

Parkland Victim's Parents Digitally Recreate Their Son's Likeness for Gun Control PSA

More than two years after 17-year-old Joaquin Oliver was killed along with 16 of his classmates in a school shooting that shocked the nation, his parents have digitally recreated his likeness to deliver a powerful final message.

In a new campaign for Change the Ref, a gun safety nonprofit founded by Oliver's parents, a lifelike virtual avatar of the Parkland Massacre victim appeals to viewers to vote for politicians who promise to support gun control measures.

To make the PSA, titled "Unfinished Votes," McCann Health used the same generative artificial intelligence tech behind deepfakes to imitate the teen's voice and generate a CGI-like representation from a single photograph.

"We found a way to bring back someone that no one will ignore," Joaquin's father, Manuel Oliver, said in the video.

"It's very hard for me to look at this," his mother, Patricia Oliver, said. "So please, please listen to what our son has to say."

Manuel and Patricia Oliver founded Change the Ref in the wake of the February 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School with the goal of giving young people the tools they need to make change around gun control. The Parkland, Fla. shooting spurred a sweeping national conversation about

the prevalence of guns in America led by teenage survivors of the violence.

But two years later, the digitally recreated Oliver bemoans the lack of progress that has been made around the issue since.

“I’ve been gone for two years, and nothing’s changed, bro,” Joaquin’s likeness says in the video. “People are still getting killed by guns—what is that?”

The McCann Health creatives behind the campaign said they were moved by the fact that this would have been the first presidential election in which Joaquin would have been able to vote.

“The more we learned about Joaquin, the more we realized that he would be the most powerful voice we could enlist,” a McCann spokesperson said on behalf of the creative team. “He was very motivated to make a difference. Just like the 40,000 other people who are killed by guns every year, Joaquin would never get the chance to help influence the one issue that might have kept them alive.”

While deepfake techniques like the kind used in the video are still most commonly discussed in terms of their potential for fake news and other nefarious uses, the tech has growing more popular as an advertising tool—even to make political statements. Another election-related campaign earlier this week from voting rights group RepresentUs used deepfakes of Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-Un to deliver dire warnings about the end of democracy.

Recommended articles

<https://www.adweek.com/agencies/parkland-victims-parents-digitally-recreate-sons-likeness-for-gun-control-psa/>