

Multimedia Lab

Report

Through My Eyes

LAB Hope - Group 12

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1. Context

Through my eyes is an immersive short film that intends to confront viewers with a cruel reality that many pets face silently. This was a project developed for the master's on Multimedia and on Electrical and Computer Engineering and its main focus is to tell a meaningful narrative using digital media.

2. Goals

The main goal of our project is to shock the participant in order to make them understand another's point of view of a problem that is mistreatment of pets. Freedom is a concept that many have as pre-acquired, however, contrary to what many may think, animals dependent on human care, such as pets and livestock, do have 5 freedoms established. (Fraser et al., 1997). It was acknowledged that almost none of these freedoms are respected in different contexts and some want to ignore that, believing that the human in charge of an animal should decide which freedoms to implement. We want those who may experience our digital narrative to stop and start thinking more about others who have no voice to defend themselves.

Using an immersive audiovisual experience we intend to confront the participants with a cruel reality that many animals face silently. We expect each person to change their perception on animal abuse and try to make them an active member of our society in the combat against animal cruelty. Another crucial goal it's to make users reflect on the differences between Human freedom and animal freedom. Questions like : are animal freedoms and human freedoms equal? Should they be equal? Do all deserve them? may arise, and even though there is not a concrete answer it is important to think about them so that, one day, no animal will suffer in the hands of a human who is responsible for it.

3. Double diamond process description

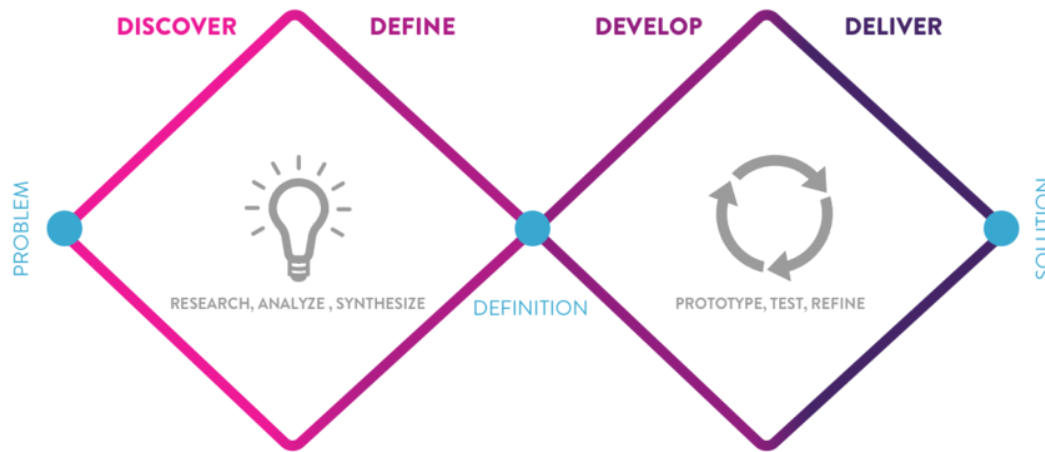


Figure 1. Double diamond process

In order to make our project a reality it was vital to define a methodology capable of guiding us through the development of all the components needed and, at the same time, take advantage of the group's multidisciplinary. For that we were asked to use a double diamond methodology approach defined with 4 main stages (discover; define; develop; deliver). (Figure 1)

3.1 Discover

In this first phase the group was in charge of researching and brainstorming the theme defined (freedom). Different ideas were discussed, like the nudge theory or the concept of free will, but in our understanding these were problematics that were already pretty much discussed. We wanted to approach something new, or at least something that could be easily forgotten. We then began to think about animals and if there were any kind of freedoms stipulated as there are in humans (Vásquez, 2019). We were surprised to find that animals in the care of humans do have 5 freedoms, (Fraser et al., 1997) but we were also surprised to find that most of them were not being applied in different contexts. (Luis et al., 2018) Circus animals, pets and livestock have those freedoms disrespected or not even considered at all. The saddest part is that almost nothing is done about it. (João, 2020) During our investigation we tried to find references of narratives that explored animal freedom and

also how they were being told. We then found a short movie that later helped us to define our narrative.

3.2 Define

It was now time to define our project, what kind of story we could tell and how we could tell it. We ended up using the overall narrative of a short Directed by Zsófia Zemberi named “Gift”. It tells the story of a little girl that was adopted recently by a seemingly loving family. With time the family starts to get tired of the little girl abandoning her. In the end of the short the little girl turns out to be a dog, confronting the public with the reality of animal abuse and neglect. With the narrative defined we now wanted to try and think of ways we could tell the story in a more immersive and emphatic manner. We thought on how we could make the participant feel like the main character, angry, sad, small and hopeless. Based on some references presented on the benchmarking document, It was then decided to use the projection of a video in a small and dark space. The video would be recorded in first person, portraying the daily life of a “child” that was recently adopted. With the use of a first person video, we wanted to occult the true identity of the character, making the participant question its identity. We would also use sounds or music along with a narrator to make the experience even more immersive. The video would be concluded with the abandonment of the character, and then another video would be projected revealing the character's true identity.

3.3 Develop

In this phase we divided each component of the project through the different members of the group. Each component was transformed into different tasks that each and one of us had to conclude : script; storyboard; recordings (video and sound) ; brand and publicity; video editing; documentation; website etc. We decided to record the video with a smartphone since it was easier to maneuver in small spaces and we didn't intend a video with too much quality, as the granny and fast movement of the phone camera would convey a more immersive and interesting experience. Some tasks were developed in parallel while others depended on the conclusion of some, like the video editing for example. We decided to remove all the sound of the recordings and use only the music and the narrator in key moments of the narrative. The video was divided in two main parts, a happy one and a sad one, therefore a happy background music was used in the first part and a more “aggressive” music in the second part. Transitions were made in the most fluid way possible in order to

convey a more appealing experience for the audience. By the time we were editing the short we also decided to include subtitles as a precaution. In some moments users can even experience the blink of the character's eyes. For the physical experience itself we ended up deciding to use a small tent with an elevated screen, since using a projection could bring problems with visibility since we wanted a somewhat dark space. We also decided it would be interesting for the experience to bring some objects that were important for the narrative, like the plush toy. Even though the tent doesn't have a direct relation with the story, we believe it was important, since it forced the participants to be sited at a low level, making some discomfort, while darkening and tightening the space.

3.4 Deliver

Our project was then delivered and presented at a corridor next to the classroom due to the size of the tent that could disrupt other groups' projects. There were a lot of people interested in testing it, including colleagues from other courses, but unfortunately due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the project was only experienced by the teachers and 2 other colleagues. Since we were also lectured by some university staff because of the tent, we then removed it.

The overall feedback was positive and the plot was well understood. Even though it was not possible for many users to experience our final project, we decided to share the link of the video on youtube. Some aspects that were mentioned that could improve the experience were: the removal of the subtitles; the decrease in volume of the music; and a more childish approach in the dialogue of the narrator. It was also mentioned that the use of the tent could be rethought, as it did not add a lot more to the experience itself.

4. Innovation points

We believe that we have an innovative project because most known multimedia projects, using immersive experiences / narratives, like the ones referred on the benchmarking document, are made with a human point of view regarding humans and human problems. We developed an immersive experience / narrative based on an animal experience and point of view that could perfectly fit on a human one. We believe we were able to express an important message in a simple way, without almost any kind of interactivity, as we wanted the user to feel unable to do anything to save or help the main character. By making the

abusers and the main character incognit it was easier to relate to the story and give the idea that an abuser could be anyone.

5. User experience

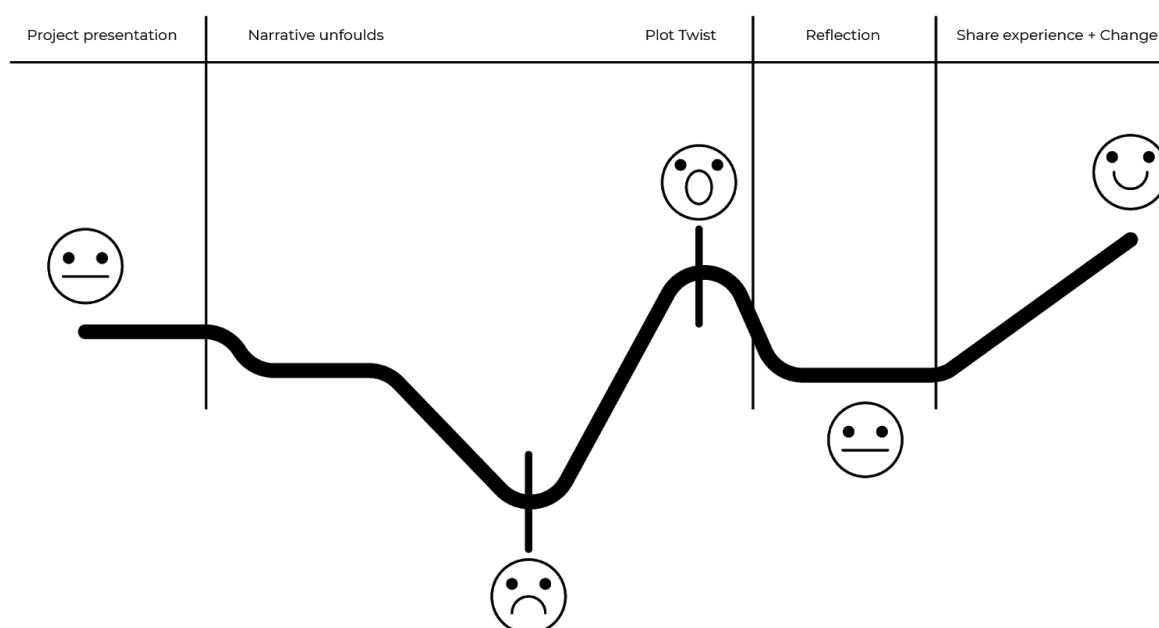


Figure 2. User experience diagram

At the beginning of the experience, the user will be asked to enter a small tent. A video will be playing on a big monitor. Initially it will be understood that it is a video about the life of someone, maybe a child. The first moments of the video will be apparently happy with a calm background music, and at key moments the history will be narrated. The user will be a little confused with the purpose of the video, but over time the narrative will distort. Slowly that someone is mistreated both physically and psychologically. Then a strident and violent music will be emitted, recreating the experience of the main character in the user. The participant will feel disgusted and angry at everything that the child is going through, however they will only be able to observe, while the story unfolds. The video will end with an unfortunate ending and the user may get up to leave thinking the experience is finished. At that moment another video will be played, showing the true identity of the main character, a domestic

dog. The user will then reinterpret the entire narrative through the eyes of a dog and not a person or child. The user will reflect on the whole experience, wondering what they saw and why something should be done about it. In the end a QR code will be shared so that the user may answer a short questionnaire about the experience.

6. Technology and interface specifications

In terms of technology and interface specifications we opted for very simple and straightforward softwares and electronic components, as we were more focused on the story itself and the message it conveyed.

- Video recording - For the video recording we used a smartphone connected to a selfie stick above the waist, since it was not intended to develop a high definition video. Its portability helped us on recording some scenes that would be quite difficult or impossible with a normal camera. The sound would be deleted later on the editing program.
- Sound Recording - The narrator was recorded using a smartphone, through an Android application *Super Recorder*, guided by a script, once again because a high quality sound was not intended. The background music was downloaded from the internet, from a free library and then added in key moments of the narrative.
- Design - All the components of the design and marketing were developed using the adobe software family, as photoshop and illustrator.
- Website - The website was created with Javascript and React, using the React-UI framework "Material-UI" and the Parallax effect to give a better visual experience. The base code was made with a free template from Creative-Tim, giving a better start than scratching it from zero. The license used in the website was the MIT License.
- Editing - All the videos and sound were then compiled and edited using *hitfilm express*, a simple free video editing software. For the subtitles and credits *After Effects* was used.
- Interface - The interface for our project consists only in a tent covered with a dark cloth. An elevated monitor connected to a computer inside of the tent. A video playing in loop and a set of headphones.

7. Conclusions

In the end we were very satisfied with the final result. We believe we were able to effectively achieve our goals and the project requirements. The message was conveyed and the participants understood it. Although we had fewer participants than expected, physically, due to COVID 19, many were able to watch the video online, and all of them were captivated and inspired by the narrative. Even though it's just a prototype we understand that there were elements that we could do differently or improve. The space of the experience could be rethought so as to link the environment to the story itself, and the narrator could have a child's voice and a simpler dialect. We should have been more careful with the hints we gave in the video, since some could spoil the plot. We considered that with some tweaking and work, our project has potential. Maybe we could record more stories from different animal contexts or even give a voice to others in need. We could also rethink our short as a more interactive experience or other ways we could make it more immersive.

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