Ofcom

Evaluation Toolkit

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Making Sense of Media

Welcome

Welcome to Ofcom's evaluation toolkit, aimed at supporting organisations delivering media literacy initiatives. This guidance is particularly aimed at those starting out with evaluation; you might be a small charity with a project that addresses issues around health misinformation, or a library that is running classes on basic digital skills for older people. However, the tools that we provide are also designed to be of use and benefit to those working across the media literacy sector.

We have developed this toolkit as part of our Making Sense of Media (MSOM) programme of work to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children.

We believe that having effective evaluation is critical to the success of media literacy initiatives. This toolkit is designed as a practical guide, to make it as straightforward as possible to build evaluation into your media literacy work. Our aim is for evaluation to be an integral part of media literacy initiatives, with the evidence and lessons learned shared with others in an accessible way.

We know that evaluation can seem complex and costly. We know too that people delivering media literacy initiatives have varied levels of experience and knowledge when it comes to evaluation - from those doing it for the first time with limited time and budgets, to organisations with more experience and available resources that are looking to deepen their evaluative approach. Our guidance sets out a practical approach distilled into simplified distinct steps, enabling you to pick and choose the elements that work best for you.

Contents

Overview

Read time: 6 minutes

What do we mean by evaluation?

There are many ways of defining evaluation, ranging from the broad – see, for example, the definition used by Better Evaluation: “Any systematic process to judge merit, worth or significance by combining evidence and values” – to the specific, from the Reading Outcomes Framework: “To understand, demonstrate and improve the **impact** of your activity”.

You could be evaluating to:

- spot opportunities for improvement in the delivery process;
- understand the cost-effectiveness of the initiative for its intended purpose; or
- understand the impact that the initiative has had on those taking part.

These are all important factors. However, impact is of particular focus in this guidance.

Definition: Impact

The term ‘impact’ is commonly used in relation to the reporting of media literacy projects and is sometimes used to refer to reach (for example, the number of participants who engaged with the material). For the purposes of this guidance, when we talk about impact, we mean change at an individual or societal level that can be attributed to an intervention.

We think it is important that wherever possible, evaluation is integrated into the development of any project from the very beginning and is woven into its design. There are two main reasons for this:

- Many of the techniques employed as part of the evaluation planning process – such as mapping out what you think the overall impact of your initiative will be – will help you develop a deeper understanding of how the project is intended to work.
- By laying the groundwork for evaluation from the beginning, you are making the process easier. For example, planning data collection into the design of your project can be a good way of ensuring you have the right content to analyse later in the project.

Why should I evaluate?

It is important to understand what works when it comes to media literacy, and evaluation plays a vital part in this. A 2021 Ofcom report found that embedding evaluation into media literacy curricula would help the people delivering initiatives to clearly identify the impact these initiatives have on audiences' knowledge, attitudes and understanding[1].

Definition: Outcome

An outcome is the result of an intervention, ideally a benefit received by the target audience. It is usually finite and measurable.

For example, for a media literacy project, this could be:

- an increase in participants' knowledge,
- participants gaining a new skill,
- a change in attitude among participants

In its 2021 Online Media Literacy Strategy[2], the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport identified a lack of robust evaluation in the sector as one of six challenges that needed to be addressed in order to improve media literacy **outcomes** for users. Evaluation is about measuring and understanding change. It has a range of benefits and should not be a 'pass or fail' judgement at the end of the project. It can:

- help you learn about your project, apply that learning, make changes to improve the project and make further progress towards your goals;
- tell you how effective your intervention was and give you confidence to roll out your approach more widely in the future;
- help you discover outcomes from your project that you weren't expecting to see.

By sharing the results of your evaluation, you can help others working on similar projects strengthen their approaches, particularly if your project is breaking new ground or covering themes or topics that have not been previously evaluated. Sharing evaluation evidence is vital to helping the media literacy sector to become more effective, in that:

- your organisation and others with similar aims will be able to make a stronger case for the value of your projects;
- those planning future initiatives will have more information as to what works, and what doesn't, and will be able to deliver better interventions as a result; and
- funders will feel more confident about directing funds to media literacy organisations if they have evidence that media literacy projects are making a difference.

We know that sharing can be challenging (especially if something didn't work as planned) but by making your findings available to others who are carrying out similar media literacy interventions, you are enabling them to apply your learnings to their own work. By working together, and pooling knowledge, you can help the sector as a whole move in a positive direction.

[1] Edwards, L. Stoilova, M., Anstead, N., Fry, A., El-Halaby, G. and Smith M. (2021) Rapid Evidence Assessment on Online Misinformation and Media Literacy: Final Report for Ofcom.

[2] Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. (2021). *Online Media Literacy Strategy*.

How this guidance works

The three steps are set out in the following chapters:

Step one: Preparing

Planning your approach and creating your framework

Step two: Doing

Gathering and analysing your data

Step three: Sharing

Reporting and communicating your findings

Preparing

Read time: 20 minutes

This section is divided into three stages:

- **A. Planning the process**
- **B. Writing your theory of change**
- **C. Creating your evaluation framework**

Planning the process

We recommend that you start thinking about your evaluation while your intervention or project is being designed. At this point there are a series of decisions you can make which will shape the kind of evaluation you end up doing. This thinking should be done in consultation with as many people involved in the project (stakeholders) as possible.

At whichever point you start planning your evaluation, there are six things we recommend you consider:

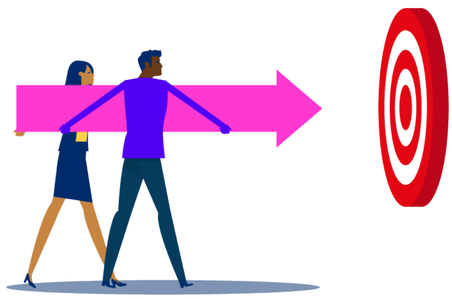
1. **What are the objectives of my project?** These will vary from project to project, as each will have specific goals related to the work of your organisation. It is useful to be clear from the outset about what you want to achieve, as that thinking will map into your evaluation plans.

2. **What kind of evaluation do I need to do?** Many evaluations are focused on how well the project was delivered (for example, what went well, what didn't, and how participants felt about it). These are often called **process evaluations,** as they assess the process behind the workshops or materials themselves, and their effectiveness.

Definition: Stakeholder

Project stakeholders can include anyone involved in the project, including project funders or sponsors, other members of the team, or for larger projects, other teams.

Stakeholders can also include anyone who might be affected by the intervention, such as target audiences.



Definition: Process evaluation

Process evaluations will focus on asking you to consider how you delivered your project, and how far the way in which the project was delivered affected the final outcomes.

Impact evaluations focus on asking you to consider what the project achieved in terms of change for the target audience and/or wider society, and how well you met your objectives. They are often requested by funders, particularly governments, trusts or foundations.

> ***Definition: Impact evaluation***
>
> Impact evaluation will focus on asking you to consider what the project achieved in terms of change for the target audience and/or wider society, and how well you met your objectives.

Evaluations that work out whether a project was value for money are called **economic evaluations.** Evaluations can include all the elements above and will be different for every initiative, depending on your theory of change and the evaluation framework, as explained in the next section.

> ***Definition: Economic evaluation***
>
> These evaluations will focus on asking you to consider the costs of your project relative to the benefits, asking questions such as "was the outcome worth the cost?" Or "could something else have delivered the same outcomes for less?"

3. **What resources are available to carry out an evaluation, and who will be responsible for it?** Some evaluations will require fewer resources than others (ranging from something the project manager can do alongside the project delivery, all the way up to a dedicated evaluation team) and this will depend on the type of evaluation you want to carry out. The skills that an evaluation might require range from project design to data management to report writing, but in all cases it is important to consider this before you start. There are pros and cons for doing the evaluation yourself or using an external evaluator.

   - **Internal.** Doing it yourself might mean building skills and experience of evaluation inside your organisation. It also means you will have the expertise in place to ensure that evaluation can be built into the initiative's design and will enable you to learn and adapt more quickly to any findings. And it is usually more cost-effective than commissioning external evaluation.
   - **External.** Commissioning an external evaluation is useful if you don't have the internal expertise or available staff to do it yourself. You can work with a commercial social research company or employ an independent evaluator to work alongside you. By employing someone with no previous ties to the project you can ensure impartiality. One option is to work with academics who research and specialise in the topic of your initiative. This won't necessarily be costly, as researchers sometimes have funding in place already.

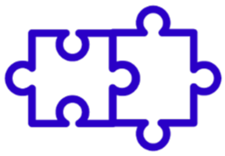
4. **What existing evidence is there on the issue my intervention is trying to address?**

Baseline evidence is the starting point against which to measure change. For a media literacy project, this could be the participants' existing level of knowledge about a topic, or their existing level of skills. This is typically gathered from participants before the intervention begins. There are also external sources of evidence you can use. Having this understanding in place at the beginning, and knowing about any evidence that you can measure against, will be useful as you progress through the evaluation.

> ***Definition: Baseline***
>
> A baseline is the starting point against which to measure change. For a media literacy project, this could be the participants' existing level of knowledge about a topic, or their existing level of skills. This could be established using a quiz, survey, interview or focus group carried out with the target audience before the intervention takes place, and/or could be informed by previous research on similar audiences.

This evidence can also help you think about where you could target your intervention, for example by highlighting particular demographics in need of support. To help get this evidence together there are bodies of research you can consult such as reports from Ofcom, the Lloyds Consumer Digital Index, ParentZone and Internet Matters, and summaries or directories of research such as CO:RE and UKCIS (UK Council for Internet Safety). For links to these, and other research reports, you can search our library.

5. **Are there any other evaluations of similar interventions that I can learn from?** It can be helpful to look for other evaluations before you start your own – these might well provide learning that can help you make your intervention even better. Also, proving impact is always difficult and if another organisation has spent money on an evaluation which demonstrates that projects like yours can have an impact, this is useful information to deploy.



6. **Who is going to read my evaluation report?** If the report is for your funders, check with them to see whether they have requirements around reporting and what kind of evaluation they are expecting to see. If it is for a wider audience, consider the types of findings that others in the sector might find useful to read, such as whether a certain delivery method worked for a specific target audience. If it is for internal use, you might want to include reflections about the evaluation process itself.

Writing your theory of change

A **theory of change** is a way of setting down the thinking (theory) behind the change that your initiative (or organisation) wants to achieve. This is popular among governments, third-sector organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Having a theory of change helps enormously when putting together a plan to evaluate your project. This is because the process of setting down a theory of change requires you to describe your initiative in a logical way.

A theory of change will allow you to understand the journey from the start of the initiative to its completion and will identify the assumptions underpinning your work, which the evaluation will need to test. You can embed your theory of change statement on to an evaluation framework – we have drawn up a template which you can use and how to do this is set out in the next section. Developing a theory of change for your initiative can range from an hour-long brainstorm with your colleagues to a week-long exercise – but thinking through these elements is an important element of understanding the impact of the project.

The phrase '**theory of change**' is sometimes used interchangeably with terms such as '**logic model**', '**outcomes framework**', 'chain of events' and 'results chain' when describing visual representations (often tables or flow charts) of the evaluation process of a project. There are some subtle distinctions between the terms, but for the purpose of your evaluation you can assume they achieve similar things. Simply put, there is no one right way to do this.

For example, the framework we suggest goes further than some theories of change and logic models we have seen, as it also includes space to include your data collection methods. As with the rest of the guidance, we suggest you choose the elements outlined below that work best for you and your evaluation project.

Definition: Logic model

A logic model explains the relationship between the inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes of your intervention.

Much of this information could also be contained in an evaluation framework.

Definition: Outcomes framework

An outcomes framework involves clearly defining the outcomes you want to achieve, and prioritising them. You might separate them into benefits for individuals vs the community, for example. It helps to focus your work on the outcomes that matter to you, to link your activities to the outcomes you want to see, and to communicate these more clearly.

Much of this information could also be contained in an evaluation framework.

For those with less time, we recommend that you write a theory of change narrative in the form of linked sentences (explained below). Below we illustrate each step with an example from a fictional project.

Fictional Example – Digital Sleuth Club

Digital Sleuth Club is a small charity dedicated to increasing media/news literacy skills in young people (age 10-18) in areas with higher levels of financial disadvantage across England, to increase the young people's resilience to mis- and disinformation, and their trust in high quality information. The charity carries out several activities which it hopes will contribute to its goal. These include running in-person workshops at youth groups and at colleges, and in public libraries, providing downloadable resources on its website for youth groups to use on their own, and producing social media campaigns to try to reach audiences wherever they are, using short videos. The charity has a small staff of nine full-time employees but can call on freelancers when it has sufficient funding for specific projects.

The four elements of your theory of change narrative

1 Define the PROBLEM:

Begin with a brief overview of the challenge your initiative is trying to address. For instance, this could be educational or skills-based, such as low levels of specific digital literacy skills. There are a range of ways you can build your evidence base including using research reports (see our research library) or learnings from a previous delivery of your own initiative.

At this point you could involve your service users by asking them what they want, or are expecting, from your initiative rather than deciding what the challenge is yourself. More information about the benefits of this approach can be found in Ofcom's *Making Sense of Media - Initiate* report. [3]

Fictional Example – Digital Sleuth Club

The target audience is vulnerable to mis- and disinformation, which has been demonstrated to adversely affect wellbeing and social cohesion. They have complex and evolving online habits: they are often the first to embrace new platforms, and are very competent in terms of digital skills, but research has shown that they often lack critical thinking skills in relation to their media use, and many actively avoid the news, with much higher levels of trust in their peers. They tend to believe that their media literacy skills are higher than they actually are. (Ofcom's *Children's Media Use and Attitudes report 2022* showed that 74% of 12-17s had confidence in their ability to spot fake information, but less than one in ten demonstrated both confidence and ability in this type of critical understanding).

2 What are you DOING about the problem and with whom?

Briefly summarise the project activities you will deliver to address the problem(s) you've outlined and the people you will be working with. Your approach could be in-person workshops using a curriculum that covers specific topics for a specific audience, or engagement with stakeholders such as social media companies to improve their moderation methods.

Fictional Example – Digital Sleuth Club

Participants on the intervention will: encounter examples of different types of information; hear about the tools to distinguish misleading online content, and paid-for content, from verified information; learn about how the digital media ecosystem works; be encouraged to reflect on their own habits and attitudes.

[3] Ofcom MSOM Research Report- What works in delivering community programmes

3 What DIFFERENCES will your intervention make?

IMMEDIATE: Participants have had their first interaction with your project; for example, by attending a workshop, receiving training or reading materials. Ideally, this interaction will have made a difference to the participants. You will be looking at specific measurable learnings or confidence levels that your participants come away with, or other changes you can measure.

Fictional Example – Digital Sleuth Club

Participants will be better able to identify reliable online content and identify advertising. They will be able to better discern which information they encounter online is reliable and which may be misleading. They will understand how the different players in the online media ecosystem operate, and the motivations for creating and spreading false and misleading content.

MEDIUM-TERM: This is where consideration is given to the impact of the intervention on participants once they are no longer engaging with your activities – what behaviour change has your intervention accomplished? This might include following up with participants after a certain period of time to explore whether the behaviour change has been sustained.

Fictional Example – Digital Sleuth Club

Participants will change their online habits and will approach information, wherever on the internet they encounter it, with a more critical eye. They will be more likely to consume information from sources they trust.

4 How could these differences CONTRIBUTE to wider societal change?

Your initiative, alongside many others, plays a part in improving the overall media literacy skills, behaviours and experiences of the population. Being clear about how your work fits into the wider societal context can form the foundation for a more comprehensive evaluation. It is worth noting that your intervention is only one thing that is happening in your participants' lives and there may be other things happening that have influenced whether things changed for them or stayed the same.

Fictional Example – Digital Sleuth Club

Participants will comprise part of a generation which is more resilient to the potential harms posed by mis- and disinformation, and by a lack of trust in reliable sources of information. This will have positive effects both on their wellbeing and on wider societal cohesion.

Creating your evaluation framework

Your theory of change can be used as a basis for the evaluation framework template we have created as a tool to help you through the evaluation process.

The template has spaces within it to include the four stages of the theory of change, which will provide an overarching structure. They will shape the evaluation approach by linking impact to project actions. The template offers a way to create a logical and realistic outline of **inputs**, **outputs**, outcomes and impacts.

There are spaces in the evaluation framework template for you to insert the four stages you came up with for your theory of change narrative. These sentences provide an overarching structure to your template and will guide your thinking as you fill in the other boxes.

Each part of the process is illustrated with an example from our fictional initiative, mapped on to our Evaluation Framework, which you can see in the Evaluation Framework example on the next page.

Definition: Input

An input is something necessary to carry out an activity: it could be staff members, information/existing research evidence, or other resources.

For example, the inputs of a media literacy project could be:

- Two full-time staff members.
- Research findings about the audience's key challenges in accessing information.

Definition: Output

An output refers to the deliverables of an intervention or activity. These could be products (resources produced, for example), or services (workshops or training sessions carried out).

For example, an output of a media literacy project could be:

- Ten workshops delivered, each attended by 14 participants.
- Ten lesson plans published, downloaded an average of 16 times.

Further reading

For those who want to read more about how to develop a theory of change or logic model, we find these sites useful:

Identify the difference you want to make | NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations)

Develop programme theory / theory of change | Better Evaluation

Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Resources - Evaluation Support Scotland

About | Reading Outcomes Framework Toolkit (readingagency.org.uk)

Theory of change in ten steps - NPC (thinknpc.org)

Evaluation Framework example

Name of project: Digital Sleuth Club

1 Define the 'problem'	2 What are you doing about the problem and with whom?			3 What differences will your intervention make?		4 How could these differences contribute to wider societal change?
The target audience is vulnerable to mis- and disinformation, which has been demonstrated to adversely affect wellbeing and social cohesion. They have complex and evolving online habits: they are often the first to embrace new platforms, and are very competent in terms of digital skills, but research has shown that they often lack critical thinking skills in relation to their media use, and many actively avoid the news, with much higher levels of trust in their peers. They tend to believe that their media literacy skills are higher than they actually are.	Participants in the intervention will: encounter examples of different types of information; hear about the tools to distinguish misleading online content, and paid-for content, from verified information; learn about how the digital media ecosystem works; and be encouraged to reflect on their own habits and attitudes.			Participants will be better able to identify reliable online content and identify advertising. They will be able to better discern which information they encounter online is reliable and which may be misleading. They will understand how the different players in the online media ecosystem operate, and the motivations for creating and spreading false and misleading content. Participants will change their online habits and will approach information, wherever on the internet they encounter it, with a more critical eye. They will be more likely to consume information from sources they trust.		Participants will comprise part of a generation that is more resilient to the potential harms posed by mis- and disinformation, and by a lack of trust in reliable sources of information. The intervention will have positive effects both on their wellbeing and on wider societal cohesion
	Inputs	**Activities**	**Outputs**	**Outcomes**	**Short/medium- term impact**	**Long-term impact**
A Details of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes etc.	Project staff. Research conducted under a previous grant about the information consumption habits of this target group and their social media use. Partnership with youth club association. Funding from ABC Foundation.	Digital Sleuth Club will deliver a series of standalone two-hour workshops in youth clubs/centres and public libraries, in areas identified using indices of multiple deprivation. The project staff will: • Deliver workshops to young people. • Develop workshop resources. • Hire and train specialists to produce supporting campaign materials for social media. • Ensure programme sustainability by sharing resources or training youth leaders. • Use their partnership with the youth club association to secure workshop venues and to find participants for the workshops	The number of workshops delivered. How many people attended each workshop. The number of downloads of each piece of material. The number of times the social campaign was viewed.	Improvement in ability to detect mis- and disinformation (assessed through a quiz at the beginning and end of the workshop). Increased comprehension of how the digital media ecosystem works. Better understanding of how verified online content is produced and how to identify it, and how to spot advertising content online.	Improved critical thinking skills that enable participants to assess the reliability of online information. Increased use of reliable sources of information. Taking a more considered approach to sharing stories and information online.	Increased resilience to mis- and disinformation. More attention given to reliable and authentic online content and less to false/misleading content. A better-informed public.
B Who are the relevant target groups?		Project staff Workshop facilitators	Youth group attendees. Students attending workshops at colleges. Young people visiting libraries where workshops are being held. Young people interacting with campaign content on social media. Youth workers/ librarians trained.			
C What relevant data do you need?	Understanding of the issues that face young people. List of colleges, libraries and youth groups where interventions could be held.		Project monitoring figures	'Before and after' survey data from workshops. Data from case studies. Feedback from teachers and facilitators.	Follow-up surveys of participants. Evidence from other evaluations.	Data on levels of resilience to mis- and disinformation across the population. Evidence from other evaluations.
D What methods will you use to collect the data?	Desk research. Project management tracking.	Project management tracking.	Project management tracking.	Surveys. Case studies. Interviews.	Surveys. Desk research.	Desk research.
E What factors beyond your control might influence this stage?	Emerging harms that need to be addressed.	Lack of take-up.	Lack of take-up.	Incomplete surveys.	Emerging harms that need to be addressed.	Lack of take-up.

> Fill in the sentences from your Theory of Change under the headings numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4.

> **Activities:** What do you do with your inputs to produce project outputs? For example, plan a workshop.

> **Outputs:** Outputs are the elements of your project that can be evaluated to see how well the delivery process went. Outputs are easily measurable as they are direct results of the inputs and activities, such as workshops delivered.

> **Inputs:** What do you need to (or can you) put into the project? This can include project staff, funding, data and expertise

> **Short-medium term impact:** What are the overall intended results of your project for participants; for example, changes in their behaviour, such as increased use of sources of reliable information because of their change in attitude, confidence or skills.

> **Long-term impact:** What are the changes in overall societal habits that could be linked to the changes in attitudes and behaviour of your participants? i.e. a better-informed public more resilient to mis- and disinformation. For smaller projects, demonstrating long-term impact won't be desirable, given the numbers of participants involved. But it is important to think about how your project's goals could contribute, alongside projects by other organisations, to a wider societal issue.

> **Outcomes:** What are the immediate changes that occur for beneficiaries as a result of the outputs i.e. perceived changes in attitudes, or confidence and skills when assessing content to judge whether information is genuine or not.

> **Who are the relevant target groups?** This will depend on the format of your project, and how it will be delivered. It will usually be the people to whom you deliver your initiative. But, for example when considering writing your workshop content, the target group would be different (for example, educators). Capturing which target groups are involved helps you know whom to approach in order to evaluate which factors influenced whether the intervention was successful.

> **Row D: What methods will you use to collect the data?** Here, fill in the data methods you plan to use for each stage. For more information and tips on the range of methods you could think about, please see our Doing section.

> **Row E: What factors beyond your control might influence this stage?** Here it is good practice to note external factors that might disrupt your planning, and your evaluation process, but that were beyond your control. This will help for future iterations of your initiative.

> **Row C What relevant data do you need?** Evaluations are only as good as the quality of the information that informs them, so data gathering throughout the project is vital. The type of data may differ across the process; we've made some suggestions below.

Doing

Read time: 14 minutes

This section focuses on how to identify the data required for evaluation. It also provides an overview of the main methods that are often used and some of the overarching considerations to bear in mind as you plan your data collection activities.

It is divided into two stages:

A. **Designing your evaluation questions**
B. **Useful information on research methods**

Designing your evaluation questions

An evaluation question should:

- test an outcome or impact which is directly attributable to the project; and
- be framed, if possible, to establish the difference between the outcomes for those who participated in the project, against those who did not.

In effect, you are flipping your hypotheses as laid out in your evaluation framework (e.g. what you believe your initiative can do), to become a question, or questions, to focus the evaluation to ensure it is addressing the most relevant issues. You do this by looking at the activities and outcomes in your evaluation framework, and the assumptions that need to be true in order to reach your stated impact, and re-frame this information as questions. (This is likely to be a long list, and it is often not practical to address every question).

Fictional Example – Digital Sleuth Club

ACTIVITIES

Digital Sleuth Club will deliver a series of standalone two-hour workshops in youth clubs/centres and public libraries, in areas identified using indices of multiple deprivation. The project staff will:

- deliver workshops to young people.
- develop workshop resources.
- hire and train specialists to produce supporting campaign materials for social media.
- ensure programme sustainability by sharing resources or training youth leaders.
- use their partnership with the youth club association to secure workshop venues and to find participants for the workshops.

OUTCOMES

- improvement in ability to detect misinformation (assessed through a quiz at the beginning and end of the workshop).
- increased comprehension of how the digital media ecosystem works.
- understanding how verified online content is produced and how to identify it, and how to spot advertising content online.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. Did project staff successfully build workshop resources that were effective?
2. Did the specialist facilitators successfully deliver the workshops?
3. Were enough participants from the target group recruited for the workshops?
4. Did participants at the end of the workshop have an improved ability to detect misinformation?
5. Did participants at the end of the workshop have an increased comprehension of how the digital media ecosystem works?
6. Did participants at the end of the workshop understand how verified online content is produced, and know how to identify it online alongside advertising content?
7. Next steps for developing and delivering this project. Is the project sustainable?

Once you have your long list of evaluation questions, you should prioritise, in collaboration with your stakeholders, the most important evaluation questions to focus on.

The **causal effect** of a project is the effect that the outputs of the initiative have had on its outcomes. In practice, these are the changes in the project participants that can be attributed to the outputs of the project.

Causal effect

The causal effect of an intervention is the effect (change) that it is shown to have on its participants. It can be described as the difference between the outcomes for the participants who have taken part in an intervention, compared to those who have not, or the outcomes of participants after an intervention, as opposed to before it.

Indicators

Outcome and impact **indicators** are the measurable pieces of evidence that allow you to track the change that has taken place as a result of your intervention – the ways of knowing whether a change is occurring.

For example, for a media literacy project, an outcome indicator might be the change in score between a pre- and post-intervention knowledge quiz carried out by participants. Consistent, significant improvements in scores, especially if they are sustained over time, would indicate a positive outcome for the intervention.

Definition: Indicators

Impact indicators and outcome indicators are the measurable pieces of evidence that allow you to track the change that has taken place as a result of your intervention.

For example, for a media literacy project, an outcome indicator might be the change in score between a pre- and post-intervention knowledge quiz carried out by participants. Consistent, significant improvements in scores would indicate a positive outcome for the intervention.

Research methods

Gathering your data

Carrying out an evaluation will involve gathering and analysing data about the **effect** that the intervention had on your target group, and/or about their experience of it. There are various methods that can be used, and there are some common concepts and practices to be aware of, which we outline below. The two main methods for gathering data are:

Surveys and quizzes: these can be useful for capturing facts and figures (**quantitative data**) to inform your evaluation. Questions are asked in a systematic way so that comparison between respondents is possible. Such questions may involve closed questions (i.e. ones with pre-designed answer codes). These result in quantitative data, which enables comparisons and trends over time to be made.

Definition: Surveys

Surveys consist of forms or lists of questions and can generate both quantitative and qualitative data, depending on the kind of questions asked.

For a media literacy intervention, you might want to survey your participants before and after the intervention, or straight after and then several months later.

The type of survey you create depends both on your target audience, and what you want to find out.

Definition: Quantitative data

Quantitative data is information that can be counted. For a media literacy intervention, this might include collating the responses to questions or statements with limited answers.

It is usually collected through surveys or questionnaires, and can include results from quizzes.

It can be used to understand what people think about something (from a limited range of options), and whether something has changed in their attitudes. Quantitative data can be gathered over time to produce longitudinal evidence which can add further proof of the effectiveness of your intervention.

It can be combined with qualitative data for deeper understanding.

Interviews and focus groups: these can be useful for capturing the 'why' and the 'so what' (**qualitative data**). The approach is tailored to capture individual stories which can bring your evaluation to life. They tend to involve open questions (i.e. ones where the participant can answer using their own words). These result in qualitative data, including quotations that can be used to illustrate the impact of the intervention.

For more detailed information and resources, the [Top Tips documents on our website] provide an overview of the methods, the key issues, and an annotated example.

Definition: Interviews

Interviews are a research method that involve conversations between a researcher and a participant, often with questions or a discussion guide that is defined in advance. They allow you to ask detailed questions and gain a more in-depth understanding of how an intervention might have changed a participant's attitude and behaviour.

Definition: Focus groups

A focus group is a research method that involves bringing together a group of people with particular characteristics or experiences to discuss a topic. As a qualitative research method, this can be used to understand how and why people think or behave in a certain way.

In terms of media literacy initiatives, focus groups within your target audience could be used to help develop aspects of the intervention, or focus groups of participants could be used to determine what they have learnt and how it has changed their behaviour, or what they think could be improved about the project's activities.

Legal, ethical and safeguarding considerations

Before starting any research, it is important to think carefully through the legal, ethical and safeguarding considerations. A good place to start is the Market Research Society Code of Conduct which sets out how a professional researcher should behave. For information about how data protection may be relevant to your research, you might want to look at the Information Commissioner's Office guidance on the UK General Data Protection Regulation. You may also want to consider seeking independent legal advice or expert advice on issues such as how to safeguard children or vulnerable adults from harm (if relevant to your project).

Don't forget the wellbeing of your own team when making plans and ensure that appropriate safeguards and escalation procedures are in place, especially if your intervention is focusing on sensitive topic areas.

Minimising bias

A challenge faced by all evaluators is how to understand potential bias and minimise or mitigate for it. We all want our projects to perform well, but if data capture and analysis are biased, the credibility of the evaluation will be undermined and the opportunity for learning will be lost.

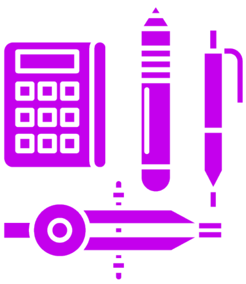
Who to include in your evaluation (sampling)

Depending on how many people participate in your project overall, you might not need to do research with all of them to get the information you need. Choosing a **sample** can reduce the burden on your team (in terms of data collection and analysis) and on your participants. But in general, a larger sample size is preferable and means you can be more confident that any small changes you observe are significant. However this isn't always the case so we would recommend reading more about sampling in the Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit on GOV.UK (pages 16-18).

Definition: Sample

When conducting an evaluation, you might be able to collect some data only from a selection of participants: this would be your sample. The sample size in relation to the overall group is important, as the statistical significance of your findings (which allows you to conclude whether or not something actually made a difference) is partially dependent on the sample size.

One option to consider is using evaluation tools as part of the project delivery. For example, people like to see that they have made progress, so if a comparison of the before and after scores of a quiz or survey are built into the programme delivery this will be both useful for the evaluation and interesting for the participants.



If you can't ask everyone involved in your initiative, you should try to speak to a representative sample that reflects the range of characteristics of the overall group; for example, by generating a random sample, or by deliberately choosing people who are best placed to help with your specific evaluation questions. For example, if your **hypothesis** is that older people are particularly likely to prefer an intervention, you should ensure that you have older and younger people in your sample, so that you can compare them.

Definition: Hypothesis

A hypothesis is a tentative statement or proposed explanation for a phenomenon or event, based on available evidence. It often predicts that there will be or won't be a correlation between two variables, one of which could be a media literacy intervention. A testable hypothesis is one which can be proved or disproved through experimentation. An evaluation should test whether or not a hypothesis seems to be true: for example, your hypothesis might be that your intervention will improve participants' knowledge or skills in a particular area, and your evaluation will determine whether it actually does.

Consider how to evidence the counterfactual

When assessing the impact of a specific intervention, it is important to be able to compare any change detected with what would have likely happened without the intervention: this is called the **counterfactual**. The counterfactual helps you to attribute any impact detected to your intervention, rather than something that might have happened anyway (e.g. someone getting better at a test over time, even without an intervention, if they can see their results straight away).

There is no way of directly observing what would have happened had you not carried out your intervention, so researchers use various approaches to estimate the counterfactual, including:

Definition: Counterfactual

When assessing the impact of a specific intervention, it is important to be able to compare any change detected with what would have probably happened without the intervention: this is the counterfactual scenario. This can be done by using a control group (an audience with similar characteristics to your target, without access to the intervention) or by using a baseline, i.e. comparing the skill or knowledge levels of your target audience before and after the intervention.

- using a control group (an audience with similar characteristics to the target, without access to the intervention); and/or
- using a baseline for comparison, (i.e., comparing skill or knowledge levels of the target audience before and after the intervention).

If you can detect a change in the intervention group that didn't occur in the control group, it is likely that it was a result of your intervention.

A **randomised control trial (RCT)** is considered one of the most robust ways to design a control group. An RCT involves people with similar characteristics (e.g. applicants to a course) being randomly assigned to one of two groups: one which receives the intervention (treatment group), one which doesn't (control group). Both groups are asked the same evaluation questions to establish whether the intervention had an impact.

When it is not possible to run a full RCT, evaluators can use quasi-experimental methods to identify a control group. You can find more information in this UK government resource, or from UNICEF: quasi-experimental design and methods.

It can be challenging and resource-intensive to set up an RCT or find a reliable counterfactual, so often evaluations will rely on comparing participants' results against baseline data. This can be supplemented by using open-ended questions to ask participants to reflect on why their scores have improved. Another option is to include questions that do not relate directly to the skills the intervention aims to target, i.e. to monitor whether these remain stable while those skills that have been targeted improve.

Analysing data

How you analyse your data will depend on what you have collected. However, there are some rules of thumb that you should always follow:

Refer back to your theory of change. The data you have collected should help you evidence each of the steps.

For quantitative data (eg data collected through surveys or quizzes) you can use statistics such as the number or percentage of people who performed better in a quiz after the intervention, or methods such as impacts compared with comparator group (see above on counterfactuals and RCTs).

For qualitative data (eg interview or focus group data) it can be harder to decide what to include, and you can be at risk of 'cherry-picking' the best quotes to demonstrate success. It can be helpful to put all the qualitative data into a large grid with the analysis questions so you can identify the common themes.

Further reading

For those who want to read more about issues relating to gathering and analysing data, we find these sites useful:

Code of Conduct | Market Research Society (mrs.org.uk)

Guide to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) | ICO

Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolki (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Simple Random Sampling - Research-Methodology

Collect and/ or retrieve data - Rainbow Framework (betterevaluation.org)

Choosing your collection methods | NCVO

Sharing

Read time: 8 minutes

Putting together a clear and compelling evaluation report for your stakeholders is the final stage of the process.

An evaluation report should not be seen as a way of demonstrating the worth of an initiative. The purpose of the report is to help you share findings and learn from them. By sharing your report more widely – for example, with Ofcom – you can also help others learn from your work.

You don't need to put all the data you collected into the report, but you must communicate the story accurately. By this we mean you shouldn't make your intervention look more successful than it was by being selective about data used, as doing so not only undermines your credibility but also means that other people may make the same mistakes, and so the learning is lost.

Putting your evaluation report together

The evaluation report is where you bring together all the evidence you have collected to tell your story. Identify the key messages that you want to get across to the reader, and how to make those points in the most impactful way using the evidence to back them up. There are some standard things it is always helpful to include in an evaluation report. However, it is important to think about who your audience is and what they will be interested in. In most cases it is a good idea to produce a one- to two-page summary of the findings that will entice people to read the additional detail.

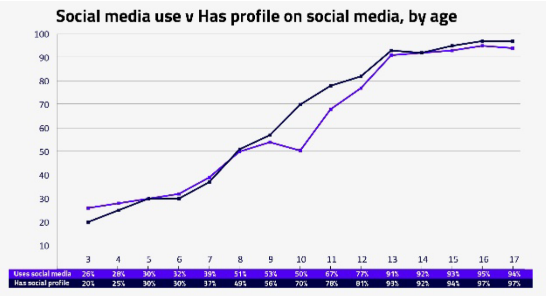
The following chapters are usually helpful to include:

- **Executive summary** (one to two pages which set out what the intervention was and what you learned in the evaluation).
- **Background to the project** (general introduction to the organisation and services being evaluated. Make sure you include a discussion of the inputs and activities in this section).
    - This can include the programme **theory of change** which will give the reader a good overview of what you planned.
- **Evaluation aims and scope** (including any specific evaluation questions and a high-level overview of the research methodology).
- **Description of the findings** (what the data shows, whether your intervention worked and why).
    - There are different ways to structure the findings depending on your audience. Options include:
        - Set out in order the evidence of outputs, the short-term outcomes, the intermediate outcomes and the impact.
        - Structure the report thematically around the different programme objectives. For example, first talk about the impact you had on participants' ability to scrutinise content, then about their ability to judge credible sources, etc. and how the outputs and outcomes contributed to these.
        - Have a chapter for each activity and the evidence for the impact it achieved.
- **Learning and next steps** (what went well and what can be improved next time / in future projects).
- **Appendix** (the key elements of these sections should be included in the main report, but it can be helpful to use an appendix to provide more detail).
    - **Details of your project delivery** (the more detail you include about the intervention, either here or in an annex, the easier it will be for other practitioners to learn from what you've done).
    - **Details of your data collection process** (when and how the research was conducted, with whom, any ethical considerations, etc.).

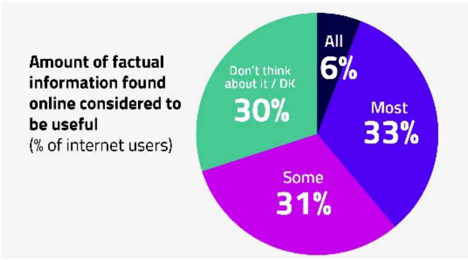
Visualising your data

There are a range of tools available to make the data you want to present easier to understand. By breaking up text, and numbers, with pictures, graphs, infographics or verbatim quotes from case studies, you can make your report more accessible. It is also an effective way of blending your quantitative (numbers) results with your qualitative (interviews and case studies) data to tell a wider story. The visualisation method you chose will depend on the points you want to make.

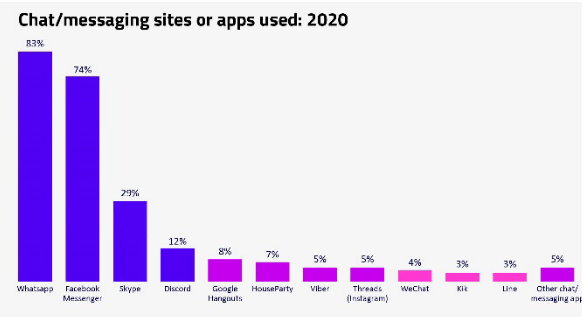
Line chart: This is useful to visualise comparative data over time.



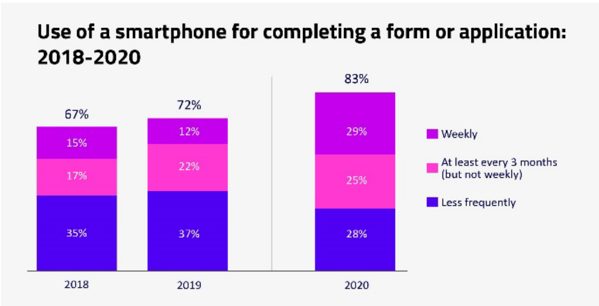
Pie chart: This is useful to show cohort responses (ie a third of respondents demonstrated understanding in a certain area) for a single period of time.



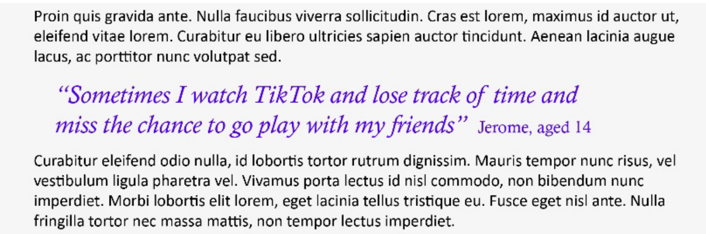
Bar or column chart: This is useful for comparative data between items.



Stacked chart: This is useful to show cohort responses over time.



Pull-out quotes: Use pull-out quotes from your qualitative data to highlight points you want to make.


Proin quis gravida ante. Nulla faucibus viverra sollicitudin. Cras est lorem, maximus id auctor ut, eleifend vitae lorem. Curabitur eu libero ultricies sapien auctor tincidunt. Aenean lacinia augue lacus, ac porttitor nunc volutpat sed.

"Sometimes I watch TikTok and lose track of time and miss the chance to go play with my friends" Jerome, aged 14

Curabitur eleifend odio nulla, id lobortis tortor rutrum dignissim. Mauris tempor nunc risus, vel vestibulum ligula pharetra vel. Vivamus porta lectus id nisl commodo, non bibendum nunc imperdiet. Morbi lobortis elit lorem, eget lacinia tellus tristique eu. Fusce eget nisl ante. Nulla fringilla tortor nec massa mattis, non tempor lectus imperdiet.

You could make your charts in Excel or PowerPoint using the inbuilt templates or use Google Charts. For more resources we suggest sites such as Datawrapper or Tableau Public.

Throughout your report, make sure you say where your evidence came from. For survey or quiz data, remember to include information about the **base size** and question answered in each chart.

Base size

The base size is the number of people who were asked a specific question.

For quotes taken from groups or interviews, include the source of the quote. This doesn't mean that you need to name individuals (they might prefer to remain anonymous) but you can say whether they were a participant, involved in delivery, a funder or someone else, so that the reader knows what perspective they are coming from.

Sharing your evaluation report internally and externally

Now you have your evaluation report, share it! Evaluation is about moving forward and learning lessons. By reflecting on your evaluation report internally your organisation can use its findings to improve the work being done and think about how things might happen differently next time the intervention is run. You can go back to your evaluation framework at this stage and adapt your project activities based on these learnings.

Throughout this guide we've tried to explain why producing evaluations is helpful, not only to the team delivering an intervention but also to the wider media literacy sector. You may choose to develop different versions of the report for different audiences – for example, a funder might be primarily interested in activities and impact metrics while other practitioners might be more interested in what you did and how.

In addition to sharing the report with your stakeholders we encourage you to share it with us.

Further reading

For those who want to read more about issues relating to writing your evaluation report, we find these sites useful:

The Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit Report Template (publishing.service.gov.uk)

How to write an evaluation report | NCVO

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES (altteaching.org)

Datawrapper: Create charts, maps, and tables

Tableau Public

Annex: Glossary

Many different terms are used when discussing media literacy evaluation. We have defined some of the most important here. It is important to note that there is sometimes overlap in the way that terms are used.

Assumptions

The assumptions in a theory of change/evaluation framework are the things which you can reasonably expect to be true, based on the available evidence.

Baseline

A baseline is the starting point against which to measure change. For a media literacy project, this could be the participants' existing level of knowledge about a topic, or their existing level of skills. This could be established using a quiz, survey, interview or focus group carried out with the target audience before the intervention takes place, and/or could be informed by previous research on similar audiences.

Base size

The base size is the number of people who were asked a specific question.

Causal effect

The causal effect of an intervention is the effect (change) that it is shown to have on its participants. It can be described as the difference between the outcomes for participants who have taken part in an intervention, compared to those who have not, or the outcomes for participants after an intervention, as opposed to before.

Counterfactual

When assessing the impact of a specific intervention, it is important to be able to compare any change detected with what would have probably happened without the intervention: this is the counterfactual scenario. This can be done by using a control group (an audience with similar characteristics to your target, without access to the intervention) or by using a baseline, i.e. comparing the skill or knowledge levels of your target audience before and after the intervention.

Data

Data refers to the information about your participants and their experience of your intervention that you gather during the research phase of your evaluation. It could be measurements, observations or feedback from participants. It can be qualitative (narrative) or quantitative (numerical). This data can be analysed and used to better understand the intervention, its outcome and its impact.

Data cleaning

Data cleaning refers to the process of removing or correcting data entries that are incomplete, incorrect or inconsistent. It is important to remove such errors in the data in order to avoid drawing inaccurate conclusions.

Effect size

The effect size measures the strength of the relationship between two variables. Although checking for statistical significance can tell you whether or not your intervention works, measuring effect size can give you an idea of the extent of the effect (or impact) of your intervention. A larger effect size indicates a stronger relationship.

Calculating the effect size of your intervention requires comparing numerical results from your treatment and control groups (or from the same group before and after intervention)

There are various methods that you can use to calculate effect size. For example, *Cohen's d* involves comparing the mean results from the two groups.

Economic evaluation

These evaluations will focus on asking you to consider the costs of your project relative to the benefits, asking questions such as “was the outcome worth the cost?” Or “could something else have delivered the same outcomes for less?”

Evaluation framework

An evaluation framework explains how the intervention will reach its goals: from the start of the initiative, beginning with resources available; to the end of the initiative, setting out the final and long-term impacts that the project is expected to achieve.

It sets out a logical and realistic outline of how inputs are used to develop project outputs, and how those outputs interact with participants' behaviour to achieve outcomes which lead to a lasting impact.

Focus groups

A focus group is a research method that involves bringing together a group of people with particular characteristics or experiences to discuss a topic. As a qualitative research method, this can be used to understand how and why people think or behave in a certain way.

In terms of media literacy initiatives, focus groups within your target audience could be used to help develop aspects of the intervention, while focus groups of participants could be used to determine what they have learnt and how it has changed their behaviour, or what they think could be improved about the project's activities.

Hypothesis

A hypothesis is a tentative statement or proposed explanation for a phenomenon or event, based on available evidence. It often predicts that there will be or won't be a correlation between two variables, one of which could be a media literacy intervention. A testable hypothesis is one which can be proved or disproved through experimentation. An evaluation should test whether or not a hypothesis seems to be true: for example, your hypothesis might be that your intervention will improve participants' knowledge or skills in a particular area, and your evaluation will determine whether it actually does.

Impact

Impact refers to longer-term change at an individual or societal level that can be attributed to the outcomes of an intervention. Impact is likely to be harder to measure than outcomes.

For example, the impact of a media literacy project could be:

- increased resilience to disinformation
- a change in the way that participants consume news
- an increase in the creativity of the audience regarding online media

Impact evaluation

Impact evaluation will focus on asking you to consider what the project achieved in terms of change for the target audience and/or wider society, and how well you met your objectives.

Indicators

Impact indicators and outcome indicators are the measurable pieces of evidence that allow you to track the changes that have taken place as a result of your intervention.

For example, for a media literacy project, an outcome indicator might be the change in score between a pre- and post-intervention knowledge quiz carried out by participants. Consistent, significant improvements in scores would indicate a positive outcome for the intervention.

Input

An input is something necessary to carry out an activity: it could be staff members, information/existing research evidence, or other resources.

For example, the inputs of a media literacy project could be:

- Two full-time staff members
- Research findings about the audience's key challenges in accessing information.

Interviews

Interviews are a research method that involve conversations between a researcher and a participant, often with questions or a discussion guide that is defined in advance. They allow you to ask detailed questions and gain a more in-depth understanding of how an intervention might have changed a participant's attitude and behaviour.

Likert scale

A Likert scale is a rating system typically used in questionnaires or surveys to assess people's attitudes, perceptions or opinions. Surveys will often ask their respondents to use a Likert scale of five (or seven) steps to rate the extent that they agree with a particular statement. These steps/options would likely be: 'strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree,' but could include further steps or a 'don't know' option instead of 'neutral.'

It is possible to code the results numerically (e.g. *strongly agree* could be 1, and *strongly disagree* could be 5) for purposes of data interpretation.

Logic model

A logic model explains the relationship between the inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes of your intervention.

Much of this information could also be contained in an evaluation framework.

Longitudinal data

In the context of media literacy, longitudinal data is evidence collected from the same participants over a period of time; for example, by asking the same questions. It allows you to track change over time.

Media literacy

Ofcom defines media literacy as "the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts".

Outcome

An outcome is the result of an intervention, ideally a benefit received by the target audience. It is usually finite and measurable.

For example, for a media literacy project, outcomes could be:

- an increase in participants' knowledge,
- participants gaining a new skill; and
- a change in attitude among participants.

Outcomes framework

An outcomes framework involves clearly defining the outcomes you want to achieve, and prioritising them. You might separate them into benefits for individuals vs the community, for example. It helps to focus your work on the outcomes that matter to you, to link your activities to the outcomes you want to see, and to communicate these more clearly.

Much of this information could also be contained in an evaluation framework.

Output

An output refers to the deliverables of an intervention or activity. These could be products (resources produced, for example), or services (workshops or training sessions carried out).

For example, the outputs of a media literacy project could be:

- Ten workshops delivered, each attended by 14 participants.
- Ten lesson plans published, downloaded an average of 16 times.

Process evaluation

Process evaluations will focus on asking you to consider how you delivered your project, and the how far the way in which the project was delivered affected the final outcomes.

Qualitative data

Qualitative data is information that can't be counted: it is descriptive, and often for a media literacy initiative it will be narratives or quotes from participants.

It is usually collected through interviews, focus groups, observations, case studies or open-ended survey questions.

It 'gives voice to experience', and can be used to understand how people think or feel about something, and why they think or feel that way. Qualitative data that explains how a participant believes your intervention has changed their life is useful to provide to funders.

It can be combined with quantitative data for deeper understanding.

Quantitative data

Quantitative data is information that can be counted. For a media literacy intervention, this might include collating the responses to questions or statements with limited answers.

It is usually collected through surveys or questionnaires, and can include results from quizzes.

It can be used to understand what people think about something (from a limited range of options), and whether something has changed in their attitudes. Quantitative data can be gathered over time to produce longitudinal evidence which can add further proof of the effectiveness of your intervention.

It can be combined with qualitative data for deeper understanding.

Randomised control trial (RCT)

A randomised control trial involves a group of people with similar characteristics being randomly assigned to one of two groups: one which receives the intervention, one which doesn't. Carrying out the same evaluation methods on the two groups – surveys, quizzes, focus groups or interviews – helps you to assess whether your intervention made a difference or not. Randomly assigning eligible participants to the two groups helps to reduce the risk that other factors might explain a difference in results.

Sample

When conducting an evaluation, you might be able to collect some data from only a selection of participants: this is your sample. The sample size in relation to the overall group is important, as the statistical significance of your findings (which allows you to conclude whether or not something actually made a difference) is partially dependent on the sample size.

Stakeholder

Project stakeholders can include anyone involved in the project, including project funders or sponsors, other members of the team, or for larger projects, other teams.

Stakeholders can also include anyone who might be affected by the intervention, such as target audiences.

Statistical significance

Statistical significance refers to the likelihood that change observed is a result of an intervention rather than simply being by chance. It is calculated based on sample size compared to the total population, and variation within the population.

If your results are statistically significant, it means that they are very likely to be the result of your intervention, rather than random chance.

Statistical significance is usually described using a probability value, or p-value, which is always between 0 and 1. A smaller p-value indicates that it is more likely that your results are not due to chance. To calculate a p-value, you could use an online calculator.

Surveys

Surveys consist of forms or lists of questions and can generate both quantitative and qualitative data, depending on the kind of questions asked.

For a media literacy intervention, you might want to survey your participants before and after the intervention, or straight after and then several months later.

The type of survey you create depends both on your target audience, and what you want to find out.

Theory of change

A model which explains the problem you are trying to solve, how you are planning to do this, and what effect you expect it to have. It explains why you think change will result from your intervention and acknowledges the elements that you cannot control.

A theory of change provides a high-level narrative of the intervention and the theory behind it; it should be put together at the beginning of the project. Much of this information could also be contained in an evaluation framework.

Annex: Resources

There are a number of resources mentioned throughout this document which are available to assist you. To access a particular resource simply click on the relevant links below:

- **Evaluation Framework Template** *(ODT)*
- **Top Tips: Interviews and focus groups** *(PDF)*
- **Top Tips: Surveys and quizzes** *(PDF)*
- **Ofcom's Media Literacy Research Library** *(website)*
- **Ofcom's Media Literacy Initiatives Library** *(website)*