A day in the life

An ethnographic exploration of media literacy

A summary report for Ofcom by Revealing Reality

November 2022

About Revealing Reality

Revealing Reality is an independent social research agency, working with regulators, government, and charities to provide insight into people's online behaviours and experiences.

Studying how the digital world is shaping people's behaviours is something we do every day. We regularly conduct detailed qualitative behavioural research, observing how people really use digital products, services, and technology. This includes exploring how digital design shapes behaviour – across technology, gambling, financial products, the health service, and more.

This project uses our experience carrying out ethnography and place-based research. We believe that context is key to understanding behaviour, so to understand how people live and make decisions, research should be in their world, not ours.

Ofcom Foreword

Ofcom has a statutory duty to promote and research media literacy. A key way we seek to fulfil this duty is through our Making Sense of Media programme, which aims to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of children and adults in the UK.

The research conducted via our Making Sense of Media programme provides Ofcom and its stakeholders with a robust and innovative evidence base across the many facets of media literacy. Our tracker studies - our Adults' and Children's Media Lives qualitative projects, and our Media Use and Attitudes quantitative surveys – are long-established and provide rich insights into the ways in which people's media use and literacy has changed over time. To complement this work, we also commission stand-alone research projects which deepen our knowledge in specific areas.

This 'Day in the Life' report represents one such project. Our aim was to bring to life the broader context of media literacy, illustrating how a person's media literacy is rarely linear or neat, but an outcome of a range of factors related to their particular circumstances and underlying attitudes and behaviour. It shows how media literacy is relevant to much of daily life, spanning a range of activities both on- and off-line. This project lays out in descriptive detail this holistic view of media literacy and illustrates how it manifests in daily life, through ethnographic research with a sample of 20 adults from around the UK.

This summary report provides an overview of the key themes, with illustrations from the participants' circumstances. It is a complement to the detailed case studies that are published as a rich immersive evidence base, providing an understanding of how media literacy manifests and thereby the ways in which it might be further developed[1].

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[1] We have published 17 case studies in which information that could identify the participants has been removed. The remaining three case studies were not possible to anonymise and so have not been published.

CONTENTS

Introduction

Background

Digital media have been increasingly woven into people's daily lives. People's ability to navigate these spaces and tools can either expand their opportunities or introduce limitations in nearly every aspect of their lives.

As the UK's communications regulator, Ofcom has a duty to promote and research media literacy across the UK. Ofcom defines media literacy as "the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts," and it is this *contextual* nature of media literacy that this research set out to explore. As part of Ofcom's ongoing understanding of the ways that media plays a role in people's daily lives, this research was commissioned to outline the varying levels and types of media literacy across the range of activities people carry out both on- and off-line. The research is an in-depth exploration of media literacy among a diverse sample of 20 people, including some of the more vulnerable members of society, and those most impacted by the relative presence or absence of their media literacy.

Through insight into the daily lives of people in the UK, this work emphasises the many different areas of life where media literacy has an effect, both in terms of the opportunities that present themselves and the constraints that may be experienced.

More specifically, the project objectives were to:

- Explore each participant's media engagement 'touchpoints' as they appear in daily life
- Analyse the range of content that participants engage with and are exposed to, and to observe their understanding of its provenance and purpose
- Provide an understanding of the role of media literacy (how it is intertwined with people's lives and in what way)
- Evidence who is currently at a disadvantage

This report presents key findings from the research and selected case studies, which demonstrate the positioning of media literacy within daily life. The report should be considered alongside the detailed case studies document which accompanies it. The case studies provide a tangible, rich picture of daily life for our sample, and the many and varied ways that the presence of media literacy can be enabling and the lack of it can be limiting.

This report summarises some of the different ways media literacy affects people's daily lives, before outlining the factors that were observed to shape people's levels of media literacy. These factors illustrate some of the challenges that need to be addressed if people are to make full use of the opportunities presented by both traditional and new media.

Methodology

For this research, it was important to take a holistic approach to exploring what media literacy looks like in everyday life. Therefore, the research started from the ground up, exploring what day-to-day life looks like for 20 people across the UK. Participants were strategically sampled to ensure that a range of demographics, lifestyles, media literacy levels and circumstances were explored. For example, the research included people who were particularly digitally excluded or who had experienced a life change, meaning that their media literacy needs had altered.

Participants' lives and experiences with media were explored in detail through full-day ethnographies, using a mixture of interview, observation, and activity shadowing to cover key topic areas and observe the moments in real time where media plays a role in people's lives. Fieldwork took place between April and June 2022.

Participants then completed a seven-day media diary, including a written account of their day and the different ways they consumed and used media - whether that was on their phones, laptops, or non-digital devices. For a majority of the participants, this included capturing three days of full screen recording on their phones, from first thing in the morning to last thing at night. This meant that every moment of the participant's phone screen time was recorded, capturing every behaviour, platform, and piece of information they encountered. After reviewing the diary, specific moments and touchpoints were explored in follow-up interviews. This helped to build an understanding of the more granular decision-making behind different behaviours and interactions with media and information across the week.

Respondents[2] who took part in the research include:

Marco	15-25	South West England
Nina	18-28	North West England
Jamie	18-28	North East England
Liv	20-30	South East England
Sammy	20-30	North West England
Rinda	25-35	Northern Ireland
Lindsay	25-35	North East England
Marcy	35-45	North West England
Safi	35-45	North East England
Mai	35-45	Greater London
Michael	35-45	North East England
Ali	35-45	South East England
Veronica	35-45	North East England
Nigel	35-45	South East England
Damien	45-55	North West England
Hamish	45-55	Wales
Sue	55-65	Midlands
John	65-75	Wales
Joyce	65-75	London
Paul	75-85	Scotland

[2] All names have been changed and identifying information removed/anonymised

Variation in media literacy gives rise to both opportunities and constraints

Media literacy varies widely between people and contexts. Someone's level of media literacy can look quite different in different areas of their life, for example. This affects outcomes, from the sources people get their news from, to the ways people search and access information relating to their health, to how they learn new hobbies.

Media literacy is relevant across a broad range of day-to-day activities

Prior to fieldwork, a list of topic areas was created as a hypothesis of where media literacy might play a role in people's lives. Through observational fieldwork, interviews with respondents, and qualitative analysis, these categories evolved to ensure media literacy was being explored across the many different areas of life that reflected the participants' lived experiences, and that they covered the main purposes and aspects of engaging in media, both on- and off-line.

These categories include:

- Civic engagement
- Work
- Education
- Travel
- Health
- Shopping
- Relationships
- Entertainment
- Finances
- News and politics
- State touchpoints.

This diagram (Figure 1) is used throughout the report, and shaded-in areas represent the extent to which media literacy plays a role in these areas of an individual's daily life. For example, the diagram on the right shows that media literacy plays a greater role in someone's finances and a much smaller role in their working life.
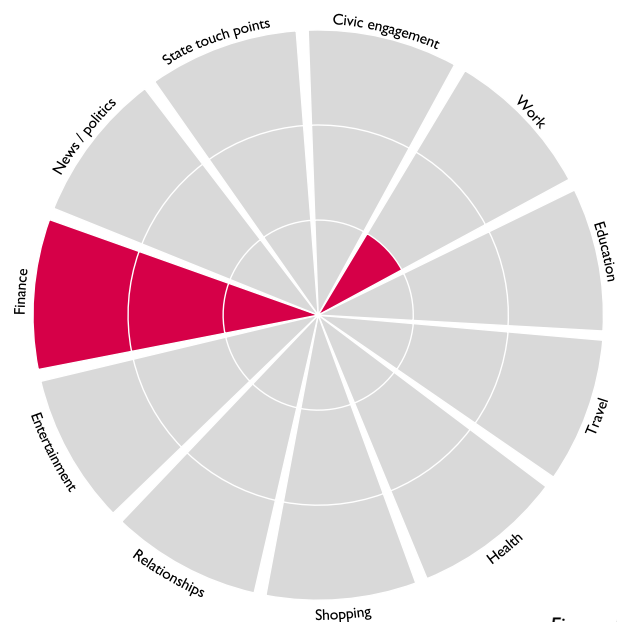

Figure 1

Across the sample, media literacy was observed to be playing a role in people's selection of and engagement in information, content, and resources in each of these areas to differing degrees.

Figure 2 maps how much of a role media literacy was playing across these different areas of activity for the entire sample. For example, across the sample, media literacy played a large role for many participants in the areas of entertainment-related media, shopping and news and politics, whereas media literacy played a large role for only a few participants in terms of travel and relationships.

However, it is important to note that the role that media literacy plays within a given area of activity does not necessarily equate to having an impact on someone's daily life. For example, the role of media literacy in relation to someone's news consumption could be – and often is – considerable, but the impact of news consumption upon their daily life is less significant than other areas of activity, such as health or finance.

The importance of media literacy within a given area of activity may also be different at an individual level compared to a societal level. For example, higher media literacy in relation to news is important for society but may be less so for any given individual.
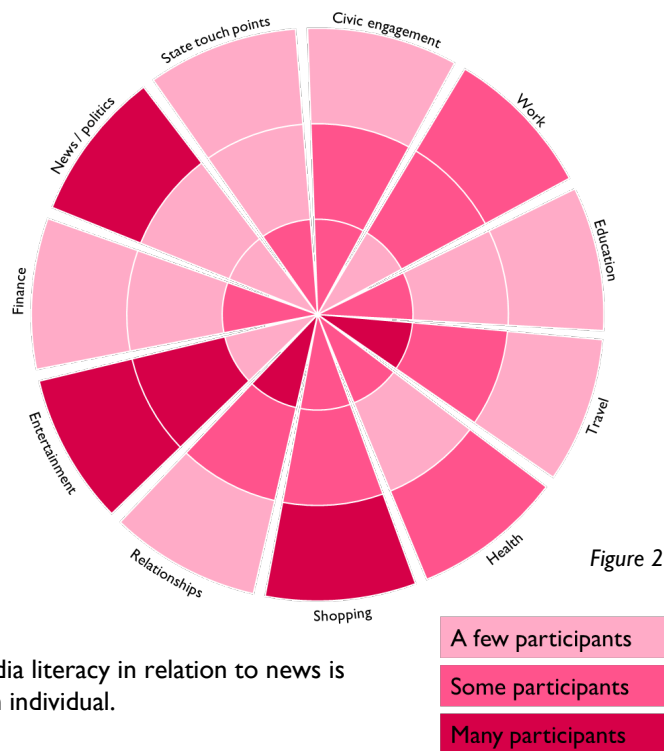

Figure 2

A few participants

Some participants

Many participants

Levels of media literacy generated opportunities for some

Media literacy has the potential to create positive opportunities in people's day-to-day lives, and we saw many examples of this in the research.

Sue (55-65), for example, has a number of disabilities and has struggled with expanding her social circle since the pandemic lockdowns and the death of her husband. She's motivated to meet new people and make friends and has recently decided to join Facebook to connect with like-minded people on community pages and groups that are relevant to her. Sue enjoys travelling but had a negative experience on a previous group holiday because it was not organised for those with accessibility needs. Subsequently, Sue did some research online, reading reviews and turning to Facebook groups for disabled people, where she found valuable advice and first-hand experiences to help her find the agency and holiday that worked best for her. Since going on this trip, Sue has made some new friends and feels a lot more confident in herself; she is optimistic for her future and feels that this opportunity has opened a lot of doors. Case study 1 on page 11 provides more details about Sue's circumstances and daily life.

Another participant, Marcy (35-45) finds it easy to navigate online content and has a comprehensive understanding of data collection and privacy due to her job. Her ease with using online platforms meant she was able to teach herself new skills and find useful information, especially in relation to marketing and starting her own business, for which she recently won funding. Marcy's proficiency in media literacy has made a large, positive impact on areas including her work, data privacy management, and picking up new hobbies.

Jamie (18-28) is a university student and has a medical condition which can be triggered by stress and sleep deprivation. He worried that his condition would affect his social life and studies at university and did a lot of research online to find out more about how he can best manage it. This led to him finding out about the Disabled Students' Allowance, through which Jamie was able to access software that helps him structure his

lecture notes into a more accessible format, which in turn helped him manage his stress and subsequently, his condition.

Levels of media literacy also led to constraints for some people

Some participants, however, were constrained in an area of their life by their more limited media literacy.

Nigel (35-45) is struggling to manage growing debts and his income has decreased after reducing his working hours due to a medical condition. Despite having some advice offered from the local council, Nigel's main source of advice in relation to increasing his income is Facebook groups focusing on making money from online games. He downloads the games which are recommended in these groups without much thought as to any potential risks there may be involved in downloading games from the internet. Nigel spends hours playing these puzzles and games each day, earning 'points' that can be transferred into cash or vouchers. While his aim is to earn money, he doesn't consider how beneficial the game is to his goal, and whether there may be more time-efficient ways of increasing his income. Case study 2 provides more details about Nigel's circumstances and daily life.

Mai (35-45) doesn't feel confident online, especially when it comes to online banking or shopping, and so often has to ask her family to make the purchase for her. Mai can spend hours looking at different products online and often finds what looks like a good deal. However, she finds it difficult to assess whether a website is safe or not, and worries she'll end up losing money or not buying the right thing from a legitimate business. Therefore, while she wants to become more independent and find good deals, she will spend a lot of time researching different items and prices, before reverting to Amazon because her family has an account. This sometimes annoys her, as she feels she has potentially missed out on savings she could have made with different retailers.

Mai and Veronica (35-45) are both seeking work. They search for new job opportunities online by subscribing to specific digital mailing lists recommending jobs for their fields of interest. Outside of these mailing lists, however, both Veronica and Mai do not search for job vacancies elsewhere online as they both believe the most relevant information will be provided via these emails. This constrained their opportunities for finding a job they wanted by passing over other potentially useful online sources for vacancies.

Another respondent, Safi (35-45) has little time for herself: she looks after her children, one of whom has a long-term health condition she has recently had to help manage. She also has several long-term health conditions herself. Recently she has been looking into getting a lawyer for help with a legal claim she hopes to make. Although she has been spending significant amounts of time looking, she reflected that she would usually click the top Google search result as it was the one she trusted the most but didn't really know why. This limited use of Google results pages might prove to be a barrier to accessing appropriate legal support.

The opportunity cost of not using the best tool for the job and of lacking awareness of the impact of the tools/devices chosen can, for some, be the biggest factor relating to media literacy, presenting difficulties for people in their day to day lives.

While media literacy plays a role across a range of topic areas, its impact can vary as the topic areas emerge as more or less relevant for different people, in different contexts, and at different times in their life.

For example, Veronica (35-45) didn't have home broadband for a long time because she couldn't afford it. During this time, she used her phone's limited 4G data to access the internet to manage her finances, reply to emails and use social media. For TV, she would rely on terrestrial channels, so ended up watching a lot of the BBC News channel. She reflected that during this time she felt well-informed about the news. Since getting home broadband recently, Veronica has not been watching the news as much. She signed up for Disney+ and prefers watching shows and films instead of the news. Veronica's high engagement with current affairs was

contingent on her lack of access to other content. Becoming more digitally 'plugged in' has subsequently impacted her awareness about current affairs.

Case studies: how media literacy generates opportunities or constraints

The following case studies illustrate the points from the previous section in more detail, providing examples of where media literacy has either opened doors for participants, or where limited media literacy has constrained them. To access detailed case studies for participants in the sample, please visit: A Day in the Life case studies

Sue's case study (Case study 1)

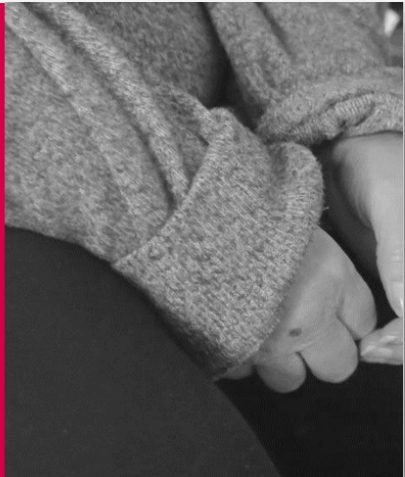Sue's situation is an example of how media literacy can create tangible opportunities.

Sue, 55-65
Socio-economic group C1

Sue lives alone in the Midlands after recently losing her husband. She has a number of disabilities. Since the loss of her husband, she has been feeling very low and anxious about the wider world, at one point refusing to leave the house. Today, Sue is building her confidence to try new things and meet new people. She has carers who meet her to help her with errands.

Despite feeling anxious over the past few years, Sue really wants to get out and "start living again". She is highly motivated to meet new people and try new things so she can have new and rewarding experiences. Sue has a small group of friends in the area and has met some people through group holidays. However, she feels one of her friends is taking advantage of her and wants to make more friends. Sue's hobbies include painting, reading, and going to the gym.

Sue has a tablet, telephone, TV, and Alexa (Amazon cloud-based voice service). She spends time browsing Facebook and Google News to get updates about relevant disabled communities. Sue is slightly worried about data sharing and doesn't feel safe sharing information online as she fears someone may take advantage of her vulnerable position.

REVEALING REALITY

"I've got a couple of new apps on my phone that help with daily life".

A Day in Sue's life

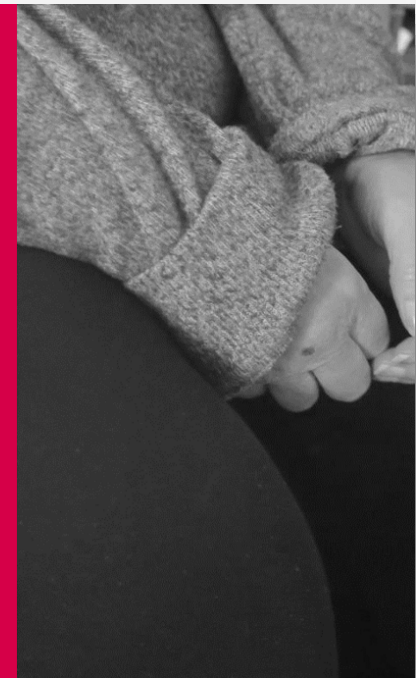|	
7:30am	Wakes up
	Reads in bed
	Makes breakfast
11:00am	Call with disability charity
	Lunch
12:30pm	**Scrolls through the news**
	Scrolls through Facebook
	Runs errands
4:00pm	**Relaxes and goes online**
	Makes dinner
8:00pm	**Watches TV**
	Phones or messages her friends
11:00pm	Sleeps

Sue has a very organised day - because of her accessibility needs she sticks to a routine.
In the morning, Sue enjoys reading in bed before getting up.

As well as her carers, Sue has a cleaner. Sue is not very confident going out by herself, although this is something she is working towards for more leisure trips.
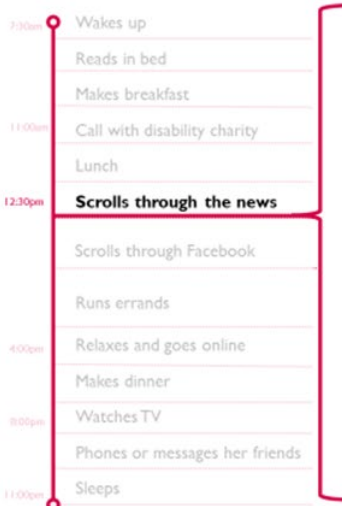
She goes to the gym regularly, getting a taxi to drop her off and pick her up.

Sue also enjoys weekly phone calls with a disability support charity.

REVEALING REALITY

Sue checks Google for news on disability

7:30am	Wakes up
	Reads in bed
	Makes breakfast
11:00am	Call with disability charity
	Lunch
12:30pm	**Scrolls through the news**
	Scrolls through Facebook
	Runs errands
4:00pm	Relaxes and goes online
	Makes dinner
8:00pm	Watches TV
	Phones or messages her friends
11:00pm	Sleeps

News / Politics

Sue really enjoys Google News – she finds that it always gives her articles that are relevant to her interests. Sue finds that using Google News allows her to focus on things that are important to her and not negative things online. She suspects this is because she searches a lot about disability.

While Sue still gets daily emails from different news sites, since finding out about Google News, she has not really engaged with her emails.

Sue has recently read a recommended article where a disabled woman was conned by a friend. This helped Sue realise that she was a victim of 'Mate Crime' where a friend was taking advantage of her finances. This information helped her manage her relationship and motivated her to meet new people.

REVEALING REALITY

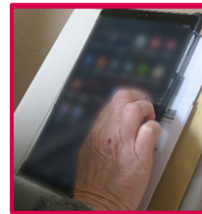## To relax, Sue will scroll through her Facebook

Relationships

Time	Activity
7:30am	Wakes up
	Reads in bed
	Makes breakfast
11:00am	Call with disability charity
	Lunch
12:30pm	Scrolls through the news
	Scrolls through Facebook
	Runs errands
4:00pm	**Relaxes and goes online**
	Makes dinner
8:00pm	Watches TV
	Phones or messages her friends
11:00pm	Sleeps
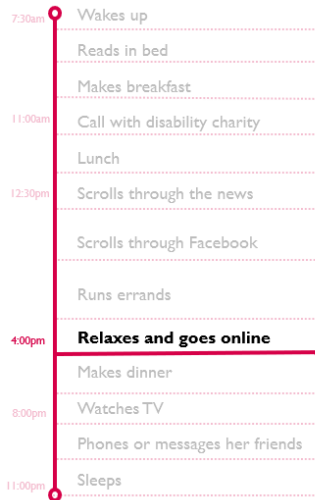
Recently, Sue joined Facebook to connect with people. She has followed several pages relevant to her, including local groups and disability pages to connect with people that have similar interests. She also uses Facebook to get an insight into what is happening around her – before she relied on daily emails but finds this a much better system.
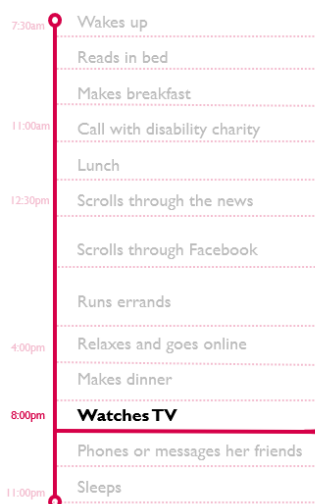
She has been able to reconnect with old friends and people in her local community.

From joining groups, Sue was able to book a holiday with a disability group where she met new people and feels very positively about her life. She read reviews and picked the group that seemed most accessible.

REVEALING REALITY

Sue likes reality TV and watches this most nights

Entertainment

Time	Activity
7:30am	Wakes up
	Reads in bed
	Makes breakfast
11:00am	Call with disability charity
	Lunch
12:30pm	Scrolls through the news
	Scrolls through Facebook
	Runs errands
4:00pm	Relaxes and goes online
	Makes dinner
8:00pm	**Watches TV**
	Phones or messages her friends
11:00pm	Sleeps

Sue usually watches a programme or two in the evening.

She's recently had her digibox updated but found the process very stressful as they had provided her with the materials but no one to help her. Sue looked up different YouTube tutorials but could not find the relevant one. After some phone calls, they were able to send an engineer to help install her new digibox.

Sue particularly enjoys reality TV shows where she thinks she'll see more disabled people, like the Undateables and ER. However, as a disabled person looking to date, Sue really hates the name of the Undateables show.

> *"I'm going to try and catch up with Coronation Street, on ITV hub then watch Grand Designs on Channel 4 then the Undatables [sic]. I hate that title, so rude implying us disabled folks can't date. The other thing that irritates me is that the people in the prog are always matched with someone with the same disabilities. Oh well I suppose they like a happy ending."*
>
> An extract from Sue's media diary

REVEALING REALITY

Where does media literacy play a role in Sue's life?
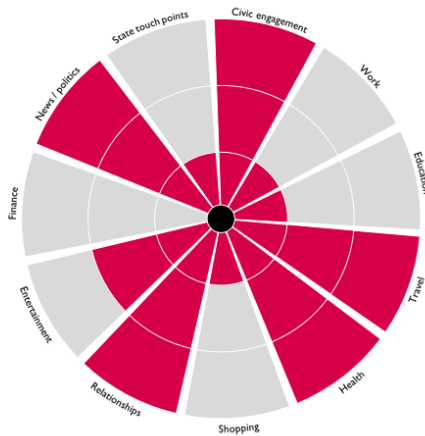
Since Covid restrictions have lifted, Sue has worked to expand her social circle. She's recently joined Facebook and has followed community pages and groups relevant to her.

Sue also went on a group holiday a few years ago but didn't enjoy it. Since then, she's been looking for a disabled tour group in the UK. She did some research online, reading reviews and turning to Facebook groups for disabled people, where she found valuable advice and first-hand experiences to help her find the agency and holiday that worked best for her. Sue recently went with a new holiday group on a UK break and was very happy that she went, despite being a bit nervous beforehand. She has made new friends and feels more confident in herself. The trip was very inspiring for Sue - she feels excited for her future and has since started looking at joining online courses where she can learn skills to help her manage her disability. She's now booked more trips with them.

Being on different groups on social media and following different newsletters means that Sue is up to date on disability news in the UK. She feels empowered knowing the different things happening and has subsequently joined campaigns and signed petitions around accessibility issues.

REVEALING REALITY

Nigel's case study (Case study 2)

Nigel's situation provides examples of the drawbacks of limited media literacy.

Nigel, 35-45
Socio-economic group: C2

Nigel lives in South East England, in a small flat. He's divorced and has two children, one of whom he doesn't see very often. He spends time with his other child on Saturdays and a few evenings a week. Nigel has had a medical condition for many years, which has gradually reduced the amount of work he can do. He's worked in a manual role since he was a teenager but as his mobility has decreased, has moved to a part-time, remote role.

Nigel's social network became much smaller after his divorce, as his working life changed. He struggled with his mental health for a period of time before he moved to his new flat, which Nigel saw as a fresh start. After he started going to church for the first time in his life Nigel began to build a community around himself.
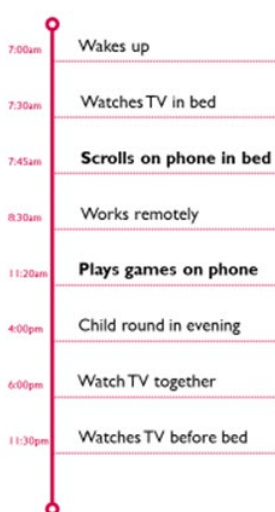
Nigel has a lot of spare time since his working hours have reduced. He spends most of his time chatting on Facebook groups and playing games on his phone as a way to make additional money. Money has become tight for Nigel with his income reducing, along with arrears with his bills and debt for the new flat and its furniture.

REVEALING REALITY

"The minute the internet drops, I go back to the dark ages… there's also spaces where no one knows I have a condition."

A day in Nigel's life

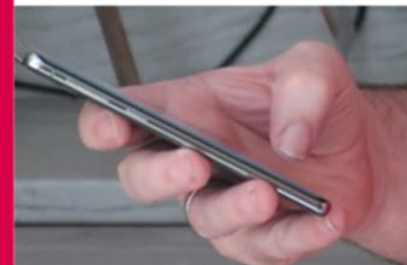| Time	Activity
7:00am	Wakes up
7:30am	Watches TV in bed
7:45am	**Scrolls on phone in bed**
8:30am	Works remotely
11:20am	**Plays games on phone**
4:00pm	Child round in evening
6:00pm	Watch TV together
11:30pm	Watches TV before bed

Nigel wakes up early most days but will spend some time in bed, **scrolling on his phone** and watching TV. Nigel finds his symptoms are worse first thing in the morning, so he doesn't like to get up quickly.

He works remotely for a few hours a couple of mornings a week. This often involves contacting various people and therefore it is work that he can do from home.

For the rest of the day, Nigel spends a lot of time on his phone. He gets a lot of notifications, most of which he ignores. Mostly, he's **playing games on his phone** as a way for him to earn 'points' which he can then transfer into cash or vouchers. Sometimes he plays these games simultaneously across multiple devices to earn more money.

One of Nigel's children comes round for a few evenings a week. They'll have dinner together and watch TV, often old films or shows such as Fawlty Towers or the Carry On films. After they have left, he'll watch TV in bed and play a few more.

REVEALING REALITY

Nigel starts his day by scrolling on his phone

News / politics

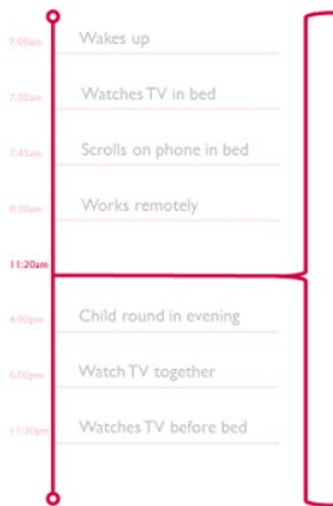|	
7:00am	Wakes up
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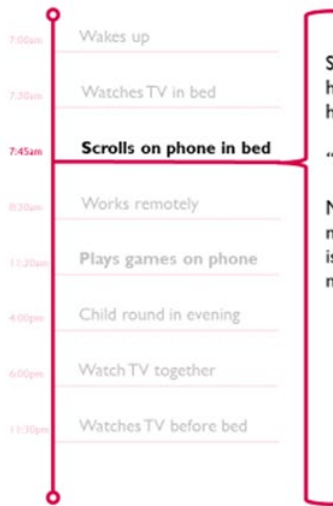
Soon after waking up, Nigel turns to his phone which is charging next to his bed. He scrolls through his Facebook feed and checks his notifications. This is a common behaviour for Nigel – he'll unlock his phone and scroll through them regularly throughout the day.

"If I'm honest, I find them overwhelming… like what is this even all for?"

Nigel described the constant notifications from his emails, social media, news notifications, and the many other apps as immense. He is aware it's not a useful way for him to access information but isn't sure how to manage them or how to change his settings. Nigel reflected that sometimes this means that useful information (e.g. about his children's school) gets lost alongside everything else.

REVEALING REALITY

Nigel spends hours playing games on his phone

Finance

|	
7:00am	Wakes up
7:30am	Watches TV in bed
7:45am	Scrolls on phone in bed
8:30am	Works remotely
11:20am	
4:00pm	Child round in evening
6:00pm	Watch TV together
11:30pm	Watches TV before bed

Later in the morning, Nigel starts playing games on his phone. He has a few that he's currently playing regularly to save up 'points' to transfer into vouchers, but often switches them up on the recommendation of people on Facebook groups. These games are posited as a way to make additional money in fast and easy ways.

REVEALING REALITY

Where does media literacy play a role in Nigel's life?
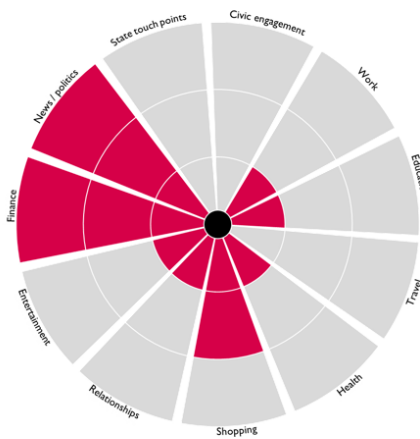
Nigel currently spends a lot of time on his phone as his work hours have been reduced. He isn't engaging with a lot of new information very often or seeking out answers – he sees his days as being focused on his children and playing games to earn himself vouchers. He receives lots of information through the constant stream of notifications and emails that he receives. However, he isn't sure how to manage or filter this stream of information to get the items that are more important or interesting to him.

His level of media literacy has the greatest impact on his finances. Money feels tight for Nigel at the moment. He described that the only way he's trying to manage his finances currently is through playing games, from the advice of people in a Facebook group, and that he didn't want to think about changing his career. For the moment, he hasn't looked into whether there might be more efficient ways of supplementing his income other than games and hadn't reflected on the motivations of those who suggest he plays them.

REVEALING REALITY

Veronica's case study (Case study 3)

Veronica's situation evidences the ways that media literacy can provide opportunities as well as limitations.

Veronica, 35-45
Socio-economic group: E

Veronica lives in charity-assisted housing in the North East of England with her child, Niki. She moved to the UK from Europe many years ago to find work. She lived in a refuge before moving into her current home. She is unemployed and not very motivated to find work as she isn't confident that it will fit her childcare schedule.

Veronica met her closest friends through Badoo, an app where users make friends and romantic connections, including a close friend who sometimes takes them both on trips away. Veronica's family lives in Europe but have unreliable internet signal, making communication difficult. Veronica enjoys reading up on current affairs, history, physics, and chemistry. She feels unfamiliar with her local area and usually walks to go to the store or pick up Niki from school. She takes an Uber to the job centre every two weeks as she finds the buses unreliable.

Veronica has a smartphone with a £10 data plan, but she sometimes needs to buy more data. She spends a lot of time scrolling through TikTok and playing games on her phone. Her laptop, which a family member bought for her, broke in 2019 and she doesn't have the money to get another one. She has live TV which typically plays BBC news in the background, or more recently, Disney+, after she bought a subscription to the service. She tries not to share her email to avoid spam, only sharing it with companies she 'trusts', like Amazon and Netflix.
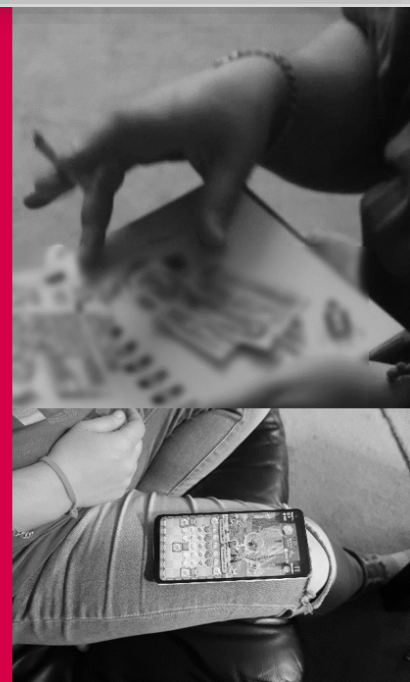
REVEALING REALITY

"I like having the news on because you learn something new every time. I want to know what's going on in my country, I must learn English, I must learn how people live."

A day in Veronica's life

7:45am	Gets Niki ready for school
8:30am	Niki watches YouTube, then goes to school
	Cleans the house and cooks
9:00am	Watches BBC news
12:15pm	**Watches Disney+ / plays games on phone / scrolls on social media**
3:00pm	Collects Niki from school
3:15pm	**Niki watches YouTube, cartoons, or plays Minecraft whilst Veronica cooks**
4:30pm	Watches TV or plays on phone
5:30pm	**Talks on the phone to her friend**
6:00pm	Watches Disney+ / plays games on phone / scrolls social media
	Prepares Niki for bathing and sleeping
8:00pm	Watches BBC News
9:00pm	Goes to bed, on phone until 2am

REVEALING REALITY

Veronica gets Niki ready for school every morning. Before school, Niki watches YouTube.

Once Veronica has dropped Niki off at school, she goes home to clean the house and cook. Veronica enjoys playing something in the background as she cleans, such as BBC news or a movie on Disney+.

Throughout the day, Veronica enjoys using her phone and TV for entertainment. When Niki gets home from school, they will spend time watching YouTube, cartoons, or playing Minecraft, whilst Veronica cooks dinner.

Veronica calls her friend in the evening. While talking to her friend, she often plays games on her phone, watches TV, or scrolls through social media. Later, Veronica will get Niki ready for bed and then watch BBC news or a TV show, falling asleep watching a movie on her phone.

Veronica uses digital devices to pass the time

Entertainment

7:45am	Gets Niki ready for school
8:30am	Niki watches YouTube, then goes to school
	Cleans the house and cooks
9:00am	Watches BBC news
12:15pm	**Watches Disney+ / plays games on phone / scrolls on social media**
3:00pm	Collects Niki from school
3:15pm	Niki watches YouTube, cartoons, or plays Minecraft whilst Veronica cooks
4:30pm	Watches TV or plays on phone
5:30pm	Talks on the phone to her friend
6:00pm	Watches Disney+ / plays games on phone / scrolling social media
	Prepares Niki for bathing and sleeping
8:00pm	Watches BBC News
9:00pm	Goes to bed, on phone until 2am

Veronica uses her phone and watches TV to relax. She has been playing a game on her phone for over four years, receiving a notification every 24 hours when she needs to complete a task and retain her progress. She pays about £5 a month for the game and reflected that it is bad for her because she doesn't have time, but equally, she does enjoy it.

When Veronica scrolls on social media, she browses TikTok and Facebook. She uses TikTok to watch funny videos and videos that teach her new things. On Facebook, she likes to see what her friends are doing and stay up to date with them.

Since getting Disney+, Veronica has also switched to playing series or films in the background instead of the news.

REVEALING REALITY

Veronica uses parental controls for Niki

Entertainment

7:45am	Gets Niki ready for school
8:30am	Niki watches YouTube, then goes to school
	Cleans the house and cooks
9:00am	Watches BBC news
12:15pm	Watches Disney+ / plays games on phone / scrolls on social media
3:00pm	Collects Niki from school
3:15pm	**Niki watches YouTube, cartoons, or plays Minecraft whilst Veronica cooks**
4:30pm	Watches TV or plays on phone
5:30pm	Talks on the phone to her friend
6:00pm	Watches Disney+ / plays games on phone / scrolls on social media
	Prepares Niki for bathing and sleeping
8:00pm	Watches BBC News
9:00pm	Goes to bed, on phone until 2am

Veronica strongly monitors Niki's online behaviour. Niki is only allowed to use YouTube Kids, and Veronica will not allow them to have TikTok because she believes that the content is inappropriate for children.

She has parental controls on Niki's tablet to ensure that Niki has to tell her what they want to download so that Veronica can check it is appropriate. Veronica also ensures that Niki's age is accurate on YouTube Kids to make sure that they are only served age appropriate content. Veronica says that Niki is sensitive and doesn't want them to watch anything scary.

Veronica will check if the games that Niki wants to download say if they will contain violence. If they do, she will not allow Niki to download them.

REVEALING REALITY

Social media helps Veronica make friends in the UK

Relationships

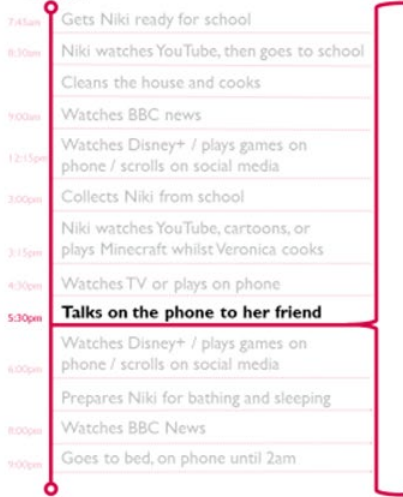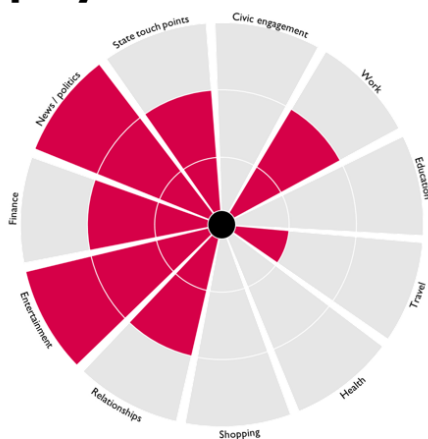|	
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Veronica made her closest connections in the UK through dating apps like Badoo.
In the evening, Veronica often talks to one of her friends on the phone.

Whilst she is talking, Veronica scrolls on social media and plays games. She said that she can't live without being online now because life would be boring. She described that she always feels an urge to scroll, especially when cooking or doing household chores.

She identified that before the internet people would go outside more. Now, she thinks kids are inside and on the internet instead. However, Veronica is happy with how she chooses to spend her time on the internet and feels that it provides her with what she wants.

REVEALING REALITY

Where does media literacy play a role in Veronica's life?

State touch points · Civic engagement · News / politics · Work · Finance · Education · Entertainment · Travel · Relationships · Health · Shopping

Veronica spends a lot of time online throughout her day, using it as a form of entertainment. She enjoys using it to learn new things, watch funny videos, play games, and keep up to date with her friends. The news is often playing and Veronica says she enjoys feeling informed about the world. Since getting a Disney+ subscription, however, Veronica watches the news less.

Despite using dating apps to make more connections, Veronica has few friends in the UK. She has close offline relationships with the friends she has managed to make. Veronica has difficulty staying connected online/over the phone with her family in Europe, who has poor internet connection.

Veronica uses technology to receive emails on new job vacancies and track her application for the EU settlement scheme. She seeks help in-person from employees at the Job Centre for further advice about both of these processes.

Veronica uses moderation tools available to monitor Niki's online behaviour. Veronica is aware of data-sharing and has put measures in place to reduce the identification of her location. However, she describes that the only information she believes the games have access to is her 'nickname', despite the accounts being connected to her Facebook account.

REVEALING REALITY

Media literacy is shaped by a range of factors

By taking daily life as its starting point, this research has allowed for an in-depth exploration of the factors and characteristics that shape someone's level of media literacy, as well as the barriers that can prevent them increasing it.
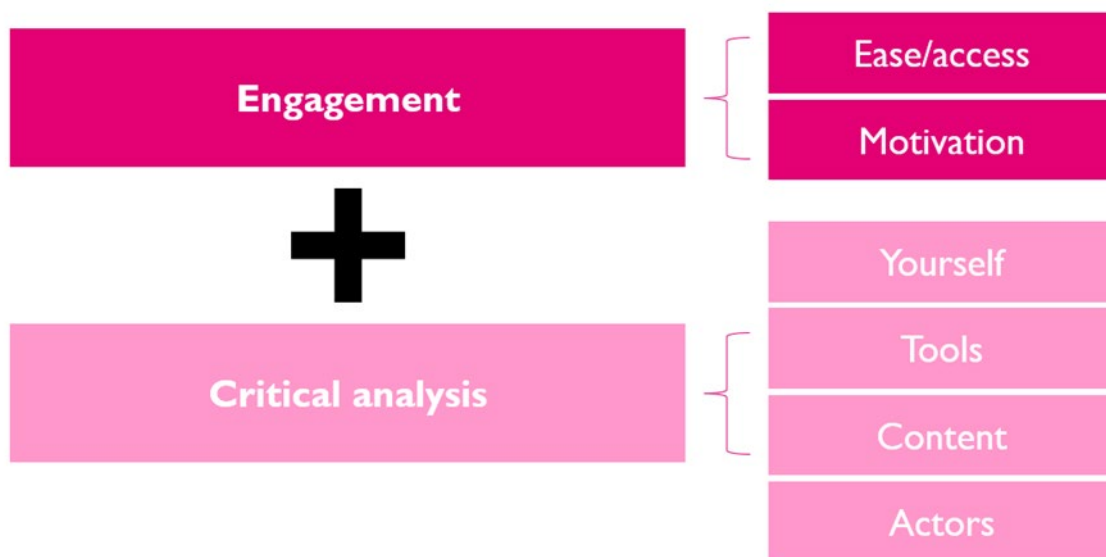

Figure 3

There are a number of factors that shape and enable media literacy. These include engagement, which in this study comprised two distinct areas – ease of access and motivation; and critical analysis, which we have characterised as having four main dimensions – one's own biases, the tools being used, the content being accessed, and the actors behind the content. Figure 3 illustrates these factors of media literacy.

Access to media and information is a key component of media literacy

Several participants faced issues around access, whether in terms of the ability, the skills, or the knowledge to access information, or in a more binary sense, being able to afford a particular device or subscription. This underlines how living on a low income can generate inequalities in media literacy, especially when it came to opportunities for gaining new skills in media literacy.

Michael (35-45) aspires to be a journalist in news and politics but is unable to afford subscriptions to many of the online publications he feels are essential to staying informed. For now, whenever he visits his local town centre, he spends several hours in the library reading all the newspapers they have available.

As discussed above, Veronica's (35-45) awareness of current affairs was constrained after getting broadband and Disney+ as she moved away from watching news to shows and films instead. Previously, Veronica could not afford broadband at home as she wasn't working and had just moved house. Being limited in how much data she could afford on her phone meant being limited in how much information she was able to find for her EU Settled Status visa application, and how much time she could spend looking for work online. Access to broadband therefore introduced both new opportunities and constraints into her life, demonstrating how media literacy was often multi-faceted.

Some people lack motivation to engage with media and information

Even people who have the knowledge, skills, and devices to access information and media might not engage if it doesn't seem important or useful to them. This could often be the case where participants felt they were time-poor, able to use known options, or assumed they would be presented with the best information automatically.

Marco (15-25) sees himself living in his hometown for the rest of his life and doesn't think of a future in which he would leave. He's looking into apprenticeships based there and intends to stay close to home. He only looks at news through local Facebook groups about his immediate area that might give him updates about the weather or traffic. He doesn't look at any other news and struggles to see the relevance of information from a more national or global perspective.

When participants *were* motivated to engage online, there were often benefits to their media literacy skills.

Paul (75-85) is retired and lives in Scotland. Paul doesn't generally use his smartphone or laptop and much prefers face-to-face interaction. However, during the Covid lockdowns, Paul began using Zoom to attend church meetings and services. Through following instructions online and support from those in his congregation, he was able to quickly learn to navigate this technology and adapt the ways in which he was involved in the community to an online format.

The challenge of motivation proved to be an impediment for some participants to gain skills in media literacy. However, levels of motivation are not static and can be overcome given a different environment, as with Paul.

Across the sample, data privacy was another area where motivation to become engaged and informed was low despite having access to information and tools to be engaged. There were few examples of people thinking about the data they share as they go about their daily life. Even when people were thinking about data privacy, so long as they could see the benefit, they were typically happy to share their data.

For example, Ali (35-45) described himself as fairly "unconcerned" about the ways his data may be used or shared between platforms or organisations. He felt that so long as it was "useful" for him in some way, then he was okay with the data being shared.

Liv (20-30) felt that her data being shared was "hard to avoid" and therefore felt it was not worth thinking about a lot.

Thinking critically involves considering the impact of several factors on the content or information presented

Critical understanding is another core component of media literacy. In many cases, participants were very motivated and engaged with media, especially when it came to its use for entertainment and education. These levels of engagement were not necessarily indicators, however, that participants were *critically aware* of the content they were consuming. Critical understanding of media requires awareness of both personal biases and

those of the media sources consumed – something that may require an unrealistic amount of effort in the context of daily life.

Figure 4 sets out the components of critical analysis and some examples of what 'high' or 'low' capabilities might look like for each component: Yourself, Tools, Content, and Actors.

Figure 4

	Low		High
YOURSELF	Unaware of their assumptions, habits and biases	Aware of their assumptions, habits and biases and aware that they probably should challenge them	Actively looks for and challenges their assumptions, habits, biases
TOOLS	Hasn't thought about the way the tool(s) they use shape the information they see	Aware that the tool(s) they use probably shape the information they see but not sure quite how or what to do about it	Understand the mechanisms that lead them to see the content they see and act on this knowledge
CONTENT	Take information at face value or do not understand it	Understand the key points communicated by a message and have enough background knowledge to understand its significance	Able to identify what is and isn't being communicated with a sense of why that might be the case, and why now
ACTORS	Accept the authority of the actor providing information	Know that different actors have different perspectives and agendas but find it hard to identify/ don't act on this knowledge	Understand why an actor might provide the content they do, recognise actors have blind spots, biases and agendas

Marcy (35-45) watches a lot of videos on YouTube and reads many articles online. Several of these are what could be described as conspiracy videos. She believes the content in the videos that she watches on YouTube as she considers them an authentic record of events. In contrast, she mistrusts mainstream media as she believes that footage of events is often edited and misrepresented, often with a sinister agenda. Marcy used the example of the Boston bombings to explain this; she originally saw content about the Boston bombings on the evening news and was horrified, but she later went on to YouTube and watched 'un-edited' footage taken from people who claimed to be at the place where the bombing took place. Marcy said that in the 'un-edited' videos, you could see that crisis actors had been employed. Marcy also commented that you would be unable to find these videos on YouTube now as they expose the lies of the media, which furthered her mistrust. While Marcy is motivated and engages with content, **she's not applying critical thinking to some of the content** she's viewing. Notably, she applies much more critical attention to mainstream media than she does to the conspiracy content on YouTube and online articles, which she often takes at face value.

Jamie (18-28) was spending his afternoons and evenings avidly following the Depp-Heard legal case taking place in the USA at the time of fieldwork. He was highly engaged, watching the livestream, and following analysis and comments on social media. However, it was clear that he was much less critical of Johnny Depp's testimony than Amber Heard's. This was impacting the articles he read and even the ways he searched for news. He often searched 'Johnny Depp' which tended to lead him to commentary that was more in favour of Depp. Overall, Jamie seemed to **underestimate how much his own prior convictions** were shaping the way he analysed the content he was seeing.

Rinda (35-45) is working in Northern Ireland, having decided to remain there after finishing her degree. Her children and husband live abroad, but she is keen for them to come to the UK to join her. She often watched videos made for migrants to the UK and kept on top of changing visa requirements through the information

passed on by these content creators. She liked the fact that it was easy to find content in her native language and felt that content creators made information that was relevant for her. However, although she hasn't found any useful information for how exactly to navigate the immigration system for her family, she continues to rely on the same YouTubers for information. Rinda appeared to have little awareness of why she saw the videos she saw on YouTube or **the motives of the people making the videos** – or why this might make these sources more or less reliable than others. Rinda had not reflected on how the tools she used limited the information she received about migration and visas.

Similarly, social media platforms, which have faced the much-publicised challenges of combatting disinformation, echo-chambers, and unreliable sources on their platforms, are often assumed to have limitations when searching for reliable or objective information. Using 'the right tool for the job' is a crucial part of media literacy, and accounting for the biases, social dynamics, and impact of forces like algorithmic selection is important. But other tools or sources, like search engines, come with their own limitations and it may be that the algorithmic selection and social dynamics on social media can be highly valuable in some contexts.

Mai (35-45) frequently uses Facebook to find reliable services and good deals, such as taxis and vouchers. Facebook has a large, established community of people from Mai's country of origin with an abundance of shared tips, advice, and local information. Mai finds it much **more valuable to get endorsements and suggestions from people she knows and trusts rather than anonymous information from other reviews.** Although searches on social media platforms will exclusively return content from the specific platform being used, for Mai, Facebook proves a highly useful tool to find information she can rely on.

Joyce (65-75) is retired. Her mobility issues mean she isn't able to get out to see her friends as often as before and spends long periods of time at home, waiting for her carer to come. Throughout the interview, Joyce referenced a book she had been reading that she felt was important in relation to the Covid pandemic. The book was fictional, but she was certain the book was more fact than fiction, and she was taking the messages very seriously. Overall, Joyce seems to accept all information as equally valid and true, and in this case that meant she **struggled to understand that the content of her book was fictional**.

Ali (35-45) is interested in leaving his role to pursue investing in cryptocurrencies. He's sceptical about some of the information he sees about this topic, especially if it's from mainstream news providers. Because of Crypto's volatile nature, Ali believes the 'official' sites aren't useful and prefers to hear about people's real experiences investing instead. One source he trusts is Reddit, where he is currently engaging with a lot of forums and content about cryptocurrencies. He **didn't reflect on what the motives of these people posting on Reddit might be** and why certain people might be so avidly promoting a particular cryptocurrency at any given point.

Across the sample, there were not many examples of high critical engagement with information and media across all of the four factors. To critically analyse information, people needed to be cognisant of themselves and their own biases, the tools they were using, the content they were viewing, or the actors behind the content. However, this level of critical engagement would entail considering a wide range of criteria which are difficult to reflect on consistently and in their entirety in a real-world context.

It is also the case that while media literacy plays a significant role in shaping people's opportunities and positive outcomes in life, this research reminds us that this does not mean that application of 'high' media literacy skills to every activity will always be the optimal strategy. There will be some circumstances where media literacy has a large impact, and others where it is less resonant. Optimal application of media literacy is highly contextual and includes applying skills and behaviours that are appropriate for the individual and their needs at a particular time.

Ofcom Afterword

This research has provided a detailed understanding of how media literacy fits within eleven areas of daily life. There are a number of common themes that emerge:

- Smartphone use is a dominant aspect of daily living, working, and socialising for many. Smartphone use is both purposive and also a default way of "filling time", meaning that for some, a considerable majority of their day is spent scrolling through their feeds.
- Many in the sample prioritise word of mouth sources – either for news, or recommendations and information – rather than established or mainstream voices. This is often because word of mouth is seen as unfiltered and authentic in comparison to more crafted content.
- Health issues are a key motivation for some participants to engage online, in terms of searching for information, identifying support, etc. There are stark examples of where media literacy enables understanding and effective management of participants' health, and also where limited media literacy can lead to constraints.
- Awareness of media literacy issues such as being in a filter bubble, or having too many irrelevant notifications, or being in a vicious circle of replying to scam emails that in turn send out more attempts to scam, do not necessarily lead to mitigating action. Participants feel uncertain or unable to modify their behaviour even when they know it doesn't serve their best interests.
- Awareness of some aspects of media literacy is low across the sample, most notably in relation to data privacy and data sharing. Participants were largely unengaged or sanguine about how their data might be used by third parties, emphasising instead the utility of being able to do or access what they required even if it meant providing details.
- A number of participants were constrained by access issues, linked to the affordability of devices, upgrades, and data, which were independent of the extent to which they displayed media literacy knowledge such as critical understanding.

These themes alongside the wider findings in this report help identify what may be most effective in enabling people in their daily activities. They are a reminder of the benefits of exploring which particular aspects of a person's lifestyle they themselves identify as being most useful to address, and which forms of support would be most resonant and applicable to those circumstances. As such, the research complements our current wider Making Sense of Media activities.

In our Approach to Media Literacy document published in December 2021, we set out our intention to commission pilot initiatives to improve online safety among local communities most at risk of online harm. These local-level initiatives will give us the ability to take account of individuals' circumstances in overcoming barriers to media literacy. We know from our research into What Works in Delivering Community Programmes, published in June 2022, that local communities require local solutions, and this 'Day in the Life' research illustrates the importance of context in forming and embedding media literate behaviours.

The findings from this research also remind us that in moments where engagement is low, individuals may not apply the same level of media literacy as they might where engagement is high. Our work to develop best practice principles for media literacy through design is intended to encourage online platforms to create environments where media literacy is supported.

Click here to view detailed case studies for participants in the sample.

REVEALING REALITY