

This startup is creating personalized deepfakes for corporations | Rest of World

By Nilesh Christopher

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Umang Agarwal is a Hrithik Roshan superfan. For the past five years, he's run a YouTube channel dedicated to the superstar, who's popularly dubbed "the Greek god of Bollywood." Aggarwal typically reposts videos of Roshan's dance performances, personal messages to politicians and actors, and behind-the-scenes shoots at exotic locations. During the Hindu festival of Rakhi this August, Agarwal shared a remarkable video.

"Hello Umang," Roshan said in the 16-second clip. "Happy Rakhi to you." The video was viewed thousands of times. Followers of the channel couldn't believe Aggarwal had solicited a greeting from their favorite actor: "Brother, you are very lucky," one person said. Another commented that his years of "hard work" running a YouTube fan channel for the superstar "paid off."

Aggarwal wasn't the only person to get a personal message from Roshan. Across social media, fans were getting the same, addressed by name. They weren't real, not exactly. They were deepfakes, created for the confectioner Cadbury by Rephrase.ai, a Bengaluru-based startup that is pioneering the commercial use of artificial intelligence-generated avatars based on real people. Roshan had licensed the rights to his image to Cadbury, allowing the company, with Rephrase.ai's help, to make him say whatever they wanted.

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