

Before The Mirror - Unknown

As a starting point for the project we looked for subjects we might be interested in as a group and found the article *False Memories for Fake News During Ireland's Abortion Referendum* by Gillian Murphy (et al.) published in *Psychological Science* in August 2019¹. This caught our interest as it is relevant to our daily lives. For a while now, we have been living large parts of our lives online. The internet is literally at our fingertips. But with it comes an uncertainty about what we see and how reliable this is. Sometimes even the most basic life hack videos are completely fictional and created by so called content farms. However, the harm this can cause is much greater when uncertainty collides with political content we see online. This is portrayed in the previously mentioned article, in which people (N= 3,140) were presented with news stories about campaign events surrounding the Abortion Referendum in Ireland. Out of the six news articles, two had been made up. Nonetheless, almost half of the people reported having a false memory of the events in at least one of the fake articles. A third of the participants even had quite specific memories of the events. The study ended on a note saying: "This study suggests that voters in a real-world political campaign are most susceptible to forming false memories for fake news that aligns with their beliefs." We thought it was interesting how something like fake news can have such a profound impact on a person's memory, especially when it aligned with their beliefs. It triggered questions like how many fake memories do we possess and how would you even know?

We continued along the lines of the article and did some digging on similar concepts. We got insights about for example attitude polarization: meaning that when people are confronted with evidence on an opposing view, their beliefs or values become even more extreme. But more importantly the paper highlights confirmation bias, the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that affirms one's prior beliefs or hypotheses. Both of these insights and the article were relevant as starting point for the concept because it is a good reflection of how society lives nowadays.

Almost everyone gets in some way involved with certain news articles as it is an important way to get updates about what is going on in the world. If it is not on the television then probably through a tablet, computer or phone that has social media apps or platforms accessible through internet. While on television the news is more likely to be monitored by the company producing it, on social media and online in general the chances are smaller. Anyone can make a 'news' website or blog and anyone can share it on social media.

¹ Murphy, G., Loftus, E. F., Grady, R. H., Levine, L. J., & Greene, C. M. (2019). False Memories for Fake News During Ireland's Abortion Referendum. *Psychological science*, 30(10), 1449-1459.

Additionally, social media and most platforms we interact with are created to keep you active on said platform by providing you with content you want to see. This is done with algorithms that use your past behavior on the platform to provide you with similar content. In the light of unmonitored news and the effect that fake news clearly has on a person, according to the article, people are at risk. Especially when algorithms are like an online form that exploits confirmation bias.

Consequently, a person will develop his/her/itself with all this news in mind and create an opinion, maybe not knowing that this opinion can be based on false information. After having come up with some statements at the early stages of the process (eg. "How hard is it to convince people of fake news?" and "People prefer fake stories over the reality when it fits better with their beliefs") we eventually arrived at the final statement: "Fake news determines your identity." This statement also assumes that real news determines your identity as well, because it shapes your thoughts and opinions as well.

After determining the statement different concepts and solutions to an experience followed, and eventually got combined to one called "Before the Mirror". The title of the work is the first nod to fake news, "Before the Mirror" is a painting by the famous painter Manet (see Figure 1). We are claiming it as our own. In this painting there is a woman with her back towards the audience, we do not fully know who she is and neither can we know from her reflection because, while most of the painting is relatively detailed, the reflection is unclear.

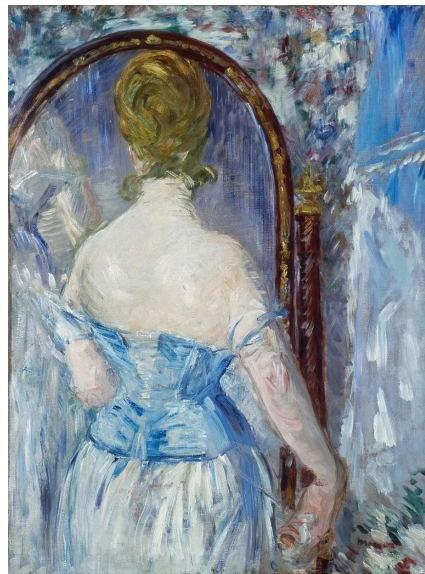


Figure 1. Manet's *Before the Mirror*

Although, this painting only served as inspiration for the title, it also somewhat conveys our installation. Specifically, the unclearness of her reflection. Mirrors in art tend to

be linked to the concept of identity and we use it in our daily lives to see ourselves. If we assume fake news determines your identity, your identity becomes muddled and unclear because it is grounded on false information. But even factual news online has the ability to muddle your identity, because of algorithms that only provide you with one sided information.

Therefore, we decided to make a mirror that creates a direct link to your identity. The mirror has nine circles cut out of it with vibration motors attached to them, these vibration motors have the possibility to render the reflection blurry/unclear. Which of the mirror cut-outs vibrate depends on the output they receive from a game on the ipad. The game, called “The Greater Firewall”, presents the user with a news headline from a real/fake news database and asks them if they would share or reject it. This would go in a quick-fire round, both to keep it engaging but also to tap into some subconscious level. Either at the end of each news article or at the end of several rounds they will receive feedback in the mirror. The amount of the cut-outs vibrating would be based on a probability calculation, which has heavier weights on fake news but also has weight on real news.

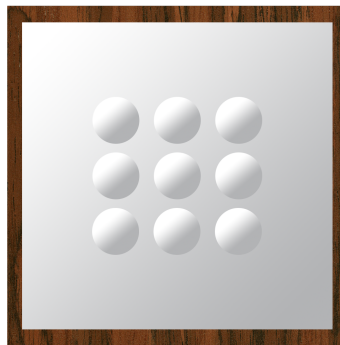


Figure 2. The mirror, with the cut-outs being able to vibrate individually.

The audience would engage with the piece in a one-on-one basis. The setup we have in mind would be an analogy for a computer (in turn often associated with internet), with an ipad as the keyboard and the mirror as the screen. Through the exhibition description, as well as the in-game introduction, the audience will know it is about fake news. However, to avoid making it a guessing game about which article is fake or real, we keep a high pace in the game so they do not have much time to think about it. Seeing their reflection, it will hopefully be clear, that their identity partially isn't and that this is linked to the fake news.