Ofcom's Making Sense of Media Establish Working Group (3)

Minutes of meeting, 20 April 2023, 13.00-15.30

Attendees:

Group attendees: Ben Bradley (TikTok); Richard Earley (Meta); Gareth Finchett (Mencap); Laura Higgins (Roblox); Niamh McDade (Twitter); Vicki Shotbolt (ParentZone); Antonio Silva (BIT)

Ofcom: Claire Levens (chair); Ines Leroyer; Sundeep Shergill; David Swanson

Apologies: Philippa Diedrichs (University of West England Bristol); Rosie Luff (Google); Arietta Valmas (5Rights Foundation), Nejra van Zalk (Imperial College London)

Item 1: Progress update

- Working Group (WG) members were informed of progress since the last meeting:
    - Work has been ongoing with participating platforms to understand decision drivers which lead to on-platform interventions. Ofcom have held in-depth conversations with three of the five participating platforms within the WG and are working on ways of securing the input from the other two.
    - Ofcom have also commissioned a literature review of the existing academic and grey literature regarding current in-scope on-platform interventions.
    - Ofcom have also developed an understanding of platform product development processes.

Item 2: Items for discussion

(a) Key takeaways on drivers of decisions to develop in-scope interventions

- Claire Levens and Ines Leroyer presented the key takeaways from the second round of 1-2-1 discussions with participating online platforms within the WG, which focused upon what drives platforms to develop in-scope interventions.
- Key discussion points from members included:
    - It is important to balance developing 'user journeys' with avoiding user fatigue. On-platform interventions such as signposting and prompts can detract from user online experience, and over deploying interventions can increase user fatigue.
    - Testing interventions to determine 'what works' can be a challenging process because of a need to establish user consent. Platforms have a range of obligations across user privacy, data minimisation and legal requirements, which can make it difficult to adequately test their on-platform interventions. We heard that any attempt to reach a specific type of user community can make this even more challenging.
    - Online platforms need to continually balance a need to promote credible and informative sources with user expectations about the content 'that they want to see'.
- Platform representatives were keen for the presentation slides to be shared, with the intention of showing colleagues working on safety by design projects and providing further feedback to Ofcom.
- There is now a desire from certain platforms to build measurement and evaluation of on-platform interventions into the earliest stages of product design, in response to user feedback.

- The best practice principles to promote media literacy by design should aim to be more specific than generalised recommendations, and also provide clear, evidence-based examples to ensure online platform uptake and application. Claire Levens advised that Ofcom has – to date – found it difficult to obtain data which can support this level of specificity.
- Platform representatives advised that when they can clearly see that an intervention is successfully having an impact regarding an issue, it is often expanded to be applied to other problem areas.

(b) Update on literature review on on-platform interventions

- Ines Leroyer presented initial findings from the on-platform interventions literature review.
- Key discussion points from members included:
    - A question was asked as to whether users were segmented according to age. Claire Levens advised that Ofcom did not specifically request for academic papers to be categorised by age, mainly due to the lack of available literature on the subject. Future research – including Ofcom's User Experience Testing – will be segmented by age.
    - A further question was raised as to whether currently published research focused upon accessibility issues, particularly for those with learning disabilities. Claire Levens advised that Ofcom have not reported upon this issue because it was not present in the research.

(c) Discussion on product development processes

- Sundeep Shergill hosted a discussion about product development processes to support our development of best practice principles to promote media literacy by design.
- Key discussion points from members included:
    - NPD is driven by resourcing and company culture as well as guidelines regarding user privacy and data minimisation.
    - Platform representatives indicated that interventions would go through many iterative stages before being launched – including 'Trust by Design' process, sampling with specific user groups, and other building and testing processes with relevant internal stakeholders.
    - Trust and Safety Teams will usually be involved throughout all development processes.

Item 3: Member updates

- Richard Earley informed WG members that Meta Oversight Board have published policy advisory opinion on the removal of COVID-19 misinformation, as requested by Meta. You can read it here.

Item 4: Next steps

- The next round of 1-2-1 conversations between Ofcom and participating platforms will be arranged by COP Wednesday 10th May.
- The next session of the Establish WG will be held on w/c 3rd July.

Item 5: AOB

- Ofcom will be hosting our annual Making Sense of Media Nations Tour in June 2023 – with events held in Exeter, Dundee, Belfast, and Bangor (Gwynedd). Working Group members are invited to register here for the events.

- Ofcom have also published the Making Sense of Media Annual Plan, which can be viewed here.