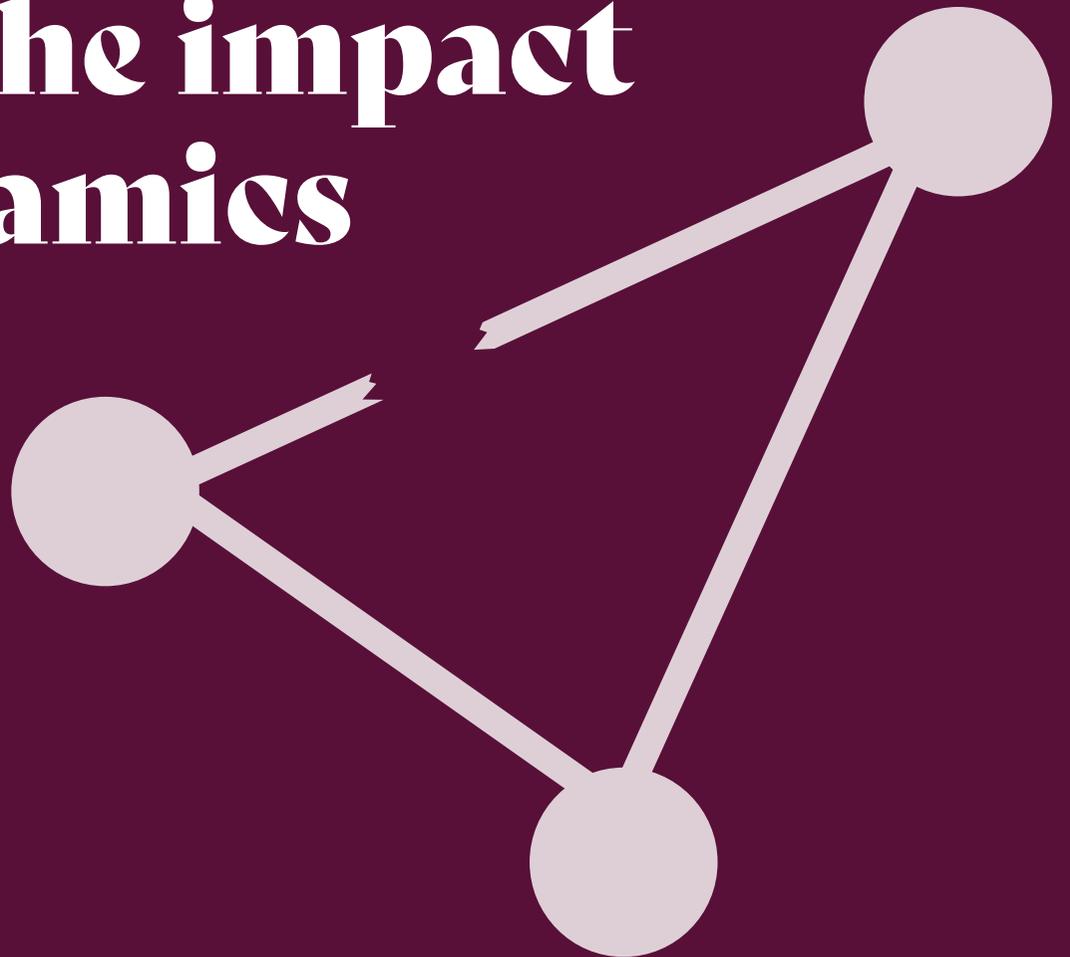


Exploring the influence of design on belief systems and the impact on social dynamics

An insight report by Carly Beynon



Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, another ‘virus’ was spreading online – a digital pandemic. The creation and sharing of misinformation regarding the physical virus and vaccinations started gaining traction worldwide. People sought answers to the confusion, grief and anger that came with living through an unprecedented situation and started to invest themselves in widely spread rumours that “the virus was engineered in a laboratory in China... as a bioweapon” and “A COVID-19 vaccine will be unsafe... will kill millions... or implant trackable microchips in people” (Lewis, 2020). Due to conflicting information presented to them, people began to question their beliefs and perceptions of what they thought was right – leading to strain within friendships, relationships and families.

Misinformation and disinformation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most recent examples of the power of visual communication and media influencing an individual’s beliefs and potentially instigate life-changing decisions. Having experienced this personally, in addition to witnessing upset and rifts caused between long-standing friendships and marriages, while also becoming aware of the 131k strong Reddit community “r/QanonCasualties” (2021) through various news articles – led to questioning the extent of what people see and hear impacts on their belief systems and social dynamics.

The research project will investigate the psychology and connections of belief systems and ideologies within the subtopics of misinformation, traditional conspiracy theories, propaganda and consumerism and the influence design can have on personal belief systems. For the purposes of the investigation and to focus on determined aims and objectives, religious beliefs were discounted within the research.

Aims

Identify and understand ideology and belief systems.

Explore how ideology may inform a person's identity and belief systems.

Determine how design can influence ideologies and belief systems both positively and negatively.

Objectives

Explore the psychology behind ideology and belief systems and what can influence them within the subtopics of misinformation, traditional conspiracy theories, propaganda and consumerism.

Identify the personal impact that fluctuations in belief systems have on individuals and relationships.

Analyse visual and linguistic outputs intended to persuade and manipulate beliefs.

Methodology

This report was compiled utilising a selection of mixed methodologies to provide a broad and holistic understanding of the topic under discussion. Being unable to conduct research in-person due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in Wales – primary statistics and qualitative insights were gathered from two online surveys using a variety of both closed and open-ended lines of questioning. One survey on *'Belief Systems, Ideologies, Brands and Social Impact'* received twenty-seven responses, and a second on *'Critical Thinking'* received nineteen responses.

Four informal, structured email interviews also gathered in-depth qualitative insights. Structured interviews were chosen due to the nature of the topic, while also establishing the same line of questioning for the three individuals who took part in under the same category to – according to Qu and Dumay “elicit brief answers” and produce “objective data” (2011, p. 244). Two of these interviews were conducted with individuals who have had first-hand experience of being a person that has shifted their beliefs following the information they have assimilated, and a third interview with a person affected by the shift in the beliefs

of another. A fourth interview was conducted on brand ideology with a McDonald's team member to gather insights as to how staff members play a part in consumer persuasion. As the nature of the subject can be complex and personal, two interviewees wished to remain anonymous and were named appropriately.

To raise further questions on the topic, provide discussion and prove or disprove own findings, secondary data required for this investigation was gathered from the *Office for National Statistics* (ONS) to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the British public. Additionally, the reading and analysis of existing literature and a documentary, including but not limited to *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell to gain insights into the viral nature of spreading information, and *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* by Slavoc Žižek further own knowledge of the philosophy and psychology behind ideologies. Lastly, analysis of the design of visual and language outputs using semiotic terminology from Daniel Chandler (2021) to understand and explain the theory behind forms of communication.

Ideology and Belief Systems

In the simplest of terms, belief systems can be explained as sets of principles and perspectives of individuals that guide understanding, interpretation and interaction with the world including what is viewed as truth and reality. Whereas ideology is the actualisation of ideas and philosophies by an organisation, group or individual (Cranston, 2020). As is well known, one of the most infamous political ideological systems in the world was that of the '*National Socialist German Workers' Party*' under the rule of Adolf Hitler. Language and design were used to influence the actions of much of the German population – generating a narrative intended to focus hate and action against a culture of “foreign intruders” (Žižek, 2012). Instilling fear, hatred and anger through the spread of disinformation and deception to turn a population of Jewish people into scapegoats or folk devils; where gaps in this information were replaced by fantasy to justify their actions, such as “Jews are vulgar... not washing regularly, seducing innocent girls” (Žižek, 2012).

Beliefs can be formed, guided and also disrupted by life experience and society; yet with wide variations in the experiences, family structure and communities of every person, beliefs are difficult to corroborate by science or fact. A statement by Daniel Kahneman (2011) as cited by Lewis (2018) attests to this:

For some of our most important beliefs, we have no evidence at all, except that people we love and trust hold these beliefs. Considering how little we know, the confidence we have in our beliefs is preposterous - and it is also essential.

COUNTABLE NOUN
[oft with poss] - The belief system of a person or society is the set of beliefs that they have about what is right and wrong and what is true and false.

(Collins Dictionary Online, 2020)

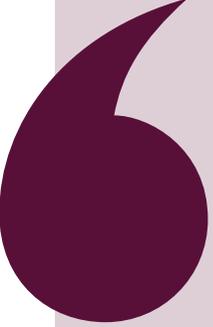
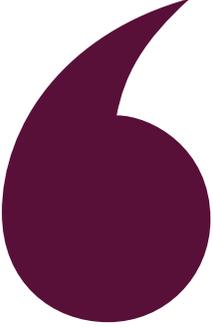
What can make someone falter in their beliefs? Could having confidence in our self-beliefs be essential and key in their adhesion throughout a lifetime? If something were to happen to knock the confidence of the population and ‘shake them to the core’ i.e. their core beliefs, how would this impact their belief systems? When questioned in an online survey (Beynon, 2021) if there was a significant event that triggered interest in this information [misinformation, conspiracy theories and propaganda], each of the seven respondents that stated they believed in such information could recall a particular event such as “9/11”, “The Brexit Referendum” and “COVID” that made an impact and triggered them to seek alternative answers.

Significant events can impact other aspects of life which can, in turn, affect beliefs. Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on health and wellbeing, the Office for National Statistics Dataset *Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (COVID-19 module), 27 to 31 January 2021* (2021) details a total of 56% of respondents stated, “my wellbeing is being affected”, which includes depression, anxiety and loneliness; while a total of 30% stated “my relationships are being affected” – with the highest percentage of both of these being among 16-29-year-olds. Meanwhile, an overwhelming 75% of respondents are ‘very’ or ‘somewhat worried’ about the impact that COVID-19 is having in their life. While the data does not delve into qualitative responses, it does show that an event like COVID-19 is having significant emotional and mental health impact on the general population, which could, in turn, affect thinking ability leading to a shift in beliefs.

Taking this into consideration, it can be suggested that the anxieties of such an event surrounding the loss of loved ones, loss of control, fear and anger; compounded with a loss of confidence in governmental entities and official agencies can lead to a shift in an individual’s belief systems.



Image: Matheus Bertelli (2019)



We fear all kind of things... We fear natural disasters, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis. We fear corrupted politicians. We fear big companies which can basically do with us whatever they want. The function of the shark [in Jaws] is to unite all these fears so that we can, in a way, trade all these fears for one fear alone. (Žižec, 2012)



The Impact of Misinformation on Beliefs

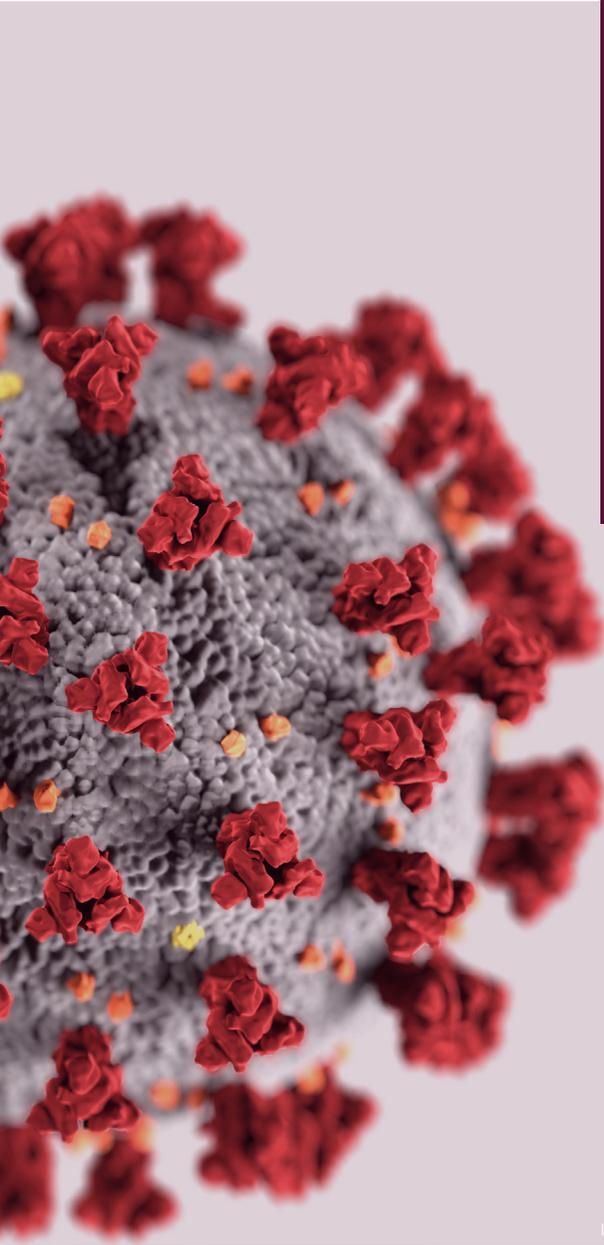


Image: CDC (2020)

The world has never had access to such vast amounts of content and news until the invention of the internet. During this digital age, the spread of misinformation (misleading and harmful information) has gained traction exponentially due to the ease of sharing information to wide audiences via the internet and in particular – social media. The metaphor ‘digital wildfire’ has been used to describe the phenomenon, whereby the viral sharing of this form of content can potentially result in devastating emotional consequences akin to that of a physical wildfire. A research study titled *Digital wildfires: hyper-connectivity, havoc*

and a global ethos to govern social media investigated the social impact of sharing misinformation and identified governance opportunities including self-governance to combat the problem (Jirotko et al, 2018).

Misinformation is not created or shared with the intent to deceive, unlike disinformation. However, the two can coincide as deceitfulness can seep into misleading information. The public reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic is reminiscent of that of the AIDS ‘global epidemic’ of the 1980s, whereby there has been

resistance to proven solutions due to opinions of infringement of personal freedom (Waxman, 2020). This resistance, along with widespread fear and uncertainty is a breeding ground for untruths and false information, instilling paranoia and distrust among the masses.

Malcolm Gladwell likens the spread of behaviours and information to viral epidemics and wildfires in his book *'The Tipping Point'*, "In epidemics, the messenger matters: messengers are what make something spread... and the specific quality that a message needs to be successful is the quality of 'stickiness'" (2015, P.92). Unverified messages of misinformation can be more aggressive in tone than the debunked alternative and therefore be more memorable those who share it. A prime and recent example of the use of social media and the internet to spread inaccurate information is that of former U.S. President Donald Trump, who utilised his social media accounts to spread inaccurate information to the masses. Taking to Twitter – where his account has since been blocked – to create short yet powerful messages using dangerous rhetoric to fit his agenda that the 2020 presidential election "was stolen" (Sardarizadeh, 2021) and that the COVID-19 pandemic was being inflamed by the "fake news media" (Fallows, 2020). The repetitive nature of these messages, along with the language he used intentionally embedded his points of view into the minds of his followers despite the accuracy of his comments.

The illusory truth effect can in part explain the influence of repetitive viewing of inaccurate information and what is perceived to be true. In an article by De Keersmaecker et al (2019), studies show that despite cognitive ability, the more exposure that an individual has to false information through

repetition, the more likely it is that they will believe this information despite being told and shown evidence that it is false – thereby acknowledging how influential repetitive messaging can be.

In addition to users sharing harmful content, social media algorithms are designed to encourage further usage of their platform and will personalise the experience by showing and recommending posts of a similar nature, therefore promoting bias and further exacerbating the spread of misinformation by enabling user access to it (Corbett, 2020). However, not all content sharing is dangerous – as Marina Jirotko and her team from the *Digital Wildfire* project explain "This rapid spread of content via social media can offer undoubted societal benefits, such as the promotion of social cohesion through solidarity messages and humanitarian campaigns" (Jirotko et al, 2015, p. 194). Communities can be formed, and social actions instigated on and offline by those with mutual beliefs through the use of social media as exemplified by #BlackLivesMatter (Black Lives Matter, 2020).

Beliefs and Traditional Conspiracy Theories

When you ask someone what a conspiracy theory is, a typical response would be along the lines of traditional conspiracies such as ‘alien abductions’, ‘the moon landing was fake’ and ‘the Illuminati’. However, with many recent unfounded misinformation and disinformation stories being labelled as conspiracy theories, is the term ‘conspiracy theory’ now being overused and confused with ‘misinformation’? If so, the underlying ideology of both conspiracy theories and misinformation intends to permeate politics and society through the use of messaging that creates distrust and paranoia, such as “claims that Fauci and Gates created the pandemic to try and control people... and that they want to use vaccines to insert trackable microchips into people” (Kelland, 2021), leading to many people forming adverse opinions on receiving vaccinations against the virus.



Image: Pixabay (2016)

Fig. 1: Belief in misinformation survey results

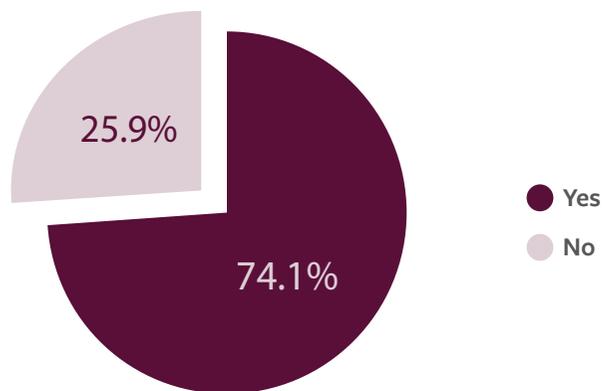


Fig. 2: Belief in conspiracies survey results

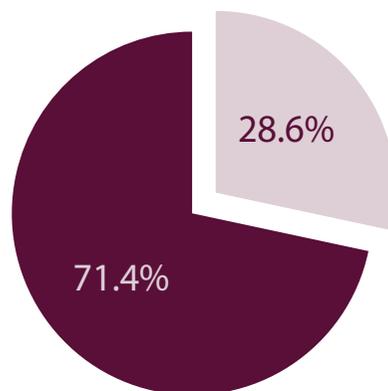
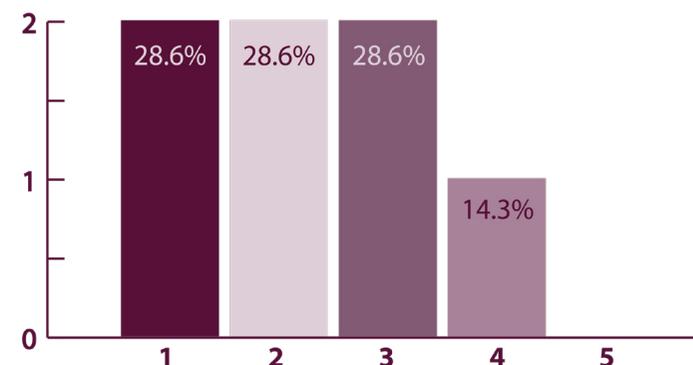


Fig. 3: Strength of belief survey results



Traditional conspiracy theories can be viewed with an amount of scepticism and intrigue, where curiosity draws them in, and they can explore without taking them seriously. However, could there be a link between believing in misinformation and traditional conspiracy theories? This was something that was explored during a survey (Beynon, 2021) where respondents were asked if they had an interest in information labelled ‘misinformation, conspiracy theories and propaganda’. 26% of total respondents stated they did [fig. 1], whereby 72% of those people also stated they had an interest in traditional conspiracy theories [fig. 2]. Then asked to rate on a scale of one to five how strongly they believed in traditional conspiracy theories, 43% rated three or more [fig. 3].

When asked why, comments included “I believe a small grain of truth starts conspiracies” and “I do think alien abduction in some cases can be genuine, we can’t be that self-centred as a planet to think we are the only beings out there”. Even though only a quarter of respondents stated an interest in misinformation, the ratings in beliefs in traditional conspiracy theories within that minority is quite high, suggesting a likely correlation between susceptibility of ideological beliefs.

Alternatively, people who did not believe in traditional conspiracy theories found them “fascinating” and “entertaining”, with most comments revealing lack of evidence as the deciding factor for disbelief citing “evidence doesn’t back them up” and “they are unproven”.

However, one comment provided an example of the ability to think critically about the topic “there is generally evidence to disprove them, although it’s often refreshing to see another perspective on subjects”. This person appears to have explored evidence and perceptions from both sides of an argument and has made an informed opinion on the topic of traditional conspiracy theories while still respecting the views of others.

While traditional conspiracy theories may be fun for some – including the mockery of low-quality visual ‘proof’, curiosity draws the audience in and raises harmless questions which go no further. However, the ensuing emotional manipulation through messages of deceit to filling in gaps of information to keep the audience engaged can lead to individuals seeking solace in a like-minded community.

Beliefs and Propaganda

Propaganda is another form of belief manipulation to progress political ideologies and sway public opinion utilising an understanding of human behaviour, language, signs and design to call people to action (Smith, 2020). These calls to action can utilise short, targeted language to embed slogans into memory. ‘Lord Kitchener wants you!’ from World War One or the ‘Hands, Face, Space’ campaign to combat the COVID-19 pandemic are easily remembered but their message is vague. This ambiguity is used to justify political ideology but can cause misinterpretation and potentially conflicting information, encouraging confusion and worry among its audience and forming the public fear required to buy into a political ideology.

The design of propaganda to provide little information or accompanying signifiers remove any context of historical background. As cited by (Gómez, 2017 p.41), Roland Barthes describes “The principal secondary idea in *Mythologies* is that myths remove history from culture and language”. Barthes describes an example of an image on the cover of *Paris-Match* where a black soldier is presented in military uniform with his “eyes uplifted” – intending to signify that skin colour discrimination is no longer an issue within the French military and that all men serve equally – fully disengaging and detracting from the historical treatment and sale of black people within the slave trade during the French colonisation of Africa.

The leave campaign of the 'Brexit' referendum was a classic example of false promises being used within political propaganda, with the leave campaign manipulating the public by stating they would reallocate money being sent to the EU back to the NHS. The 'Brexit Bus' was a key element within their campaign to encourage voters to leave, using a coach in the same red colour as the iconic British double-decker bus. With a vague message stating 'We send the EU £350 million a week, let's fund the NHS instead' which spoke to the public implying that the full £350 million would be invested back into the NHS, yet did not specifically stating that message as fact or accounting for additional financial details (Reid, 2019). This visual prompt and coinciding message benefitted the leave campaign, swaying the vote to leave the EU.

The underlying political messaging – using the aforementioned 'Hands, Face, Space' campaign as an example – switches onus and accountability to the public rather than the Government, thereby making members of the public the scapegoat or folk devil – especially those who disobey the message. Shifting this perspective of an audience can mobilise them into action on behalf of an ideology.



Image: Getty, The New Statesman (2018)

Beliefs and Consumerism

How does ideology impact consumerism? Why do people buy into a brand? Branding and marketing materials are designed with the intent to manipulate and persuade the audience into connecting and interacting with a said brand to ultimately boost sales or usage. The tone of voice used in recent years has become more personable along with the utilisation of artificial intelligence like Siri, Alexa and chatbots creating a more intimate relationship and building trust, persuading the consumer to take more enjoyment in the things they buy (Hildebrand and Bergner, 2019, p. 39). Using Slavoc Žižek's Coca Cola analogy as an example of desire within consumerism – he explains:

Enjoyment becomes a kind of a weird, perverted duty. The paradox of Coke is that you are thirsty - you drink it but, as everyone knows, the more you drink it the more thirsty you get. A desire is never simply the desire for a certain thing. It's always also a desire for desire itself (2012).

This intent to buy into desires and to feel good was supported during a survey (Beynon, 2021), when asked if buying brands ever impacted you or your family in a positive way, comments included the “feel-good factor” and “makes you feel special”. Does this ‘feel-good factor’ come from the perception that you are buying commodities with higher quality than counterparts? With the top three brands within the survey being listed as Apple, Heinz and Tesco the participants were asked “Why do these brands appeal to you?” [fig. 4] 67% stated ‘quality’ followed by 41% who said, ‘brand reputation’. Whereas, when asked about brands they didn't like, the top two responses were ‘Brand ethics’ (19%) followed by ‘expensive’ (19%). These messages appear conflicted, so how much of this is perceived quality versus actual quality produced by a brand? The most favoured brand from the survey result was Apple (19%) – known for their minimalist style of branding and marketing along with their pricing is perceived to be of high quality – even overpriced and can suggest that minimalism equals quality.

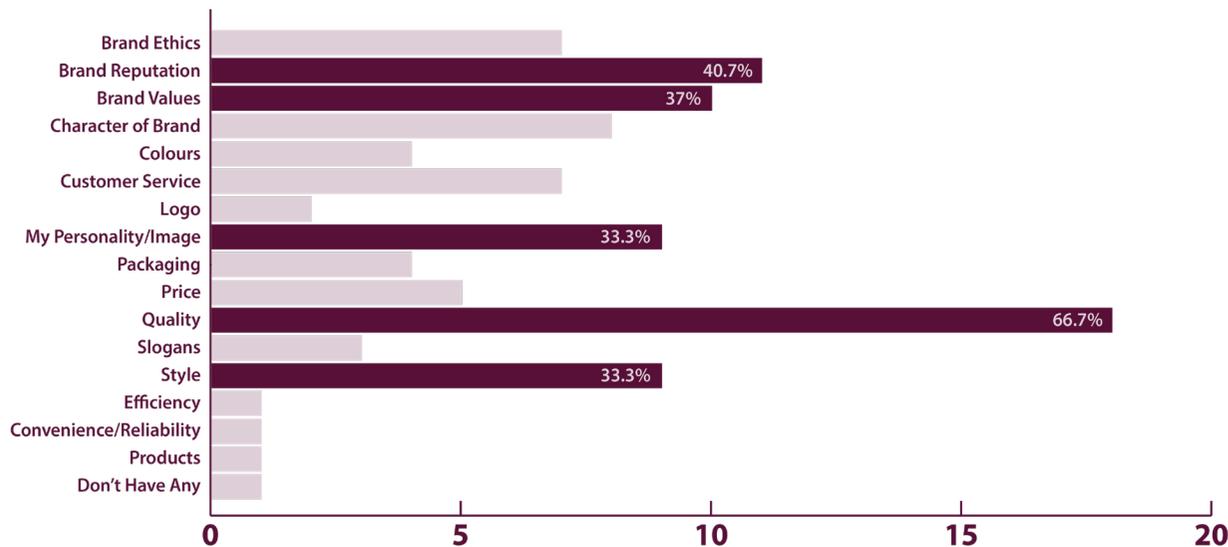


Fig. 4: Branding survey results

Tapping into our desires for enjoyment, brands can incorporate their ethos and language to manipulate you into buying into their ideologies. McDonald's tagline and accompanying jingle "I'm loving it" subconsciously taps into our desire for something we perceive we love – and persuades you into engaging with the brand no matter your opinions on McDonald's food itself. A McDonald's team member – Charlotte Middleton-Roberts was asked how the McDonald's brand is maintained as a staff member? "It's all in the terminology and corporate culture used. For example, we're not allowed to call the food 'fast food' – we have to use 'speedee food service'" (2021). This removes connotations of McDonald's food being fast food and therefore unhealthy and replaces it with being food that's grabbed on the go due to fast-paced lifestyles; while also referring to their original mascot 'Speedee' (McDowell, 2020)

There has been an uprise in artists and designers using their skills to question and combat consumerism by creating and installing work around the world under a movement coined 'Brandalism' – "Brandalism is a revolt against the corporate control of culture and space" (brandalism.ch, 2021). Utilising an activist approach, Brandalism encourages alternative thinking towards consumerist endeavours and corporate advertising through localised propaganda which is then shared online for a wider audience. Poster and billboard artworks are dotted in cities around the world, replacing original advertisements with anti-capitalist and sensationalist messages using design to promote rebellion against global corporations.



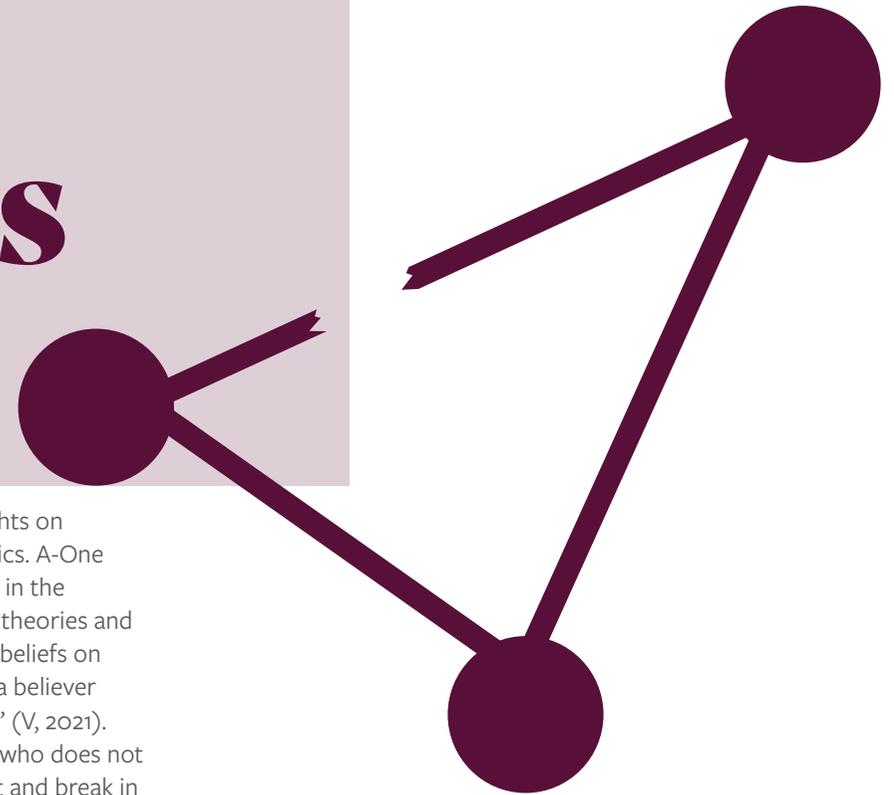
Image: Polina Tankilevitch (2020)

Impact on Social Dynamics

The term 'social dynamics' is used within this research investigation to describe personal connections of families, friendships and romantic relationships. The personal impact of ideology influencing beliefs has been documented throughout the report, with many similarities in the underlying ideological causes between each subtopic. However, how does a switch in beliefs impact loved ones?

Buying into brand ideology has additional emotional and financial issues that can impact social dynamics, as raised by survey respondents where "hoarding and financial issues for family members" are a problem along with "paying extra for that name sometimes causes arguments" (Beynon, 2021). Hoarding is increasingly being recognised as a symptom of mental health conditions and even a standalone condition, where one study by Tolin et al (2008, p. 200) found hoarders were five times more likely to access mental health services. This might be a direct correlation of buying into brand ideology due to the speed of product turnover meaning that commodities are not disposed of promptly, also providing an insight into the financial implications of materialistic behaviours impacting on personal finances while also contributing to the decline of the mental health consumers (Nepomuceno and Laroche, 2015).

Interviews that were conducted gave richer insights on the impact of ideological beliefs on social dynamics. A-One (Anonymous Interviewee One) who does believe in the information labelled 'misinformation, conspiracy theories and propaganda' stated there was no impact of their beliefs on personal relationships, along with 'V' who is also a believer stated "no, because we are of the same opinions" (V, 2021). Contrarily, A-Two (Anonymous Interviewee two) who does not believe in this information, has suffered a conflict and break in contact with a close friendship as a result of the other party's shift in ideological beliefs "We don't speak at the moment as I challenged her point of view and this seems to have deeply offended her... I also found that the misinformation she was spreading was impacting my mental health" (A-Two, 2021). Recognising the impact that differing opinions can have, it leads to wonder if all of V's family and friends can share the same view? Whilst it's likely that she and A-One surround themselves with like-minded people, it could also suggest that some of those close to her are not willing to share a differing opinion out of respect or fear of potential conflict.



CASE STUDY: A BREAKDOWN IN FRIENDSHIP DUE TO MISINFORMATION AND MODERN CONSPIRACY THEORIES.

A-Two is currently disconnected from a very close friend of hers – C – due to her friend’s shift in a belief system as a result of delving into misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories during the COVID-19 pandemic. How close was their friendship? “I was present at the birth of both her children and were very close in the past, even if we disagreed” (A-Two, 2021). A-Two explained how C had always been suspicious of the government to what seemed like a reasonable level, but they had never believed this type of information before.

However, around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, C started to engage with more misinformation and become persuaded by the alternative opinions surrounding the virus, such as “Bill Gates and the world governments all have created COVID-19 in an attempt to control us all... and the COVID-19 vaccine will change our DNA so that governments can watch our every move” (A-Two, 2021). C also started absorbing ‘conspiracy theory’ information being spread by QAnon including ‘Pizzagate’ – a worldwide paedophile ring trying to kidnap and traffic children for satanic sacrifices (O’Rourke, 2020). Having had two daughters, this false information will have played heavily into C’s anxieties as a mother and has led her to the point of “wanting to

home school her autistic daughter who has a high level of special educational needs” (A-Two, 2021). This statement alone confirms that some individuals believing the dangerous rhetoric they are being exposed to and are willing to make life-changing decisions.

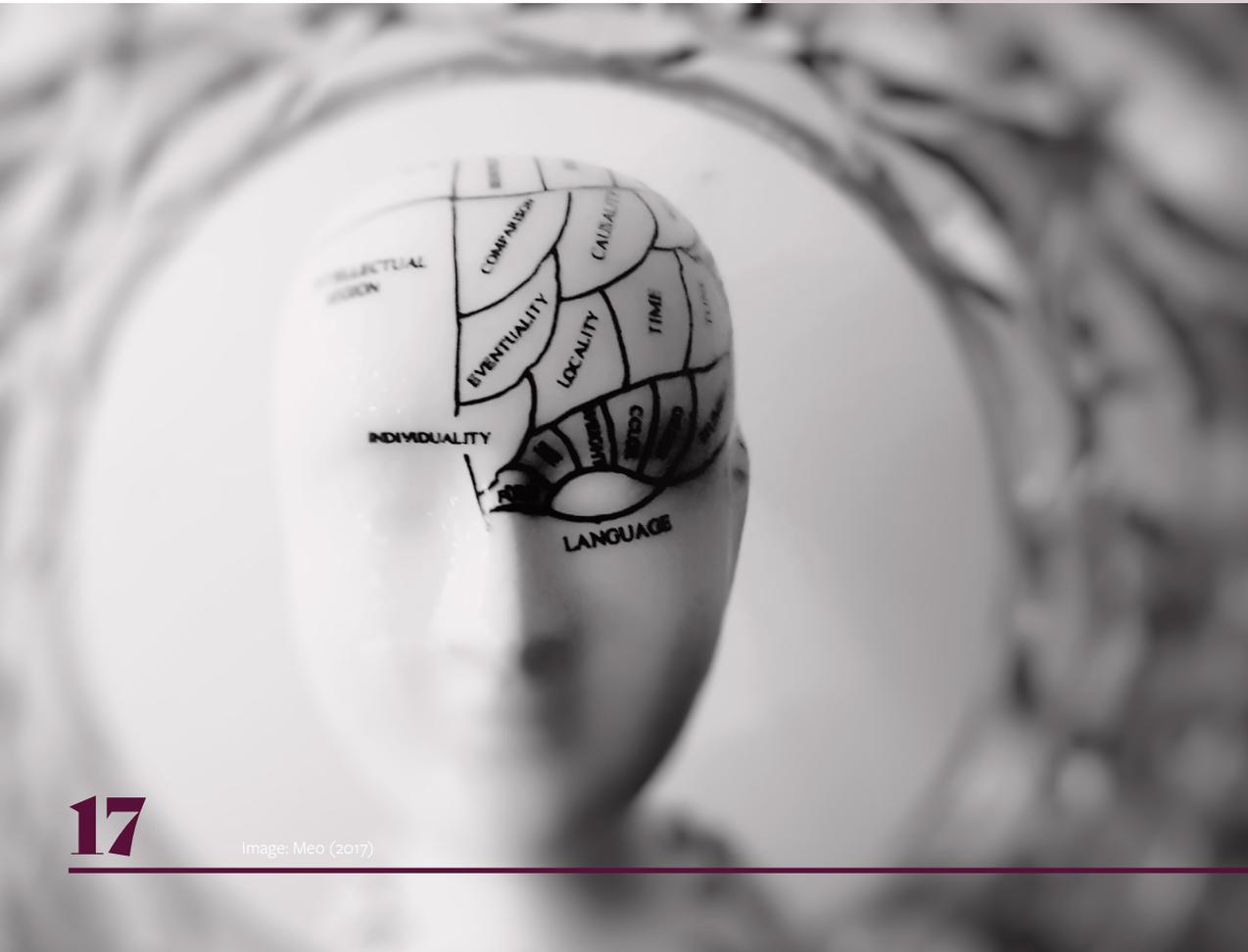
Despite asking C to stop sharing information about ‘Pizzagate’ as it was also affecting the mental health of A-Two, she continued to do so. Trying to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic herself, C’s insistence on sharing QAnon messages started resurfacing previous issues for A-Two “after having a breakdown years ago after working with child abusers in a previous job” (A-Two, 2021). After questioning and challenging C on these beliefs, the situation came to a climax where A-Two then felt she was being gaslit by C for not conforming with the same beliefs.

A-Two is still concerned for her friend and her two children, as she is “putting her and her children’s health at risk by ignoring pandemic advice from specialists and allowing people who believe dangerous notions to be present in her life” (A-Two, 2021), and would like more done regarding research, tackling the issue and further support for those involved.

The final statement in the case study by A-Two implies that despite differing opinions creating rifts in long-standing relationships, beliefs in alternative information can also build communities and relationships with other like-minded people online and in person. This can provide comfort for the individual, but also reinforce behaviours and beliefs even further. It appears that those who challenge a conflicting opinion of another are the ones that suffer a negative shift in social dynamics, as seen by the first-person accounts from the case study of A-Two and C.

What About Critical Thinking?

Being human means people have freedom of speech and to believe what they wish – However, problems stem from ideologies and debunked theories that result in dangerous global actions. So how do we distinguish the truth from a lie? Education? Upbringing? A key skill in the formation of judgements is the ability to think critically utilising a variety of cognitive techniques including problem-solving, analysis and evaluation of information. According to Snyder and Snyder, people “who are able to think critically are able to solve problems effectively. Merely having knowledge or information is not enough”. (2008, p.90)



As a student, there is an understanding that higher education facilities focus attention on developing critical thinking skills amongst students, and so it could be argued that this form of intelligence is prevalent among those with a bachelor's degree or higher. This was recognised as a potential factor during the case study interview, where A-Two commented that she has a background in higher education while C does not. To further explore if there was a connection between education and the ability to think critically, a short survey was conducted (Beynon, 2021). Participants were asked "how would you explain critical thinking?", with 21% being unable to do so, although this number could be higher as some correct answers being so similar in wording suggests that searches of the topic may have been conducted.

Respondents were also asked to provide their education level [fig. 5], 42% had A-Levels or lower, and further analysis of these responses showed half of these participants were the same people unable to explain critical thinking. As Snyder and Snyder describe, "Critical thinking is not an innate ability. Although some students may be naturally inquisitive, they require training to become systematically analytical, fair, and open-minded in their pursuit of knowledge", thereby corroborating survey findings (2008, p. 92). Challenging an individual's use of critical thinking in everyday life could be key in curbing the spread of misinformation, or helping people understand methods used within branding and marketing that persuade people to live beyond their means. However, from the same survey (Beynon, 2021) it appears that even if people do have the ability to think critically, it does not necessarily mean they have confidence in conveying these skills.

When asked rate an answer to "How effectively can you communicate your opinion to others of differing opinions?" [fig. 7] on a scale of one (not at all) to five (very effectively) - 37% scored four and above - of whom 50% have a bachelor's degree or higher yet when asked to rate the same question based on communicating opinions to those with similar opinions [fig. 6] - the percentage increased to 53% scoring four and above - of whom 70% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Suggesting that there may be less confidence in communication with those of differing opinions, or effectively communicating their opinion at all based on the remaining percentages that scored under four, due to fear of embarrassment or conflict as seen in the previous case study.

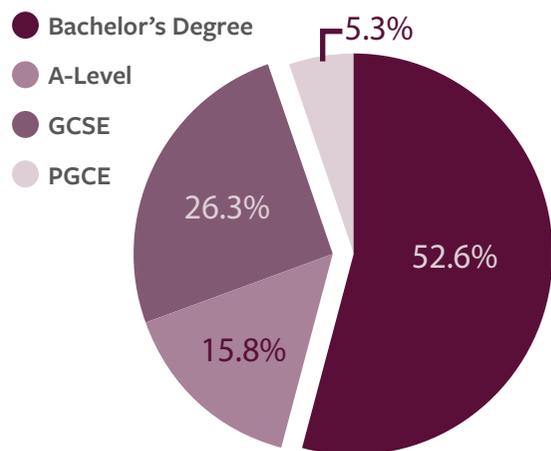


Fig.5: Education level survey results

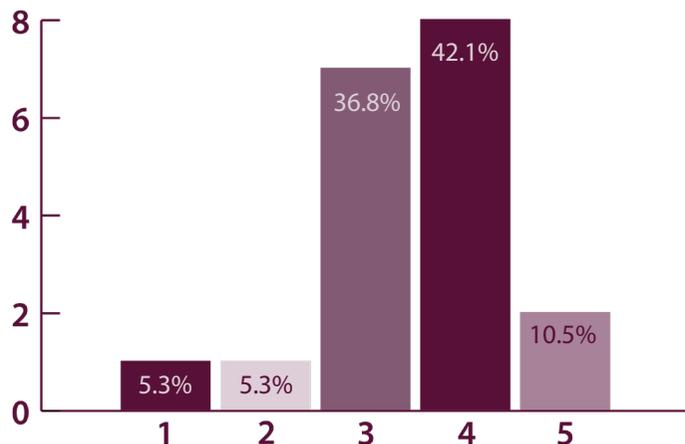


Fig.6: Similar opinion survey results

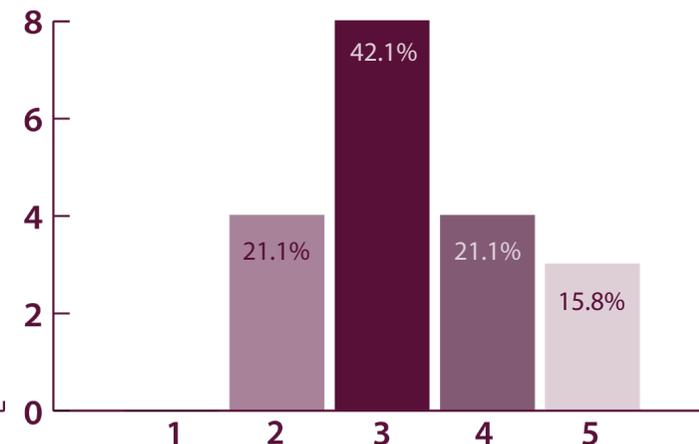


Fig.7: Differing opinion survey results

This report provides insights into the ideology, beliefs and differing views of the public surrounding misinformation, conspiracy theories, propaganda and consumerism.

The research discovered four main problems:

- 1) A change in belief systems of one subtopic can impact another due to similarities in underlying ideologies,**
- 2) Social dynamics can change as a result of conflicting opinions of the subtopics,**
- 3) A lack of awareness and use of critical thinking skills,**
- 4) That repetition is a technique used to embed ideologies and works despite education level.**

Ultimately, there is a correlation between ideology and significant socio-economic or global events impacting on social dynamics and society, whereby ideologies play on the emotions of the public due to political mistrust, fear, uncertainty, resistance and confidence – and design is used with intent to manipulate or persuade the audience within all subtopics using theoretical semiotic and psychological tactics. These raised emotions can then cause the dissolution of relationships through conflicting opinions or financial distress.

Although research of critical thinking was not initially a pre-determined aim, during the report investigations it was discovered that critical thinking skills are an essential part of the ability to analyse and differentiate between conflicting information, and a lack of these skills may lead to susceptibility of a switch in belief systems.

Summary

As such, the original question has now been re-framed to inform the next part of the project as:

“How might design challenge critical thinking skills in order to promote informed decision making?”

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All graphs are author's own from self-conducted surveys, (2021)

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