

Chatterbox #310 – The troubling world of deep fakes

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Episode description

In our modern world, technology is changing our lives all the time, and mostly, it's making things better. But there are some tech innovations that can be a little worrying, even scary. In this episode, Andrew and Anna dive into the world of deepfakes. They explore their pros and cons and discuss how they might affect our future. If you're interested in the world of modern technology and its hidden dangers, this episode is for you!

References in this episode:

Savages by Alltta: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7r6PAkFRfU>

Miles Fisher: <https://www.instagram.com/milesfisher/?hl=en>

Pentagon attack deep fake: <http://bit.ly/3EF71Qt>

South Korean documentary, *Meeting You*: <https://youtu.be/0p8HZVCZSkc>

Fun fact

In this episode, Andrew and Anna explore both the dangers and the positive aspects of deepfakes. An interesting example of deepfake entertainment takes place at the Dalí Museum in Florida, where visitors can virtually meet the famous surrealist painter, interact and take selfies with him.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To have got [something] down
- In the limelight
- To reap the benefits
- To an extent
- A hard sell
- To take [something] with a pinch of salt



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Chatterbox number 310. The troubling world of deepfakes. Featuring, Andrew and Anna. Hello, Anna, how's it going?

Anna: I'm great, thanks, Andrew. How are you doing today?

Andrew: I am very good, Anna. And today, I am very excited and a little bit nervous about our conversation because we're going to be talking about an issue related to technology. And just like so many issues and technology these days, there are good things and bad things about this tech. So, it will be an interesting conversation at least. But maybe Anna, before I say too much, you could introduce our topic for today.

Anna: Of course. In today's episode, guys, we're going to talk about deepfakes, an interesting, but worrisome technology. And we're going to share our thoughts and opinions about this tech, and the potential impact that it might have on the future.

Andrew: Exactly. So, we'll start with our main topic, which is deepfakes. And let's explain it to everyone here Anna, because I think it might be a new term to some people, and it does sound like something a little bit complex, and it is, but we'll try and break it down and explain it as best that we can, so that it is easy to understand. So essentially, a deepfake is a type of artificial intelligence, and it's used to create, or maybe we could say, fake is a better term, you could fake videos that didn't actually happen in reality.

Anna: That's right, Andrew, and to put it simply, basically, what you do is you take a video of a person and make it look like that person did something that they never actually did. It's essentially like putting on a kind of digital mask.

Andrew: I like that, Anna, a digital mask, that's a great analogy. And this technology is done with the help of a type of artificial intelligence, which is called machine learning. And this technology takes essentially just a ton of hours of video footage of someone. And by doing that, it learns how they talk, how they move how they express themselves. And the result is that it can make very believable videos that look real, even though they're not real, they're fake.

Anna: Right, exactly. And while this technology can be used for very fun or innocent things, like swapping your face with a celebrity or a movie star, for example, just to have a laugh or whatever. It also has some really potentially serious implications, which we're going to be going through and discussing in just a minute.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So then, essentially, deepfakes are this form of advanced digital impersonation, right? But it's important to remember that not everything that you see in a deepfake video is true. And in reality, most of it is fiction. And so, this is becoming just a hotter issue these days, Anna. I don't know personally, have you ever heard of deepfakes before this episode? Is it something that's been on your radar at all?

Anna: That's a really good question, because actually, it has been on my radar. But just recently, on one of the major streaming services, they released a reality TV show called *False Love*. And on this reality TV show, what they do is, people who are partners go on this reality TV show, and they show them images, which they have to decide whether they're true or false. And basically, what they do is they use body doubles. And just like you said, in that introduction, Andrew, they use the body doubles to then superimpose the face of the person. And the contestant has to choose whether what they're seeing is real or fake. That was the first time I've really ever come across it in like mainstream media or in a television program. So yeah, it's definitely on my radar right now. And it's interesting, because I'm thinking, are we going to have more types of entertainment or TV shows like this, where you kind of have to guess, is it real or is it fake? So, it's definitely on my radar from an entertainment perspective. What about you, Andrew?

Andrew: Well, I think the first deepfake that I saw that was really mind blowing to me, was by this TikTok. So, there's this guy, and I believe he's an American, and his name is Miles Fisher. Anyways, this guy is actually a look alike for Tom Cruise. He's almost a doppelganger for Tom Cruise. Like he looks a lot like Tom Cruise. And he has a very good impersonation of Tom Cruise down. So, even when he's not doing a deepfake video, if you were to ask him to do a Tom Cruise impersonation, he could do a very good job at it. He's got this schtick down about how to impersonate Tom Cruise. But now he's combined that with the machine learning and the deepfake to do a really amazing version of Tom Cruise. Like, it's almost impossible to tell that it's not the real Tom Cruise, it looks really, really convincing. So, he's **got, you know, the mannerisms down**, he's got the voice down, he's got the looks down just naturally. And then you combine that with the technology, and it's very, very convincing. And he's made some TikTok videos that have gone viral. I don't know if you're on TikTok, or not Anna or listeners but if you are, maybe you could go and search for his name and see some of those viral videos that he's made. So, that was the first time that it really came on my radar. And that was maybe during the pandemic, I think maybe a couple of years ago so pretty recently. But I've also heard about another kind of deepfake within the last few months and that is an audio deepfake. And so, you're using the same kind of technology, except instead of creating video, you're creating audio. Anna, are you familiar with the rapper Jay-Z? I'm sure you are, he's a very popular rapper, right?

Anna: Yes, I'm familiar.

Andrew: Right, the husband of Beyoncé, huge power couple in American pop music. So, a few months back, I heard this song by a group called Alltta. And I'm not sure if that's a group name, or a rapper name or a producer name. And the spelling is A-L-L-T-T-A, A-L-LT-T-A, Alltta. And we'll put a link in the description for this episode if people want to listen to this song on YouTube. But in this song, there is a verse by the rapper Jay-Z. So, a verse is what we call it when a rapper raps in a song for a section of the song, not the whole song, but just a part of the song, we call that a verse. So, there's a verse by the

rapper, Jay-Z, but it's actually not Jay-Z. It's all machine generated, it's a deepfake of his voice. So, what happened was that they used machine learning to learn about how Jay-Z sings, and you know, his flow, his style, where he usually pauses to breathe, how he expresses his voice, the machine learning did all that. And then some other rapper rapped the part. And they used some kind of computer process. You know, I'm not sure about the technical details, but they were able to emulate Jay-Z's voice through this. And the end result is really shocking. To me, it sounds exactly like Jay-Z. But it wasn't him at all, he had nothing to do with the song. And actually, the song is pretty good. I don't know if you've heard this one Anna or not. But like, I was like, this is a pretty good song. I was impressed.

Anna: Well, that kind of throws up a couple of questions to me really, because when you mentioned Andrew, about the Tom Cruise thing, for example, I was thinking, well, what's the legality around that? Like, where does that stand legally? I don't really know. But I think it'd be interesting to find out, can somebody just create deepfakes of you and post it on whatever site? And then also, when you mentioned about the audio thing, well, now you've got me a little bit worried because there is 1000s of hours of me talking away on a podcast. And I'm sure Andrew, well, you've been doing Culips now for a while, so, I guess that's where somebody could get me, right? They could create, well, hopefully not a rap song with me singing in it, because that would be horrendous. I don't think anybody wants to hear that. But technically, they could create something with my voice just because there's a lot of hours of audio out there. So, I think really, my question is, well, what's the legality around that? I'm really not sure. And then the second thing that comes into my head is, how is this going to affect I'm going to put in brackets "normal people" because I can really see the threat. For example, for people who are in the spotlight or **in the limelight**? But what about people who maybe don't have a public persona, or a presence? So yeah, I guess that's an interesting question for me. I don't know what you think about that, Andrew?

Andrew: Yeah, it's a question that I think has no answer. I'm sure from a legal standpoint, it feels illegal, right? It feels very illegal to create the likeness of somebody's image, and to pretend like you're them. I don't know if there are laws specifically for deepfakes yet, but I'm sure there are some kind of laws around impersonation and pretending that you are someone when you're not. And I'm not exactly sure of the details, but there's got to be some legal protection there. And I'm sure in the future, we'll see that be expanded to the digital space as well. I've heard some stories of some celebrities having their likeness and their voice's deepfaked for advertisements overseas in foreign countries. And I could see that as being troubling as well.

Like, let's just use Tom Cruise, for example, because everybody knows who he is, and we are already talking about him. So, imagine you're Tom Cruise, like your image is extremely valuable, right? And as far as I know, Tom Cruise doesn't really do endorsement deals like I don't recall seeing him ever, in an advertisement selling anything. Like I think he doesn't really need to do that at this point in his career, so he doesn't really sell products using his image. But, you know, in a foreign country where maybe the law is different, and he still carries a lot of cachet, right? Somebody could just make a deepfake of Tom Cruise selling their product and then they could **reap all the benefits** of having that celebrity endorsement without having to pay a penny. And if I were Tom Cruise in that situation, I'd probably be pretty upset and would want to get that squashed as soon as possible. So, I could see that happening and I think that may already be happening **to an extent**. So yeah, a lot of legal issues that come up when you're talking about this topic.

And Anna to mention, you know, from a podcaster's perspective, like the one that you and I have, it is very troubling. I read a story just this week of an elderly couple here in South Korea, who received a phone call, which they thought was from their daughter. But it actually wasn't from their daughter, it was from a scammer. And the scammer had deepfaked the daughter's voice and was saying, you know, "Mom and Dad, I'm in trouble, I need some money, you need to send me some money to this account right away." And you know, maybe in that kind of situation, a red flag would go up for many people. But for

elderly people who have no idea about this technology, they just totally were tricked and fooled, and they sent the money right away to that account, because they thought their daughter was in trouble. So yeah, I have to say that I'm pretty concerned. Like, like you mentioned, we have hundreds of hours of our voice just out there on the internet, I heard that they can make deepfakes with even just a five second clip of your voice. But it doesn't even take that much. So, I think even people who aren't podcasters maybe have to be concerned because what happens if you were just talking on the phone with somebody, and they recorded that one or two-minute conversation, and that could even be enough to copy your voice and make a deepfake of your voice. So yeah, it's something that I'm concerned about. It's something that I've talked to my family about even, you know, like if somebody calls and demands money, and it sounds like me, it might not be me. So, don't just like fork over the money right away.

Anna: You have to set up some kind of like secret code or something like that, that a deepfake wouldn't know. Well, I mean, if it only takes five seconds, then we're screwed basically, if it's only five seconds of audio required. Yeah, I mean, it is potentially wearing, of course, you mentioned there about financial fraud. So that's definitely a part of this deepfake technology that could affect I guess, people that are not in the limelight or the spotlight. And I mean, I guess there's also the other side of and as you mentioned at the beginning, Andrew and we talked about this, guys, when we're normally talking about these technology things is it's a double-edged sword, you've got the negative side, but you've also got some positives in there as well. And I think you mentioned about the voice as being used on adverts. And I think there are some benefits in terms of marketing and creating digital content. If an actor or somebody gives their permission to use their voice or use their image to do something, you know, there is that potential avenue for them as well. So, I think sometimes people do give their permission to create a deepfake, whereas they might not be able to have done that before. But then they can give them their image or their voice and then they do tutorials, or maybe they make an advert. So, I've seen that there are some benefits to deepfakes in terms of, you know, maybe advertising or creating digital content, maybe even educational purposes. And actually, one thing that I saw was

that with deepfake technology, what they could do is that I don't know if they can do this already, I'm really not up to speed on that. But they could actually put you in the advertisement. So, they could show you using the product, or they could put you in a situation where I don't know in an education for educational purposes, for example. So, there are some ways that they could actually use it in a positive way to maybe create a better customer experience, for example, or a better educational experience, for example. So, I guess there are some great positives to it. But for me, it's the name deepfake, it just doesn't sound good. I think it's **a hard sell**.

Andrew: Yeah. Anna, you're absolutely right, that is exactly what could happen. So, in an advertisement, for example, you could just have an extra do the acting, and then you could map some famous person's face over their face, and then you would have it look completely natural, right? And you're right, that this, like any technology is a double-edged sword. But for me, for this one, you know, usually I can say it's 50/50. There are some good things about it, there are some bad things about it and overall, it evens out. But for me, I don't really see deepfake technology as being 50/50. I could see some positive aspects, like you said, like, you know, if you were someone like Morgan Freeman, for example, who has a very iconic voice, and who could license his voice technology to documentaries and audiobooks. And you know, that kind of thing where they need a narrator, then that would be awesome for Morgan Freeman, right? Like, he could just not do any of the work, he could just license the software for his voice, and he could cash in on that, that would be great for him. But it would also be terrible for all of like, the small fish out there, and the narration and audiobook reading world, because suddenly they're out of a job, right? So, it's good for like the top guy, that's like the best of the best, but all of the other people, then they're maybe going to be out of work. And then we would also have less diversity in the audiobook world. Like all of a sudden, all of your audiobooks are going to be narrated by Morgan Freeman, right? Like, that could be a bummer. And yeah, so I mean, that's one of the positives, though, right? It's good for like a select group of people.

But I think overall, I don't really see how it could be a positive thing going forward. I think, you know, we're already hearing about some really bad things with this, like pornography, right? People being deepfaked in pornographic situations, which is terrible, revenge pornography, extortion, these kinds of really serious problems that are scary and don't really have a good solution yet, I think. I just don't really see the benefits of it as much as I see the negatives. Another negative that I just thought of is also like fake news, right? I heard recently, there was, I don't know if this was a video or an image, I think it was an image, not a video. But somebody tweeted out an image of the Pentagon with some smoke coming out of it. And they said the Pentagon had just been attacked, and the image look really, really real. And the tweet went out, and then it got retweeted by, I believe it was Reuters News Agency, and I may be wrong about that. But it was a big news agency accidentally retweeted this image. And so then suddenly, people believed that it was real. And instantaneously, a bunch of stocks in the American stock market went down. Now, it only took like 10 or 15 minutes for this story to be squashed and for the truth to come out, but there were like, 15 minutes of chaos, right, in the stock market as the truth was trying to be found. So, I could see this as just being like the starting point for way, way, way more crazy things. And I don't know if this like whole fake news kind of era that we're living in right now, it's just gonna get harder and harder and harder to tell truth from lie. And I'm pretty concerned about it, to be honest with you. And yeah, there are some benefits, but overall, with this one, I'm gonna say it's kind of a dangerous technology.

Anna: Yeah, definitely. And I really agree, to be honest, I agree. On the whole, I could imagine something along the lines of what you were saying there, Andrew, like pornography and revenge porn that can really affect somebody in such a damaging way. And I think another thing that's really dangerous about this is, the damage is sometimes already done. So, even if like within a very short period of time, people realize that it's actually a deepfake, and it's not real, well, sometimes, as I said, the damage is already done, the reputation is ruined. Or maybe there's potential damage, you know, a person, group, or an organization. So, it's really powerful, even though maybe it ends up not being actually true and people realize that it's a deepfake. And I don't know about you guys, but I

have to be honest, in the fact that I am more skeptical about the things that I see, read about in that kind of space. Sometimes you see some of these videos on YouTube with like sharks and things like this. And you're like, well, it's obviously fake. So, I think sometimes it is obviously not real. But I definitely take things more **with a pinch of salt**. And I'm definitely a little bit more critical about what I see online because as you said, Andrew with that example, in the Pentagon, these things can have a huge knock-on effect.

Andrew: Anna, maybe we'll wrap up with this one last story. And I really want to get your opinion on this because I think, you know, I am obviously not a Korean person, but I live in Korea, so I've maybe adjusted to the culture a little bit. But you as someone who doesn't live in Korea, or is not too familiar with the culture, then I'd really like to hear your opinion about this. So, this is maybe one of the good ways that deepfakes could be used. And this just popped into my mind, so let me run this by you. There's a TV show here in South Korea. And to be honest, I've never seen this TV show, I've just heard about it. And I don't even know the name of the show off the top of my head. I'm not a big TV watcher. But I'm sure some of our listeners in Korea will be familiar with this. And if I can find the information, maybe I'll put a link in the description for this episode as well.

But anyways, in this TV show, what they do is they essentially perform a kind of therapy. So, the guest on the show will be somebody who has recently lost a loved one, or maybe not even recently lost a loved one, but has lost a loved one at some point in the past. And I believe the premise is that the death was sudden and very traumatic, and there wasn't closure. So, what they do is they actually deepfake the deceased person, and kind of bring them back to life almost digitally so that the family member or the friends can re meet that person in a kind of VR space and have a final conversation with them to have that kind of closure. And they use it as an almost like a therapy tool. And yeah, apparently, it's supposed to be quite therapeutic. Like, I think that's what the guests on the show have said, even though they know that this is obviously just a recreation, and it's not their son or their best friend that had passed away. It's not that, they know that but then once you go into this kind of experience, and they have the VR, and the likeness is so real, and the

voice is so real, they can get that closure that they had been missing for so long. So, I think yeah, maybe there is some kind of application in that regard as well, some kind of therapeutic use to deepfake, I'm not sure. Anna, what do you think about that? Just what's your like, initial reaction to that kind of scenario?

Anna: Wow, that's a really tricky topic. I mean, the first thing I'd say is, I can't imagine what it's like to go through that sort of situation, that kind of grief, because I've never been through that. So, it's hard for me to understand. And you know, my heart goes out to anybody that's had that situation. My initial reaction is, of course, if there's some therapeutic benefits, then I guess each person has to decide that for themselves. For me, I feel like it's playing with fire a little bit, because I think there's something about, you know, establishing that person has gone, and that person is no longer there anymore. That's important in terms of moving on with the grieving process, from my perspective as somebody who's never been through that before so there's also that to take into account. But I think there is kind of that playing with fire a little bit there because, OK, you have this conversation with them. But then what if that then opens up this, OK, I want to have more conversations with them, or I want to do this again, or I want to, you know, have another conversation with them. And then I don't know, I think it could be a little bit dangerous. But I think, again, everybody would have to choose that for themselves. Again, everyone's different. I'm not sure. My initial reaction is, proceed with caution, like be careful with that. But again, I don't know. It's very tricky. It's a very personal thing.

Andrew: Yeah, I agree. I think it is very personal and probably best if it were administered by, you know, a mental health professional to help you with that, yeah, to guide you through. But that's just one example of how maybe we could use this deepfake technology for good in the future as well. You know, so maybe I'll give it a few points more in favor of the good, it's not all bad. Maybe there's some good to this technology, but we'll really have to wait and see. And I do think that we'll be hearing more and seeing more deepfakes in the future. So yeah, we'll have to keep our eyes open.

OK, Anna, so we're gonna keep the conversation going just for a little bit longer here for our Culips members, we have three rapid fire questions prepared. And let's start with question number one. So, Anna, question number one is, how do you feel about the use of deepfakes in movies? Like, for example, making characters younger, or using dead actors in new roles?

Anna: I think if the person who's being deepfake gives their permission, and they're happy to do that, then I don't see any issue with it, why not? I guess would be my question. But I guess it comes down to the permission element from me like, is that person happy to do it or not, obviously and that kind of seems to be common sense. What about you, Andrew?

Andrew: I think it's cool. I have no problem with it, other than the fact that it might stifle like new actors, right? We might just keep reusing the same old actors again. And again, it's like, can't we get any new blood into the cinema? I also heard like right now, Anna, I'm not sure when our listeners will be hearing this episode. But right now, in the States, there is a big strike happening with the movie writers and actors, everybody is on strike. And there's many reasons why they're striking. But one of the reasons is for extras going forward, the movie producers wanted to be able to pay extras \$200 for their likeness. And so, what they would do is they'd pay them \$200 and then they would scan their face and then for forever, they would have that image, and they would just be able to use that in upcoming movies to deep fake extras. So, there would be no actually human actor extras in future upcoming movies. And that's one of the reasons that the union was like, "Yo, hold on, we can't have this happening." So yeah, I mean, we don't want to get rid of the act of acting, right, the art of acting, I should say. Yeah, so it's cool. Like I heard in the new Indiana Jones movie, I haven't seen it, but I heard that Harrison Ford was deepfaked as a younger actor, and as a middle-aged actor. And then he played himself as a kind of senior actor, so in these different roles have the same character. So, I think that's, you know, kind of cool technology, but I just hope it doesn't replace new actors altogether.

Anna: I agree. I totally agree. I think that's a really valid point. Definitely.

Andrew: OK, rapid fire question number two, imagine a positive use of deepfake technology in education. What would it look like? And how would it benefit students? Could you see an application for this in education, Anna?

Anna: I was thinking initially about sort of English language learners. And I was thinking, well, maybe it'd be cool to have somebody, if you could maybe see what it could be like, let me explain. For example, if somebody is wanting to learn English, and they want to see like, what they could potentially get in the future, like, as in how fluent they could be in the future, so you could kind of maybe superimpose their voice and image onto somebody who's maybe a native speaker, or who's more advanced. And you could say, OK, this is what it could be like in the future. This is what you could aim for. I don't know if that would be a bit weird. But I'm trying to think how that might be motivating for some people to see oh, wow, like, look at me, there, like I'm giving a presentation. I'm speaking more fluently. I don't know, maybe that could be motivating for some people? Maybe not. But I'm sure there's many other better uses in education rather than that, but it's the first one that popped into my mind. What about you, Andrew?

Andrew: Yeah, it's really interesting to think about it in terms of pronunciation. You know, you could probably almost build this technology today, it would be a little bit clunky. But you could technically speak into your phone, even if you had a rather thick accent. And your phone, as long as your accent was understandable to your phone, then your phone could understand what you're saying. And then output it using a deepfaked voice that's, you know, a perfect accent. So, you just speak into your phone, and the output would be you know, perfect English with no accent or whatever language you're learning right? Now, there is enough of delay between you speaking into your phone and your phone speaking out that it would be too annoying to use, right? But like, what about in 20 years? Like, I don't know, maybe they could just almost put some device in your throat or in your brain. Like, I don't know what the future will hold. It's impossible. Like that's what's interesting

about living right now is it's absolutely impossible to imagine what the world will be like in 10 or 15 years. But yeah, there's got to be many examples of where you could use this technology in an education setting. The first thing that popped into my mind is just like replacing boring teachers with celebrities or people that students find interesting, right? Like having their favourite basketball player teach them instead of like Mr. Brown or something, right?

Anna: OK, Andrew, what about rapid fire question number three? Would you trust a news source that's been accused of using deepfakes?

Andrew: Yeah, it's pretty tough. I mean, everybody, I think, is allowed to make mistakes, including news organizations. And as this technology gets better and better and better, like we said, it's gonna be harder to tell what is real, what is fake. But yeah, definitely. Anna, like you mentioned, like, it hurts your reputation, it can damage your reputation, right? So, if a news organization were to do this once, maybe I could overlook it. But if it's something that they have done a couple of times, or, you know, several times, or maybe even have done on purpose, then definitely I probably wouldn't trust them for being a reputable source of information. What do you think?

Anna: Yeah, me neither, I think. But I guess the question is, would you ever know like, would you ever know if it's true or not? I guess sometimes you would and sometimes you wouldn't. But I think, yeah, sure, if I knew that something or a source was putting that kind of information on a platform, I probably wouldn't want to follow that platform anymore. And I'd probably be a little bit more picky about the information that I was consuming from that platform.

Andrew: The problem is with the news cycle these days, that even if something were fake, by the time that it was revealed and came out, then we'd just be onto the next story. And probably we'd forget about it as well, so.

All right, everyone, well, I think we'll end our bonus content here. So, thank you for listening, and we will talk to you next time. Take care. Bye.

Anna: Thanks so much, guys. See you soon.

Andrew: That brings us to the end of this lesson. Talk to you next time. Bye!

Detailed Explanations

To have got [something] down

Expression, informal

When sharing about the first deepfake he saw, Andrew mentions the TikToker named Miles Fisher, who does a very good impersonation of Tom Cruise. Andrew says that he's got the mannerisms down, he's got the voice down, he's got the looks down.

To have got [something] down is an informal expression that means to have become very skilled at doing something. If someone's got [something] down, it means they've mastered that task or skill and can perform it easily and exceptionally well. Usually, it means that they've put a lot of effort and time into learning and practicing that skill. For example, a musician who has been practicing playing the drums for years and can do it confidently and perfectly has got playing the drums down.

You can use this expression when talking about any skill or subject that you understand very well or can do at the proficient level. For instance, if you've learned all about how to use Photoshop and can do it very well, you might say, "I've got Photoshop down."

A common variation of this expression is to have got it all down. It means to have completely mastered a particular subject and have a high level of proficiency in every aspect of it. If someone has got it all down, it means they're an expert at something and excel at it.

Here are a couple more examples with **to have got [something] down**:

Mitchell: Are you ready for your trip to Spain? How's your Spanish?

Trina: Well, **I've got some basic phrases down**, hopefully it'll be enough!

Mitchell: Good luck and have a great trip. Can't wait to hear about it when you're back.

Christian: Hey Courtney! How did the band rehearsal go? Are you ready for the concert tomorrow?

Courtney: It was a success! **We've got all the new songs down**, and I'm super excited for the concert!

Christian: Right on! You guys are going to do great tomorrow.

In the limelight Idiom

When discussing the negative effects deepfakes can potentially have on people, Anna mentions that she sees the threat for both those who are in the spotlight or in the limelight, and those who are not.

To be in the limelight means to be in the center of public attention. If a person is in the limelight, they're famous for either positive or negative reasons. This expression is typically used when talking about celebrities or public figures who are very popular and receive a lot of media attention. It can also be applied to things and objects, such as companies, movies, technological inventions, and so on. For instance, when a new smartphone is released, and everyone is talking about it, you can say that the smartphone is in the limelight of the tech world.

The expression **in the limelight** originates from the 19th century when a piece of actual lime was heated and used as a source of bright light for actors standing on a theater stage. Similarly, when used figuratively, it means being the focus of attention so that everyone can see you.

Another expression Anna uses here is **in the spotlight**, and it has the same meaning. You can use both **in the limelight** and **in the spotlight** to describe someone or something that's receiving a lot of attention.

Here are a couple more examples with **in the limelight**:

Gabe: If you could date a famous person, who would you choose to date?

Roxanne: I don't think I'd like that at all.

Gabe: Really? Why?

Roxanne: I just don't like the idea of being **in the limelight**. I find it so exhausting. I'd never want to deal with that.

Caroline: Have you noticed that many celebrities are speaking openly about their mental health struggles lately?

Raymond: Yes, I have! Mental health awareness is **in the limelight** these days.

To reap the benefits

Idiom

In this episode, Andrew talks about using deepfakes in advertisements. He points out that somebody could make a deepfake of Tom Cruise selling their product and then **reap the benefits** of having that celebrity endorsement without having to pay them.

To reap the benefits is an idiomatic expression that means to get the advantages of something you've done. When used literally, in the farming context, the word "reap" means to harvest fruit or vegetables that have been planted. When used figuratively, "reap" means to enjoy the positive results of your actions.

This expression is typically used in situations when someone puts in a lot of time and effort in order to achieve something. For instance, if you've been working hard all summer, saved up a lot of money, and now you can take a month-long vacation, you might say that you're **reaping the benefits** of your hard work.

To summarize, **to reap the benefits** is a versatile expression and it can be used in any situation where you enjoy the good things that come from your efforts, whether it's work or personal life.

Here are a couple more examples with **to reap the benefits**:

Peter: It's truly amazing how you decided to change your career and become a data analyst. Another four years in college! So, was it worth it?

Gabby: Absolutely! I'm already starting to **reap the benefits** of all my hard work. I love my new job, and the salary is so much better!

Peter: I'm really happy for you!

Zach: I've been going to the gym for two months, but I see no changes. I'll be honest, I'm close to giving up.

Emma: It takes time, Zach! Stick to your exercise routine, and soon enough you'll be **reaping the benefits**. Trust me on this.

Zach: Thanks, Emma. I needed to hear this. Your support means a lot!

To an extent Phrase

When discussing the use of deepfakes of celebrities to sell products, Andrew says that in some foreign countries with different laws, someone could create a deep fake of Tom Cruise endorsing a product without his consent. He adds that it may already be happening **to an extent**.

To an extent is an expression used to talk about a degree of something. When something is happening **to an extent**, it means that it's partly true, but not entirely true. It means there's a limit to it. A common variation of this expression is **to some extent**, which means the exact same thing – to a certain limit, not entirely.

Another common variation of this expression used in questions is **to what extent**. For instance, you might ask, "To what extent do you agree?" This means you're asking someone how much they agree with a given statement, to what level they agree with it.

You can use **to an extent** in various situations, both formal and informal, when you need to express the idea that something is true only up to a certain point or degree, but not completely true.

Here are a couple more examples with **to an extent**:

Charlie: How's your research going?

Heather: We've been working so much lately. But I must admit, having a team working alongside you does make it easier **to some extent**.

Charlie: Totally! At least you're not alone.

Vanessa: I need your advice. I'm buying my first car, and I have no idea which one to choose.

Nick: It'll depend, **to an extent**, on your budget and your needs. Do you want a compact car, or do you need space? Do you have any model in mind? Do you want a new car, or were you considering used cars too?

Vanessa: I'm open to exploring different options, to be honest! I think I'll need to test drive some cars before I can decide.

A hard sell

Idiom

In this episode, Anna suggests some ideas as to how deepfake technology can be used in a positive way. However, despite all the positive aspects, she admits that the name “deepfakes” just doesn’t sound good. She adds, “it’s a hard sell.”

A hard sell is an expression that originated in the world of sales and marketing. It refers to an aggressive sales technique that involves pressurizing a buyer into making a purchase. Literally, it means trying hard to sell something and implies using strong and forceful tactics to make a person buy a product. The opposite technique is known as a **soft sell**, which is a more gentle and subtle approach.

However, the expression **a hard sell** has an additional meaning that isn’t related to sales. When used figuratively, as in this episode, it refers to something that is hard to convince people to do. If something is **a hard sell**, it means that it requires a lot of effort to get people to agree with it or accept it, and you need to work hard to persuade them. For example, if a friend suggests investing all your money in a startup, but you’re skeptical and hesitant, you can say that it’s **a hard sell**. This means they’d need to use strong arguments and persuasive tactics to convince you to agree and “sell” their idea to you.

You can use this expression in the negative when you want to express that it was easy to convince someone to do something. For example, if your colleagues agreed to work late on Thursday so that they could take a day off on Friday, you can say, “it wasn’t **a hard sell**.”

Here are a couple more examples with **a hard sell**:

Jason: I'm quite happy to see that everyone loved the new healthier snacks vending machine! I'm thinking about introducing this idea to our other branch.

Mary: Are you serious? It might be **a hard sell** for our colleagues there! A lot of them are addicted to sugary snacks and soda.

Jason: I know, but it's worth considering!

Helen: I can't believe you guys are going to travel and live in a van! It's crazy!

Mike: Well, it **wasn't really a hard sell for me**, I've always been very adventurous. It took me a couple of years to convince Jane to go for that, though!

To take [something] with a pinch of salt

Idiom

When talking about being able to determine if a piece of news or a video is true or fake, Anna mentions that she's more skeptical and critical about what she sees online. She says that she **takes things with a pinch of salt**.

To **take something with a pinch of salt** is an idiomatic expression that means not fully believing it. If you take something you see or hear with a pinch of salt, it means that you don't think it's entirely true and you have doubts about it. It might have some truth to it but be exaggerated or not be true at all. **Taking things with a pinch of salt** means thinking critically and being more cautious and skeptical.

The origin of this idiom is believed to come from the idea that adding a bit of salt to food could make it taste better. Similarly, when used figuratively, taking something with a pinch of salt means not fully trusting what you hear. Adding salt here refers to approaching things with a more skeptical and careful approach. For instance, if a skincare advertisement claims that it will smooth out all your wrinkles, it may sound hard to believe, and you should **take it with a pinch of salt**. In other words, you should question it and not accept it as fact.

A variation of this expression that is more common in American English is to take [something] with a grain of salt. We talk more about it in [Catch Word episode #202](#). Check it out to learn more about it.

Here are a couple more examples with **to take [something] with a pinch of salt**:

Sean: What are you drinking?

Melissa: Cleansing juice! I read in a magazine that you can lose 10 pounds if you drink this juice for a week!

Sean: Are you sure about that? I'd **take that with a pinch of salt** if I were you.

Austin: Check this out! Lucy just posted another video. Can you believe her? Smiling and dancing, like nothing happened. We just broke up a week ago!

Jackie: Come on. **Take everything that you see on social media with a grain of salt.** You know people only post the good stuff there.

Quiz

1. Which of the following means to be in the public eye?

- a) In the light light
- b) In the lemon light
- c) In the limelight
- d) In the line light

2. Which of the following is a good example of reaping the benefits?

- a) Buying something on sale
- b) Passing a test after studying hard
- c) Quitting your job to become a farmer
- d) Meeting a friend after a long time

3. True or false? If you believe something to an extent, you don't think it's entirely true.

- a) True
- b) False

4. If a friend says to you that moving their family to another city was a hard sell, they mean that ____.

- a) they had to sell their house
- b) it was challenging to persuade their family
- c) it was very easy for them to move
- d) they work as a salesperson

5. If someone tells you to take the news with a pinch of salt, they mean that ____.

- a) they advise you to never watch the news
- b) you should eat a salty snack while watching the news
- c) this news source is reliable
- d) you shouldn't trust everything you hear in the news

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel about deepfakes? Can you see any positives in this technology?
2. Is there a skill that you've got down? What is it and how did you achieve that?
3. How do you think it feels to be in the limelight? Would you ever want to be in that situation?
4. To what extent do you agree that using deepfake technology to recreate dead people can be helpful in therapy?
5. What type of information do you usually take with a pinch of salt?

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.b 3.a 4.b 5.d

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