

Digital Identity and Misrepresentation

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In 2024, 1-in-7 British citizens fell victim to online scams, losing an estimated £11.4 billion, while users' confidence in their ability to recognise scams has decreased as AI-generated content convincingly impersonates people and organisations. Digital misrepresentation does not only financially harm people, however. In one recent case, now subject of a hit [podcast](#) and [Netflix documentary](#), Kirat Assi met “Bobby” online and they began to chat by text in an intimate relationship. She eventually discovered, however, that Bobby didn't really exist; her cousin had created a fake profile, talking to her as “Bobby” for ten years. Such romance scams, even when lacking financial harm, have a significant emotional impact.

At the University of Leeds, I will examine the ethics of online misrepresentation, focusing particularly on contexts such as online dating. First, I will outline the ethical norms we have to disclose information to potential romantic partners online. I will further explore how platform constraints and social norms shape our identity presentation online, and outline the various harms that romantic deception can inflict upon victims in online and offline contexts.

Following my PhD on our engagement with videogames and virtual reality, where we frequently role-play and adopt different identities, this project broadens its scope to online environments more generally, considering the ethics of self-presentation in contexts where we are expected to present ourselves more authentically.

The University of Leeds constitutes the ideal venue for this project, hosting [IDEA: The Ethics Centre](#) which contains various staff researching related topics, including my mentor [Dr Luke Brunning](#), who co-organises (with [Dr Natasha McKeever](#)) the [Ethical Dating Online](#) research network, an international group of researchers exploring how dating apps can empower us, keep us physically and mentally well, and promote flourishing intimacy.