simplify navigation of YouTube's vast educational content. Thakur, Bhat, Shukla and Ram (2025) developed Quiz-Tube, an AI-powered platform that converts YouTube videos into interactive quizzes using a fine-tuned Gemma-9B model, reporting substantial improvements in question quality and accuracy following fine-tuning. While these applications demonstrate the constructive potential of AI in supporting learning outcomes, they also illustrate the broader trend of AI systems mediating and shaping the viewer's relationship with video content, a dynamic that extends into the emotional domain examined in this study.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives to interpret the relationship between AI-generated video content and emotional well-being. The first is the concept of the uncanny valley, originally articulated in the context of robotics (Mori, MacDorman and Kageki, 2012), which describes the discomfort experienced when an artificial entity closely resembles, but does not perfectly replicate, authentic human behavior or expression. Applied to AI-generated video narration and imagery, this concept helps to explain why viewers may experience unease or emotional dissonance even when content is technically polished and superficially convincing.

The second is Media Richness Theory, which holds that communication media vary in their capacity to convey emotional and contextual nuance, with richer media, such as face-to-face interaction, generally supporting deeper emotional connection than leaner, more standardized forms of communication. AI-generated video, despite its visual sophistication, may be understood as a comparatively lean medium in emotional terms, given its reliance on synthesized rather than genuinely experienced expression, which may account for the sense of emotional hollowness reported by respondents in this study.

The third is the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) framework, previously applied by Hussain, Khan and Malik (2024) to explain audience engagement with AI-related YouTube content. This framework suggests that viewers actively select content to satisfy specific psychological needs, such as entertainment, information, or social connection. Where AI-generated content fails to satisfy the emotional gratifications viewers seek, despite succeeding in capturing attention through novelty or sensational framing, a gap emerges between engagement and genuine emotional satisfaction, a gap that this study's findings suggest is central to understanding the well-being effects documented among the sample.

Together, these three frameworks, the uncanny valley, media richness theory, and the uses and gratifications framework, provide a coherent lens through which to interpret why AI-generated content can simultaneously capture high levels of viewer attention while contributing to negative emotional outcomes such as disconnection, fatigue, and mistrust.

2.6. Research Gap

Taken together, the reviewed literature demonstrates that AI-generated and AI-assisted video content can influence audience engagement, sentiment expression, attention, and, in some contexts, emotional support. However, the majority of existing

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studies focus on engagement metrics, sentiment classification accuracy, or narrowly defined use cases such as music or product recommendation, rather than on the broader emotional well-being of viewers exposed to fully AI-generated video content across a general-interest platform such as YouTube. Moreover, limited research has been conducted within a South Asian, and specifically Sri Lankan, context, where cultural attitudes toward authenticity, trust in media, and emotional expression may differ from those examined in the predominantly Western studies reviewed above. Existing research also tends to treat engagement and well-being as though they were aligned outcomes, whereas the present study specifically investigates the possibility that they diverge, a possibility only indirectly suggested in prior work such as Soomro (2025) and Mishra (2025). This study addresses that gap by focusing specifically on the emotional well-being effects of AI-generated YouTube videos among viewers in the Western Province of Sri Lanka, using two locally popular AI-driven channels as case studies. Beyond applying the uncanny valley concept, the study makes a theoretical contribution by examining whether engagement and well-being diverge, and by proposing that this divergence can be understood as an engagement-satisfaction gap within the Uses and Gratifications framework.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the impact of AI-generated YouTube videos on emotional well-being. A mixed-methods design was selected specifically because emotional well-being is a multidimensional construct that is not fully captured through numerical scales alone; the quantitative component allowed the research team to identify broad patterns of emotional response across a relatively large sample, while the qualitative component allowed those patterns to be explored and explained in participants' own words, providing a level of interpretive depth that a purely quantitative design would not have afforded.

The quantitative component involved a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of residents of the Western Province of Sri Lanka, while the qualitative component comprised semi-structured interviews conducted to gain deeper insight into participants' personal experiences and perceptions. The Western Province was selected as the geographic focus of the study because it is the most densely populated and most digitally connected province in Sri Lanka, making it a suitable setting for examining patterns of engagement with a digital platform such as YouTube.

A stratified quota sampling method was used to select survey participants. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 150 active YouTube users, with a fixed quota of 50 participants drawn from each of the Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara districts of the Western Province. In addition, eight individuals residing in these same districts were purposively selected to participate in semi-structured interviews, allowing for richer, narrative-based insight to complement the quantitative findings.

The target population consisted of individuals aged 18 and above who regularly watched YouTube videos and who had been exposed to AI-generated or AI-enhanced content, including synthetic narration, deepfake visuals, or videos produced using generative AI tools. Two AI-driven YouTube channels with substantial subscriber bases, referred to as Aura Play and Sri Lankan Footprint, were used as the primary case-study content sources, selected because they held the highest subscriber counts among comparable AI-generated channels available to the research team at the time of data collection.

3.1. Research Instrument

The structured questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section captured demographic information, including district of residence, age, gender, and weekly YouTube usage. The second section assessed general exposure to AI-generated content, including recognition of AI-generated videos and familiarity with the Aura Play and Sri Lankan Footprint channels. The third section used five-point Likert-scale items to measure emotional responses to AI-generated content across the dimensions of emotional connection, cognitive and emotional fatigue, trust, viewing compulsion, and mood disturbance. The fourth section included open-ended items inviting respondents to describe, in their own words, any specific emotional reactions to AI-generated videos they recalled. The semi-structured interview guide mirrored these themes but allowed for greater elaboration, probing participants for specific examples and personal narratives relating to their viewing experiences.

3.2. Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data collected through the structured questionnaire were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), applying descriptive statistical techniques including frequency distributions, measures of central tendency, and cross-tabulations by district, age group, and gender. Where relevant, chi-square tests were used to examine whether emotional response patterns differed significantly across demographic subgroups. Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically, following an inductive coding approach in which recurring statements were grouped into broader themes relating to emotional disconnection, trust, fatigue, and behavioral response. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings followed a convergent parallel design, in which both data strands were analyzed independently before being interpreted together to provide a fuller account of participants' emotional experiences.

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3.3. Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed of the purpose of the study prior to participation and provided verbal or written consent before completing the questionnaire or interview. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw at any point without penalty. No personally identifying information was collected in the questionnaire, and interview transcripts were anonymized prior to analysis. Given the sensitive nature of some questions relating to emotional and mental well-being, participants were also provided with general information on where to seek support should the discussion raise any concerns.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

To enhance content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by faculty members familiar with media studies and survey design prior to distribution, and minor revisions were made to improve clarity of wording. A small pilot test was conducted with a limited number of respondents outside the final sample to check comprehension and identify ambiguous items. While the study's cross-sectional design and reliance on self-report measures limit the extent to which causal claims can be made, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was intended to strengthen the overall credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation. Table 1 summarizes the demographic composition of the survey sample.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (N = 150)

Variable	Category	Percentage of Sample
District	Colombo	33.3%
	Gampaha	33.3%
	Kalutara	33.3%
Gender	Female	54%
	Male	46%
Age Group	18–25 years	41%
	26–35 years	29%
	36–50 years	19%
	Above 50 years	11%
Weekly YouTube use	Less than 5 hours	22%
	5–15 hours	47%
	More than 15 hours	31%

Note: District proportions reflect the fixed quota of 50 respondents per district built into the sampling design.

3.5. Scope of the Study

The scope of this study was deliberately bounded to allow for depth of analysis within the available time and resources. Geographically, the study was limited to the Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara districts of the Western Province, selected for their relatively high rates of internet access and YouTube usage. In terms of content, the study focused specifically on two AI-driven YouTube channels rather than attempting to survey the full diversity of AI-generated content available on the platform, a choice intended to allow participants to reflect on concrete, shared examples rather than an abstract and undefined category of content. This bounded scope should be read alongside the limitations discussed in the concluding sections of this paper.

4. Findings and Analysis

This section presents the key findings of the study, drawing on both the quantitative survey data and the qualitative interview data. The findings are organized around four themes: general viewing patterns, self-reported emotional effects, channel-specific findings for Aura Play and Sri Lankan Footprint, and insights emerging from the semi-structured interviews.

4.1. General Viewing Patterns

The survey results indicate that AI-generated content occupies a substantial share of respondents' overall YouTube consumption. Approximately 78 percent of respondents reported having knowingly watched AI-generated or AI-enhanced videos, while a further 15 percent indicated that they suspected they had done so without being certain, reflecting the increasing difficulty of distinguishing AI-generated content from human-created content. Respondents in the 18–25 age group reported the highest frequency of exposure to AI-generated content, consistent with this group's generally higher overall YouTube usage. Cross-tabulation by district indicated broadly similar exposure levels across Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara, suggesting that AI-generated content circulates relatively evenly within the Western Province rather than being concentrated in any single locality.

Table 2 summarizes responses to the core Likert-scale statements included in the questionnaire, presenting the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.

Table 2: Summary of Key Survey Statements and Levels of Agreement (N = 150)

Survey Statement	% Agree / Strongly Agree
I can usually tell when a YouTube video was made using AI.	49%
AI-generated videos feel less emotionally genuine than human-made videos.	74%
I feel mentally tired after watching several AI-generated videos in a row.	64%
I trust the information shown in AI-generated videos less than in human-made videos.	68%
I sometimes watch AI-generated videos for longer than I intended to.	58%

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Survey Statement	% Agree / Strongly Agree
I have felt anxious, restless, or low in mood after watching AI-generated content.	52%
AI-generated videos make it harder for me to feel empathy for the people or events shown.	46%
I would prefer channels to clearly label content as AI-generated.	81%

4.2. Self-Reported Emotional Effects

Across the sample, negative emotional effects were reported more frequently than positive ones. As illustrated in Figure 1, 71 percent of respondents reported some degree of emotional disconnection when watching AI-generated videos, describing the content as feeling emotionally 'hollow' or 'off' despite being outwardly entertaining or informative. Sixty-four percent reported symptoms consistent with cognitive or emotional fatigue after extended viewing sessions, while 68 percent expressed a degree of digital mistrust or insecurity, attributing this to difficulty distinguishing authentic from synthetic content. Fifty-eight percent described patterns of viewing that they characterized as compulsive or difficult to control, and 52 percent reported mood swings, restlessness, or mild anxiety symptoms following prolonged exposure to AI-generated content. Forty-six percent felt that their capacity for empathy toward the content or its subjects was reduced when they were aware the video had been AI-generated.

A closer examination of the open-ended responses accompanying these Likert-scale items revealed that emotional disconnection was most commonly attributed to synthetic narration voices, which several respondents described as sounding 'flat' or 'robotic' even when the underlying script was well written. Respondents who reported cognitive fatigue frequently linked this to the pacing of AI-generated videos, which many described as unusually fast or densely edited compared with human-produced content, a pattern consistent with content strategies optimized to sustain viewer attention through constant stimulation rather than narrative depth.

Notably, agreement with negative emotional statements was not uniform across the sample. Respondents who reported watching more than fifteen hours of YouTube per week were more likely to report both compulsive viewing and emotional fatigue than lighter users, suggesting a possible dose-response relationship between exposure and negative emotional outcomes. By contrast, respondents who reported actively seeking out AI-labelled content out of curiosity, rather than encountering it through algorithmic recommendation, reported comparatively lower levels of digital mistrust, indicating that the manner in which viewers encounter AI-generated content, whether sought out deliberately or algorithmically served, may moderate its emotional impact.

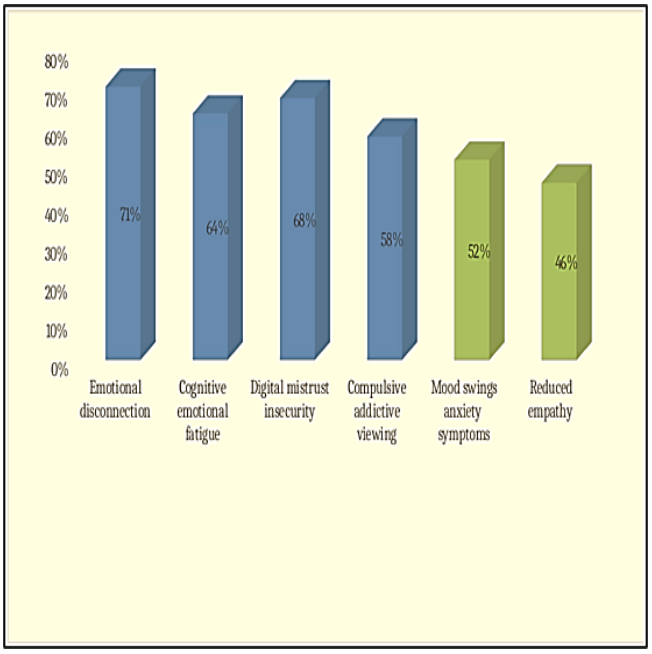


Figure 1. Self-Reported Emotional Effects of AI-Generated YouTube Video Consumption (N=150)

4.3. Channel-Specific Findings

Analysis of the two case-study channels revealed distinct emotional impact profiles. The AI-based channel Sri Lankan Footprint consistently produced and shared videos depicting violent incidents, war-related events, and natural disasters affecting Sri Lanka. These videos attracted significant viewer engagement; however, respondents and interviewees frequently noted that the channel's content creators appeared to prioritize view counts and revenue generation over the psychological well-being of viewers. Because public interest in dramatic or violent content remained high, such videos continued to be produced and circulated widely, reinforcing a cycle of emotionally intense content consumption.

On the channel Aura Play, videos frequently depicted events that had never actually occurred, alongside distorted portrayals of real incidents. These videos were found to lack substantive informational content and were, in effect, fabricated. Several respondents indicated that such videos had the potential to spread false beliefs or shape public opinion based on misinformation, with the use of deepfake-style visuals increasing the perceived credibility of false content and making it more difficult for viewers to discern fact from fabrication. Notably, younger respondents, particularly those in the 18–25 age group, were found to be disproportionately inclined to watch this type of content, raising concerns about the long-term effect of such exposure on younger viewers' understanding of real-world events and social behavior.

4.4. Interview Findings

The eight semi-structured interviews provided further depth to the quantitative findings. Several interviewees described a

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growing sense of distrust toward video content in general as a consequence of prolonged exposure to AI-generated material, noting that they had become more skeptical of even genuinely human-created videos. Multiple interviewees reported feeling emotionally 'drained' or 'overstimulated' after watching AI-generated content optimized with high-intensity visuals, rapid editing, and emotionally provocative narration, describing a sense that the content was designed to maximize watch time rather than to inform or genuinely entertain. Some interviewees also described a paradoxical pattern in which they continued to watch such content compulsively despite reporting declining emotional satisfaction from doing so, a pattern consistent with the addictive viewing behaviors highlighted in the quantitative results.

Three broad themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. The first, labelled 'authenticity fatigue', captured interviewees' growing weariness with having to constantly evaluate whether content was real, a burden several interviewees described as unfamiliar and mentally taxing compared with their prior YouTube viewing habits. The second theme, 'emotional flattening', described the sense that repeated exposure to synthetic emotional cues had made interviewees less responsive to emotional content generally, including content that was genuinely human-made, echoing the reduced empathy findings from the quantitative data. The third theme, 'awareness without avoidance', captured a pattern in which interviewees were fully aware that certain channels, including Sri Lankan Footprint and Aura Play, produced content they considered manipulative or of low informational value, yet continued to watch such content regularly, citing habit, curiosity, or the difficulty of avoiding algorithmically recommended material.

Interviewees who were parents of school-aged children expressed particular concern about their children's exposure to AI-generated entertainment content, noting that younger viewers appeared less able to critically evaluate the authenticity of what they were watching. This concern aligns with the survey finding that younger respondents were both the heaviest consumers of AI-generated content and the group most drawn to the fabricated-event style videos characteristic of the Aura Play channel.

5. Discussion

This section discusses the study's findings in relation to the existing literature reviewed in Section 2, considers their theoretical implications, and reflects on their practical significance for content creators, platforms, and viewers. The discussion is organized around the core emotional effects identified in the findings, namely emotional dissonance and disconnection, digital mistrust, compulsive viewing behavior, and the differential vulnerability of younger viewers to misinformation-oriented content.

The findings of this study are broadly consistent with, and extend, the existing literature on AI-generated media and emotional well-being. Consistent with Gavrilenko and Zinchenko (2024), the present study found that the artificial nature of emotional cues in AI-generated videos frequently produced a sense of dissonance among viewers, who reported feeling disconnected from content that was nonetheless engineered to be engaging. This supports the broader concern that AI-generated media, while technically proficient, often lacks the emotional depth associated with human-created work, a pattern also observed in the biometric findings of Fiser, Pascual and Sanchez (2025) regarding AI-generated versus human-composed music. Notably, the present study's finding that 74 percent of respondents felt AI-generated videos were less emotionally genuine than human-made videos provides direct survey-based corroboration, within a Sri Lankan sample, of a pattern that had previously been documented mainly through biometric and laboratory-based methods in other cultural contexts.

The high proportion of respondents reporting digital mistrust aligns with concerns raised by Meghana (2024) and reflects the broader societal challenge posed by the increasing sophistication of synthetic media. As AI-generated content becomes progressively more difficult to distinguish from human-created content, the erosion of trust documented in this study may extend beyond individual videos to viewers' broader relationship with digital media, a concern with implications for media literacy and platform governance alike.

The compulsive and addictive viewing patterns reported by respondents also resonate with findings from Hussain, Khan and Malik (2024) regarding the disproportionately high engagement generated by AI-related content, suggesting that the same qualities that make AI-generated content attractive to platforms and creators, namely efficiency, novelty, and algorithmic optimization for engagement, may simultaneously contribute to negative well-being outcomes for viewers. This tension between engagement-oriented content design and viewer well-being echoes the dual-role framing proposed by Soomro (2025) in the broader context of AI-human interaction. It is also worth noting that the dose-response pattern observed in the present study, whereby heavier weekly YouTube users reported disproportionately higher levels of fatigue and compulsive viewing, mirrors well-established findings in the broader literature on problematic media use, suggesting that AI-generated content may not introduce an entirely new category of risk so much as intensify existing vulnerabilities associated with high-volume video consumption.

The finding that 68 percent of respondents reported reduced trust in the information presented within AI-generated videos is particularly noteworthy in light of the misinformation-oriented content observed on the Aura Play channel. This finding suggests that viewers are not simply passive recipients of synthetic media but are, to some extent, developing an intuitive skepticism toward AI-generated content, even if, as

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the survey also found, only 49 percent felt confident in their ability to reliably identify such content when encountering it. This gap between generalized distrust and specific identification ability is itself a notable finding, indicating that media literacy interventions should focus not only on cultivating skepticism in the abstract but on building concrete, practical skills for recognizing the visual and narrative markers of AI-generated video content.

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted alongside evidence that AI-mediated interaction can, in some contexts, provide genuine emotional benefit, as demonstrated by Hu, Ho and Wong (2025) in the context of AI-assisted emotional venting. This suggests that the emotional impact of AI-generated content is not uniformly negative, but is instead shaped by the specific design, purpose, and framing of the content in question. Entertainment- and news-style AI content optimized primarily for engagement and revenue, as observed in the Sri Lankan Footprint and Aura Play case studies, appears more likely to produce negative emotional outcomes than AI applications explicitly designed to support emotional or educational needs, such as the AI-enhanced learning tools described by Tadpatri, Shree, Manjunath and Ahmed (2024) and Thakur, Bhat, Shukla and Ram (2025).

The particular vulnerability of younger viewers to the misinformation-oriented content observed on Aura Play is a notable finding with implications beyond emotional well-being alone, extending into concerns about social learning, empathy development, and susceptibility to misinformation among younger audiences, consistent with the concerns raised in the conclusions of this study regarding distorted understanding of social behavior among young viewers of AI-generated entertainment content.

Viewed through the theoretical lenses outlined in Section 2.5, the findings suggest that AI-generated YouTube content frequently falls into the uncanny valley described by Mori, MacDorman and Kageki (2012): sufficiently polished to attract sustained attention, yet not authentic enough to satisfy viewers' underlying emotional expectations. Interpreted through Media Richness Theory, AI-generated video may be understood as a comparatively lean emotional medium relative to human-created content, despite its high production values, which helps to explain why the 'authenticity fatigue' theme identified in the interview data emerged so consistently. Interpreted through the Uses and Gratifications framework, the gap between high engagement and low emotional satisfaction documented in this study represents a specific instance of unmet gratification, in which viewers continue to consume content that captures their attention without fulfilling the deeper emotional needs that originally motivated their viewing.

5.1. Practical and Theoretical Implications

The findings carry practical implications for three groups of stakeholders. For individual content creators, the results suggest that AI-generated content optimized purely for engagement metrics, without regard for emotional authenticity, risks eroding the very audience trust and loyalty that sustains long-term channel growth. For platform designers, the disproportionate amplification of emotionally intense or misinformation-adjacent AI-generated content, as observed in the case of Sri Lankan Footprint and Aura Play, raises questions about the adequacy of current recommendation systems in balancing engagement optimization against viewer well-being. For policymakers and media literacy educators, the findings underscore the urgency of equipping viewers, and particularly younger viewers, with the skills needed to critically evaluate AI-generated content.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the growing body of literature applying the uncanny valley concept beyond robotics into the domain of AI-generated video content, and extends the Uses and Gratifications framework by demonstrating how engagement-driven algorithmic curation can produce a measurable divergence between attention capture and gratification fulfilment. Future theoretical work might usefully develop a more formalized model of this divergence, potentially incorporating constructs such as 'engagement-satisfaction gap' as a distinct analytical category within media effects research.

5.2. Comparative Reflection on Positive and Negative Framings

It is important to note that the literature reviewed in Section 2 is not uniformly negative in its assessment of AI-generated content. Hussain, Khan and Malik (2024) and Mishra, Sengupta, Biswas, Kumar and Coussement (2025) both point to genuine engagement and content-management benefits associated with AI-assisted video production, while Hu, Ho and Wong (2025) demonstrate that AI-mediated interaction can, in specific therapeutic contexts, provide emotional benefits comparable to human interaction. The present study's predominantly negative findings should therefore be understood as specific to the particular genre and production style of the two channels examined, entertainment and pseudo-news content optimized for broad engagement, rather than as a categorical claim that all AI-generated video content is emotionally harmful.

This distinction matters for how the findings should be applied. Content such as the AI-enhanced learning tools described by Tadpatri, Shree, Manjunath and Ahmed (2024) and Thakur, Bhat, Shukla and Ram (2025) is designed around clearly defined educational goals, with AI serving a supportive rather than emotionally persuasive function. By contrast, the Aura Play and Sri Lankan Footprint channels examined in this study rely on emotionally charged material, whether fabricated dramatic scenarios or real depictions of violence and disaster, precisely because such material reliably captures attention within YouTube's engagement-driven recommendation

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environment. The comparative reflection offered here suggests that the well-being risks identified in this study are less a function of AI generation as a technology per se, and more a function of the specific commercial incentives that shape how that technology is applied within attention-based platform economies.

5.3. Reflections on Methodological Approach

The mixed-methods design adopted in this study proved valuable in surfacing findings that either strand alone would likely have missed. The quantitative survey data established the overall prevalence and relative strength of different emotional responses across a reasonably sized sample, while the qualitative interviews provided the language and lived detail, such as the 'authenticity fatigue' and 'emotional flattening' themes, needed to interpret what those numerical patterns actually meant for participants. This complementary relationship between breadth and depth is consistent with established guidance on convergent parallel mixed-methods designs in media and communication research, and reinforces the value of combining SPSS-based statistical analysis with thematic qualitative coding when studying emotionally complex, rapidly evolving phenomena such as AI-generated media consumption, where standardized measurement instruments have not yet been fully developed or validated within the local context.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how AI-generated videos on YouTube affect human emotional well-being, focusing on two popular AI-driven channels, Aura Play and Sri Lankan Footprint, and drawing on survey and interview data from 150 and 8 residents respectively of the Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara districts of Sri Lanka's Western Province. The findings indicate that, on balance, the negative emotional effects of AI-generated video consumption outweigh the positive ones among the sample studied. Prolonged exposure to AI-generated videos was associated with emotional disconnection, cognitive and emotional fatigue, digital mistrust, compulsive viewing patterns, and, in some cases, mood disturbance. These videos, often optimized for engagement through high-intensity visuals, rapid editing, and emotionally provocative language, appeared to prioritize efficiency and revenue generation over viewers' emotional expectations.

The realistic quality of AI-generated content further contributed to a broader erosion of trust in visual media, as viewers found it increasingly difficult to distinguish authentic from synthetic content. Young viewers, in particular, exposed to AI-generated entertainment content featuring exaggerated or fabricated emotional scenarios, may be at risk of developing a distorted understanding of social behavior, empathy, and conflict resolution over time. Taken together, the loss of emotional authenticity, the manipulation of viewer psychology through engagement-optimized design, the spread of misinformation, and the disruption of social learning processes constitutes the core negative emotional effects documented in this study. While AI-generated videos on YouTube undeniably offer technological innovation, efficiency, and creative possibility, this study concludes that they also pose substantial risks to human emotional well-being that warrant attention from content creators, platform designers, policymakers, and viewers alike.

Importantly, the findings of this study should not be read as a blanket condemnation of AI as a creative or communicative tool, but rather as a call for more deliberate, ethically grounded design choices in how AI is applied to video content intended for mass audiences. As generative AI tools continue to lower the barrier to video production, the responsibility for safeguarding viewer well-being will increasingly fall on a combination of individual creator practice, platform-level design decisions, and broader societal investment in media literacy. The evidence gathered from the Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara districts in this study offers an early, locally grounded indication of how these dynamics are already unfolding within the Sri Lankan digital media landscape, and underscores the need for continued research as AI-generated content becomes an increasingly permanent feature of platforms such as YouTube.

7. Recommendations

7.1. Recommendations for Stakeholders

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for the key stakeholder groups involved in the production, distribution, and regulation of AI-generated video content.

For content creators: creators using AI-generation tools should be encouraged to disclose clearly when videos are wholly or partially AI-generated, allowing viewers to make informed choices about their consumption and reducing the digital mistrust associated with ambiguity about content origin. Given that 81 percent of surveyed respondents indicated a preference for clear labelling of AI-generated content, such disclosure is likely to be well received by audiences rather than harming viewership. Creators should also consider incorporating genuine human elements, such as authentic narration, transparent sourcing, and emotionally considered pacing, to reduce the emotional dissonance associated with purely AI-generated production.

For platform designers: YouTube and similar platforms should consider refining recommendation algorithms to reduce the disproportionate amplification of emotionally provocative or misleading AI-generated content, particularly content depicting violence, disaster, or fabricated events. Platforms might also explore built-in labelling systems that flag AI-generated or AI-enhanced videos automatically, reducing the

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burden currently placed on individual viewers to assess content authenticity themselves.

For educators and policymakers: media literacy initiatives, particularly those targeting younger viewers, should incorporate specific guidance on recognizing AI-generated and deepfake content, to mitigate the risks of misinformation and distorted social learning identified in this study. Given the interview finding that parents were particularly concerned about their children's ability to evaluate AI-generated content critically, school-based digital literacy curricula in Sri Lanka may benefit from incorporating age-appropriate modules specifically addressing synthetic media.

For future researchers: this study should be extended through larger, more geographically diverse samples that include rural as well as urban populations, longitudinal designs capable of tracking emotional effects over extended periods rather than relying on a single point-in-time survey, and comparative studies examining differences in emotional response across AI content genres, cultural contexts, and age groups. Future research would also benefit from incorporating physiological or behavioral measures, such as those used by Fiser, Pascual and Sanchez (2025), alongside self-report data to strengthen the validity of emotional response findings.

7.2. Implications for the Sri Lankan Media Context

The findings of this study carry specific relevance for Sri Lanka's evolving digital media landscape. As internet penetration and smartphone ownership continue to expand across the country, YouTube has become an increasingly influential source of news, entertainment, and information for Sri Lankan audiences, including audiences outside the Western Province examined in this study. The popularity of channels such as Sri Lankan Footprint, which packages depictions of local violence and disaster into AI-generated content, illustrates how global AI production tools are being adapted to local content markets in ways that may have distinct cultural and social consequences. Given Sri Lanka's recent history of social and political tension, the potential for AI-generated misinformation content, such as that produced by channels like Aura Play, to shape public perception of real events carries particular weight. This suggests a need for locally grounded research, regulatory attention, and media literacy programming that goes beyond generic global guidance on AI-generated content and addresses the specific dynamics of Sri Lanka's digital media environment.

8. Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting its findings. First, the sample was confined to three districts within the Western Province of Sri Lanka and, despite being the country's most digitally active province, may not be representative of viewers in more rural provinces where patterns of internet access, content consumption, and cultural attitudes toward digital media may differ substantially. Second, the survey sample was selected through quota sampling, a non-probability method, which limits the statistical generalizability of the findings beyond the sampled districts. Third, the reliance on self-reported emotional responses introduces the possibility of recall bias, in which participants may inaccurately remember the intensity or frequency of past emotional reactions, as well as social desirability bias, in which participants may under- or over-report certain responses based on perceived social expectations.

Fourth, the study focused specifically on two AI-generated YouTube channels, Aura Play and Sri Lankan Footprint, selected for their high subscriber counts within their respective content categories. While this focus allowed for a detailed, case-study-informed understanding of two influential channels, findings may not generalize fully to other AI content creators employing different production styles, subject matter, or target audiences. Fifth, the cross-sectional design of the study captures emotional responses at a single point in time and cannot establish whether the emotional effects observed persist, intensify, or diminish with continued or reduced exposure over longer periods. Finally, although the study employed a mixed-methods design to strengthen validity through triangulation, the qualitative component was limited to eight interviews, which, while valuable for generating illustrative depth, cannot be assumed to capture the full diversity of viewer experiences within the broader population. Future studies employing larger, more diverse samples, longitudinal tracking, and physiological or behavioral measures of emotional response alongside self-report data would help to address these limitations and build on the findings presented here.

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