

Social media investigation

Previous compulsory steps / Prior students' knowledge	None
Learning objectives	Experience and think about the security/freedom and surveillance/privacy dualities.
Subjects	Media education, social sciences
Recommended Age	All
Material needed	PCs that can run the game (light), smartphones
Sequence duration	2 – 3 hours
Individual or group activity	Individual
Skills developed	Problem-solving, social skills, empathy
Price range of the game	9€ on pc, 5€ on smartphones
Similar games to use with the approach of the sequence	Orwell: Ignorance is strength (more fake news oriented)

Step by step: how to implement the sequence

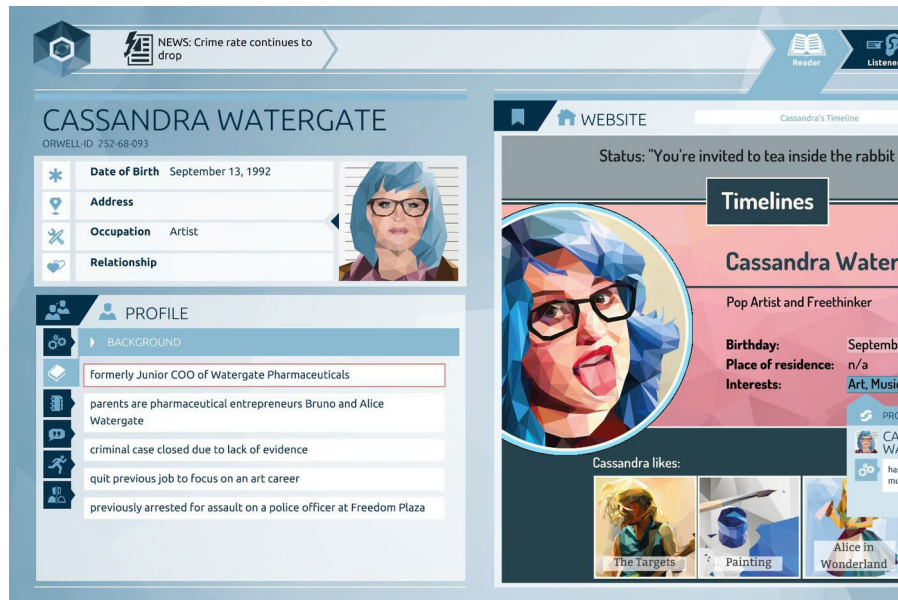


Figure 1: Game UI (source: www.theverge.com)

In this sequence, students will play the first chapter of the game: "Orwell: Keeping an Eye On You". The player is in the shoes of a recently hired government operative that investigates— through webpages, social media posts, and private messages—the suspect of a terrorist attack.

Your job is to upload relevant data to the "Orwell" surveillance system. Whether data are relevant or not is your decision, and this is where the moral dilemmas of the game occur. It will force you to balance security and freedom. The players will also have to resist the urge to listen to their prejudice and rushed judgments. It is crucial because your colleagues and the system will draw conclusions on the suspect based on your choices.

Orwell is a direct inspiration from PRISM and XkeyScope, two existing software systems leaked by NSA whistle-blower Edward Snowden in 2013. They present themselves as an efficient search engine capable of querying massive amounts of data from Microsoft, Yahoo!, Google, Facebook, Apple and Dropbox to find names, places, dates, emails, communications and other documents. PRISM was enabled under President George W. Bush by the Protect America Act of 2007 and the FISA Amendments Act of 2008, which immunises private companies from legal action when cooperating with U.S. government agencies in intelligence collection.

Cutting the cost

To spend less money on this sequence, you can buy one or several copies of the game and share them with your class. Students will play and write about the game at different moments. Once all of them have played, you can correct and speak about the game in class. Try not to spread this over a long period so that it remains fresh in their minds.

Step 1: Explain the concept (15 minutes)

Don't show gameplay. The game will use its first chapter to teach players how to play while still engagingly delivering its theme and story. However, you can explain the concept by using the introductory paragraph of this sequence.

Step 2: Students play at home (1 - 2 hours)

There is not much advice to give in terms of gameplay or hosting. However, ask your students to note their experiences and thoughts while playing the game. They should at least play the first chapter of the game but feel free to continue if they like.

Step 3: Debrief and discussion

Orwell depicts the best-case scenario of mass surveillance.

For gameplay reasons, the game makes you play as an analyst that chooses the data to be exploited. You then observe the decisions taken by your colleagues. In real life, mass surveillance runs more and more often on algorithms.

The problem is: algorithms have racist and sexist biases. That is because the training data itself contains these biases. Ask your students to search "nurse" on google. You'll find an overwhelming majority of female nurses' pictures. An algorithm trained on this data and asked to search medical jobs in healthcare based on the searcher's profile often will suggest nurse to a girl and doctor to a boy.

You can use [this video](#) to go deeper on this topic.

Furthermore, the game makes the player fight rushed judgments. To explore the question of human bias and discrimination, you can use these videos:

💡 [Prejudice and Discrimination: Crash Course Psychology #39](#) by **CrashCourse**.

💡 [The illusion of truth](#) by **Veritasium**.

The game's main topic is the duality between surveillance and privacy. By uploading specific data chunks, the players know that they trigger consequences beyond their control. In contrast, if they cut the suspects some slack, they might be endangering civilian lives.

Privacy: "I have nothing to hide."

When you receive a phone call from your parents and your friends are around, do you feel like you want to isolate yourself? That is your feeling of privacy.

Because of security concerns in the face of terrorist attacks, the global pandemic and social media, privacy becomes synonymous with having something to hide.

If I've done nothing wrong, should I agree to be observed to be protected?

You think you have not done anything wrong, but that is rarely the case. The world is not divided between good and bad people, and everyone makes mistakes.

Moreover, the wrongs of today are not those of tomorrow. Another government might inherit surveillance tools, and acts or ideologies that are permitted today might no longer be permitted tomorrow.

Use this video to explore these concepts:

 [Glenn Greenwald: Why privacy matters](#) by TED.

Getting the game:

[https://store.steampowered.com/app/491950/Orwell Keeping an Eye On You/](https://store.steampowered.com/app/491950/Orwell_Keeping_an_Eye_On_You/)

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.OsmoticStudios.Orwell&hl=en_US&gl=US

<https://apps.apple.com/fr/app/orwell-keeping-an-eye-on-you/id1476541931>

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